MORAL FIBER:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF UNEMPLOYMENT, ETHICS, AND THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET IN NORWAY

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Abstract

Following the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, international observers turned to the Nordic countries for a model of the "good society." Their interest has revolved primarily around the region's social democratic welfare model, wherein an extensive public sector provides comparatively generous cash transfers, social services, and healthcare "from cradle to grave." While politicians wonder at the model's replicability, social scientists and historians tease out its ideological and political origins, effects on material and psychological outcomes, and challenges in a post-industrial, migratory, and increasingly interconnected world. Where popular and scholarly concerns intersect is on the point of the "work ethic." Skeptics worry that adopting a Nordic-style social safety net, whatever its merits, would imperil the economic incentives of work, fostering dependency and passivity.

Based on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Oslo, Norway between 2014 and 2017, this dissertation examines the relationship between the welfare system, the everyday lives of the unemployed, and the shared moral imagination of labor. The study's principal finding is that the Norwegian welfare model is not morally corrosive. Rather, through the experience of life events like unemployment, it cultivates a distinctive "employment ethic" that affixes value to moderating one's use of the welfare system and working in the formal sector. This suggests that the qualitative variation in welfare systems, documented by comparative scholars, is associated with qualitative variation in the moralities of work and worklessness.

The Norway depicted in this dissertation is not static. The twilight of social democratic hegemony has unleashed new ideological currents and political actors. A

strong petroleum sector has increased the material standard of living, revolutionizing leisure time and stimulating consumerism. Finally, immigration—of foreign workers, refugees, family members—has introduced greater ethnocultural diversity and thorny questions about identity, belonging, and integration. These changes have led to debates about the compatibility between the social democratic welfare model and the ethical commitments of for-profit welfare service providers, young people, and immigrants. This dissertation argues that of these three groups, only for-profit welfare service providers are motivated by a conception of "the good" that conflicts with that of Norway's social democratic welfare model.

For my teachers

Acknowledgements

Years ago, I read Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and enjoyed it so much that I resolved at once to read the massive novel many consider his masterpiece, *The Magic Mountain*. The book is set in the period just before the First World War and tells the story of a young German, Hans Castorp, and his intellectual development during an extended residency at a Swiss sanitorium. Little happens there: the patients take walks, do their rest cures, share meals, and attend lectures. Above all, they talk, and the impressionable Castorp begins a remarkable journey of mind, directed by encounters with figures like the liberal and worldly Settembrini, the enigmatic Madame Chauchat, the uncompromising Naphta, and the charismatic but incoherent Peeperkorn.

The Magic Mountain followed me through graduate school, at times languishing for months among the ever-multiplying books on shelves and tables, desks and nightstands. Shortly after my return from fieldwork in Oslo, I at last read its final pages, where Hans Castorp makes his descent. I see now, as I write these words, that I have had my own journey and am at last coming down from my mountain. As the summit begins to recede, I feel compelled to take account of the intellectual debts I accrued there. My gratitude, I hope, will service these debts, which I know cannot be repaid in full.

First and foremost, I thank the scholars who have been my most constant and supportive interlocutors and mentors. Carol J. Greenhouse, the chair of my committee, has been an inexhaustible reader and unwavering source of optimism and encouragement during these years. Her advice has proven essential to navigating academic life, and her appreciation for the possibilities latent in language means that she is one of few people

whose questions and insights are genuinely worth turning over and over again. I credit her with many things, including various important refinements to this work and introducing the use of the words “imbricate” and “gambit” into my vocabulary.

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Throughout the writing process, parts of this dissertation have benefited from the thoughtful feedback of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. An early draft of Chapter 2, "The Unemployment Business," was presented as a paper at the 2018 annual meeting for the American Anthropological Association ("The Unemployment Business: Delegated Governance and 'Welfare Profiteering' in Norway"). Earlier drafts and parts of Chapter 3, "Out of Circulation," were presented for the 2016-2017 Princeton Fellowship of Woodrow Wilson Scholars ("Active Labor Marketing: Notes on the Norwegian Job-seeker Course"), at the 2017 spring meeting for the American Ethnological Society ("Welfare Ethics: Unemployment, Active Social Policy, and Rebuilding the Self in Norway"), for a 2017 invited presentation at the Stockholm University Center for Organizational Research ("Active Labor Marketing: Social Policy and the Ethics of Work and Welfare in Norway"), and at the 2016 European Association of Social Anthropologists biennial conference ("Unemployment, Active Labor Market Policy, and the Presentation of Self in the Norwegian Welfare State"). Chapter 3 is slated to be published as: McKowen, Kelly. forthcoming. "Out of Circulation: Activating Labor and Finding Selves in Norwegian Job-seeker Courses." *Anthropology of Work Review.*

Shorter, earlier drafts of Chapter 4, "Welfare Kings," were presented at the 2017 International Conference of Europeanists ("Moral Climate Change? Unemployment, Ethics, and the Sustainability of the Nordic Welfare Model") and a 2017 symposium in Oslo, *Global Challenges – Nordic Experiences* ("A Welfare 'Regime of Goodness?' Material Self-interest, Reciprocity, and the Moral Sustainability of the Nordic Model). A version of Chapter 4 was published as: McKowen, Kelly. 2018. "A Welfare 'Regime of Goodness'? Material Self-interest, Reciprocity, and the Moral Sustainability of the

Nordic Model." In *Sustainable Modernity: The Nordic Model and Beyond*, edited by Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun, 119-138. London and New York: Routledge.

Finally, earlier drafts and parts of Chapter 6 were presented at the 2018 European Association of Social Anthropologists biennial conference ("Going Native: Unemployed Migrants and Social Incorporation in the New Norway"), the 2018 *Digesting Difference: Modes of Social Incorporation* symposium at Princeton ("The 'Norwegian Way': Unemployed Immigrants and the Ethics of Integration in Norway"), and the 2017 annual conference for the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study ("Coming to Terms with Belonging: Work, Welfare, and Integration in Norway"). A version of Chapter 6 will be published as: McKowen, Kelly. forthcoming. "Going Native: Unemployed Migrants and the Active Creativity of Integration in Norway." In *Managing Multicultural Scandinavia*, edited by Sherill Harbison, Eric Einhorn, and Markus Huss. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

These opportunities would not have been possible without the initiative of very generous colleagues. I thank Christina Garsten and Renita Thedvall for the invitation to present what ultimately became Chapter 3 at Stockholm University. This chapter, which will appear in the *Anthropology of Work Review*, also benefited from the perspicacious intervention of that journal's editors, Josh Fisher, Kathleen Millar, and Alex Nading, as well as two anonymous peer reviewers. I am also grateful to Nina Witoszek, Atle Midttun, and David Sloan Wilson for their constructive feedback on what became Chapter 4. Their comments on previous drafts helped nurture my engagement with texts from fields like evolutionary biology, resulting in a chapter that approaches the "problem" of dependency in a novel way.

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Introduction

Khalid and Jonas[1] grew up together in east Oslo, in one of the multiethnic "satellite cities" built between the 1950s and 1970s for the postwar city's growing middle-class. They are both in their late 20s, able-bodied, out of work, and living on cash benefits provided by the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration, more commonly called "NAV." On a chilly afternoon in April 2016, the three of us met in downtown Oslo for coffee and a conversation about their experience of being unemployed in a country that has topped the UN's Human Development Index for fourteen of the past sixteen years (United Nations Development Programme 2018). As an American and a cultural anthropologist, I was curious to know about their relationship with the country's vaunted welfare system, their day-to-day lives, their thoughts on work, and their aspirations for the future. My questions, particularly those about NAV, elicited strong reactions. The agency is incompetent, they said. It is discriminatory. At one point, Khalid, whose family is from Pakistan, suggested that it can be tempting to take revenge by remaining unemployed. He reasoned, however, that this would probably hurt him more than it would hurt NAV.

With darkness descending on the city outside and the white bottoms of our cups beginning to show through the strong Nordic coffee, I decided to ask a question that I felt had hovered along the edges of our conversation: why do you want work at all? Both Khalid and Jonas received unemployment benefits (*dagpenger*), which replaced 62.4% of their previous income for two years. As members of the National Insurance scheme, their healthcare was guaranteed and all annual costs beyond approximately $280 would be

covered by the state. They seemed reasonably comfortable. There were economic incentives to find a job, but these incentives were not overwhelming, or at least not as overwhelming as they are in countries like mine, the United States, where the social safety net has worn so thin that it hardly provides anything with even a passing resemblance to "safety" (Campbell 2014; Edin and Lein 1997; Morgen, Acker, and Weigt 2010). And by their own account, Khalid and Jonas had been so mistreated that Khalid had entertained a fantasy of "altruistic punishment" (Fehr and Gächter 2002)—that is, inflicting costs on oneself in order to inflict them on another. But both had made it clear that finding work was still their goal. I wanted to know why.

"You must," Jonas answered, as if the words had been queued up before the question.

"No," Khalid interrupted. "It's more—it's to contribute (*bidra*)."

"That's a better word," Jonas agreed.

"Contribute to society," Khalid continued, "and achieve status and a happy life (*et lykkelig liv*)."

"But what does this mean?" I asked. "'Contribute to society'? Because that's very abstract."

"Pay taxes," Khalid answered. "And those taxes do some good."

I was puzzled. Khalid and Jonas had just spent almost an hour complaining about NAV. Did they mean that NAV was in fact something worth supporting? I asked if he were imagining taxes that go to NAV.

"No," Khalid said, "I'm thinking of the welfare system."

"The decency of being a citizen (*anstendigheten av å være en borger*)," Jonas offered.

"Simply that," Khalid said. "The 'decency of being a citizen.' It's that easy."

Khalid and Jonas were looking for jobs in retail and music production—not fields that most Americans would associate with 'contributing to society.' And yet, they had explained their desire to work in terms that were unambiguously moral. This raises numerous questions: Why did they see work this way? Where does this moral language come from? Why are two young guys, out of work, telling an American anthropologist that they aspire to work and pay taxes to "contribute to society," "achieve status and a happy life," and live up to the "decency of being a citizen"? Why do any of these things matter to them?

This dissertation aims to answer these questions and others pertaining to the morality of formal wage labor in contemporary Norway. I term this morality, which revolves around having (or not having) a job and paying (or not paying) taxes an "employment ethic." This emphasis on employment marks this ethic as qualitatively different from so-called "work ethics," such as the famed Protestant ethic (Weber 2011), which understand the labor process itself as possessing moral or cosmological significance. In Norway, as I discovered during more than a year of conversations and observation with jobless people like Khalid and Jonas, one cannot account for why people who are otherwise materially comfortable persist in looking for work unless one understands the centrality of *det å ha jobb*, or "having a job," in shared understandings of social personhood and moral life.

The dissertation makes a further claim: the cooccurrence of *this* morality and *this* welfare system in a single place is no accident. They are indissolubly linked with one another, they produce one another, they need one another. This is the meaning of the study's title: with respect to formal wage labor, there is a distinctive "moral fiber" in Norway that reflects the particular institutional weave of the country's social safety net. Or to borrow from Geertz (1973), there is direct correspondence between this social safety net and the "webs of significance" (1973, 5) that provide the shared "structures of meaning" (1973, 312) through which people experience, think about, speak about, and value different categories of work and worklessness.

But though this dissertation is concerned with the moral multivalence of employment, the reader will discover that the employed hardly appear in its pages. As an ethnographer, I have chosen to work in what might be called the 'analytical subtractive.' That is, in order to describe the complex of meaning and value associated with employment, I have found it productive to study people for whom it represents an object of aspiration and a structural opposite to their current circumstance. Being unemployed, I believe, allows an individual to take a more thorough inventory of the meanings, values, affects, and norms they associate with various categories of work, if only because becoming workless has entailed their loss—or subtraction.

I am not the first to claim that Nordic moralities are in some way related to the Nordic welfare model. Reflecting on his travels in early 1980s Sweden, for example, the German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1982) mused that the Swedish "institutional apparatus has been able to seize not only the majority of all income but also the citizens' morality. It is the one that provides for solidarity and equality, for help and protection, for

justice and decency—all things that are too important to be left to ordinary people" [translation mine] (1982, 18). The same, perhaps except for the sardonic final line, could be written for 21st century Norway. There too, as evidenced by my conversation with Khalid and Jonas, one discovers relationships between individuals and a vast welfare state in which the material and moral are inextricably entwined. Most people see the state not as an oppressor but a trustworthy ally, whose life-long patronage engenders some form of moral obligation and sculpts a normative view of what ordinary and good lives look like.

The notion that different welfare systems correspond to different normative and moral systems has recently found a few advocates among comparative scholars of the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby et al. 2018; Mau 2003). These accounts typically marry the concept of "moral economy" (Scott 1976; E. P. Thompson 1971) with that of "welfare regime" (Esping-Andersen 1990). The former concept, despite key theoretical differences in its various conceptions (for overview, see Edelman 2005; Carrier 2018), proposes that the economic relationships between actors and groups is to some extent grounded in reciprocal expectations, norms of fairness, and the recognition of privileges. In Thompson's (1971) seminal account, the moral economy refers to a specific historical formation in 18th century England, a popular "consensus" (1971, 78) that "was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community" (1971, 79). When these "social norms and obligations" are breached, as they were in England at the time, the result is a collective sense of violation expressed in rioting and violence.

As moral economy has evolved in the work of other scholars, it has largely ceased to refer to the consensus of a given moment, and rather begun to encompass the tacit, moral content of macroeconomic (Appadurai 1984; Booth 1994; Arnold 2001; Scott 1976) and microeconomic (Bowles 2016; Olivier de Sardan 1999) phenomena. The notion that there could be multiple kinds of moral economy was a necessary step to its eventual connection to the modern welfare state, which has also become multiple in contemporary theory. The keyword here is "welfare regime" (Esping-Andersen 1990). A welfare regime is, among other things, the variable institutional architecture of social security, which links the individual, the family, the labor market, and the state in relations of dependency, indebtedness, and exchange over the life-cycle. Though scholars have identified many welfare regime types, Esping-Andersen's original three remain the most prominent in the comparative scholarship. The liberal welfare regime, found primarily in the Anglo-American world, features paltry, means-tested benefits and is broadly market-oriented. This makes for-profit actors, such as private insurers and firms, a key locus of individual well-being. The conservative (sometimes termed "corporatist," "continental," or "Bismarckian") welfare regime affords a much smaller role to for-profit welfare providers, instead supporting the gendered, single-earner family and relying on state-subsidized intermediary institutions like churches or trade unions to provide benefits and services. Finally, the social democratic welfare regime—found with minor variations in Scandinavia—is characterized by universal social insurance schemes, featuring high-quality benefits and services administered by an extensive public sector. When viewed anthropologically, welfare regimes represent different ways of configuring—and thus

normalizing and moralizing—the life-sustaining bonds between the individual and the family, the corporate group, the firm, and the state.

The scholars who have argued that these welfare regimes correspond to different moral economies focus mostly or entirely on the norms that govern reciprocity (Mau 2003; Taylor-Gooby et al. 2018). But, as even the fragment of my conversation with Khalid and Jonas demonstrates, reciprocity is but one dimension of the moral substance that connects individuals and the state in Norway. For this reason, a more capacious theory is needed—one that accounts for how welfare regimes are not only animated by particular meanings, norms, and values but productive of them. Following the recent call for a "neosubstantivist" economic anthropology, this dissertation shows how a welfare regime—in this case, the social democratic—shapes the ways work comes to be seen as essential to how people both "make a living" and imagine and create "a life worth living" (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S6).

And clearly, work is, even in social democratic Norway, something that makes life worth living. This can be demonstrated in part by returning for a moment to Khalid and Jonas to consider the moral appraisals contained within their responses to my question about their desire to work. Recall Jonas' initial response for instance: *du må*, you must. Cut off by Khalid before he could elaborate, there are at least two possible interpretations of his words. The first is that he sees work as necessary for survival. Perhaps had he continued, he would have said that not working would eventually lead to the cessation of their benefits and the transition to a rougher life on social assistance (*økonomisk sosialhjelp*), Norway's means-tested scheme of last resort. The injunction to work would therefore reflect an understanding of its being ingredient to basic

subsistence. This idea calls to mind a short, rhyming Norwegian proverb, *nød lærer naken kvinne å spinne*, or "necessity teaches the naked woman to spin [yarn]." If you want clothing, you must spin; if you want to survive in this society, you must—*du må*—work.

But I had met people living on social assistance in Norway, and while money was typically tight—it averages about $1000 a month—they fare relatively well once one considers that they also typically receive housing support, monthly child benefits (if they have children), and access to healthcare. Though deprived of life's major and minor luxuries, the ends seem in most cases to meet.

Another interpretation of "you must" is possible if one assumes that Jonas was thinking in deontological terms. Deontology, from the Greek word *deon* or "obligation," is a field of normative ethics commonly associated with Kant and his concept of the "categorical imperative." According to Kant (1998), the ethical content of any action is contingent of whether a person could reasonably will it to be a universal, transhistorical law. If so, then the act is compelled by a categorical imperative, which the person is obliged to obey in all circumstances. Reading "you must" in Kantian terms would suggest that Jonas' believes that working is a universal injunction: as he would will others in his position to work, then he must will it for Khalid and himself as well.

Khalid's intervention—and Jonas' concurrence—create the possibility for other readings. Khalid asserts that the reason to work is to "contribute to society." Once more, this could be read deontologically, meaning that contributing to society is a duty that the individual must fulfill through working. Alternatively, one could imagine that Khalid was thinking in terms of reciprocity: society has provided for me, I must provide for it. This

view of the relationship between the individual and the welfare state was sketched by the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss in the conclusion of his seminal study *The Gift*. According to Mauss (2000), the development of social insurance schemes and corporate welfare programs in *fin-de-siècle* France was indicative of a return to the "group morality" colored by the "themes of the gift, of the freedom and obligation inherent in the gift" (2000, 68). Perhaps Khalid and Jonas, having come of age in a country where healthcare, education, and social services are provided by a beneficent state, felt that they had already accumulated a gift-debt that prompted an extended counter-prestation in the form of the taxes associated with formal wage labor.

Another possibility is that Khalid perceived the imperative to work as issuing from the general welfare it produced. This would make his reasoning a species of "consequentialism" (Anscombe 1958)—an approach to normative ethics that measures the morality of any action in terms of the utility it produces. When he says that his taxes will "do some good," he is perhaps announcing his understanding of the individual's work as uniquely beneficial to the common welfare.

Each of these moral frames—deontology, reciprocity, or consequentialism—becomes even more complex when one notes that Khalid answered my follow-up question by clarifying that when he said "society" (*samfunnet*), he was not thinking of NAV, the agency that manages Norway's public benefits and services, but of the "welfare system" (*velferdssystemet*). The conflation of "society" and the "welfare system" and not "NAV" and the "welfare system" is telling, as it suggests that, like a deity and its church, the welfare system is an idea that its adherents believe transcends its administrative machinery (cf. Abrams 1988). Also telling is his view that work's ethical

substance is not intrinsic or located in its product but in the subset of compensation paid in taxes (*skatt*)—money Khalid might imagine is transmogrified by the state into the currency of individual and social welfare (*velferd*): child allowances, unemployment benefits, old-age, pensions, elderly care, x-rays, open-heart surgeries, etc. This is a critical detail, as when I asked the question—"Why do you want to work at all?"—I did not specify a kind, category, or character of work (Tilly and Tilly 1998). By foregrounding the importance of paying taxes, Khalid signaled that what we were talking about was formal wage labor—the relationship between an employee and employer whereby the former contracts with the latter to provide labor power, measured in time, for a wage or salary (Marx 1978, 204). It was this form of tax-generating work, and not informal or voluntary work, that he and Jonas understood as the proper means to contributing to society.

But Khalid does not limit himself to just "contribute to society." The phrase forms part of a discursive triad with "achieve status" and "a happy life." In a classic study, the anthropologist Ralph Linton (1936) outlines the differences between "ascribed status" and "achieved status." The former refers to a social station that is assigned to a person based on characteristics, traits, or affiliations over which the person has no control. An achieved status, by contrast, can be attained by a person using things he or she has at her disposal, such as knowledge, skills, or experience. The desire for any status, others have argued, is a function of its value. Work, Khalid seemed to say, is a socially-recognized setting for the attainment of valuable status through the deployment of individual traits and abilities.

The words “a happy life” (*et lykkelig liv*) close the statement but open yet another reading, this time based on Aristotelian virtue ethics and its central notion of *eudaimonia*. Glossed as “happiness,” “flourishing,” or “well-being,” *eudaimonia* is for Aristotle (2011) a state that one achieves through living in accordance with virtue. It posits that the happy life is the virtuous life—and vice versa. To suggest, as Khalid does, that formal wage labor is ingredient to a happy life would mean that he understands this form of work to be virtuous or indicative of particular virtues, such as fortitude, that are understood as “linked to some particular notion of the narrative structure or structures of human life” (MacIntyre 2007, 204). Here, the narrative structure is provided by a welfare regime that scripts the typical life according to a series of acts that revolve around the axis of work and worklessness (e.g. childhood, retirement).

Or perhaps he understood “a happy life” to refer not to virtue but to things that people in Norway tend to desire: a cottage in the mountains or along the sea, an electric car, a handmade *bunad*,[2] nice dinners downtown, new pairs of cross-country skis, a large flatscreen TV, vacations in the Canary Islands, etc. If this were his meaning, we could say that Khalid understands happiness in terms of objects, which are only—or most easily—attainable with the wage (*lønn*) one receives as compensation for working. Aristotle would add that it is not necessary to sever the virtuous or materialistic: flourishing, he argues in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, is a matter of living in accordance with virtue *and* possessing “external goods” (Aristotle 2011, 16)—of fortitude and a new pair of skis.

But then Jonas reappears in the conversation. Khalid had just clarified that “contribute to society” meant paying taxes that fund the welfare system. Jonas, having

remained silent for a few seconds, then brought the discussion to an introspective close: it is "the decency of being a citizen." The word he used, "*anstendigheten*," is a noun fashioned from the adjective "*anstendig*," which can mean "decent," "proper," "fitting," "acceptable," or "reasonable." By linking it with *borger*, or "citizen," he implied that working—and perhaps paying taxes—is the minimum obligation associated with being a member of society. This might be interpreted as a version of role ethics, which posits that what is proper to an individual is specific to his or her position in the social structure. In this particular context, "citizen" is understood not just in civic or political terms but social ones (Marshall 1950). In Norway, being a citizen—or even just a legal resident—entitles one to membership in *folketrygden*, or the "National Insurance." Membership is the legal basis for both the rights and duties one holds with respect to NAV and the healthcare system. But to frame this relationship in terms of decency and not obligation is significant: it suggests that the individual has some discretion, that the ethical, which here revolves around the question of working or not working, is in fact a choice, an act of freedom (Laidlaw 2002). It is the decent thing to do.

The point of dwelling on this exchange is to show that formal wage labor is polysemic and poly-ethical, possessing meanings and moral valences that cannot be fully parsed without an account of how they relate to their institutional context. But this leaves us with the question of how these meanings and moral valences are transmitted. One of the claims of this dissertation is that the ideas, concepts, and impressions that people have about formal wage labor and institutional abstractions like government, the welfare state, the family, and the labor market are constituted through their interpretations of experience—both their own experiences and those of others. It is through making sense

of the experience of unemployment, for example, that people attain some notion of the normative relations *between* institutions, and between institutions and the individual. Interpretations of others' experiences are no less important with respect to shaping how people perceive these institutions. Opinions and impressions, for instance, are often concretized and legitimated with anecdotes, images, gossip, jokes, media, and other discursive artifacts wherein the relationship between the individual and the aforementioned institutions is represented as normal/abnormal, appropriate/inappropriate, or ethical/unethical.

The relationship between experience and its interpretation is complex, and it cannot be assumed that first-hand contact with or consumption of representations entails the straightforward inculcation of the affects and meanings (Turner 1967) "envehicled" (Geertz 1980, 135) in those representations. Someone who shares a story about being mistreated by NAV, for instance, may intend it "to disclose a world" (Ricoeur 1981, 182), but its actual consumption and incorporation into the listeners' own symbolic reservoir will reflect an idiosyncratic 'reading' process, inflected by his or her commitments and the interpretive tradition (Ginzburg 1992) within which the listener is situated. Moreover, as these commitments and traditions evolve through time, representations are bound to be selectively misremembered or shifted chronologically, creating vivid but "false" memories consonant with one's other understandings (Portelli 1991). One of my unemployed interlocutors, for example, shared during an interview that his difficulties had made him suicidal. During a later conversation, after he had found work, he looked back on that period and said that being out of work had not been so bad. Was he lying? Did he forget what he had told me? Did he want me to forget?

This is why it cannot be said that interpretations based on personal experience necessarily take precedent over interpretations imparted from other sources. What we experience is the symbolic residue of a dialectical process whereby a "frame of interpretation" (Geertz 1973, 9) is applied to and ultimately changed by an event (Sahlins 2000). In this dissertation, the event is unemployment. Insofar as the specificities of a person's obligations and rights vis-à-vis the welfare system remain somewhat unclear until one has entered direct relations of exchange, much of the 'learning' with respect to norms and ethics will involve 'doing'—and particularly the doing that occurs when the hegemonic exchange relation of modern capitalism, formal wage labor, becomes temporarily or permanently unavailable. It is during these periods after all that the individual must seek alternative conduits of material support. The relations that are available to the individual are certainly not pre-determined: circumstances change, people come in and out of one another's lives, resources are distributed and re-distributed. Nevertheless, there are patterns of dependency that distinguish one welfare regime from another.

This study traces the everyday processes whereby unemployed shift their dependencies in Norway. This marks it as a different kind of welfare state scholarship. Other studies have largely opted to describe welfare regimes as if they were cities rendered on a map. From this birds-eye view, policies and institutions, which in everyday life reveal themselves partially and only from the perspectives of different actors, become, like two-dimensional streets and parks, visible and thus comprehensible both in their entirety and in their relationship to the greater whole of the system. But while the

cartographic view corresponds to what exists out there in the world, it is nevertheless an abstraction—and one which cannot possibly serve all analyses equally well.

This study takes a different approach. If the welfare regime is like a city, then I endeavor to describe it as it appears from the perspectives of those whose lives unfold within it. This account emerges through conversations, stories, digressions, asides, lies, impressions, observations, and participation. It builds an understanding of institutions and ethical commitments based on their concretization in quotidian interactions. This is a scholarly reckoning with the Nordic welfare model that aims to reveal its distinctiveness in the impressions it leaves on experiences, norms, anxieties, aspirations, biases, and most importantly, ethics. With respect to policy and policy design, this is a demonstration of ethnography's capacity to provide an account of social and labor policies that captures both their primary functions (e.g. income maintenance, re-training) and their latent or unintended consequences (e.g. fostering an understanding of formal wage labor and paying taxes as moral obligations, building trust between the individual and the state). The result is a form of policy studies that provides a more robust account of what policies actually achieve through their sculpting of experience.

For the present study, I focus on the experience of unemployment. Thanks to the universal figure of the "unemployment rate," we tend to think of unemployment as something that varies quantitively, in the very narrow but rather practical terms of more or less. But this should not obscure the very significant qualitative variation in the ways people—to invoke the title of Bakke's (1940) celebrated study—"make a living without a job." The material and sociocultural consequences of unemployment, as well as the kind and amount of post-loss support—not to mention its source(s)—are likely to be quite

different depending on where one finds oneself when the bad news is broken. According to Gallie and Paugam (2004), there are broad patterns of unemployment experience, which they define in terms of relative financial deprivation and social exclusion. These patterns follow from the form of a country's welfare regime, the nature of its dominant family structures, and the state of its economic development and rate of sectoral change. In Norway, for instance, relatively generous public benefits allow most people to live much as they did while working—and often without needing to turn to kin or extended-kin networks for support. In the United States, by contrast, state support is comparatively nasty (low replacement rates), brutish (greater social stigma), and short (26 weeks vs. 104 in Norway). For this reason, American ears do not perk up when they hear of jobless people selling their homes, moving in with family, beseeching kin and friends for help, or even turning to complete strangers through digital fundraising platforms like GoFundMe. At further remove from Norway and the United States is a case like Lebanon, a country where the destitute rely neither on the state nor the family alone but sectarian-political groups for aid (Cammett 2015).

In each of these cases, the experience of unemployment reflects differences in the institutionalized relations of exchange and dependency between the individual, the family, the labor market, the state, and other actors. In the extant scholarship, interest in welfare regimes and their "welfare mixes" (Esping-Andersen 1999) has revolved around the project of creating and testing typologies (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Powell and Barrientos 2004). With the exception of the aforementioned scholars who have taken up the concept of "moral economy," the political scientists and sociologists who study welfare regimes have not, to my knowledge, inquired further into the sociocultural and

moral implications of different welfare regimes—and yet, these are potentially significant. After all, it is apparent that the form and meaning of any particular relation, say, between a parent and a child, is a product of the kinds of interactions, exchanges, and dependencies people view as appropriate to that relation in certain situations. In Norway, it would seem strange in most circumstances to turn to a parent after losing your job when the state provides 62.4% of your previous income for two years. In Italy, which features what Gallie and Paugam call a "familiastic model," moving home and spending your parent's money might hardly be a last resort—in fact, it may seem like the obvious or "right" thing to do. After all, what are parents for?

Or what is a state for? Or a partner? Or a sectarian-political group? In this dissertation, based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Norway, I show that answering these questions necessarily involves articulating some moral vision of what the individual is for, as well as what his or her obligations are to various groups and institutions (Mauss 2000). What interests me is why these visions are broadly similar and shared. My solution is to suggest that industrial and post-industrial phenomena—like unemployment—figure as sites for the normalization and moralization of certain patterns of what economic sociologist Viviana Zelizer (2012) calls "relational work," or "the creative effort people make establishing, maintaining, negotiating, transforming, and terminating interpersonal relations" (2012, 149). Relational work is oriented toward the formation—or dissolution—of "relational packages" (2012, 151), or durable social ties based on certain terms and media of exchange. I am interested in the everyday processes by which the relational packages associated with different welfare regimes are (re)produced, contested, and modified as people navigate life events like unemployment.

With the relational work perspective, we see that a welfare regime is an instituted process marked by the confluence of certain life events or phases with particular relational packages. Social and labor policies are thus interventions that redraw the coordinates of relational work—between the individual, family, labor market, and state—toward new relational packages. In doing so, policies may change substantively the nature and meaning of certain social relations and their associated expectation: in Lebanon, a sectarian-political group is not just a vehicle for electoral politics but a locus of individual and collective welfare. The relational work involved in creating and maintaining that relational package is very different than the relational work a Norwegian might feel is appropriate for an individual and a political party. And yet, Norwegians have a different relationship to the state than the Lebanese, or, for that matter, the Americans. At the same time, in Norway, the kinds of exchanges that mark the parent-child relationship are quite different from the ones that mark it among many groups in the United States: there is in most cases no expectation that one's parents will support them financially during a spell of unemployment.

Another benefit of this perspective is the novel understanding of migration and integration it affords. When people leave their homes to settle in a new country, they often depart not only from a familiar sociocultural terrain but from a familiar economic one (which we are also conceiving in a sociocultural sense). In this way, migration constitutes a process of partial dis-embedding from one economic world and partial embedding in another. It is often a move between dissimilar welfare regimes. For this reason, a life event like unemployment might become a site of sociocultural integration,

as, say, a young Pakistani man in Oslo does not turn to his family—like he might in Pakistan—but to the state for support.

There are potentially many implications: because he does not turn to his family, he will not need to repay specific favors, he may not be bound by some of the expectations they would otherwise have of him, and he may not expect to have to provide aid of this kind to his own children in the future. At the same time, his parents may be insulted that he does not come to them for help or does not move home. Here, we have a clash between conflicting attempts to cement relations—and cultural meanings—with one encompassing relational package. If my research in Norway is anything to go by, it suggests that the welfare system triumphs here, if only because it is perceived as appropriate ("when in Rome, do as the Romans do") and because in institutionalizing relations of reciprocal expectation with the (predictable, rule-bound) state, it frees one to some extent from these same relations with real, mercurial individuals. Thus, behind a persistent aesthetic multiculturalism, real changes in economic—and thus sociocultural—life occur when people lose their jobs and decide whom they should and will turn to.

This is how I believe the "employment ethic," or the shared moral imagination of formal wage labor, is learned and affirmed in contemporary Norway. It is through the experience of being out of work and navigating the terrain of the country's distinctive social safety net that one comes to understand precisely what is lost alongside the loss of a job. It is not merely income—or approximately a third of it—but the means to participating in this society on the specific social and moral terms specified by its social democratic welfare regime. And in teaching and affirming, this experience proves to be a remarkable means of integrating people across class, gender, ethnic, and generational

lines, producing a homogeneity of moral understanding on the point of formal wage labor and the welfare system.

At least, that has been the case until recently.

The New Norway

It is late summer 2015, nearly a year before Khalid, Jonas, and I met for coffee. It is raining lightly, and I am walking the winding road to Sagene (literally meaning "The Saws"), a neighborhood near the heart of what was once working-class Oslo. The sooty air, the cramped workers' dwellings—all is gone. Today, Sagene is home to charming antique houses, cozy restaurants, bustling cafes, and a quiet, old pharmacy that houses my destination, the Labor Museum. Upon arrival, I am greeted by Grete, a middle-aged Norwegian woman and the museum's resident historian. We walk through the small, main space into a room featuring an exhibit on Swedish labor migrants to Norway. Grete makes coffee, we sit, and she tell me about the museum and its philosophy. Its core commitment, she says, is translation. We tour the other exhibits, and she shows me what she means. Through images, sounds, textures, artifacts, and stories, this small building infuses the anonymous, black-and-white laboring masses with color and individuality. Here, one does not read about the whistles that announced the beginning and end of the work day—one *hears* them. And your hands, like their hands, touch the rough, scratchy fabric of the sails they made. Through this sensorial immersion, the museum reveals the temporal gulf between *then* and *now*, *here* and *there*, *them* and *us*, to be an illusion. It shows that the that lives lived a century or more ago, beneath different clothes and in

different buildings, were in meaningful ways like ours. They were filled with hopes and anxieties, aspirations and disappointments like our own.

At least, this is Grete's goal. Ironically, while it seeks to dissolve the boundary between past and present, the museum sits close to the city's most significant class boundary, the Aker River. In the 19th and 20th centuries the Aker was the artery along which Oslo's industry blossomed, as well as the geographical and symbolic border separating the overcrowded, working-class dwellings of the east from the affluent, bourgeois neighborhoods of the west. Today, at a time when Norway's industrial working class has largely passed from the factories into the photographs of the Labor Museum, the Aker remains the thin seam of a two-sided city, both separating and stitching together the more homogeneous, more well-to-do west and the less homogeneous, less well-to-do east.

And perhaps like the gap between Oslo's west and east, the distance between past and present in Norway is greater than historians like Grete would like to believe. After all, there is a fundamental difference between experiencing the horrors of industrial life first-hand and discovering them in a textbook or during a field trip. More generally, there is a difference between an era where unemployment, injury, illness, old age and poverty were essentially synonyms, and one where all legal residents are eligible for various cash transfers and social services that protect their individual welfare when they cannot enter into relations of formal wage labor. To look beyond the undeniable similarities between early industrial and post-industrial Norway, such as the shared affects and practices that bind human beings across time and space, is to discover divergences that signal that time has in fact passed and things have changed. The coming of the social democratic welfare

regime was a sociocultural and moral revolution, the effects of which are still perceptible in the ways that people like Khalid and Jonas perceive work and worklessness, the individual and the state, social rights and obligations.

If you leave the Labor Museum and walk south along the Aker, you eventually reach the Oslofjord, a placid bay embraced by the city on three sides. Here, at the water's edge, is a different city—one with its gaze fixed on the future. This is the new Oslo. For centuries, Norway's capital was little more than a drab, provincial town in a backwater province of Denmark.[3] As recently as the mid-1960s, it was described as being "like a gangling youth who has grown up overnight and feels more at ease on the mountain trails than on the traffic-clogged city streets" (Connery 1966, 210).[4] No longer. The city now exudes the optimism and confidence of a country flush with money and buoyed by an unblemished global reputation. Down along the Oslofjord, where once stood the warehouses, piers, and cranes of the city's industrial waterfront, there is now the "Fjord City," a massive development project and gleaming monument to Norwegian ascendancy. Fashioned from Italian white marble and Norwegian granite, as well as wood, steel, glass, asphalt, and concrete, these projects include the pearl white and iceberg-like Opera House, the futuristic high-rise office buildings of the "bar code," the ultramodern apartment complexes of Tjuvholmen and Sørenga, a new grand boulevard named for a medieval queen, a shopping mall, hotels, restaurants, and avant-garde museums to house modern art, a massive collection of works by Edvard Munch, and various national treasures. These embellish the edge of the capital like the frosted edge of a thick slice of cake. And notably, this new Oslo does not lie above or along the water, like most coastal cities, but, through the Fjord City's assortment of stairs, ladders,

platforms, and ramps, it ascends from it—a fitting image for a people whose immense wealth has in fact emerged from the sea.

But, like a borrowed suit, these new things hang a bit awkwardly on the frame of a city unaccustomed to luxury. For this reason, it is not difficult for a careful observer to find the remnants of Oslo's old soul clinging here and there. In fact, close to the tourist-friendly wharf and the hulking skeleton of the future National Museum (to be completed in 2020) stands the City Hall, a red-brick social democratic cathedral built in 1950[5] and recognized—by people who recognize it—as the setting for the annual Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. Inside and out, the City Hall celebrates the myths and ideals of the labor movement, social democracy, and the Norwegian nation, blending them into a single and singular heroic frieze. When Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and Barack Obama collected their golden medallions, they did so beneath enormous allegorical murals depicting the birth of a modern, independent nation through the collective struggle of fishermen, farmers, industrial workers, scientists, and writers. This celebration of labor continues outside along the part of the building's perimeter that faces the dark blue Oslofjord. There, six life-size statues of male workers, muscles flexing and bellies bulging, remain perpetually suspended in the midst of their soundless lifting, hauling, and hammering. Between the men and the fjord are fountains ornamented with statues of massive nude women and children, joined hand-in-hand.

This mid-century tableau of production and reproduction, which I have stopped to admire many times since my first visit to Oslo in 2009, recalls the values of an era fondly remembered in Norway—and increasingly remote. Norwegian historian Francis Sejersted (2011) christened this period, which lasted from the end of the Second World War to the

mid-1970s, "*sosialdemokratiets lykkelige øyeblikk*," or "social democracy's happy moment."[6] These decades were distinguished by three trends. The first was remarkable economic growth. Like the rest of Western Europe, Norway recovered from the devastation of the war with stunning speed and staggering annual growth rates (3.3% from 1950-1973) (Grytten 2008). Unemployment virtually disappeared and inflation was more or less tamed (ibid.). Before the coming of the "oil shock" in the early 1970s, Norway had begun to experience labor shortages, leading to the creation of a guest worker system that inaugurated immigrant flows, particularly from Pakistan, that would eventually transform the demographics of the country (Brochmann and Hagelund 2010; Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008). Alongside economic globalization, immigration spurred the growth of a xenophobic and welfare chauvinist political formation, the Progress Party, and initiated searching, sometimes painful conversations about new axes of inequality (Wikan 2002), racism (Gullestad 2006), integration and belonging (Alghasi, Eide, and Eriksen 2012; Eriksen 2011) and what it means to "be Norwegian in a shrinking world" (Eriksen 1993).

The second key dimension of social democracy's happy moment was the political supremacy of the Norwegian Labor Party (AP). Founded in the late 19th century, AP was from the early decades of its existence committed in word and deed to finding a non-revolutionary path to socialism (Lorenz 1972; Kjeldstadli and Helle 2016). Its support grew prodigiously following the turn of the century and in the late 1920s, it managed to appoint its first government under Christopher Hornsrud, the former operator of a general store. Though Hornsrud's government was short-lived, AP would return to power in 1935, as Norway faced mass unemployment due to the Great Depression. AP pledged to

find a path to full employment. The party would rule with few interruptions until the end of social democracy's happy moment in the 1970s. During its hegemony, steered primarily by multi-term prime minister Einar Gerhardsen, the party would abandon its commitment to abolishing capitalism,[7] settling instead for "industrial modernism" (Slagstad 1998, 410), a "reform technocratic ideology of governance" (1998, 418) that mixed Keynesian macroeconomics, positivistic social science, and paternalist governance to steer Norway along the path of managed, egalitarian growth. This remained the party's—and thus the government's—dominant ideological current until the late 1970s, when both social democratic and conservative elites began to experiment with deregulation, privatization, and market competition (1998, 503-506).

The third aspect of the happy moment was the construction of Norway's social democratic welfare regime. Building on the legislative accomplishments of the Liberal Party, which had been ideologically dominant in the early part of the century (Slagstad 1998; Sejersted 2011), AP-led governments created or expanded protections for the injured, sick, elderly, and unemployed. During one of AP's periods in opposition, a "bourgeois" (*borgerlig*) coalition adopted the "crown jewel" of the social democratic welfare regime, *folketrygdloven*, or the National Insurance Act of 1967, which created the legal basis for a unified social insurance scheme accessible to all legal residents. As a member of the National Insurance scheme, one is entitled—given certain conditions—to healthcare, as well as various forms of social protection. "The ambition," Sejersted (2011, 266) writes, "was not only to create security but also to create equality where equality was viewed as a cornerstone for social integration."

Beyond economics, politics, and policy, however, I believe it is possible to identify a fourth, less-appreciated dimension of social democratic hegemony—the era's distinctive moral imagination of labor. It finds expression in the form of the social democratic welfare regime, as well as the statues, reliefs, and murals of constructions like the City Hall. At the height of social democratic control, the ethics of industrial labor were broadly shared and deeply resonant. Work was understood as fundamental—and fundamental in the literal sense of constituting the foundation of a society that had yet to discover the massive fields of oil and natural gas in the North Sea. Like the identical, interchangeable red bricks of the City Hall, the workers of social democracy's happy moment were in a way asked to see themselves as material to be used for building something larger and greater than themselves.[8] What they built was a society where the state plays an almost unrivaled part in securing the individual's well-being against the unexpected contingencies of health, age, and the capitalist economy. None of this was possible without labor—in particular, industrial labor—which produced economic growth and, through taxation, undergirded a welfare system that utilized the spoils of that growth to protect its victims: the unemployed, the injured, the sick, the disabled. In turn, the groups were invited to claim their entitlements without shame but only—and this is critical—to the extent that formal wage labor was not a viable option.

It is this normative understanding of what the welfare system is for that some in contemporary Norway worry is no longer appreciated by some groups. In particular, there is concern that young people and migrants, both groups who are disproportionately unemployed, either lack the proper 'moral fiber' with respect to formal wage labor and proper use of the welfare system or, in the case of migrants, possess one that is keyed to

rights and obligations recognized by an alternative and incompatible cultural system. A separate challenge is presented by a group who would threaten not to use the welfare system differently (and thus inappropriately) but *administer* it differently. These are for-profit service providers and social entrepreneurs—actors, who thanks to the deregulation of NAV's labor market services, now participate in the work of helping the unemployed find jobs. What brings them in this dissertation into the same frame as young people and migrants is their capacity to elicit condemnation and criticism from people—often different people depending on the group in question—who believe that what motivates their actions in relation to the welfare system is a set of principles and ethical commitments that are discordant with the moral disposition they believe is required by the social democratic welfare regime.

Dissertation Overview

What follows in this dissertation is an ethnographic account based on 16 months of fieldwork in Oslo between 2014 and 2017. Primary fieldwork was conducted during the year between August 2015 and August 2016,[9] in the midst of an economic slump commentators called the "*oljesmell*," or "oil crash." During that year, I conducted in-depth interviews[10] with 30 current and recently unemployed NAV "users" (*brukere*) in Oslo. Interviews with these core interlocutors covered their employment and unemployment histories, their daily routines, their experiences with the welfare system, their job-search process, their values and aspirations, and their reflections on the material and moral dimensions of work and worklessness. Among my core interlocutors were four non-immigrant women, twelve non-immigrant men, eight immigrant women (one each

from China, Dubai, Estonia, Poland, Serbia, and Switzerland; two from Lithuania), and six immigrant men (one each from Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Somalia; two from Chile). Nearly all my interlocutors received unemployment benefits, a scheme that I describe at length in Chapter 1. Those who were ineligible for unemployment benefits, due to having either failed to qualify or exhausted their benefits, received means-tested social assistance. If they participated in labor market services, such as the job-seeker courses I describe in Chapter 3, they were eligible for a nominal course benefit.

I met most of these core interlocuters during a six-month period (December 2015 to May 2016) when I was an almost daily participant observer in NAV-sponsored job-seeker courses developed and managed by a consulting firm, New Possibilities (NP).[11] NP is a national, for-profit third-party service provider—one of Norway's largest—that bids competitively against similar organizations to win contracts with NAV to deliver local labor market services. During the half-year period during which I observed NP's Oslo-based operation, the company was under contract to provide basic job-seeker courses with one-on-one career advising for unemployed individuals in the capital. My role at NP was dynamic: at times, I sat near course instructors, scribbling notes as a silent observer; at others, I joined participants as an active co-participant and collaborator, playing networking games, doing mock interviews, and editing CVs and cover letters. While my investigation revolved mostly around the courses and associated activities, I also interacted informally and at length with the instructors. We often rode the metro together, ate lunch together, and chatted during breaks and before and after courses. This engagement gave me access to the "front stage" and "back stage" (Goffman 1959) of one

of the main sites where the unemployed in Norway spend their time and interact with one another.

My fieldwork had two other key components. In late 2015, I met Silje, the director of StåPå, a non-profit organization that develops initiatives for struggling NAV users, advocates for social entrepreneurship, and collaborates with NAV on community projects. Silje invited me to participate in back-office meetings at one of Oslo's NAV offices, attend social entrepreneurship seminars, and follow the development of StåPå's abortive youth mentorship program. My contact with Silje and StåPå, though punctuated, enabled me to collect data on user advocacy, the nascent social entrepreneurship movement, and interorganizational collaboration within the welfare sector. To supplement my work with StåPå, I met with other actors engaged on behalf of users, including representatives from NGOs and two "work-rehabilitation companies," non-profit organizations that work with NAV to help people with diminished work capacity gain new skills and experience. The result of these engagements was an ethnographic mapping of the Norwegian welfare state drawing on the perspectives and experiences of the people who use it and administer it.

The other key component of my fieldwork involved an ongoing series of conversations with politicians, policymakers, and party political advisors. This began in summer 2014, when I interviewed two members of parliament on the Standing Committee for Labor and Social Affairs, as well as party political advisors working with two other committee members. I subsequently interviewed three other members of parliament with experience working on labor and welfare issues. At the invitation of one member of parliament, I also attended the 2016 convention for the Conservative Party.

Data collected through my contact with political elites provides insight into unemployment as a site of political struggle and policy design. As this dissertation foregrounds unemployment as experience and an object of moral discourse, this data is mainly used as background, particularly in my discussion of the recent history of labor market services in Chapter 2 and of policymaker 'folk anthropologies' in Chapter 4.

The dissertation itself is divided into six chapters, which tackle the relationship between work, workless, and morality from different angles. Chapter 1, "Down and Out," begins, appropriately enough, with the loss of a job. From there, it examines the experience of becoming a NAV user, shifting between "relational packages", and living with the various "displacements"—social, financial, temporal, and spatial—that typically obtain in the lives of the unemployed in Norway. This chapter aims to show that navigating unemployment is morally instructive, introducing a person to a catechism of formal wage labor that reinforces the notion that employment is the basis of social personhood and a central feature of moral life in the social democratic welfare regime.

In Chapter 2, "The Unemployment Business," I survey the institutional landscape of Norway's labor market services—policy tools at the government's disposal to intervene directly in the lives of the unemployed. Focusing on NP, a consulting firm that provides job-seeker courses, I discuss the recent entry of for-profit actors into the world of labor market services through competitive procurement. Contrasting the philosophy of the actors who advocate for competitive procurement with the position of a prominent left-wing activist, I show the privatization of welfare state administration to be an epochal, moral struggle between two different and diametrically opposed societal ontologies. Shifting scales, I draw on data collected as a participant observer at NP, to

argue that while this struggle plays out, there are people—NP's front-line workers—whose employment has been made precarious in the name of creating a welfare system that is more adaptable.

Chapter 3, "Out of Circulation," examines NP's job-seeker courses. These state-sponsored but privately-administered courses serve ostensibly as primers in navigating the labor market. As I show, however, they are also settings where the abstractions of the labor market and the self are concretized through a neoliberal rhetoric of seeing oneself as a sellable product. But rather than treat this rhetoric as evidence of a neoliberal turn in Norway's welfare state, I argue for a more nuanced reading, which foregrounds the ways in which this rhetoric promotes an ethics of unemployment that is continuous with the broader productivist logic of the social democratic welfare regime.

In Chapter 4, "Welfare Kings," I turn to the ever-fraught issue of benefit dependency (Fraser and Gordon 1994) and examine the empirical basis of recent concern about a genre of unethical welfare state use termed "*naving*." *Naving* refers to the practice of exploiting NAV benefits and services in order to avoid employment or education. It is a fixture of the Norwegian media and a pressing concern among some policymakers, particularly in the center and on the right of the political spectrum. This chapter draws on comparative statistics and my ethnographic data to contest the notion that *naving* is a widespread phenomenon. By contrast, I show that the *naving* discourse, which is woven into everyday conversation, reaffirms Norway's employment ethic—albeit with potentially hazardous policy consequences that I describe.

The dissertation's final chapters take up the apparent disappearance of shared categories and concepts pertaining to work—precisely what many in Norway have come

to fear with respect to the country's young people and immigrants. In Chapter 5, "The Oil Kids," I examine the case of the former. Drawing on the narratives of two unemployed young people, Ida and Kjetil, I examine the experience of youth unemployment and interrogate the idea, held by some older Norwegians, that young people lack the ethical relationships to work and the welfare system that their forebearers had. Using these cases as exemplars for my broader engagement with young people, I argue that the dilemma faced by Norway's youth is not a failing work ethic but a persistent employment ethic ill-suited to the increasingly competitive and demanding post-industrial labor market.

In Chapter 6, "Going Native," the dissertation turns to unemployed immigrants and their reflections on the connection between ethnocultural belonging and the local norms of work and worklessness. Challenging the view that migrants' cultural and moral orientations and practices are fixed by "cultures" inimical to core Norwegian values and ways of life (Wikan 2002), I show that unemployed migrants are often engaged in creative and open-ended projects of "becoming" whereby they attempt to "grow out of themselves" (Biehl and Locke 2017b, 4) into something else. Within the context of the social democratic welfare regime, these projects involve confronting, resisting, or acceding to normative and ethical complexes like the employment ethic. I contend that this process blurs the line between the cultural and social dimensions of integration (Eriksen 2007), and teaches migrants that the Norwegian labor market is not a market but a space governed—often in a discriminatory way—by gendered, racialized, and moral expectations.

In the Conclusion, I summarize the main findings and contributions of the dissertation and outline avenues for future research that explore the association between

welfare regimes and the different normative ethical theories through which people understand and navigate life events like unemployment, as well as illness, disability, retirement, parenthood, and so on. The ambition of this study, ultimately, is to provide a theoretical and methodological blueprint for examining how different "worlds of welfare capitalism" (Esping-Andersen 1990), in both the Global North and South, foster modes of ethical life. It is a call for cultural anthropologists to join the interdisciplinary and comparative social science of the welfare state to investigate the continuities between the diversity of social safety nets and their associated 'moral fibers.'

Chapter 1
DOWN AND OUT

"It is a feeling of relief, almost of pleasure, at knowing yourself at last genuinely down and out. You have talked so often of going to the dogs—and well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it."

George Orwell (1933), *Down and Out in Paris and London*, p. 1

People in Norway do not talk of going to the dogs. Isak certainly did not. For the last sixteen years, he made a nice living selling IT services and products in Norway and abroad. He is 49 years old but looks half a decade younger and would look younger still if he were not bald and a bit paunchy. He is—or was—good at his job, though it took him awhile to realize that it was right for him. In college, he studied history and liked it so much that he went back for a master's degree. But jobs for historians were rare when he graduated, and if he were honest with himself, which eventually he was, he was not really suited to the slow, tedious work of archival research. He craved, as he put it, "frequent stimuli" and "measurable results." Sales, it turned out, was nothing like history. It was constantly stimulating, often unpredictable, and there was no ambiguity about what you had—or had not—achieved: there was either a deal or there was not, and if there was not, the next opportunity, the next pitch, the next triumph, was never too far off.

Until it was. The small Norwegian company Isak worked for eventually made him a victim of its success. It grew and grew until it seemed sensible to move the main office to London, making the Oslo contingent—of which Isak was a part—an ever-shrinking appendage in a relatively unimportant European market. He knew what was coming and greeted the impending sack with optimism. Finding a new position, he thought, would not

be too difficult, and after working for his entire adult life, a little time away from an office might be good for him. He later recalled:

> It was a little nice to begin with—to be free in a way. The first weeks, the first two, three weeks felt like a vacation...[and] almost at once after I became unemployed (*ble arbeidsløs*)…I received inquiries from headhunters from other companies…and then I had a process with a company that was interested. I visited in January and went through a qualification process (*kvalifiseringsprosess*) with them and had two interviews in February. At that point, I thought I would probably get the job—[they] seemed very interested. In the end of February, I learned that it wouldn't [work]…And it was then that I thought, 'Oi! Now, I have a problem.'

When Norwegians like Isak lose their jobs, they tend to say that they *fikk sparken*, or "got the kick." Each year, thousands get the kick in Norway—a social fact that might not at first be apparent to observers or Norwegians themselves, given the low unemployment rates that policymakers in other countries can only fantasize about. But there are people out of work behind these figures, and the experience of losing a job in Norway is more common than most Norwegians probably realize. In fact, according to statistics collected by the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), approximately 41% of Norway's labor force registered as *helt arbeidsledig*, or "fully unemployed" at some point between 2007 and 2016 (NAV 2016). In 2016 alone, roughly one of every ten people in the labor force was out of work, if only for a short period. This

suggests that while there are relatively few people unemployed at any given time in Norway, the experience of being out of work, if only for a short time, is something nearly half the able-bodied, working-age population has experienced during the past decade.

Still, the commonness of unemployment is little comfort to people like Isak, who suddenly find themselves cut loose from their job and the associated relationships and routines. Many have grown accustomed to the fact that of the 168 hours in each week, 37.5 of them—the amount considered "full-time" in Norway—will be spent putting their bodies, experience, skills, personalities, and social networks to work in exchange for a wage or a salary. The loss of a job does not just drain those 37.5 hours of their previous content. It initiates a process that redraws the social, economic, and moral coordinates of an individual's life—at least for a time. He or she no longer visits the same places, sees the same people, engages in the same activities. It is in the patterning of these shifts—or what I will call "displacements"—that one can discern the distinctive institutional and relational architecture of Norway's social democratic welfare regime. Unemployment, as pure abstraction, is part of the *langue* of industrial and post-industrial economies. It falls into various macroeconomic categories—e.g. cyclical, structural, seasonal, frictional, voluntary—and is amenable to policymaking. *Being* unemployed, by contrast, is a localized *parole* that unfolds idiosyncratically but according to a broad design that reflects the roles that states, families, corporate groups, and other actors are expected to play when an individual finds him- or herself "down and out" in a particular place and time. This experiential *parole* is morally instructive. It affirms the rights and obligations that an individual has toward other actors and institutions under certain conditions during the life-cycle. In Norway, the experience of unemployment typically endorses formal

wage labor as both the basis of social personhood and a central feature of moral life. To be unemployed is to rehearse a catechism that endows *det å ha jobb*, or "having a job" with social and moral values that add to its material ones.

This catechism, I argue, is inscribed both explicitly and implicitly in the experience of unemployment. Its explicit side lies in the individual's relationship with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), the agency that manages the unemployment benefits scheme. When a person registers with NAV, he or she is flagged as a "job-seeker," signaling that the entitlement to material support during periods of joblessness does not entitle a person to be unemployed. Agreeing to take money from the state means accepting—at least outwardly—a symbolic reframing of unemployment as "job-seeking." This means circumscribing the potential outcomes of what might otherwise be a site where "people's plasticity" (Biehl and Locke 2017a, 12) is momentarily unbridled, multiplying the possibilities of "becoming" (2017a). When unemployment is re-framed as job-seeking, the horizons of becoming are inscribed within the world of formal wage labor: there are no non-workers, the state seems to say, only *soon-to-be* workers.

The implicit side of the catechism is written in unemployment's reconfiguration of the social, financial, temporal, and spatial coordinates of a person's life. The overall aim of this chapter is to offer an account of how certain moral attitudes toward formal wage labor, discussed in the Introduction, are fostered or reinforced by "the meaningful structure of experience" (Geertz 1973, 364). It is an attempt to document ethnographically the experiential basis for the tacit ideas that undergird the shared

understanding of formal wage labor's natural, good, and necessary place in the moral order of the social democratic welfare regime.

Becoming "Real" Job-seekers

What do I do *now*? In Norway, the loss of a job is experienced by most people, perhaps exempting seasoned freelancers and consultants, as a rift in the fabric of ordinary life. In some cases, like Isak's, this rift is greeted with a combination of relief and optimism—being jobless, they presume, will feel like being on vacation (*på ferie*) and will end when they wish it to end. There are undoubtedly people for whom this is the case. After a brief spell away from work, they find a new position and acclimate to a new employer without having had their lives seriously disrupted. These people, whose passage through unemployment is almost too quick for an ethnographer to catch, were not among my interlocutors. The people I shared countless coffees with, listened to, commiserated with, laughed with, and observed had in common the discovery of just how difficult it can be to find a job even in a country with a relatively low unemployment rate. And many of them were less cheery and confident than Isak. Trygve, a Norwegian in his 50s with experience in sectors like furniture production and sales, shared that the first time he was laid off—during the "bank crisis" of the late 1980s, early 1990s—felt like a calamity. Confusion, usually about what happens next, intermingles with shame, self-doubt, embarrassment, and uncertainty.

But, critically, in Norway, that uncertainty does not extend to the question of *who* one will turn to for material support. Whereas people in other welfare regimes might expect to rely mostly or entirely on their own savings, loans, their immediate family,

extended kin and non-kin networks (Stack 1983), or sectarian groups (Cammett 2015), people in Norway turn without hesitation to the state. More specifically, they turn to NAV. In NAV's local branches and other administrative hubs, a staff larger than Norway's standing army manages a cradle-to-grave suite of cash transfers and services ranging from child and parental-leave benefits to pensions and unemployment benefits (*dagpenger*), the most common benefit scheme used by my interlocutors.[1213] NAV's proximity to the individual throughout the life-cycle is paralleled by its physical ubiquity. With more than 400 branches fanned out across the country, including one in each of Oslo's 16 boroughs, the agency's distinctive red and white logo is perhaps Norway's second most common symbol—the first being the Nordic cross-emblazoned national flag.

An actual NAV office is about as inviting as a government office can be—which is to say not very. They tend to be brightly lit and comfortable, though rather impersonal. Because of the standardization of the décor, they do not feel anchored in any one place or community. Whether in a NAV office in urban Oslo or a small municipality nestled somewhere in the fjords, one can expect to find things like the computer cluster, where people may apply for benefits, browse for jobs, or work on applications, or the wall boards with flyers advertising language courses, training programs, and upcoming events. There are the chairs where people wait for their number to appear on flat-screen monitors, and there are the small, semi-private counters where questions are asked and sometimes actually answered. Through its physical presence, NAV makes the welfare system, an abstraction that otherwise dwells largely in government white papers and scholarly literature, tangible and ordinary. It is aided in achieving this effect by certain experiential connotations—NAV is unmissably redolent of other 'ordinary' settings

through which a person passes from day-to-day. The take-a-number *kølapp* system, for example, recalls the experience of waiting one's turn at a bank or the tax office; the computer clusters suggest a public library. For this reason, the offices, as physical spaces, do not leave a strong impression on most people.

This combination of functional breadth, ubiquity, and standardization is the product of an ambitious 2005 reform, which consolidated three previous public agencies—the public employment services (*Aetat*), the national insurance office (*Trygdeetaten*), and the municipal social services—into a "one-stop shop." The reform's advocates complained that having to navigate three separate agencies, split across two administrative layers—state and municipal—added to the burdens of people looking for support. Too many, it was said, became "balls" (*kasteballer*) who bounced from one agency to another, or simply "fell through the cracks" (*falt mellom to stoler*), never getting the right kind of help. The revolutionary premise of the NAV reform was that Norway's extensive and unwieldy welfare system could be put behind one door in each of the country's 400+ municipalities (Andreassen and Aars 2015; Reegård 2008). Alongside this structural transformation, there were also numerous minor tweaks. Among these, one Oslo NAV branch leader explained to me, was that the term "*klient*," or "client," which connoted passivity and dependency, would be dropped in favor of the more neutral "*bruker*," or "user."

The process initiated by the loss of the job is one of securing material support to replace income. Because the unemployed are typically aware of the unemployment benefit scheme, having perhaps been briefed by their former employer, told by a friend, or informed by something in the media, this search for material support is almost

immediately transformed into a project of becoming a NAV *bruker*, and in particular, a NAV *bruker* using *dagpenger*, the term Norwegians use for unemployment benefits. It literally means "day money." The Law on National Insurance (*Lov om folketrygd*), the integrated legal code for Norway's welfare system, states that "The purpose of unemployment benefits (*dagpenger*) during unemployment is to provide partial coverage for the loss of work-income (*arbeidsinntekt*) during unemployment" (*Lov om folketrygd* § 4-1).[14]

The multi-step process of applying for unemployment benefits almost always begins on the internet, at NAV's ever-expanding web portal, nav.no.[15] The first step is registering as an *arbeidssøker*, or "job-seeker." One does this by logging into the portal using a form of electronic identification, usually consisting of one's "person number" (*personnummer*), and a username, password, and device-generated passcode associated with one's bank account (this is also called "BankID"). After logging in, the prospective user uploads a copy of their CV, which they are obligated to keep updated throughout the duration of their unemployment. In addition to registering as a job-seeker, one must meet four conditions to apply for unemployment benefits. First, the applicant must be a legal resident in Norway. Second, his or her work time must have been reduced by at least 50%. Third, as of 2019, the applicant's total income for the previous year must exceed 145,325 NOK (approximately $16,900) for the previous calendar year or 290,649 NOK (approximately $33,800) during the three previous calendar years.[16]

The final condition is somewhat more ambiguous. To receive unemployment benefits, NAV stipulates that a person must not only register as a job-seeker but be what they term a "real job-seeker" (*reel areidssøker*). At nav.no, NAV clarifies that this means

that "as a main rule, you must be willing to and able to take any work anywhere in Norway." Further text states that being a real job-seeker entails "being capable of work" (*arbeidsfør*), "willing to take work anywhere in Norway," "willing to work both full-time and part-time," and acknowledging that you can only be legitimately "exempted from taking work anywhere in Norway or working full-time/evenings/nights/weekends if you are more than 60 years old or there are serious social considerations (*tungtveiende sosiale hensyn*) connected to health, care responsibilities for children under one year, sole responsibility for children up through the seventh grade, or nursing for family." In addition, being a real-jobseeker means that one will "be an active job-seeker," "be available for NAV and able to begin in work or labor market schemes (*tiltak*) on short notice, "keep your CV updated on NAV.no," "have a permanent postal address where NAV can contact you," and "be able to arrange supervision of your children—if you have small children—on short notice."

Nothing said by my interlocutors suggests that they pay anything more than passing attention to the specifics of being a real job-seeker. For example, when I asked Marija, a Serbian woman who had recently completed her PhD at the University Oslo, what she thought NAV expected of her, she replied, "not to bother them, and to find a job on my own." This was a typical view. Bjørn Erik, a young Norwegian, emphasized that one's actual obligations to NAV are the ones your caseworker bothers to mention. "As long as I do what's asked," he said, "things function fine." Some of my interlocutors were asked to do more than others. A common NAV *krav*, or "demand," was that the user apply for a certain number of jobs per month and document their progress on a "job log" *(jobblogg*). They complied, perhaps grasping that the ambiguity of the "real job-seeker"

condition gave NAV discretion to terminate benefits if they failed to follow explicit instructions. Even so, none of my interlocutors took seriously the idea that NAV would actually withdraw support if they refused to take *any* job in *any* part of the country—and they were never asked to. This notion seemed particularly ludicrous to my foreign-born interlocutors from the oil and gas industry, many of them engineers. Having used specialized knowledge to build lucrative careers in multiple countries, they dismissed the idea that they would take *any* job in Norway as ridiculous.

On its website, NAV advises that people do not apply for unemployment benefits more than five or six days in advance of the last day that they will be paid. The actual application involves the electronic submission of various documents that clarify, among other things, a person's current work situation, the reason and date of termination, previous working hours, the reduction in work hours, legal residency, recent education, and any severance compensation. Applying too earlier or without all of the proper documents is likely to result in a rejected application.

But as some of my interlocutors discovered, even submitting correctly and at the right time can lead, puzzlingly enough, to the denial of benefits. This is precisely what happened to Szymon, a middle-aged Polish man who lost his job in the oil and gas sector. He shared with me that more than a month after meticulously gathering the required documents and applying for unemployment benefits, he was turned down without explanation. To add insult to injury, the notice was in Norwegian, which he does not speak, even though he elected online to receive correspondence in English. He had to type the text into Google Translate to learn that his money was not coming. When he appealed, a NAV representative responded, strangely enough, that "they just couldn't

understand the decision." Even stranger, the representative explained that they could not locate the person who had made it! By this time, Szymon found himself both "living with the hope that [he would] start getting unemployment benefits" and "getting a bit paranoid" because of all of the "really contradictory information." Fortunately, his appeal was successful.

When an application for unemployment benefits is approved, the recipient can expect to begin receiving payments after a three-day "wait time" (*ventetid*). If, however, it is determined that the applicant is responsible (*har ansvaret*) for their joblessness—i.e. they quit their previous position—then the wait time between approval and disbursement is three *months*. This is meant to be an economic disincentive against voluntarily resignation.[17] At the same time, it communicates a clear message about the gradations of legitimacy the state recognizes with respect to not participating in formal wage labor. A withdrawal from work which is foisted on you by an economic crisis or a firm's bankruptcy is legitimate cause for near-immediate aid; withdrawal that you foist upon yourself is not. Of course, this emic delineation of what might be called 'structural' and 'agentive' conceptions unemployment obfuscates the fact that the roots of all job-loss in Norway are in some sense structural. To a person who leaves a job because of a hostile work environment, psychological distress, or burnout, the decision to exit is unlikely to feel entirely voluntary, though it may be recognized as such by NAV. In any event, this biased accounting of responsibility, reflected in different wait times, undermines the notion that the social democratic welfare regime necessarily strives toward a kind of "decommodification" where "citizens can freely, and without potential loss of income, or

general welfare, opt out of work when they consider it necessary" (Esping-Andersen 1990, 23). In practice, they can opt out under certain conditions.

The cash transfer associated with the unemployment benefits scheme consists of direct deposits made to the recipient's bank account every two weeks. The amount received annually is 62.4% of the person's gross income from the previous calendar year or average gross income from the three previous calendar years. As of 2019, the ceiling for annual benefits is 362,729 NOK (approximately $42,100). Given previous research which has argued that the social democratic welfare regime largely mitigates the adverse material consequences of unemployment (Gallie and Paugam 2004), I was keen to find out how people felt about the amount of money they received. The common sentiment was gratitude mixed with a view that the benefits did not approximate what they had previously paid in taxes. The money, Szymon said, was "the smallest amount that will allow me to sleep more or less…I can look for a job without major worries." He was surprised to learn that unemployment benefits are also taxable. In general, my interlocutors reported that living on unemployment benefits spurred them to cease dining out, going on holiday abroad (for obvious reasons), and buying new, up-to-date versions of things they already owned. Though deprived of things they perceived of as minor luxuries, nobody I met who received unemployment benefits wondered about how to make ends meet. This, and the fact that one can receive benefits for up to two years, provided a sense of long-term financial security that is rare by international standards.

While receiving unemployment benefits, users are obligated to send a bimonthly "message card" (*meldekort*) that answers five questions. The first asks the user if they have worked in the previous two-week period, and if so, how many hours. On its website,

NAV clarifies that work (*arbeid*) encompasses "activity that provides or would normally provide compensation." This includes everything from ordinary employment and freelance work to voluntary labor that "is usually (*vanligvis*) paid." The second question asks if the user is participating in a labor market scheme (*tiltak*), education, or other activities as part of an agreement with NAV. If so, the user must write the number of days they did so during the recent period. The third question inquires about whether the person has been sick enough to not work or participate in labor market schemes, education, or other activities. If a person answers "yes" and certifies their illness with a sick leave notice (*sykmelding*), they are entitled to receive sickness pay instead of unemployment benefits. The fourth question pertains to vacation (*ferie*) and asks if a person was unable to work or participate in other activity due to vacation. Normally, vacation that precludes work or activity leads to a reduction in benefits. Fifth and finally, the user is asked to answer "yes" or "no" to the question of whether they would still like NAV's support to help them find work.

The manifest function of the message card is to keep NAV informed about a person's eligibility for benefits. According to the law that governs the unemployment benefit scheme, benefits cannot be given to a person who is enrolled in "education or training, or participating in unpaid work" (see *Lov om folketrygd* § 4-6). The answers given to the various questions provide potential justification for the reduction, replacement, or termination of benefits. Obviously, NAV is unable to verify the truth of the user's responses, affirming this relationship as one that both caseworkers and users recognize to be based primarily on *tillit*, or "trust." My interlocutors, native- and foreign-born, shared a positive view of this arrangement, though many suspected that it was

vulnerable to exploitation by untrustworthy people. Bjørn Erik, for instance, said that he thought that the demands NAV makes on job-seekers "are good," but that "they're maybe easy to exploit (*utnytte*)." He concluded that "for me, for people who are honest (*ærlige*), I'll say that it's good. But when it comes to people who are slick (*sleipe*), I am a little unsure." When my interlocutors responded this way, I followed up by asking, if that is the case, why do *you* not exploit it? The answers usually revolved around the undesirability of being out of work and the desirability of having a job.

Some answered my question by admitting that they had exploited the system. Still, they were quick to diminish this breach in trust by reasoning that it was either (1) so minor as to be unethical but irrelevant, or (2) beneficial to their job-search and thus unethical with respect to NAV's rules but ethical with respect to NAV's goals. A version of unethical-but-minor exploitation involves taking unsanctioned holidays abroad and finding some way to have the message card sent from one's account on a Norwegian IP address. In one case I heard about, someone simply asked a former coworker to do it for her, which he did. An example of unethical-but-actually-ethical exploitation was shared with me by Viktoria, a young, highly-educated entrepreneur from Lithuania. While out of work in Oslo, she decided to see if she might be able to find a job by leveraging her unique position at the intersection between the Norwegian and Lithuanian business communities. But there was a problem: she could not travel abroad without risking reduction or even termination of her unemployment benefits. She decided she would do so anyway, unable to resist an invitation to join a delegation on their trip to Lithuania. She remembered it this way:

> I was that binding asset they [the Norwegians and Lithuanians] needed…but I lied to NAV. When I was on that trip, we look a lot of photos, shaking hands… I knew that I was doing something illegal because I was in Lithuania building my network…And you can't explain to them [NAV] that that was my way of getting a job because they only recognize *applying for* jobs. That's the only way they recognize you can get a job. So, I was lying to NAV. I didn't like it, but that was the reality, and they were narrow-minded enough that if they didn't like it, that wasn't my problem—it's their problem.

For Viktoria, the trust-breaching trip was justified by its alignment with the purpose that she believed NAV's rules were ultimately meant to serve. Still, not all feel the need to inscribe what they feel to be unethical within a broader ethical framework. Martim, a young Portuguese who lost his job in the oil and gas sector, once shared with me the story of two of his former colleagues, both of whom were also Portuguese and laid off. When recruited in Portugal, all three were told that coming to Norway would mean a job "for life" (see Chapter 6). According to Martim, all three experienced their termination as an act of betrayal—a breach of trust with the country for which they had uprooted their lives. The two men, Martim said, applied for and received unemployment benefits and thus a portion of their previous salaries. Meanwhile, they had secretly moved to the Netherlands to start new jobs. To hide the fact that they were illegally double-dipping, they maintained post addresses in Norway and had an acquaintance open their mail. When NAV asked for an in-person meeting, as it occasionally did, the men would schedule an appointment and fly back to Norway. I asked Martim why he thought they did something that was so clearly a violation of the written—and unwritten—contract

between NAV and the user. He could not know exactly what they thought, but suggested that they likely still shared his own sense of betrayal: if you have deceived me, why should I not deceive you?

Antipathy for NAV, though not rising to the level of instigating fraud, was a common theme among my interlocutors. Viktoria said that part of what motivated her to find a job was the fact that "NAV gives me a feeling of being stuck." When I asked one young Norwegian which words come to mind when he thinks of NAV, he joked "*stikkord*," or "swear words." Ahmed, a middle-aged Somali who moved to Norway as a child refugee, wanted to make sure that I knew that "everybody hates NAV" and that "it's the gestapo of our time—it's the worst office." These sentiments, which users will link with particular grievances, are undoubtedly the product of experience. But they also reflect the public's ingestion of years of negative media coverage of NAV. In Norway's newspapers, NAV is almost always represented as either hopelessly naïve, allowing itself to be swindled by lazy kids and shifty foreigners, or inconceivably heartless, denying a person with a dire health issue or the purest intentions or the desire to turn their life around the benefit or service that might just make the difference. In both cases, critics bemoan the alleged incompetence of the organization's employees and their tendency to adhere inflexibly to the rules and regulations as written.

A newly unemployed user's first in-person encounter with NAV typically occurs when NAV makes contact and requests that the person attend a group information session at their local office. These sessions vary from office to office but share an ignominious reputation for their uselessness. Dagny, a middle-aged Norwegian woman, remembered that hers was "a very strange experience." She explained, "There were very many who sat

there, I believe it was 30 or 40 people, of all sizes, shapes, and backgrounds, and most of them just sat there…the mood was very bad…it was very strange…I saw two others that were like me, who were a little quicker, a little more active. The rest, I don't know."

She noted that the NAV employee in charge seemed new to his role and probably untrained. He could not answer the deflated group's questions, which resulted in a surreal scene where the users asked and tried to answer questions among themselves. For unemployed who do not speak Norwegian, the meeting may go a bit differently. Nicolae, a young Romanian consultant who lost his job with a company that provides services for oil and gas companies, described his visit like this:

> After you apply, you have an initial meeting and they talk about your situation. The meeting is a group meeting, but if you don't know Norwegian, you'll have [a] five-minute meeting when [sic] they tell you, 'You have to involve yourself and find a job. Most of the job [sic] are through connections.' They don't give you too many directions. If you don't know Norwegian, they tell you, 'It's up to you to find a job. You struggle and find a job.'

In general, the unemployed do not visit their local NAV offices much. In the near future, it is possible that they will not visit them at all. Already, the main points of contact between NAV the unemployed—registration, the message card, the cash transfer—have been digitized, and almost daily it seems as if nav.no has added or modified a new guide, template, or wizard. For users whose digital application for unemployment benefits is processed and approved without issue, the only office visit may be the rather awkward

group information session. This is particularly true for users—and these appear to be the majority—who, like Nicolae, do not go out of their way to interact with NAV.

But while fewer office visits is more convenient for all involved, it also presents a problem for users, who usually want to know who is managing their case and what that person is doing. For this reason, the relationship—or lack thereof—between the user and the *saksbehandler*, or "caseworker," can be a source of great vexation for the unemployed. They typically complain that they do not know who their caseworker is, or if there is even one person who is alone responsible for their case. They wonder who has decision-making authority with respect to their benefit claims, who decides that they need to record more applications in each month's job log, who determines that it is time for them to participate in a job-seeker course (see Chapter 3). Opportunities for in-person appeals (Dubois 2010), while still available, are becoming rarer as NAV aggressively redirects users to the phones and the web portal. Confirming the findings of empirical research that has found that the chief characteristic of the relationship between NAV and its users is *uforutsigbarhet*, or "unpredictability" (Lundberg 2012), the accounts of most of my jobless contacts reveal the user-NAV tie to be like that of a supplicant and a benevolent if faceless and capricious god.[18] While the god's mind may remain a deep mystery, however, its demands of the supplicant are quite clear: find employment and shift your main axis of dependency back to the labor market until you are either too sick, too injured, or too old to do so.

The loss of income associated with the loss of a job propels people to seek a new conduit of material support. In Norway, this conduit can be created relatively easily with NAV. This ease may obfuscate what is in fact a remarkable symbolic transformation of

non-work into pre-work. Unemployment, for those who accept the state's support, is, through both formal requirements and tacit understandings, recast in teleological terms: regardless of what one does now, there is only one legitimate destination for the able-bodied person out of work: gainful employment.

Displacements

In his seminal study of the unemployed in Great Britain, sociologist E. Wight Bakke (1934) cannily observed that "When the day's 'work' becomes a search for work, the whole manner of life changes" (1934, 48). The changes he had in mind were primarily social, "occur[ing[in a man's relation with others, in the home, the community, in religious life, in the use of leisure time" (ibid.). In his groundbreaking qualitative research, Bakke captures what I believe remains the most salient feature of unemployment—its capacity to reconfigure. But where he focused on social relations, I propose here to take a holistic view, drawing together social displacements with those that occur along the financial, temporal, and spatial dimensions of life. I do so by drawing on economic sociologist Viviana Zelizer's (2012) concepts of "relational work" and "relational packages." According to Zelizer, economic activity is not calculative and oriented toward individual material advantage but rather creative and dedicated to "establishing, maintaining, negotiating, transforming, and terminating interpersonal relations" (2012, 151). This is what she calls "relational work." The outcome of relational work are assemblages she calls "relational packages." These have four elements (ibid.). The first is "distinctive social ties," or mutually-recognized categories of relationship that link two or more transactors. In any context, recognized social ties are diverse and can

never be fully enumerated, as new ones constantly come into existence through the practices that invent new categories of person (see Hacking 1999). In a country like Norway, common ties during the life-cycle include employer-employee, state-user, seller-customer, parent-child, and friend-friend.

The second element is "a set of economic transactions" that are considered appropriate, or at least plausible, for the particular social tie. For example, Americans may find it appropriate to provide a cash gift that helps a child buy their first house. Americans would likely find it unusual, however, if the same gift for the same purpose were made to a neighbor, a coworker, or their local barista. Something about the tie between a parent and child authorizes a particular set of exchanges, or at least brings these exchanges within the realm of thinkability.

The third element in Zelizer's relational package framework is particular "media" for the set of transactions linked with the social tie. Though we tend to think of money as homogeneous and perfectly fungible, it is neither. People use multiple monies—including national currency, rewards points, coupons, SNAP benefits, scrip—and "earmark" those monies for different purposes depending on when, how, where, and with whom they have been or will be exchanged (Zelizer 2017). One source of tension between organizations that provide aid to the poor and the poor themselves is the conflict between different systems of earmarking (ibid.). Today, for example, one sees certain state governments in the United States mulling an earmarking of SNAP benefits—more commonly known as "food stamps"—through placing restrictions on the purchase of "luxury" foods like steak and lobster.

The fourth and final element of a relational package is negotiated meanings. One of the advantages of Zelizer's framework is its linking of social relations and meaning without presuming that meanings are always—or even often—shared by people linked through a social tie. What people bound in a relational package may in fact share are the terms of contesting what their relationship, its transactions, and its media mean. This foregrounding of contestation offers a way of thinking about economic activity that emphasizes its dynamism and fragility. Whether the relational package links an individual and an employer or an individual and NAV, the transactors must participate in the work—particularly the work of exchange—that keeps that particular tie going.

In her scholarship, Zelizer does not attempt to discern if there are institutional forms that lead to certain relational packages becoming what might be called "primary relational packages"—that is, the relational packages by which an individual attains the socioculturally-determined means of what he or she considers a dignified existence (Polanyi 1957; Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S6). Primary relational packages, as the comparative welfare state literature suggests, are not arbitrarily chosen throughout the life-cycle. Rather, from parent-child to state-pensioner (or child-parent), there are normative patterns of relational packaging that obtain in different situations and during different phases. Some of these relational packages may have never been active but are potentially activatable, given the fulfillment of certain conditions. These, such NAV-unemployed user, might be called "latent relational packages." Though they too result from creative relational work, they are in some sense latent in the broader structure of the welfare regime and thus reasonable to expect in particular circumstances, such as childhood, illness, or, the loss of a job. The state-unemployed user tie in Norway is an

example of a latent social tie because its possibility is ordained by certain factors—i.e. legal residency, a work history—and contingent on an occurrence—i.e. the loss of a job.

From the Zelizerian perspective, the individual's move from employer-employee to NAV-unemployed user involves movements along all four dimensions of relational work. The social tie, as should be obvious after the discussion above, is the tie between the individual and NAV. The economic transaction involved ceases to be the expenditure of labor power (e.g. knowledge, skills, experience, etc.), measured in time, for a *lønn*, or "wage" (see Marx 1978, 204). Rather, it involves the exchange of message cards, submitted job applications, and an updated CV for a bimonthly cash transfer. The media of exchange is also different. Though digital money changes (digital) hands in both the employer-employee and NAV-unemployed user relational packages, the things owed in each package is quite different. Finally, the move from the former to the latter package involves a remarkable shift in the meanings ascribed to the exchanges involved. No longer is the money deposited in the individual's back account recognized as *kompensasjon*, or "compensation." Now, it is an entitlement and a form of social security (*trygd*).

But the displacements experienced by the unemployed are not limited to these four dimensions. It is thus possible to productively broaden the relational work perspective to account for the fact that creating and maintaining a relational package is often linked to other discernable experiential and relational shifts in one's life. After all, the change that my interlocutors probably mentioned most was temporal. Losing a job in Norway unbridles one's time, and in so doing, distorts it and the routines that had been reliably mapped to its rhythms. This may at first sound strange, as the 37.5 hours that

constitute a full-time work week are less than 1/3 of the waking hours a person has each week (assuming eight hours of sleep a night). And yet, people discover that when these hours are evacuated, the boundaries that separate work-time from leisure-time disappear and people are left trying to impose structure on what suddenly feels like the undifferentiated flow of the day. It is not uncommon for the newly-unemployed to look forward to this kind of "free" time, as a few of them called it. Like Isak, Dagny told me that she was eager to have the "chance to have a little time off (*få det litt fri*)—with a salary—and think about what I want now." But, as both discovered, there was something illusionary about the idea that "free time" remains a meaningful category when there is no longer time that is explicitly unfree. The unemployed typically describe time as excessive, capacious, and unwieldy. "You have a lot of time," Szymon told me. "You aren't really happy about it. It becomes a problem."

Time's abundance—and emptiness—seems, for many, to increase the velocity of its passage. Hans Magnus, a young Norwegian looking for a corporate finance job, explained that:

> Time passes extremely quickly. And even the days pass quickly…especially days where you really don't have anything planned and where, like this summer, there's been little that needs doing…you can read up on the old school stuff and do little preparations [for a potential job], but you do it for an hour, maybe two hours, and you get bored…The days go by: you get up, you eat breakfast, you watch the news or read a newspaper, and suddenly it's dinner, and then soon you're…going to bed, you know? It's eventless.

Along with abundance, emptiness, and speed, there was a maddening lack of structure. The chopping of the day into ever smaller units was itself a functional outgrowth of early capitalism's need for more precise work-discipline and coordination in production (E. P. Thompson 1967). This differentiated capitalist temporality from non-capitalist methods of time-reckoning, such as those used by peasants, who in places like Sweden usually construed lengths of time in non-standardized units linked with familiar tasks (Frykman and Löfgren 1987). My unemployed interlocutors, both Norwegian- and foreign-born, have been thoroughly socialized to capitalism's rhythms and the day that is organized into three segments (i.e. pre-work, work, and post-work) and linked temporally with days in the past and future through institutions like the "planning meeting," the "deadline," the "performance review," and so on. The workless day is thus disorganized in a double sense: it lacks both its own coherent structure and a relationship with other days that might justify devoting one's time to this or that task at this precise moment.

Isak, for instance, was quite unhappy to learn that the "many long days" he eagerly anticipated featured no deadlines to achieve results or accomplish goals. Kjetil, a young man looking for his first real job, said that unemployment felt like "all free time. You have nothing to do during your day. You have all the time in the world, but nothing to do with it."

Unemployment creates other temporal problems. Consumerism is driven in part by the institution of fashion, or the regular obsolescence of products and styles. Multiple interlocutors receiving unemployment benefits indicated that while they did not lack for necessities like clothing or cell phones, they were unable to purchase *new* clothing and *new* cell phones. One of my interlocutors, for example, a young woman named Ida

complained that being jobless had left her stuck with an iPhone that, she wanted me to know, was so old it could hold only two applications. This did not create any noticeable difficulty in her life but appeared to foster a sense that she had fallen behind everyone else.

One might also be precluded from keeping rhythm with society. This was a point that Trygve felt was very important. Weaving together metaphors of space and time, he explained that unemployment puts you "outside of society. When you have structure, you are in rhythm (*i takt*) with society. But when you sleep in late, now you are out of rhythm with society. In any case, that's how I feel. When I'm out of rhythm with society, then I am outside of it. Or *more* outside of it. Now that I have some structure, I am *less* outside of it. I don't have a job, so I am a little bit outside of it, but I have a structure, so I am not so far away…it is a distance, less distance. It's reducing."

As with time, so too with space. For the unemployed in Oslo, the scenes of life no longer play out on the platforms and in the crowded cars of the metro, in the office and its cafeteria or breakroom, behind a desk or a counter or a steering wheel, along the aisles of the warehouse, over a candlelit table at the office Christmas party. Home, which serves as a person's refuge at the end of the work day becomes almost inescapable during the workless one. When describing their lives, my unemployed interlocutors typically mentioned their apartments or houses as the place where they spent most of their waking hours. This was usually a grievance. Disconnected from the circuits of in-person interaction, people feel isolated. Even chatting for a few hours with an ethnographer, some of my interlocutors indicated, was a welcome social departure from an existence

that at times was uncomfortably silent and one-sided, or as one Somali woman shared, too full of distractions that were an impediment to finding work.

One reliable means of egress from this isolation is the internet. The internet offers a door to an expansive virtual landscape, one where one's excessive undifferentiated time might be marked, categorized, and made significant. Even deeper immersion is made possible by increasingly elaborate and realistic videogames, which, as I discuss in Chapter 5, offer alternative and even satisfying social, financial, temporal, and spatial coordinates to the unemployed. Something like the structure which Isak and some of the others craved could be found in games like *World of Warcraft*, which replace work assignments with quests, feedback with leveling-up, and salaries with rare items and in-game currency. But one cannot spend every waking moment with a computer and breaking one's gaze with what lies within the screen of a computer or a smart phone may cause a person to notice what is always there but unnoticed—the reflection of a face, framed by an empty room.

Other than what comes through one's computer speakers or headphones, there may be an excess of silence in these spaces. Many of the common settings of unemployment—the home but also the bus, the metro, the supermarket, and the NAV office—are relatively quiet. During our interview, Dagny commented a few times on the café's cacophonous melding of voices and the grinding whir of an espresso machine, sharing "I have been home all day, so I'm so thrown off by all the noise!"

In addition to these temporal and spatial displacements, there are displacements of status. Jobs have achieved within the capitalist countries a symbolic cache that endows their possessors with basic respect or regard. In contemporary Norway, people may only

become truly aware of the status attached to employment when confronted with its loss. No longer employed, they can measure the distance between how they were viewed when they had a job and how they are viewed when they are 'on NAV.' What is striking is how little people actually know about how others view them. When reflecting on their status as NAV users, my interlocutors almost all agreed that being dependent on NAV is at least slightly shameful, though they shared no stories in which another person criticize them or scoffed at their decision to use unemployment benefits. For many of my Norwegian-born interlocutors, it seemed self-evident that being an unemployed NAV user, while socially allowable was not socially acceptable. This was a view that some of my foreign-born interlocutors, such as Marija, the Serbian woman with the PhD, found strange. Trying to figure out why Norwegians seem so uncomfortable with receiving money they have a rightful claim to, she said "I find it very weird, because it's a system that is there to protect you. But I guess it says about you, 'I'm not able to find a job.' Or maybe it's because there is this idea that the majority of people that are on unemployment benefits, they are abusing the system, and they don't want to work. I don't know."

In any case, she personally found it difficult to feel guilty and refused to bemoan her situation. She thought of the relational package that would obtain if she were in Serbia: "Even some of my friends ask me," she said, "'how come you're not depressed? We would be depressed if we were you.' But even when I'm being low, I'm just thinking, wait a second, if this happened in Serbia I would be living with my parents, sleeping on their sofa, and literally asking them for money to go out."

In taking a full account of the experience of unemployment, it is necessary to consider both the primary relational package and the various displacements associated

with the loss of a job. The NAV-unemployed user relational package is unusual in comparative perspective for both the relative generosity of the cash transfers involved and the long time horizon during which these transfers are receivable. One implication of this package is its nullification of the need to create and maintain other relational packages that would involve their own rights and obligations, with other actors and organizations. Both Norway and Serbia have the parent-child relational package, but thanks to the existence of a robust welfare system in Norway, the kinds of exchanges considered normal and appropriate are quite different. Though some of my interlocutors, usually young people, received an allowance from or lived rent-free with their parents, nobody described having to rely primarily on anyone or anything but the state. For this reason, they accrued no significant debts or obligations to family members, friends, former coworkers, civic associations, religious communities, and so on. And without debts, there were no reciprocal expectations: as you had not called on others to support you materially while you were out of work, it would not be appropriate for them to call on you. I suspect that in Norway if an unemployed person beseeched a friend for any serious sum of money, the response would be: "why don't you go to NAV?" NAV, of course, responds, "Why don't you go get a job?"

Conclusion

At the end of a CV, it is not uncommon for people in Norway to share some of their *fritids interesser*, or "free time interests." There is little variety in what people write: hiking, traveling, cooking, music. You see the same activities listed so many times that when reading a CV—as I did often in the course of my research—you allow your eyes to

move quickly over this section, registering only that there is nothing unusual. When there is something unusual, you stop for a moment, and the two-dimensional person inscribed in the page-long work history, for better or worse, may acquire a third-dimension, or a little complexity. When reviewing Isak's CV, for example, I noticed that he wrote "role-playing" under his free-time interests. This seemed incongruous not only with the person who otherwise emerged from the CV—a veteran software salesman—but with the middle-aged man in business casual who had asked me to read it. Later, at the close of a long interview about his unemployment experience, I could not resist asking him about it.

This prompted an animated excursus on the subject, properly termed "live action role-playing" or LARPing. Isak enlightened me about how LARPing differs from other game-types ("one is physically in the role…it's similar to theatre"), the various genres (e.g. Fantasy, Western, Victorian, Steampunk, Harry Potter), and even the divergent national tendencies (Americans and Danes prefer conflict and combat; Norwegians and Swedes are drawn to drama).[19] I asked what it was about LARPing that made it so special to him.

"You can take a holiday from your own person," Isak said. He elaborated: "It's nice to be another person with other references, priorities, another agenda, and other people around you who just play. One can forget himself and his own anxieties. Perhaps get another perspective on things." I found myself returning to this segment of our interview when thinking about what unemployment teaches a person in contemporary Norway. Many believe that being without a job will, in its own way, be a kind of "holiday from your own person." What they typically discover, however, is that it is *having a job* that is the welcome departure from the rest of one's life—the thing "with

other references, priorities, another agenda, and other people around you." Without commodified time, there is only the vast continent of decommodified time where one struggles to escape oneself for even a moment, let alone for a "holiday."

In Norway, the social democratic welfare regime offers comparatively generous material support to the unemployed but makes unemployment itself a realm of multidimensional shapelessness and, for some, moral distress. The intolerability of this shapelessness and this sense of distress stem from what I have called the "employment ethic"—a mode of ethical life that sees in formal wage labor the polysemic and poly-ethical cornerstone of what is typically considered the good and normal existence. Adherents of the employment ethic, unlike those of the labor and profit-driven Protestant ethic (Weber 2011), are less interested in productivism than they are productivist relations. To live in accordance with the employment ethic is not to work hard but rather to achieve that sense of ordinariness, fulfillment, and moral satisfaction that comes through successfully upholding the singular relational package between the individual and the state through maintaining the tax-generating tie between the employee and employer.

Chapter 2
THE UNEMPLOYMENT BUSINESS

"Work for everyone is an overarching goal for the government."

NOU 2012:6 (2012), *Arbeidsrettedetiltak,* p. 11

The precipitous drop in oil prices in 2014 and 2015 led to Norway's worst economic crisis since the early 1990s. Businesses closed, thousands were laid off, and the purchasing power of the *krone* declined, cutting the discount that Norwegians had grown accustomed to whenever—and wherever—they traveled abroad.[20] This was all bad news. But not for everyone. For one kind of organization, the private *tiltaksarrangør*, or "service-provider," the fall in oil prices and sharp climb in unemployment[21] meant that NAV would have more users, more users would mean greater demand for so-called "labor market services" (*arbeidsrettede tiltak*), and greater demand for labor market services would mean more contracts. For these companies, unemployment is not a personal catastrophe or a source of shame. It is not a social ill, a macroeconomic problem, or a catalyst for the disruption of everyday life. It is a business, and in fall 2015, as so much in Norway seemed likely to bust, the 'unemployment business' was booming.

My entrée into this world was one of Norway's leading private service-providers, New Possibilities (NP). Most Norwegians will not have heard of NP—unless they have lost a job and their days and weeks on unemployment benefits become months, and an overworked NAV caseworker decides that whatever the person is doing to find work is not working. In late fall 2015, I e-mailed NP after the firm was mentioned in my interviews with two Lithuanian women who had been sent there for multi-week job-

seeker courses. I was intrigued by their stories, and in particular, one about a course where the instructors believed so strongly in the power of "mindfulness" that they asked course participants to meditate on a raisin. Viktoria, who shared this with me, thought it was ludicrous and could not resist reenacting the scene:

"'Let's look at the raisin, and look at the different shapes it has, and the different colors and shades. Let's smell the raisin, and feel what it smells as [sic], and what nature it comes from. And let's listen to the raisin.'"

Returning to the present, she explained:

"We all had our own raisin. She [the instructor] went around and gave everybody a raisin, and everybody was doing that. A group of thirty fucking academics with Masters and PhDs were sitting and meditating on a raisin in a job-seeking course."

I had to know more, if only because companies like NP have become integral to the Norwegian government's broader effort to realize full employment. But by this point I had grown accustomed to a certain guardedness in the Norwegian world of welfare capitalism. Organizations that deal with people during some of the hardest times in their lives can be wary—at least at first—when an American anthropologist comes knocking.[22] I was therefore surprised to be warmly received by NP—*of course* somebody from the firm would chat with me about the role for-profit service providers play in administering critical labor market services of the welfare state.

And not just somebody: I was invited to meet with Terje, the firm's well-dressed and affable Director for the Public Sector. We met at NP's Oslo headquarters, which is little more than a handful of offices lining a few corridors in a building you would not notice unless you were looking for it. The job-seeker courses that the firm provides on

behalf of NAV are actually held in an office building down the street. NP employees referred to that building as the *kursenter*, or "course center." The spatial division between the main office and the course center at first seemed insignificant to me—an inconvenience that likely resulted from the availability of real estate close to the metro stop in the area. But during the six-month period I would come to spend as a regular participant observer at the NP course center, this divide began to take on a symbolic quality, replicating spatially the gulf between the status, pay, and job security of well-remunerated executives like Terje and the course instructors, who received bare bones, month-to-month contracts to run the firm's job-seeker courses and provide one-on-one advising.

For reasons that are still unclear to me, Terje seemed all too glad to meet.[23] At once, he struck me as a new species of actor in the taxonomy of people one encounters in Norway's vast welfare sector. At least three things made him distinctive. First, he is male. Though Norway is lauded globally for the remarkable strides it has taken toward gender equality, the country's labor market remains remarkably segregated (Nilsen 2018). The private sector is dominated by men, the public sector—including NAV—by women.[24] In fact, on the few occasions I was invited to be a participant observer in back-office meetings at a NAV office, I was often—and never to my surprise—the only representative of my gender present. NAV employees, particularly if drawn from the municipal side of the office, seemed to be overwhelmingly female. That Terje and the other top executives of NP were all men was unusual for the welfare sector and struck me not as indicative of a move toward sectoral parity but as the entry of the male-dominated private sector into what had been a world of women's work. And yet, unsurprisingly, as I

would see in the courses themselves, much of the street-level labor in NP was still done by women.

Another distinctive feature of Terje's was his lack of training or experience in social work, therapy, or the public sector. Prior to coming to NP, he had spent over a decade with a large, Scandinavia-based multinational company. This was not unique at NP. In fact, I cannot recall meeting a single employee who was trained as a social worker or had professional experience in the public sector. Among the course instructors, it was impossible to guess before chatting with them what they had previously done. There was the former flight attendant, the one-time Microsoft salesperson, the yoga instructor, the retired businessman, and a seemingly endless supply of "coaches," "mental trainers," and other evangelists of American-style positive thinking. I thought it was sensible that at least the firm's in-house "labor market expert" had a PhD, though I soon learned that it was not in economics or sociology but literature. Eventually, I came to expect this disconnect between the instructors' professional experience and education, on the one hand, and the everyday work of helping people find work, on the other. What mattered to NP's executives and managers was that a prospective instructor could be presented to NAV and course participants as an expert. Failing that, they had to at least possess some "real-world experience" that gave them, allegedly, an edge over the typical bureaucrat, who, NP employees claimed, had few connections in the labor market and knew even less about it.

During our initial chat, Terje explained to me that NP saw a lack of experience in the public sector as a strength. Of the firm's instructors, some of whom had been directly recruited from among the unemployed participants in job-seeker courses, he said, "We all

come from the private sector [we are] all entrepreneurs. Most here have been managers, have a ton of experience from Norwegian work-life (*arbeidsliv*)… It's not rocket science." Terje's confidence was itself a departure from what I had encountered in NAV offices and non-profit organizations who worked with NAV users. In these spaces, actors seemed to understand that helping people who were struggling was something that required the kinds of delicacy and empathy that only come with the proper training. People, like rockets, they seemed to believe, are extraordinarily complex, and small errors can have devastating consequences. In waving away the difficulties entailed in managing an organization that caters to people who have fallen to the margins, Terje gestured toward a distinctive way of understanding the work of helping the workless. NAV, he seemed to say, had made something seem much harder than needs to be.

The third noteworthy thing about Terje was his lack of concern about a for-profit company receiving tax dollars to provide services for the unemployed. In fact, he thought that this is exactly as it should be. NP was founded as a consulting firm, specializing in corporate restructuring and recruitment. Along the way, however, partners in the firm recognized that newly-fired workers had needs that exceeded the severance packages they received on their way out the door. Thrown into the labor market, perhaps for the first time in decades, they were utterly lost. Advising thus became not only a new service for the firm but a whole new 'product area'—one that would later prove attractive to NAV, particularly as an ailing economy dramatically swelled the number of unemployed job-seekers, including people who had for a long time been well-ensconced within the high-earning, upper echelon of the labor market. These were people NP knew well, and the firm bid effectively on contracts to host their job-seeker courses and provide one-on-

one advising. It was, to Terje's mind, a win-win: NAV desperately needed the expertise that only a firm like NP could provide, and NP was happy to provide it—for a price.

All of Society's Powers

What to Terje seemed natural and appropriate is, historically speaking, anything but. In fact, NP's very profitable entry into the world of labor market services signals an ongoing break with a particular paradigm of welfare state administration. After all, for most of its existence, the Norwegian welfare state has been a decidedly *statist* affair. A comprehensive suite of benefits and services, funded primarily by taxation, has been delivered to entitled users by an extensive public sector, which, prior to the 2005 NAV reform, consisted of various governmental agencies. If the state were formally aided in its mission to secure social welfare, it was usually by state-owned enterprises or humanitarian nonprofit organizations, such as the Red Cross or the Church City Mission (*Kirkens bymisjon*). These latter actors typically developed supplemental programs for the most marginalized members of society—those, such as drug addicts and unskilled migrants, who continued to struggle despite the country's robust social safety net. In recent decades, however, Norwegian policymakers have taken steps toward what Morgan and Campbell (2011), call, writing on the American healthcare system, "delegated governance." Delegated governance is the allocation of administrative responsibilities and social policy objectives to non-government actors. In the case of the United States, delegated governance has produced what they call "a Rube Goldberg welfare state—a complex hybrid of public and private actors engaged in social welfare provision,

convoluted lines of authority and accountability, and a blurring of boundaries between public and private" (4).

While Norway remains far from the highly delegated and outsourced United States, more and more Norwegian public services, including nursing homes and kindergartens, have been opened to private operators. In most cases, these actors compete with one another in a competitive procurement process for contracts. In recent years, private provision and contract-bidding have also permeated labor market services and the broader world of *attføring*,[25] or measures aimed "to support persons who for different reasons have fallen out of the labor market in getting back into work" (Leikvoll and Herning 2017, 4). These measures are a signature feature of the social democratic welfare regime-type and reflect its core logic: while income maintenance schemes like unemployment insurance temporarily decommodify labor power, the state encourages voluntary recommodification of labor power through education, re-training, experience-building, and employment services to maintain high aggregate levels of employment (Huo, Nelson, and Stephens 2008).

Since its institutionalization in the years following the Second World War, Norwegian *attføring* has primarily been administered by public institutions or pre-approved service providers. In 2009, despite opposition from both the Trade Union Confederation and the National Employers' Association, a Labor-led government announced that measures for the ordinary unemployed (*ordinære arbeidsledige*) and people on sick-leave would be opened to competitive contract-bidding. Measures for people with reduced work-capacity (*nedsatt arbeidsevne*), by contrast, were still delegated to a list of pre-approved, non-profit service providers. Among these are the

attføringsbedrifter, or "rehabilitation companies," which provide a sheltered workplace for people with reduced work-capacity to gain experience and learn new skills. The companies produce high-quality products and services but are not driven by the profit-motive. Rather, as I learned through visiting two of them in Oslo, they are spaces of learning, practice, and participation in the world of labor without the reduction of a person's value to what they produce.

But their days may be numbered. In 2014, the "blue-blue" government, a coalition of the neoliberal Conservative and far-right Progress parties, announced that the rules for the various user groups—the ordinary unemployed, the sick, and those with reduced work-capacity—would be integrated. Further, the four previous *attføring* schemes for them would be reduced to two, called—obtusely—"clarification" (*avklaring*) and "follow-up" (*oppfølging*). These would be opened up to competitive bidding, creating a batch of contracts worth roughly 1.4 billion *kroner* (approximately $163 mil.) a year (Leikvoll and Herning 2017, 4). The stated goal, as it had been with the Labor-led government in 2009, was to harness the alleged power of competition to improve the quality of services and broaden the variety of service providers, ideally growing the number of non-profit, grassroots organizations involved. The move was then and subsequently legitimized as a necessary step toward using what advocates called "*alle samfunnets krefter*," or "all of society's powers." This way of representing the situation suggests that for too long policymakers had been fighting social ills, such as unemployment, without deploying all the weapons in their arsenal. By opening things up, advocates seemed to say, the state could gain new allies in its daily fight against worklessness.

But if it were meant in earnest, the rhetoric of *alle samfunnets krefter* was also a sleight of hand. It implied that political conservatives and their allies were moving away from their long-held grievance that the state does too much to instead argue, like social democrats and their allies typically do, that it was not doing enough. The critical difference was that the blue-blues argued that doing more would require policymakers to go *beyond* the state, delegating more and more responsibility to actors they seemed to believe existed before there was actually a market for these actors to exploit. At various events I attended in Oslo, including a seminar held at parliament, competitive procurement was praised as a way to involve "social entrepreneurs"—well-meaning people who wanted to make a difference both in their society *and* in their bank account. Oddly, while the social entrepreneurs were featured prominently at these events, sharing stories of personal redemption, community improvement, and limitless ambition, it seemed to me that it was the entrepreneurs—Terje and his ilk—and not the socially-motivated actors who were doing NAV's heavy-lifting and making the heavy profits.

In any case, it is unclear if opening labor market services to all of society's powers, including firms like NP, has attracted a greater diversity of service-providers and improved service quality since 2014. Some research, including an investigation commissioned by the government (Proba samfunnsanalyse 2018), provides plenty of reasons to be skeptical. On the point of greater variety, for example, the outcomes are unambiguous: the overall number of providers has declined and no new non-profit or voluntary organizations have entered the market. Instead, contract-bidding has achieved little other than to bring commercial or for-profit actors, like NP, to the table—and in a big way. This is no surprise for people that work in the world of *attføring*. At one work-

rehabilitation company I visited, representatives complained bitterly that contract-bidding had created huge advantages for actors and organizations that know how to sell themselves and their services to NAV. This is the kind of expertise that social workers and others from the non-profit world do not have. Terje and the executives at NP, of course, have plenty of it.

And perhaps for that reason, they have done quite well. An investigation by TV 2 (Figved and Fossheim 2018), a private media company, revealed that since 2013, private service providers have received approximately 19.3 billion NOK (approx. $2.2 billion), of which 2.7 billion went to just four firms. One firm, *Din Utvikling AS*, received a staggering 359 million NOK between 2013 and 2016. At least 39 million NOK of that sum went to the three executives who manage the firm's business with NAV. *Din Utvikling* pays its employees about 350 NOK an hour while charging NAV 580 NOK for that same hour.[26] These numbers are all broadly similar for NP, where a yawning gap separates the incomes of course instructors and executives. Between 2013 and 2016, for example, Terje received the equivalent of approximately $1.5 million—tax-payer *kroner* paid for turning NAV users into tax-payers. In short, he and some of the other representatives of all of society's powers are making very good money for what they do.

Welfare Profiteers

Or, depending on your perspective, what they do not do. After all, not everyone in Norway is convinced that profit and welfare mix. The greatest opponent of everything represented by Terje is a dogged journalist and activist named Linn Herning. In 2016, she published *The Welfare Profiteers* (*Velferdsprofitørene*) (Herning 2016), an

uncompromising assault on the companies and individuals who have earned big profits by providing care, running kindergartens, and offering education. The book's cover leaves no doubt about Herning's feelings: it depicts three large parasites sucking gold from a city skyline. To Herning, the private companies are parasites that exist to fatten themselves on the meaty host of Norway's vast welfare system. They are able to do so, she argues, because of how they have reconceptualized the services they offer. To her mind, "[t]he long political fight that lies behind today's welfare state is based on an understanding that welfare services distinguish themselves fundamentally from other types of services, and that the market cannot deliver [these], given that the goal [of welfare services] is an equal offering to everyone, regardless of residence, need or income" (2016, 17). By contrast, she argues, "the political right and the increasingly powerful welfare profiteers attempt to erase the distinction between welfare services and other services…" (ibid). Having already established that this distinction was itself the product of a "long political fight," she calls for "more knowledge about what it is that separates them, and what the consequences are if these distinctions are erased" (ibid).

To people like Terje, the consequence of erasing the categorical distinction between services is better, cheaper, and more individualized assistance for the unemployed. Herning clearly disagrees, as her book suggests that the legitimacy of commercial involvement in the welfare sector is not a question of whether services provided by private actors are superior but whether people in Norway accept that welfare services and other services are different *in kind*. Terje believes that they are not; Herning believes that they are. Her reasoning is that welfare services are allocated not only on the basis of social rights but by a public sector motivated primarily by fulfilling the objective

of meeting user's needs (see also Rothstein 1998). By contrast, firms like NP are necessarily profit-seeking. This, their advocates claim, will motivate them to develop services that strike the optimal balance between quality and cost. To critics, firms like NP ruthlessly cut staff and sacrifice either the quality of the service or work conditions and pay of its employees to remain competitive and thus profitable. The result, they believe, is a race to the bottom.

Between Terje and Linn Herning, there is more than a disagreement over the ethics and effects of profit-making. Inscribed in their divergent perspectives is the conflict between two fundamentally different visions of Norwegian society. In the aforementioned "all society's powers" perspective, society (*samfunnet*) is divorced from the state (*staten*). It is a realm of creativity, commerce, and experience that has been suppressed or sidelined due to a welfare regime that institutionalized direct, life-long ties between the individual and the government. This, to the perspective's advocates, is unfortunate. Society is, they believe, an irreplaceable fount of creativity and, as I heard them say at public events, "*nye impulser*," or "new impulses." Competitive procurement, they believe, creates a kind of tournament between these impulses, leaving the best ones at the disposal of the government.

Against the rhetoric of "all of society's powers," Herning and her allies on the left embrace what might be called the "social democratic societal ontology." Here, as Trägårdh (1997) has elsewhere argued about Sweden, society (*samfunnet*) and the state (*staten*) are essentially synonymous. What exists outside the society-state is not a realm of commercially-oriented and constrained goodness, creativity, and good will but a world of self-interested profit-seekers and morally-corrosive markets (Fourcade and Healy

2007). To open administration to this world is to invite the corruption of the welfare state's humanitarian mission, the degradation of its offerings, and the slow evaporation of trust in government, as tax revenues flow from the laboring public through a porous state and into the swollen bank accounts of executives and shareholders. From Herning's critical perspective, the rhetoric about utilizing the totality of society's strength is naïve at best and disingenuous at worst: contract-bidding advantages for-profit firms who can delay profitability longer than non-profits can, make excessive promises, deliver just-adequate results, and return substantial profits to investors.

By juxtaposing Terje's and Herning's positions, one sees that the rise of delegated governance in Norway is far more than a disinterested turn in policymaking; rather, it represents a fundamental revision of a long-entrenched societal ontology. It promotes a particular vision of society and how it relates to the state, as well as what role profit motives should—and can—play in the achievement of individual and collective welfare. With so much on the line, it should come as no surprise that this is not a friendly disagreement. In August 2017, for instance, Kristin Skogen Lund, Director of the Norwegian Employer's Association, told the Norwegian News Agency that she was "provoked" by the term "welfare profiteer" (NTB 2017). "'Profiteers,' she said, "is an expression that is associated with those who collaborated with the Germans during the Second World War and earned by it. It has a very negative connotation in the Norwegian language. I think it is vile to use it. I am rather [*skikkelig*] provoked."

Herning, one assumes, would answer that this is hardly more provocative than the brazen attempt to create a business—and a booming one—where previously there had been none. She and other critics observe that actors moved by the profit motive have no

economic incentive to see crises end or problems solved. Rather, their bottom-line depends on the perpetuation of the societal ill and the popular perception of its insolubility. Here is the paradox: the social democratic welfare regime depends on near-full employment, and yet the actors it contracts with to help achieve full employment have strong incentives to make sure that some segment of the working-age population remains jobless.

Precarity and Potemkin Villages

The question of what NAV—and the Norwegian public—gets for its money is worth asking, if only because the sums of money, as cited above, are huge. It is critical to remember that while the discursive struggle between the advocates and opponents of delegation unfolds in newspapers, internet comment sections, campaign materials, and conferences, the unemployment business hums along in the halls of firms like NP. My initial conversation with Terje concluded—to my surprise and delight—with an invitation to observe one of the firm's job-seeker courses. I accepted. One became two, two became many, and before I realized it, I had been commuting across the city almost daily for six months to join course instructors and participants in the everyday work of finding a job in a swooning economy. I was drawn by the prospect of seeing one of 'society's powers' up close.

My first visit to the course center involved a tour and meet-and-greet with Sylvi, a fast-talking bleach-blonde with more make-up and attention to workplace fashion than I had ever seen in a NAV office. She was the course center leader. It was November 2015, unemployment was still rising, and NP was expanding. Syvi explained that the course

center had recently grown into the office building's second floor and NP had hired a record number of course instructors, at least some of whom were unemployed participants directly recruited from previous courses. At the time, I—and probably they, the course instructors—had no idea that when I returned in the new year, most of them would not have their contracts renewed, and the number of courses would plummet to scarcely a handful.

During this first visit to the course center, I could tell already that NP was not quite what Terje represented it to be. Sylvi walked me through the building, which was decorated with little more than posters featuring trite, motivational aphorisms written in English. The rooms themselves looked like high school classrooms, featuring stands with large pieces of paper and closets full of laptops for participants to borrow. The most impressive part of the building was the career center, a work-space and computer cluster where participants could do self-driven work or meet with advisors for career counseling. Overall, the course center had a kind of 'pop-up' or temporary quality, as if I could leave one day and return the next to find everything cleared out.

This was, I think, by design. The demand for job-seeker courses could increase rapidly, as it did when the price of oil fell, but NAV could not scale easily or quickly. NP could do both because the course instructors were not employees. They were independent contractors whose contracts were renewed on a month-to-month basis. Further, their work did not entitle them to unemployment benefits. This was the cruel irony of the job-seeker courses: the instructors themselves lived with a kind of professional precarity that their participants, who received either unemployment benefits or course benefits, could scarcely imagine. This irony was not lost on the employees. In 2014, an anthropology

MA thesis (Eilertsen 2014) received some attention from the media for thickly describing the plight of the insecure people who spent their days trying to help others find the security of a steady job. I remember seeing one course instructor, Ánde, reading a news story about Eilertsen's thesis on his computer during a break in his course. He and other instructors found their work genuinely fulfilling but also distressing. Planning for the future, perhaps one of the luxuries that even the unemployed are afforded thanks to long-term benefit schemes, was nearly impossible for most of the instructors, who had to wait and see each month if they would be invited back.

The precarity of the course instructors had numerous implications, most of which were invisible to the participants. One was a fixation on numbers. In the next chapter, I describe the *måltavle*, or "score board"—large sheets of paper put up in each room to track the job-seeking progress of each participant. These had a triple purpose: they helped instructors keep track of numbers that were reported to NP and NAV; they were to inspire participants to be competitive and increase their activity; and they gave course instructors a sense of how they were doing for the month. There was a perception among the course instructors that while comparative performance was not everything to Sylvi and Terje, it was probably the most important factor in determining who was rehired each month. The most critical metric was the number of people that actually found jobs during the four-week courses. This number never exceeded more than a handful in each course that I observed, making the other metrics—applications sent, calls made, temp agencies registered with—essential for distinguishing the quality of one instructor from another. The result was constant encouragement from course instructors to their participants do something, anything to pump those numbers up, even if the activity itself was ineffectual.

A second implication of precarity was an ambivalence with respect to providing what might be called 'intellectual property' to NP. One enthusiastic course instructor, Karl, voiced this ambivalence during a moment when he and I encountered one another in a stairwell, where he believed we would not be overheard by others. NP, he explained, wanted instructors to help innovate and improve the courses. This could take the form of new exercises, course topics, even original materials. Contributing, it seemed obvious, would increase the likelihood that your contract would be renewed. But what if were not enough? What if you furnished them with things that made them better at helping job-seekers—and thus more attractive to NAV—and you were just cut? He did not want to keep his best ideas secret but felt that he had to do so, lest they be alienated from him and used without him. This was obviously a loss for the participants, who would have undoubtedly benefited from new ideas from among the company's creative instructors. But it was also a missed opportunity for NP. To allow it to scale up and down so quickly, there was no real training to speak of for course instructors. This is likely how you get instructors, like Viktoria's, who make participant meditate on raisins. One imagines that this sink-or-swim approach, though not optimal, would at least produce better results if enterprising instructors like Karl felt they could better the job-seeker courses without the fear of an unrenewed contract.

A third implication of instructor precarity was one that was whispered about but unconfirmable: that instructors rejected participants with particularly difficult cases in order to improve their numbers. Difficult participants were a frequent topic of conversation at lunch with the instructors, who often admitted that they had just informed NAV that their course was inappropriate for this or that person. The reasons typically

given were inability to speak Norwegian or inadequate computer skills. These reasons were unquestionably invoked legitimately during my time there: some participants spoke very broken Norwegian and could barely work an email account. At the same time, I observed courses, such as Karl's, where certain participants with a shaky grasp of the language were not turned away, despite it being obvious to me—and probably to Karl and his co-instructors—that they were not quite grasping everything that was said. Karl could probably have turned them away, and in doing so, relieved himself of participants who were less likely to find work during the four weeks. After hearing rumors that other course instructors availed themselves of such possibilities, I wondered if at least some of the rejected participants I had heard about were victims of NP's precarity-driven ethos. I was never able to confirm participants were dismissed in order to improve reported outcomes because, unsurprisingly, no course instructor ever admitted to doing it.

This accounting of what precarity produced in the halls of NP should not give the impression that the course instructors were always or often miserable or anxious, however. During the 16 months I spent in Norway working on this project, I did not encounter a more welcoming, passionate, and thoughtful group of people. Most of them were dedicated to their work, showed genuine concern for their participants, and believed that they could make a—perhaps *the*—difference in what had otherwise been a futile job-search process. They shared a belief that the difference was motivation. This stemmed in large part from their own experiences with overcoming rejection and failure. In fact, this was one of the two common ways course instructors introduced themselves to participants. One was to introduce oneself as a professional success with various credentials and accomplishments that made one an expert on the private sector. I am here,

these instructors seemed to say, because I want to give back—this is my act of professional altruism. The other common introduction was to try and connect to the unemployed participants by emphasizing that one had once been in a hard place, perhaps even their place, before finding the strength and resolve to get back out there and find a job. Whether intended or not, instructor teams often featured one altruist and one who had achieved redemption.

Whatever their personal stories or approach to establishing authority and expertise, the instructors almost uniformly deployed an Americanized rhetoric of self-help and positive thinking. One instructor, Sverre, shared with me how much he enjoyed the work of Tony Robbins, the American motivational speaker who entreats his listener to "awaken the giant within" and harness their "unlimited power." The instructors themselves talked about "power stances" and overcoming mental "saboteurs" to stay positive. There was nothing cynical in their use of this rhetoric: they seemed to believe that it could help people not only deal with the psychological difficulty of feeling like a failure but also become motivated enough to do the work of finding a new job. The emphasis on motivation and thinking about the self, as will be described in the next chapter, is easy to explain when one understands that as a form of *attføring*, the job-seeker course is extremely limited in what it can actually do for people. Once instructors have shared the strategies, techniques, templates, and tips that increase the likelihood that their applications will succeed, their only other area of intervention is psychological. They had to motivate their participants to actually spend their time developing and sending applications. They did so by trying to get them to become perpetual optimists—people for whom success was always just around the corner. It rarely was.

Down in the course center, one finds something like a Potemkin Village of a welfare state agency: a semi-convincing version of the real thing that only reveals its shoddy quality when viewed up close. The courses, which are not unpleasant, are nevertheless haphazard affairs run by untrained though well-meaning people who overwork to achieve the above average results they hope will get their contract renewed for another month. Paid as independent contractors, they, unlike the participants they teach to write CVs, send cover letters, and interview, have no right to comprehensive coverage when they are down and out. The irony is not lost on them that they live quite precarious lives while spending most of their time trying to help people realize the Norwegian dream of finding a *fastjobb*, or "permanent job." An observer cannot help but feel that accepting the "all of society's powers" view of things means accepting the very real disempowerment of these people.

The Social Entrepreneurs

Companies like NP have been the biggest winners since Norway's *attføring* portfolio underwent what I once heard Arve Kambe, the leader of parliament's Standing Committee for Labor and Social Affairs, call a "paradigm shift." But to understand how that paradigm shift occurred and why it may signal the beginning of a broader transformation of welfare state administration, it is necessary to briefly discuss one more relatively new character in the welfare state's *dramatis personae*: the social entrepreneur. On the website for *Ferd*, a holding company used by a billionaire to promote social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship is described like this: "At the intersection between non-profit organizations, public welfare, and business, we find the social

entrepreneurs. They establish companies that deliver results on a so-called double bottom-line, results that have both a social and economic effect (Ferd, n.d.)." [translation mine]

The key idea—and the one that makes it so attractive to cost-cutting politicians—is that non-governmental organizations will provide services that are profitable enough to sustain the organization and perpetuate the provision of a social good. During my fieldwork in Norway, it was impossible to investigate the actors and institutions who assist the unemployed without regularly encountering talk of social entrepreneurship and its potential to revolutionize welfare. At one event I attended, a seminar sponsored by the Church City Mission, a representative from an urban renewal initiative described their work as "locally-anchored social entrepreneurship." Social entrepreneurs, she declared, are "society's change-agents (*samfunnets endringagenter*)", but noted that the "social enterprise," though common abroad, has proven difficult to translate into the Norwegian context. With a series of power point slides, she explained that social enterprises constitute a middle way between for-profit companies—like, say, NP—and non-profits. The reason social enterprises have not taken off in Norway, she claimed, was due to the welfare state and a strong tradition of volunteering. Where social entrepreneurship has taken root, in places like Taiwan and Uganda, foundations have greeted them as a replacement for non-profits, she said, because they tire of having to fund the non-profits over and over again.

One of social entrepreneurship's biggest boosters is a middle-aged, chain-smoking woman named Silje. Silje manages an organization called StåPå that develops supportive initiatives for NAV users and collaborates with a local NAV office to address

particularly difficult user cases in its local borough. Her other great project involves advocating for social entrepreneurship, which I witnessed first-hand at various events, including a seminar at parliament that was cosponsored by the far-right Progress Party.[27] Various organizations presented their work with slick power points, video packages, and pitches. They were not just selling themselves to the audience of elites—they were selling the paradigm of harnessing the profit motive to solve Norway's persistent social ills.

Having heard the same phrases and claims at other events, I asked the person next to me if she did not find the rapturous talk of "innovation" and "solutions" a bit…empty? Was there too much focus on the *potential* of social enterprises and not enough on their actual *accomplishments*? Not at all, she said, it is exciting. And how could it not be? At this event and others where I saw social entrepreneurship praised from a stage and vigorously applauded by an audience of old and new converts, I realized that the concept was a singular discursive platform that could reconcile an almost unlimited number of desirable things: it provides the kind of work that gives you "goosebumps"; it is about "profit, people, planet"; its "journey has just begun"; it offers "measurable results" and "measurability"; it could allow people to invest in "social impact bonds"; it provides "income instead of costs for the public sector"; it fulfills the growing need for a "third way"; it is a chance to go beyond the idea that "the business of business is business." It is an orchestra of good ideas.

Competitive procurement is the gateway through which all of this is supposed to enter the welfare state. And, indeed, some social entrepreneurs, who appeared again and again at Silje's and others' events, have availed themselves of this gateway. But the reality, as described in the government-commissioned study cited above, is that while the

intention of opening up labor market services was to attract a greater diversity of actors, it has mainly brought in firms staffed with people who have little or no background in social work. These firms do not hold fun, catered seminars where people share feel-good success stories. But they benefit from these seminars, which no doubt create the impression among elites that uncoupling the state and society will allow socially-minded entrepreneurs to work with a "double bottom-line." The problem is that they compete for contracts with firms like NP that have only one bottom-line, a ruthless approach to cost-cutting, and an interest in social impact only insofar as it is profitable. Social enterprises may legitimize competitive procurement and thus the "paradigm shift" toward delegated governance, but they appear fated to join the work-rehabilitation companies and other endangered species of Norway's increasingly competitive welfare sector.

Conclusion

Terje, Sylvi, and Silje represent Norway's new world of delegated governance. Whereas NAV's bureaucrats invoke laws, rules, categories, and jurisdiction when describing their approach to assisting the unemployed, these three see niches, angles, and possibilities. They are irrepressible entrepreneurs who understand difficult life events—like unemployment—to be opportunities to make money. Silje, who also advocates aggressively for social entrepreneurship might protest that what she does is fundamentally different from the profit-motivated work of NP. But after shadowing her organization for a year, watching multiple stump speeches for social entrepreneurship made for high-level politicians, and hearing her sell her ventures as success stories for a new approach to welfare, I began to reject the idea that Norway's social entrepreneurs

work a middle ground between for-profit firms and NAV. The meaningful divide, as Herning points out, lies between a view that holds that welfare services and other services are different in kind, and a view that rejects the distinction. Terje, Sylvi, and Silje stand on the latter side of the divide.

But there is a second divide that is no less important. It is the divide between two ways of administering services: one with full employees and the other with independent contractors. Is it ethical to provide services if the services themselves generate precarity and uncertainty for the providers? Though NAV currently accepts the situation at firms like NP, it is not clear if it will continue to do so. Recently, NAV retained a law firm to investigate whether *Din Utvkling* Rogaland's independent contractors are being exploited as part of a scheme to evade laws that cover employment and vacation. The investigators concluded that *Din Utvikling's* workers were in fact employees and should receive formal status as such. In private, actors within both NAV and NP shared with me that something about this delegated arrangement feels unsustainable, even immoral, and within a half-decade or so policymakers will grow tired of it and either move to administer labor market services through NAV or rely on one, public or heavily-regulated private service provider. This would be a victory for Herning and her supporters, who would re-inscribe society within the state and the state within society.

Nevertheless, at present, the unemployment business is a fact of the Norwegian welfare system, making for-profit firms like NP essential conduits of support for Norway's most vulnerable people. Some service-providers have taken steps toward hiring more of their contractors as full-time employees. Meanwhile, their executives continue to earn massive salaries through complex transactions involving a dizzying mix of salary,

dividends, and billed services. It seems unlikely that in the near term this will change, largely because the left parties, despite what Norway's most confident political experts believed, lost the 2017 parliamentary election,[28] ushering in at least four more years of Erna Solberg's blue-blue government and its belief in the need to embrace "all of society's powers." But this is not the whole nor the end of the story. For while AP, led by a well-intentioned if somewhat dull millionaire, underperformed, the other two parties of the left—the Socialist Left and Red parties—improved their vote share markedly over their previous outing. Commentators, pundits, political scientists, and others have yet to reach consensus on why they succeeded when AP failed, but one persuasive explanation in circulation since the election points to a stark difference in rhetoric: AP, almost echoing the "all of society's powers" argument, tried to convince voters that Solberg's government had not done enough to stanch the economic bleeding when the price of oil collapsed. If AP had been in power, its candidates suggested, more would have been done. Voters did not seem to care. The Socialist Left and the Red parties, by contrast, argued that the important thing was not *what* was being done but *who* was doing it. The blue-blue coalition, they claimed, were opening the country's widely-admired welfare state to be ravaged by "welfare profiteers." Their rallying cry, and one that shall no doubt be heard as this struggle continues into the next election cycle and beyond was one thing: "profit-free welfare."

Chapter 3
OUT OF CIRCULATION

"If you all want a job, you have come to the right place…We're going to transform you into professional job-seekers."

Karl, NP course instructor

"Who are you?", "What can you do?", and "Where are you going?" These three questions, scrawled in black marker on a dry erase board, stare down at a listless group on a dusky Oslo morning. Appearances to the contrary, this is not a philosophy course or a motivational seminar. Rather, it is one of NP's government-funded job-seeker courses for the unemployed. During four weeks of coursework and self-driven activity and four weeks of "individual follow-up," the firm's advisors will attempt to outfit their jobless participants (*deltakere*)—young and old, native-born and newly-arrived—with the information, skills, and motivation necessary to navigate the formal and informal dimensions of Norway's labor market. The courses are held Monday to Friday, from 9:00am to 3:00pm in NP's well-appointed course center. During those hours, participants write and re-write their resumes, craft cover letters, rehearse interviews, refine LinkedIn profiles, and register with temp agencies. The explicit goal of their participation, which NAV funds, is to find a job. But conversations with participants reveal that for many the stakes are far greater than that. As Hans Magnus, a young job-seeker, put it, the relationship between the unemployed and the welfare state is for many a "moral agreement." In this agreement, formal wage labor constitutes the normative, if not necessarily legal, basis for the able-bodied individual's claim to a share of the social

democratic welfare regime's public benefits and services. "*Gjør din plikt, krev din rett*," goes a familiar aphorism, "Do your duty, demand your right."

But if the stakes of Norway's job-seeker courses encompass the social and the moral, they also transcend them. From the perspective of political economy, the courses attempt to manage one of the central problems of modern capitalism: unemployment. As Marxist sociologist Claus Offe (1984) once wrote, the unemployed, whose labor power goes unsold in the labor market, are "values failing to perform as commodities" (1984, 123). This, Offe (1984, 123-124) argued, is an existential issue for the capitalist state, which relies on the value generated by commodified labor power when in productive circulation. He suggested that the state has three strategies it can pursue to solve the problem of non-performing "values." The first is the *laissez-faire* strategy of "inaction." The benefit of this strategy is its costlessness. Offe argues that it fails, however, due to the viable alternatives to commodification open to the jobless: emigration, crime, rebellion, etc. The second strategy, "decommodification," manages the problem of idle, redundant, and potentially rebellious values by developing modern welfare institutions to maintain them as non-commodities. In time, however, these institutions generate exorbitant costs without corresponding revenues, rendering the strategy financially untenable. Offe thus argues that policymakers are left with no choice but to embrace a third strategy. This strategy involves, among other things, growing the "salability" of unsold labor through "education, training, regional mobility and improving general adaptability." He terms this "administrative recommodification."

In recent decades, Western policymakers have embraced different versions of administrative commodification—under the headings of "activation," "active social

policy," "active labor market policy," and "workfare"—to contain the costs of the "passive" income maintenance schemes (e.g. unemployment insurance, disability pensions, old-age pensions) associated with 20th century welfare states. These "activation strategies" reflect a broad consensus that social policy should constitute not only a safety net but "a productive factor" (Bonoli and Natali 2012, 8) that promotes self-sufficiency through formal wage labor. To achieve this, policymakers have developed an extensive policy toolkit, ranging from incentive tweaking, sanctions, augmented surveillance, and stricter eligibility criteria to education, vocational training, internships, and subsidized employment.

These tools, Bonoli (2010, 2013) suggests, differ markedly in their orientation to the market and the human capital of the unemployed. Tracking the history of European activation strategies, he argues that pro-market, low human capital investment policies, such as incentive reinforcement and employment assistance, have become dominant. This observation is corroborated by scholarship on the emergence of work-for-your-welfare—or so-called "workfare"—schemes (Lødemel and Moreira 2014; Lødemel and Trickey 2001). Along with this embrace of pro-market and low human capital investment activation strategies, various governments have also enacted significant administrative reforms. These reforms include the integration of public employment services (PES) with income maintenance institutions in "one-stop shops," the implementation of new public management (NPM) practices, and the introduction of sub-contracting for activation services (Van Berkel 2009; Minas 2014).

While unanimous in their observation of the trend toward activation, scholars disagree on whether it reflects the adaptation of policymaker-thinking to the structural

realities of aging welfare states and the emergent risks and conditions of post-industrial societies and global capitalism (Bonoli 2013; Halvorsen and Jensen 2004), or an ideological coup for a paternalist, neoliberal vision of society and the economy (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; Boland 2016; Van Oort 2015). The truth, one suspects, will not yield easily to either alternative. While the adoption of active social policies may reflect a shared aspiration to increase employment and decrease social clientage through conditionality and incentives, the policies themselves do not necessarily reflect shared ideological origins nor—given the enduring institutional variation of contemporary welfare systems (Esping-Andersen 1990)—entail the same effects.

This chapter describes how the neoliberal rhetoric of the sellable self (see also Gershon 2017, 2018, 2014; Lane 2011) is deployed in a social democratic welfare regime to stimulate job-search activity. It rejects the notion that this rhetoric is indicative of an ideological or institutional drift from social democracy to neoliberalism. Rather, it argues that Norwegian job-seeker courses instrumentalize market-oriented, neoliberal concepts, ideas, and framings to manage two problems associated with Norway's distinctive brand of welfare capitalism. The first is the sense of moral abjection and social disorientation many associate with unemployment in a society where having a job is central to shared ideas of moral life and social personhood. Recall in Chapter 1 that many of my interlocutors experienced unemployment as molded by an 'anti-structure,' particularly with respect to time. The familiar temporal but also spatial and relational coordinates of life largely vanished with one's tie to an employer. Job-seeker courses, which replicate the structured, goal-driven setting of an office or a classroom, are a stage that allow a person to play a role that they know. While the list of participants' complaints about the

courses could fill its own chapter, it is noteworthy that there was near-consensus among those I talked to about the benefit of having a place to go, things to do, and people to see.

The second problem is the decommodifying welfare state's need for commodified labor power. The neoliberal rhetoric deployed in courses encourages the recommodification of labor power through cultivating particular understandings of the self and the labor market. At the same time, this commodified labor would ultimately contribute to taxes that support the social democratic welfare regime. From this perspective, the neoliberal rhetoric indirectly supports the perpetuation of what is otherwise a bulwark against neoliberalism and one of the world's most comprehensive systems of decommodification. Moreover, this instrumentalization of neoliberal ideas is not surprising. As I show toward the conclusion of this chapter, the promotion of active "social citizenship" (Marshall 1950), wherein comparatively generous benefits are combined with activation initiatives, is largely continuous with Norway's longer ideological commitment to an "active society" (Halvorsen and Jensen 2004).

This chapter builds on and extends recent discussions in the emergent anthropology of unemployment and job-seeking. For instance, it affirms the programmatic view that the anthropological study of unemployment must not only "consider it [unemployment] within its appropriate context" (Kwon and Lane 2016, 3) but grasp that "[t]he meaning and experience of unemployment are culturally and historically variable, informed by specific ideals of social dignity and moral-political belonging" (2016, 4). This, as Fisher (2016) puts it, is a call to describe ethnographically "how unemployment, an apparent law of the capitalist system, strips the lives of human beings of something far more profound than money (2016, 210)." What this article adds

to this burgeoning literature is an appreciation of the contextual role welfare systems play in patterning the meanings and experiences of unemployment, as well as the individual and institutional strategies deployed to understand it, mitigate its material effects, and, ultimately, escape it.

This chapter also responds critically to the anthropological scholarship on the contemporaneous rise of neoliberalism and the post-Fordist transformation of labor and welfare (Jessop 1994; Muehlebach 2013; Greenhouse 2010; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003). Most studies in this area find the welfare state in ruinous condition. Muehlebach (2011), for instance, describes Italy's "neoliberal present" as characterized by the intense and unfulfilled public longing for the forms of belonging and recognition associated with mid-century Fordism. This longing is manipulated to promote a post-Fordist voluntarism and society that "weds hyperexploitation to intense moralization, nonremuneration to a public fetishization of sacrifice" (2011, 75). The contrast with Norway is striking. Norwegians possess similar Fordist longings, albeit with the realistic possibility for many to access social protection, activation schemes, and permanent jobs (*fastjobber*) that largely keep belonging and recognition within reach, even for people with reduced or no work capacity. In turn, however, both ordinary people and policymakers in Norway tend to represent formal wage labor, which generates tax revenues for the welfare system, as a social good and moral obligation. If in Italy, moral sentiments are manipulated to conjure an unremunerated laboring public, in Norway, they are manipulated to create a working, tax-paying one. The job-seeker course, as I will show, is one such site where formal wage labor is represented as the ethical horizon—the *telos*—of an able-bodied individual without work.

New Possibilities

The job-seeker courses were held in NP's "course center," which was described in Chapter 2. Participants who were unable to find employment during the four-week course period were eligible for an additional four weeks of voluntary "individual follow-up" (*individuell oppfølging*) with an advisor in the career center. During the individual follow-up period, participants were also entitled to the free use of the career center and its resources for job-searching activities.

The job-seeker courses were capped at 30 participants and run by small teams usually consisting of two advisors and a career center advisor.[29] The two advisors, one of whom, usually a veteran of many courses, was designated the "primary instructor" (*hovedinstruktør*) and given main responsibility for the course, were to be present for all course days. The career center advisor would visit sporadically, though usually at least once a week. The amount of instruction done by each advisor varied from course to course. In some courses, instruction was shared more or less evenly. In others, such as one course for unemployed from Oslo's relatively diverse eastern suburbs, nearly all instruction—e.g. modules on values and motivation, writing CVs and cover letters, creating a LinkedIn profile, networking and cold-calling—was provided by the primary instructor and supplemented here and there by the career center advisor. This variation in the distribution of instruction was mirrored by variation in actual course content. Though the courses ostensibly followed a plan laid out in a lengthy standard course book (*kurshefte*), individual advisors were given the freedom to adapt the content to their strengths and interests, as well as the specific needs of the group. This meant that each course very much had its own character—and quality.

Aside from instruction, most of which occurred in the first week or two weeks of the four-week courses, instructors spent nearly all of their time engaged in the ceaseless toil of "audit culture" (Shore and Wright 2015; Strathern 2000), completing report after report on the course participants and their quantifiable progress for NAV. All participant activity—e.g. temp agencies registered with, cover letters sent, calls made, interviews, etc.—was also tracked on a large paper "scoreboard" (*måltavle*) in the room. I was told that its visibility was intended to motivate participants either to build on their own achievements or outcompete their fellow participants. In practice, its purpose was to provide instructors with real-time information about participants' doings, the various categories of activity serving as indices of effort (*innsats*). As instruction largely ceased in the second or third week, the job-seeker course became more of a self-directed enterprise for participants, who were expected to maintain a steady flow of CVs, cover letters, networking emails, and calls to potential employers until they landed a job. Courses are considered successful by NP and NAV when participants find work and cease attending. Still, each course concluded—without any irony—with a celebratory 'graduation ceremony' and 'party,' where the remaining participants shared food and received certificates of completion. Given that the overwhelming majority of participants I encountered failed to find work during the four weeks, these parties were well-attended and never lacked for delicious things to eat.

What initially strikes an observer about the participants themselves is their diversity. At NP, I witnessed the "universal" quality of Norway's universal welfare system as a fact of everyday life. The women and men in the hallways and classrooms of NP's course center range from those young enough be looking for their first job to those

old enough to be planning their impending retirement. All are Oslo residents but not necessarily Oslo-born and raised. They come from all over Norway—a fact revealed in different dialects and their respective pronunciations of the Norwegian first-person pronoun (e.g. *jeg, eg, æ*). They also come from all over the world. I met job-seekers from Sweden, Poland, Pakistan, Somalia Armenia, Dubai, South Africa, Switzerland, Mongolia, among other places. Some had BAs, MAs, and even PhDs. Others had little education to speak of. When asked by course instructors to share their "Plan A" and "Plan B"—to be plotted on the scoreboard at the beginning of each four-week course—the participants said they aspired to be warehouse workers, investment bankers, kindergarten assistants, architects, pharmacy assistants, interpreters, drag queens, software engineers, oil engineers, and, of course, nothing in particular.

To be sent to a mandatory job-seeker course by NAV, they had to be unemployed and without a diagnosed mental or physical condition that would make them eligible for health-related benefits and activation services. Based on my interviews and observation, it appears that the majority of participants lived on unemployment benefits (see Chapter 1). Participants who did not qualify for—or had exhausted their—unemployment benefits were eligible to receive "course benefits" (*tiltakspenger*), which, as of 2019, can be as much as 386 NOK (approximately $44.50) per day for people over 18 years of age (NAV 2019). If traveling six or more kilometers to the course center, participants could also be reimbursed for the cheapest mode of transportation available. Interviews with course participants indicated that some lived with working parents or spouses and received informal financial support. In general, my formal interviews and informal conversations with job-seeker course participants revealed that most were not down and

out materially. In fact, for some, the benefits—particularly unemployment benefits—they received were more than adequate to live much as they did when employed, with commonly-invoked exceptions of eating at restaurants, going out for drinks, and vacationing abroad.

Forgetting and Remembering

Job-seeker courses discover many participants long after the end of their brief honeymoon period with unemployment, described by Isak in Chapter 1. Having been subjected to months of disorienting displacements and eager to escape, these people make for ideal participants. This is because as an activation strategy, job-seeker courses aim to stimulate job-search activity through manipulating participants' understandings of the self, the labor market, and the relationship between them. With respect to the self, this involves helping people 'remember' who they are, what they are capable of, and where they are going. This process works, when it does, because when they are out of work, "people forget who they are." That's how Halvard, a career center advisor and one of NP's older employees, put it when I asked him one morning about the participants. With the loss of a job, he explained, there's a "feeling of doubt," of being helpless and overwhelmed. Someone has used their power to take something from you, and you become angry, bitter. Many are ashamed and do not tell others they are unemployed, believing it might all be easier to bear that way. But it is not. It is "unfamiliar and very scary terrain" where you lose not only money but "self-respect" and a "way of life." Halvard declared that the point of the job-seeker course is to help people remember who they are. The participants themselves provide the raw material—it is all there in the titles

they have had and the things they have done. The advisors, he insisted, merely assist them with organizing it and packaging it effectively in CVs, cover letters, LinkedIn profiles. If the advisors do their job, the participants look at it all and see a mirror, exclaiming, as Halvard put it, "This is me! This is me!"

But if it is "me," it is a very particular kind of "me"—an *employable* me. Despite the noticeable variation across courses, the project—if one may call it that—of the mandatory job-seeker course is persuading, helping, and even ordering participants to develop a sense of self that sells in the labor market. On the one hand, this means encouraging them to imagine and understand what the labor market actually is—in this case, something between an actual supply-and-demand-driven market and a "theatre of performances" (Boland 2016, 347). On the other, it means helping each participant get clear on what exactly they have to offer. In a sense, in Norway's job-seeker courses, active social policy or active labor market policy, which in Scandinavia has traditionally been identified with growing human capital through endowing people with new education, experience, and skills, becomes 'active labor *marketing.'* Here, labor power is not improved but, as is characteristic of the more broadly neoliberal approach to unemployment, repackaged and re-branded.

Course instructors cannot force this transformation to occur. Rather, they try to elicit it through encouraging participants to reflect critically on, and develop answers to, the three core questions that opened this chapter. The first question is "Who are you?" Advisors do not want to hear "a Norwegian" or "a Somali," "a football fan" or "a mother." Most of the time, they are clear that they want participants to think of themselves as a product. In one course, for instance, the head instructor, Karl, declared

that "You will sell a product," and then wrote on the dry erase board, "YOU=THE PRODUCT" and "CV=THE DESCRIPTION." An attractive product, participants would learn, shows its potential. During a session on using recruiting agencies, for example, an advisor, Sigrid, asked participants: "How can we become visible to others?" Alluding to an earlier discussion of using portrait photos on CVs to make oneself more memorable to potential employers, she explained that "We need to do the 'sneaking-in-the-brain thing.'" With regard to recruitment websites, the key is to be seen over and over again. This, she told the participants, would show that they are motivated: "We are a product…that is reality…a person comes out of the CV…we have to help everybody see opportunity." Later, after a participant said he did not like cold-calling because of rejections, Sigrid's co-instructor Trine flipped the metaphor so that the job-seeker was no longer a product but the one seeking a product—a job—in the labor market. "It's like shopping," she told them. Just because you do not find what you want in one store does not mean you give up. You simply go to another store.

To help participants figure out "who" they are, advisors asked them to focus on their individuality and uniqueness—something they routinely referred to as their "X-factor." But explaining this could be difficult. One course instructor, Arvid, a former philosophy graduate student, once attempted to share his "theory" of why in-person presentation is essential by citing Hannah Arendt. He said that Arendt believed that people have the tendency to say "what" they are when others ask "*who*" they are. The latter, he said, is how a person makes contact, dresses, uses his or her voice. It is something almost indescribable, suggesting that "who you are" is only expressible through interpersonal interaction. Noticing the quizzical look on participants' faces,

Sigrid, Arvid's co-instructor in that particular course, jumped in to clarify that a face-to-face meeting is about "feelings." When she, for instance, "sends good feelings...then something happens" even if one "cannot put their finger on it." She added that the goal is "to be ourselves," or rather, "the best version of ourselves."

Being the best version of oneself means answering the second question—"what can you do?" To develop an answer, participants were invited to see themselves not only as products but as *desirable* products. Here, the job-seeker fuses a particular understanding of the self with a theory of value. Desirable selves possess experience, skills (see also Urciuoli 2008), and moral values. During the first week of the job-seeker course, course instructors usually worked with participants to map their "competencies" using an exercise in the course book called the "competence reservoir" (*kompetansebeholder*). The reservoir is a conceptual storage container meant to help participants take an inventory of their "formal," real," and "social" competencies, as well as their "personal abilities" (*personlige egenskaper*). Once identified, these competencies were used in interview training and group presentations to develop an effective "presentation of self" (Goffman 1959).

The final question—"Where are you going?"—is deceptive in its openness: the only acceptable answers were forms of formal wage labor. Here, an ethical dimension to unemployment emerges, binding together a self-understanding, a theory of value, an array of practices, and a horizon of aspiration to shared conceptions of the "good" (see Lambek 2010; Laidlaw 2002; Robbins 2013). That this ethics of unemployment does not provoke resistance or confusion but is well, if passively, received by participants suggests that it takes root in a sociocultural and psychological soil nurtured by the broader

experience of living in a society where the good of the individual and the good of the community (*fellesskap*) are entwined through a cradle-to-grave, social democratic welfare regime. The courses, which for most participants are mandatory, position formal wage labor as the *telos* for the able-bodied benefit recipient, making employment not only a way to realize oneself and actualize one's potential but, implicitly, a way to fulfill a greater moral obligation to society.

Many studies of job-seeker courses and groups, particularly those that foreground their disciplinary character (Korteweg 2003; Van Oort 2015), focus on rhetoric and disciplinary techniques and offer limited insight into how they are perceived, experienced, and assimilated. With regard to the job-seeker courses I observed, participants' reactions, which I sought continuously and after courses concluded, were mixed. Some participants found them boring, useless, and even degrading. A friend of mine, an academic, shared that he had once been sent to a job-seeker course during a spell of unemployment. He called it "ritual humiliation." This sentiment was not uncommon in courses with well-to-do and well-educated people, who, at least initially, felt that the courses were so basic and infantilizing that they could not possible be for them. If they found something valuable in the courses, it was the social contact and the opportunity to be of use to others, who they believe, unlike them, needed help. Other participants I encountered during and after the courses shared that they found aspects of them helpful and empowering. In addition to echoing the emphasis on the value of social contact, they pointed out that certain lessons—on CV formatting or interviewing or cold-calling—were either useful for job-seeking or helpful, as they provided the kind of

confidence that comes with feeling like one at least understands what they are supposed to do when unemployed.

What is striking from participants' feedback, however, was that what most found valuable and enjoyable was not the actual job-search training, but the things Jahoda (1981, 1982) identifies as the latent functions of *employment*: a structured schedule, performance measurement, feedback, and social contact. Participants, including many of my interviewees, regularly voiced appreciation for these things and welcomed the opportunity to spend time in a place where they could focus on job-seeking without the distractions, such as children or household chores, associated with being at home. As one participant, a middle-aged Somali woman, put it: at home there was only "children and cleaning." In the course, where the outside world was temporarily suppressed, she could focus on what NAV wanted her to focus on: CVs, cover letters, applications.

If ultimately this process of 'remembering' worked in some cases, stimulating either more quantifiable activity or a more optimistic view of the job-search process, it was because the participants had, in fact, experienced unemployment as a kind of forgetting—or loss. Though far from materially destitute, many seemed to miss the coordinates that had previously given their life a sense of constancy, predictability, and meaning (see Chapter 1). In one session, an advisor wrote "The Importance of a Job" (*Viktigheten av jobb*) at the top of a poster-sized sheet of paper and asked participants to share the words and phrases that came to mind. The answers, recorded in my fieldnotes, were: "being useful," "a place to go to," "possibilities," "development," "independent," "community," "possibility," "learning new things," "influence," "the desire to work," "identity," "health," "culture," "care," "being satisfied," "humor," "feeling of obligation

(*pliktfølelse*)," "contribute to society," "experience," "professional development," "security (*trygghet*)," and, lastly, "money."

Obstacles

Though advisors never disputed that their participants were legitimately entitled to their unemployment benefits, they implied that *passive* unemployment was only acceptable in a labor market with insurmountable obstacles—and that no such labor market exists. Thus, the advisors devoted much time to creating a *navigable* representation of the labor market and participants' relationship with it. On the one hand, this involved frequently invoking a "hidden market," where jobs were plentiful but unposted and thus only accessible through networking. On the other, it meant developing compelling explanations for why even good job-seekers fail—and how, with the right understanding of things, they might succeed. These explanations took the form of broadly-similar, though idiosyncratic, theories of external and internal obstacles.

Of the external obstacles, none was said to be as formidable as language for non-native job-seekers. Norwegian, which is spoken by few people outside of Norway, is almost a precondition for working in all but the most menial jobs. Of course, many of the unemployed highly-skilled, educated foreign workers I encountered were recruited by multinational corporations like General Electric to re-locate to Norway and work in English-language offices. This, combined with the accessibility of media in other languages via the internet and the relatively high proportion of proficient English speakers in Norway, means that years—in the case of one Australian woman I met, decades (!)—among the Norwegians can result in negligible language acquisition. One

can grow roots into Norwegian soil without the Norwegian language—that is, until one is laid off.

In a job-seeker course for highly-skilled, educated job-seekers, Sigrid stated clearly that people with Norwegian language skills will have an easier time in the labor market. Still, she reminded them, "Let the others give you the 'no'…Don't give yourself the 'no."

This same advice was given when participants invoked another obstacle: the anemic state of the economy. While the worst effects of the 2015-2016 oil slump were confined to the regions on the west coast where the oil industry is centered, Oslo-based employees of StatOil and oil and gas service companies like Aker Solutions were also let go. In job-seeker courses, some former employees of the oil sector openly questioned the point of searching for jobs that do not exist, particularly when the terms of the unemployment benefit scheme seemingly provide them with two years to wait for the state of the economy to improve. Both the language barrier and the weak state of the economy challenged instructors to convince skeptical participants that a great CV or a successful interview could get them a job. More often than not, even if prospects were poor, advisors, whose own jobs largely hinged on the numbers they achieved, were eager that their participants at least made a—quantifiable—attempt.

A less formidable, though no less pervasive, obstacle targeted by instructors and regularly invoked by participants was culture—and more specifically *janteloven*, an extremely common trope in any discussion about the particulars of Norwegian culture. "Have you ever heard of the 'Law of Jante?'" NP's resident economic expert, Lukasz, asked a group of foreign job-seekers during a briefing on the labor market. One of the

male participants spoke up, saying he had heard it is a set of equality rules. Lukasz continued, telling the group that the Law of Jante—more commonly known as *janteloven*—consists of ten rules first recorded in an old novel. He then produced a piece of paper with the rules and read them, from the first, "You're not to think *you* are anything special" to the last, "You're not to think *you* can teach *us* anything." When he finished, he looked up at the group. With respect to interviewing, he said, "you need to do it in a Norwegian way." He clarified what he meant by contrasting the Norwegian way with the "American" way, which he summed up as, "If you're not good, don't waste my time." The implication was that the goodness of an employee is not self-evident to an American: it has to be performed, expressed, demonstrated. This approach "doesn't work in Norway," he told them. "You need to keep a low profile."

Guiding foreign participants, as Lukasz tried to, toward the "Norwegian way" constituted one kind of cultural orientation at NP. Another was pushing shy, self-effacing participants, often native-born Norwegians, to promote themselves more vigorously. Both in front of their participants and in private, advisors voiced frustration with what they felt was a Norwegian proclivity for shyness and an unwillingness to stand out. In this case, *janteloven* was viewed less as an informal, quirky cultural script and more as a codified set of oppressive laws. One way to interpret these contradictory instructions to participants is to see them as attempts to bring two different groups toward a single ideal somewhere between (Norwegian) self-effacement and (non-Norwegian) self-promotion.

The other possible interpretation is that advisors understood different "products" to require different marketing strategies in Norway's labor market. For foreigners, the job interview is an opportunity to demonstrate a working knowledge of what are stereotyped

as essential aspects of "Norwegian" character, such as "humility" (*ydmykelse*) and "curiosity" (*nysgjerrighet*). Performing these communicates successful integration and the nullification of the cultural boundaries that might otherwise render working together difficult or awkward. For Norwegians, however, signaling these same character traits might represent an undesirable kind of conformity—even provincialism. For them, being an attractive job-seeker—that is, an attractive product—may mean performing a break with *janteloven* through unselfconscious emphasis on unique experience, skills, and accomplishments.

In addition to orientating participants with respect to the "external" obstacles of language and cultural (in)competency, advisors devoted a significant amount of course time to describing and combating what they viewed as "internal" obstacles. Chief among these were mental impediments some instructors referred to as "saboteurs" (*sabatører)*. For example, during one session, a young instructor, Petter, spoke at length about how saboteurs lead to passivity during the job-search process. He began by asking the group—many of whom had been born abroad but spoke Norwegian—how they relate to feelings, thoughts, and opinions. One participant, a young Vietnamese man, said he had so many thoughts that he must be selective with his internal dialogue. Another, a Norwegian, told the group that his thoughts "govern everything I do and don't do," adding that "it depends on the situation." A Swiss woman shared that she "analyzes thoughts." Following these examples, Petter told the group that "studies" show that the average person has 70,000 thoughts a day—80% of which are *automatically negative*!

To demonstrate his point, Petter asked the group to share negative thoughts—thoughts like, "I can't do it…It's going badly, something awful will happen." "I'm

exhausted," the Swiss participant offered. A male voice from somewhere in the room shared: "I can't bear it…nobody cares about me." Another: "You are nothing…I am unsuccessful." Petter wrote all of these on a large sheet in the front of the room. Words and phrases kept coming, including "depressed" and "suicide," though Petter chose not to write the latter. Satisfied that the participants were themselves familiar with automatic negative thoughts, he continued: Thoughts have a significant effect on our actions and behavior. There are twelve types of negative thoughts, and understanding the different types helps us do something about them—that is, act consciously and choose other thoughts. If we fail to engage our negative thoughts, we risk becoming passive and depressed. "Drinking a lot!" suggested a male participant. Petter explained that he once believed he was himself a "loser." Because of *janteloven*, we are raised to believe we are not allowed to tell yourself that you are fantastic, he explained, but you are allowed, as long as you have good values and community. The key is to ask, "What are my saboteurs?"

After the lunch break, Petter explained the twelve categories of saboteurs. They had names like "All or Nothing," "Overgeneralizing," "Making it Personal," and "Victim Thinking." He argued that they work as part of a cycle—or a spiral: thoughts lead to feelings, feelings lead to actions, and actions lead to new thoughts. He gave an example: "The situation is unemployed…the thought is, 'I am useless,'…the feeling is sad…the action then becomes passive." And what is the next thought? "Depressed," a participant called out. "I can't do anything," suggested someone else. And then what happens? "Give up," said a male participant. Petter swirled the marker on the large sheet, illustrating the spiral through these thoughts and feelings toward paralysis.

Again, he said. Same situation, but what can we change? “I will get myself a job,” said Robert, a young Norwegian. “Feelings?” Petter fired back. “Motivation,” said Robert. “Action?” “Active.” “Thought?” “I can do this.” “Feeling? Action?” “Creative.” Thought? “I’m moving forward.” “Feelings?” “Invincible.” “Action?” “Apply! Get a job!” Robert said, triumphantly. “A little too simple, but it works!” confirmed Petter. Turning to the group, he asked them to use these weeks to give it a real try. When you meet saboteurs, ask if those thoughts correspond to reality. A young woman from Turkey spoke up, saying she has confidence when she hears Petter but is afraid she will lose it when she goes home. Petter reassured her that she can begin to change today. Another female participant added that she now understands she was actually depressed all along, and that is why she lost her job. “Fear steers powerfully,” Petter added. “We will stop there.” The group applauded.

In her study of unemployed Californians after the financial crisis, Strauss (2016) pushes back against a common scholarly understanding of “positive thinking” as obfuscating the structural roots of unemployment and fostering self-blame. She finds that for her interlocutors positive thinking does not necessarily preclude critique of the social forces that produce individual misery. Rather, it can provide the means for “imagining the future” (2016, 190)—something quite difficult to do when one is out of work. I found something similar in the job-seeker courses I observed in Norway. Through introducing participants to obstacles that come with ready-made remedies, advisors located agency—and thus possibility.

There is unquestionably something dishonest about this. As evidenced by the small numbers of participants that found work during the courses, no amount of job-

search activity will help one overcome the language barrier or the state of the economy in the short-term. Shifting attention to surmountable obstacles, such as culture or saboteurs can, at best, inspire people to keep trying. If Robert and the others were momentarily swept up in Petter's hypothetical, it is perhaps because Petter offered a vision of the labor market as tractable, navigable, conquerable. He showed them a way out and back to all of the things the aforementioned group associated with the "importance of a job." This can give hope, and hope, insofar as it leads to another search through the job boards or another application sent, is beneficial to a welfare system that requires commodified labor.

An Active Society

My ethnographic observations, which show job-seeking represented as an individualized process of selling oneself, undoubtedly fit a well-described pattern associated with neoliberalism (Gershon 2017, 2014, 2018). With respect to rhetoric, one could certainly conclude that neoliberalism has come to Norway. But I demure from the view that the welfare state and the "active society" represent paradigmatic opposites (Dean 1995), or that Norway, in particular, and Scandinavia, in general, have simply moved from one to the other. In fact, the Scandinavian welfare regimes, through their entwinement of generous social policies and activation strategies, are characterized by parallel commitments to the decommodification and (re)commodification of labor (Huo, Nelson, and Stephens 2008). As a form of administrative recommodification, job-seeker courses aim to stimulate job-search activity, increase employment, and ultimately reduce the costs of protecting people from the exigencies of the modern capitalism. They

encourage commodification to perpetuate a comprehensive system of decommodification.

In this sense, these courses are not novel. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Norwegian public debate about social policy has revolved around *arbeidslinja,* or "the work line" (Kildal 2001; Drøpping, Hvinden, and Vik 1999). The term first appears in an official capacity in the preface of a 1992 government white paper on rehabilitation and social policy for people with disabilities (Stortingsmelding Nr. 39 (1991-1992)). The preface reaffirms "full employment and the secure welfare society" as the primary objectives of the government, as well as employment as "the basis of the welfare of the individual." To realize these ideals in practice, however, it states, "It is necessary to improve rehabilitation and other benefit schemes (*attførings- og andre stønadsordninger*) for persons of working age such that the most reasonable choice for all involved will be the work line before the welfare line (*trygdelinja*)."

During the 1980s and 1990s, the commitment to reinforcing the primacy of employment was deepened through various policy tweaks and interventions aimed at youth, the disabled, and working-age people generally (Drøpping, Hvinden, and Vik 1999). In a synoptic review of the period, Halvorsen and Jensen (2004) summarize the changes:

> The central government reduced the duration of several benefits, increased the demands of prior income from participation in the labor market to qualify for the benefits, and stressed and enforced to a larger extent demands of geographical and

> professional mobility and acceptance of job offerings or participation in labor market measures, training or education (2004, 475).

Though it is tempting to see this explicit concern with 'tightening' as indicative of a policy paradigm shift or even a turn toward a residualist neoliberalism, the Norwegian case resists such a reductive reading. Halvorsen and Jensen argue compellingly that, given that "an active society has been promoted for more than half a century in the Nordic countries", the 1990s fixation on the work line should be interpreted not "as a path-breaking innovation" but as a path-dependent "adjustment" (2004, 463). Still, others suggest that even if this adjustment is in keeping with the Scandinavian reconciliation of a generous welfare state and the commitment to full employment, the work line represents a contradiction. A survey Scandinavian activation strategies, for example, highlights the "ambiguity" of recent changes, noting the development of a tenuous balance between the "conflicting paths" of the "citizen's income" and "workfare" policy trajectories (Kildal 2001, 13). Subsequent developments in Norway suggest that this tenuous balance persists as policymakers continue to maintain relatively lavish benefits and services while tightening eligibility requirements and imposing further conditions.

My ethnographic observations in Norway's job-seeker courses capture the ambivalence of this development. On the one hand, the courses' commitment to "active" job-seeking is clearly continuous with the long tradition of an active society. On the other, the neoliberal, often American rhetoric of self-commodification indicates that the global vulgate of neoliberalism has begun to spread in one of the last strongholds of social democracy. The continued vitality of comparatively generous cash transfers and

social services in Norway, however, not only for the unemployed but for people of various statuses throughout the life-cycle, suggests that neoliberal rhetoric is here being put to service on behalf of a welfare system that cannot tell the difference between tax revenues generated by someone who does and does not seem themselves as a product to be sold.

Conclusion

Observing the rise of activation strategies throughout the West, scholars tend to be skeptical of their actual effectiveness and view the enthusiastic turn toward activation as evidence of "a broad shift from rights-based concepts of citizenship to obligation-centered notions" (Fuller, Kershaw, and Pulkingham 2008, 157). As part of this transition, it becomes easy to see "[j]ob search clubs and organizations…as the engines that help animate the neoliberal discursive shift from the social to the individual" (Van Oort 2015, 77). This article has not disputed this broader movement but has sought to trouble it with respect to one case. While acknowledging the role that Norway's job-seeker courses play in promoting an individualized worker-subjectivity and reinforcing the ethical imperative to work in the formal sector, I find two reasons to desist from the view that these courses represent something *imposed* on Norwegians and Norwegian society.

First, in keeping with the conclusions of previous research (Garrett-Peters 2009), my observational and interview data suggest that the job-seeker course is not infrequently experienced as a therapeutic intervention. This is only comprehensible if one acknowledges that in Norway the individualized worker-subjectivity and understanding

of formal wage labor as moral obligation are already deeply entrenched, making the absence of employment psychologically painful and socially disorienting. What Perelman (2007) writes in his ethnographic research of unemployment in Argentina could be written for Norway: there exists "a view of work as a natural part of life" (2007, 11). This, I believe, can be attributed not only to modern capitalism but to the long political and cultural hegemony of social democracy and its active society, which institutionalized and valorized employment as an ethical imperative, a constitutive aspect of social personhood, and the normative basis of social citizenship: do your duty, demand your right, as the old, oft-quoted labor movement slogan goes. The job-seeker course's therapeutic potential lies in the fact that it temporarily supplies the latent goods of employment *and* the conceptual tools for finding agency and hope when one feels stuck and hopeless.

The second reason I depart from the view that activation strategies, in general, and job-seeker courses, in particular, necessarily prefigure an insidious, neoliberal turn in Norway stems from the indissoluble link between decommodifying and commodifying institutions characteristic of Norway's version of welfare capitalism. The cradle-to-grave system of social security diminishes the pressure the unemployed would otherwise face to commodify their labor power through employment. In doing so, however, it creates a parallel imperative to facilitate and encourage the recommodification of labor power for those who are not employed. From the perspective of political economy, the job-seeker course, which aims to stimulate job-search activity through the propagation of particular ideas about the self, value, and the labor market, is a functional outgrowth of the need to move the unemployed from one side of the societal balance sheet to the other.

Ultimately, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to pronounce on either the efficacy or long-term social and psychological effects of Norway's job-seeker courses. What can be said is that the objectives, techniques, and rhetoric of these courses are only suggestive of a neoliberal turn if one ignores the distinctive social, moral, and political economic context of Norway's social democratic welfare regime. With this context, it is unsurprising that policymakers have sought to make the sense of self and self-presentation sites for encouraging recommodification. Moreover, it is hardly shocking to learn that while participants oscillate between finding the courses demeaning, exhausting, boring, empowering, and even therapeutic, the rhetoric of the self-as-product does not strike most as radical or de-humanizing. After all, what could make a person in this kind of society feel more human than glancing at a newly polished CV and remembering—after months of awkward networking e-mails, unanswered applications, and bombed interviews—that one does in fact possess some marketable value?

Chapter 4
WELFARE KINGS

"[They are] substantial farmers, who have none of that cunning to contaminate their simplicity...A man, who has been detected in any dishonest act, can no longer live among them. He is universally shunned, and shame becomes the severest punishment. Such a contempt have they, in fact, for every species of fraud, that they will not allow the people on the western coast to be their countrymen...The description I received of them carried me back to the fables of the golden age: independence and virtue; affluence without vice; cultivation of mind, without depravity of heart; with 'ever smiling liberty;' the nymph of the mountain..."

Mary Wollstonecraft (2009 [1796]),
Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, p. 85-86

Ask Svein about what ails Norway, and you should consider clearing your schedule. A Member of Parliament for the far-right Progress Party, one of two parties in the conservative coalition that has governed since 2013, he will happily bend your ear about the lack of good jobs, the over-diagnosing of children, the excessive taxes (particularly on personal wealth and capital), the onerous regulation, and, thanks to fond memories of a stay in the United States, the infantilizingly low speed limits. Perhaps his chief concern, however, is "*naving*"—the practice of refusing to work or go to school, instead living on benefits and services provided by the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV). "It's pretty scary," Svein tells me over coffee in a parliamentary corridor on a July day in Oslo in 2014, "[it] seems to be like a trend or a fashion." He believes NAV is rewarding kids for dropping out of school and dispensing cash to immigrants who—he is certain—do not understand its proper use. He awkwardly contrasts "you and me and other average guys" with Norway's Somali population, and then asks rhetorically, "if you come from Somalia, why *should* you work?" Anxious

about perverse incentives and the moral costs of Norway's comprehensive cradle-to-grave welfare system, he remarks grimly that today "there's no difference between work and NAV."

For Svein, as well as many others with less influence over Norwegian social and labor policy, the *naver* figures as a symbol of moral decay. Public concern about *naving* arose in the wake of the far-reaching 2005 administrative reform that created NAV and initiated its national roll-out between 2006 and 2011. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the NAV reform took what had been three separate public agencies and amalgamated them into a "one-stop shop." The new super-organization, NAV, would, its proponents believed, prevent people with complex needs from being bounced around different agencies, streamline the sizeable welfare state bureaucracy, and offer holistic assistance that would protect users' well-being while actively assisting them to re-enter the labor market (Reegård 2008; Andreassen and Aars 2015). *Flere i arbeid, færre på trygd*, policymakers repeated—"More in work, fewer on welfare."

What nobody anticipated was that NAV's name would become slang for some of the very problems the reform was designed to combat. In March 2012, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) reported that employees at a NAV office in Hedmark county, just north of the capital, had noticed high schoolers talking about using their eligibility for social assistance—a comparatively meager, means-tested benefit—to take a year off from school. The teenagers referred to this legal but apparently unethical practice, much to the consternation of the local NAV office, as "*naving*" (Rikvoll and Wold 2012). The NRK story introduced *naving* to the public discourse and catalyzed an impassioned debate about dependency on the internet and in the pages of the country's

daily newspapers. By the end of year, "*å nave*"—"to *nav*"—had so firmly entrenched itself in the Norwegian lexicon that the National Language Council recognized it as its new word of the year (Rostad 2012).[30] Since then, public interest—and anxiety—about *naving* has hardly abated. A selection of headlines from recent years reflects the desires to understand the phenomenon and stop it: "Earning more from NAV than from work"…"*Navers* Have Status"…"NAV Director Wants an End to '*Naving*'"…"Don't Want Youth to *Nav*"…"Stringent Requirements Get Young *Navers* Out of NAV."

The *naver* disrupts the otherwise flowery image of Norway as a "great and good place on earth" (Witoszek 2011, 14)—an image that dominates both domestic and international representations of the small Nordic country. Norway, popularly conceived, is "good" in a double-sense. On the one hand, there is the quality of the country's economic, political, and social institutions. A booming oil and gas sector has made it one of the richest countries on the planet. Its democracy is stable, transparent, and active. And along with its Nordic peers, it ranks at or near the top of the world in terms of socioeconomic equality, gender equality, social mobility, and work-life balance (United Nations Development Programme 2018). On the other hand, however, Norway's reputation for goodness stems from the perceived moral superiority of the Norwegian people. Internationally, they are lauded as humanitarians and peace-builders (Skånland 2010). At home, they have constructed their own version of the famed "Nordic Model", a distinctive political economic formation that joins an export-driven liberal market economy to a tax-funded, cradle-to-grave welfare system (Dølvik et al. 2014; Dølvik 2016). This welfare system, which Esping-Andersen (1990) cites as an example of the "social democratic welfare regime," is distinguished from the "liberal" welfare regimes

of the Anglo-American world and the "conservative" welfare regimes of continental Europe by both the generosity of its benefits and services and their universal provision on the basis of citizenship or legal residence.[31] In short, with regard to both quality and morality, the Norwegians—to repurpose a felicitous phrase coined by Tvedt (2003)—have erected a "regime of goodness."

How, then, to make sense of Norway's alleged *naving* problem? The issue of *willful* dependency in Norway not only subverts romantic representations of the Nordic country but suggests that the Nordic Model, despite its notable achievements and long tenure, may be 'morally compromised'—that is, productive of behaviors that undermine its financial and political viability. Examining the *naver* allows one to ask fundamental questions about the extent to which Norwegian social policy is complicit in undermining its own viability through the encouragement of free-riding, rent-seeking, and fraud. These latter practices, animated by the egoistic—or what I will call "antisocial"—norm of material self-interest, involve maximizing individual return without a corresponding contribution to the shared pool from which resources are distributed. By contrast, what I here call "prosocial" norms are animated by concern for others or the sustainability of common resources. These norms reinforce practices that involve matching or exceeding one's individual material gain with contributions. A compromised welfare state, like the one envisioned by some elites like Svein, would damage itself via the cultivation of antisocial norms through perverse economic incentives and/or the suppression of prosocial norms. Given the international interest in the Nordic Model (Pontusson 2011), particularly in the wake of the recent global financial and Eurozone crises, understanding

its effect on norms is critical to determining both how it functions and whether it should be seen by others as a standard to which to aspire.

This chapter aims to contribute to the broader study of the sustainability of the Nordic Model with a close examination of one antisocial pattern of welfare-claiming, *naving*, in contemporary Norway. In the first part, I specify the nature of the Nordic Model and describe why widespread *naving* would constitute an existential threat to Norway's version of it. I then briefly review two scholarly accounts of the Nordic Model that provide separate frameworks for understanding the unique institutional conditions under which antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming like *naving* might arise. These accounts set the stage for a closer look at the Norwegian case. Drawing on comparative statistics and my own ethnographic research, however, I cast doubt on the notion that *naving* is pervasive and thus a sign of moral climate change among users of the Norwegian welfare state. Neither the statistical evidence nor my ethnographic data substantiates the idea that *naving*—the willful avoidance of employment or education to live on benefits—is a widespread empirical phenomenon. Instead, I offer a counter-interpretation that emphasizes the productive role that the *naving* discourse may play in promoting prosocial patterns of welfare-claiming. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that the greatest moral threat to Norway's welfare state—and by extension, its iteration of the Nordic Model—is the possibility that *naving* will be uncritically accepted by elites or the public as incontestable evidence of either weak work ethics or rampant material self-interest and calculating behavior among some or all users of the welfare system. Such a reductive 'folk anthropology,' I argue, could potentially justify reforms toward a more

restrictive welfare regime that adds to, rather than alleviates, the burdens of people on society's margins.

Moral Architecture

To much of the world, the Nordic Model is an unlikely thing—a *happy* marriage between capitalist productivity and socialist egalitarianism. Unfortunately, public interest in the Nordic Model has left both its admirers and detractors with a rather shallow understanding of what it is and how it functions. Often, the "Nordic Model"—or narrower "Scandinavian Model"—is used to refer to what is more accurately called the "social democratic welfare regime." This welfare regime features an extensive public sector that provides a suite of tax-funded benefits and services during different phases of the individual's life-cycle, primarily as a matter of citizenship, legal residence, or labor market participation. The conflation of the Nordic Model and the Nordic countries' social democratic welfare regimes obscures the fact that the Nordic Model encompasses a range of institutions which include but are not limited to those associated with individual and social welfare (Dølvik et al. 2014).

Note that the institutions of this model are interdependent—a wobble in one could, at least in theory, topple the model as a whole. Previous scholarship has primarily focused on exogenous 'wobbles,' including immigration (Djuve 2016; Brochmann and Hagelund 2010; Brochmann and Grødem 2013), Europeanization and globalization (Jæger and Kvist 2003), and the vicissitudes of global finance (Dølvik, Goul Andersen, and Vartiainen 2015). Endogenous challenges, particularly those pertaining to the Nordic Model's vulnerability to the effects of the social democratic welfare regime on individual

behavior, have received less attention. Nevertheless, the need for these studies is clear. Scholars agree that through the institutionalization of incentives, the social democratic welfare regime—or any welfare regime, for that matter—has the potential to impact individual motivations and behavior at different points in the life-cycle. According to Lindbeck (1995), "The basic dilemma of the welfare state is that it partly disconnects the relationship between effort and reward by creating disincentives to work, saving, asset choice, and entrepreneurship (1995, 490)." Some argue that these disincentives, which can result in antisocial norms that reinforce practices of free-riding, rent-seeking, and fraud, are so significant that they hamper the state's capacity to reduce poverty and social exclusion, augmenting suffering for people on the margins of society (Mead 1986; Murray 1984; Lindbeck, Nyberg, and Weibull 1999; Lindbeck, Nyberg, and Weilbull 2003).

Beyond stifling policymakers who would solve social problems, however, antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming may actually undermine the long-term functionality of a particular welfare regime. They do so in two ways. First, free-riding, rent-seeking, and fraud weaken a welfare regime's popular legitimacy. This legitimacy is predicated on voter self-interest, as well as ideological-normative considerations (Rothstein 2001), such as shared norms of exchange and reciprocity (Mau 2004, 2003), fairness, and justice (Rothstein 2015, 1998). Rothstein (1998, 141-143) argues that for a given welfare state configuration to be viewed as legitimate, it must conform to a shared standard of "substantive justice"—that is, the distribution of social goods must be viewed as fair. Governments that fail to meet this standard will find that the public will make their desire for redistribution felt at the ballot box. Further, the system must reflect what

the public views as a "just distribution of burdens." This means that voters want to know that others are also contributing to the pool of resources doled out in cash and in kind. Free-riding delegitimizes the welfare state and may cause people to withdraw their support. Lastly, the system must meet the public's criteria for "procedural justice." Even a welfare regime that achieves substantive justice and a just distribution of burdens risks losing support if the system of allocation is corrupt. Antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming like *naving* represent a threat to the legitimacy of the social democratic welfare regime because they signal that some members of society are unwilling to do their part, skewing the distribution of burdens. In theory, the social democratic welfare regime is configured so that able-bodied people work and pay the taxes that make the provision of goods and services possible. Rothstein's conception of welfare state legitimacy posits that if the contributors perceive that their peers are capable of working but have chosen not to in order to live on publicly-funded benefits, they will eventually withdraw their support for this welfare regime-type by voting for parties promising reform.

Second, antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming undermine the sustainability of welfare regimes by eroding their economic bases. In Norway, the welfare system is funded by taxes—primarily on income and consumption—and depleted by social expenditures. The common pool of resources into which taxes are paid, and social expenditures drawn, constitutes a "fiscal commons" (Jakee and Turner 2002), which, like the communal meadows, irrigation systems, fisheries, and other "common pool resources" famously studied by Elinor Ostrom (1990), is susceptible to overuse and thus depletion. On the use side, though welfare states have extensive rules that stipulate who is eligible to receive a given benefit and for how long, users are afforded variable amounts

of discretion when it comes to claiming, depending on the scheme in question and personal circumstances. Just because one is jobless and eligible to receive unemployment benefits for two years, for instance, does not mean one *ought* to leave the labor market for that long. Indeed, social expenditures would no doubt increase markedly if everyone claimed all benefits to which they were legally entitled. In addition to legal use, social expenditures also reflect illegal utilization, as less scrupulous users claim benefits by misrepresenting their situations. On the funding side, the fiscal commons of the welfare state is depleted by tax avoidance and evasion, both of which decrease the store of resources from which social expenditures are drawn. Both overutilization and underfunding create pressure on policymakers to enact either entitlement reform (e.g. reducing payments, shortening duration, tightening eligibility) or tax reform. Neither is likely to be popular with the public. It is more prudent to safeguard the financial health of the social democratic welfare regime by ensuring that those who are capable of working and paying taxes do so.

The two dimensions of welfare state sustainability—popular legitimacy and financial viability—illuminate the nature of the threat posed by *naving* to social democratic welfare regime in Norway. On the one hand, voluntary dependency has ideational effects. To the extent it fosters the impression that burdens are not fairly distributed and contributions are not reciprocated, it weakens the legitimacy of the welfare system and diminishes its popular support. On the other, *naving* has material effects. Subsisting on benefits provided by the state when one could otherwise work and pay taxes reduces the welfare system's financial fitness, compelling policymakers to raise additional revenues or restrict access to current benefits and services. In short, the social

democratic welfare regime is only viable insofar as it induces its users to reciprocate via the symbolic and material contributions associated with labor market participation.

But why should there be *naving* in the first place? Explanations for the origin of antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming in the Nordic countries are furnished by two scholarly accounts, each of which argues that the Nordic welfare regimes are uniquely configured to fail without drastic modifications. The first, a synoptic essay by Danish politician and social scientist Bent Rold Andersen (1984), explains that the Scandinavian welfare systems were never intended to function in societies of rational actors. Prior to the social democratic *Gesellschaft*, he argues, there was a distinctive Nordic *Gemeinschaft* comprised of face-to-face community ties and networks. These traditional ties and networks suppressed material self-interest, enabling politicians and bureaucrats to erect a massive system of social protection and redistribution. But as the universal welfare system expanded, it absorbed functions that had once fallen within the domain of the family, the church, the friendly society, and so on. Through the colonization of the community, the state broke the personal ties and social networks that had for so long effectively stifled free-riders, rent-seekers, and fraudsters. Community, Andersen contends, forced people to act "irrationally," putting the collective good above private interest. The bureaucratic, impersonal welfare state thus unbridled the "rationality" of the public. Without the invention of some way "to restore a clear psychological connection between rights and duties", perhaps by "reintroducing ties between contributions and eligibility…or by confining the major responsibility of solidarity to smaller units of social formations" (1984, 137), rational actors will eventually destroy the welfare system through demanding as much, and contributing as little, as possible.

A similarly pessimistic account, albeit with very different emphases, is offered by Danish sociologist Aage Sørensen (1998), who traces the development of the Nordic welfare states beyond the social democratic breakthrough of the 1930s often cited by scholars to the 18th century. Sørensen argues that this was a formative moment, as the relations between the governing and the governed were fundamentally renegotiated amidst the "conflation of absolutism with Pietism", and regulated by a unique ethos of "obedience and respect" (1998, 364). This meant that the sovereign could implement relatively generous aid schemes, as was done in the 1799/1802 Danish 'poor plan', without having to worry about rent-seeking. Sørensen writes: "The 18th century project was based on a political culture of obedience to the paternalistic ruler and his good intentions. Absence of this culture will expose the welfare system to rent-seeking—that is, obtaining benefit by breaking rules or changing behavior in order to obtain benefit rather than being self-supporting" (1998, 373).

In Scandinavia, the 20th century brought the construction of more—and more elaborate—schemes to protect individual and social welfare against the contingencies of health and the industrial economy. Contemporaneously, however, the ethos of obedience and respect was gradually eclipsed by an ethos of individualism. This latter ethos, which Sørensen argues is now hegemonic, is, he believes, anathema to the social democratic welfare regime, the reach, generosity, and open accessibility of which, require subjects be obedient, moderate, and self-effacing. "The crisis of the modern Scandinavian welfare states", he writes, "does not reflect the contradictions of capitalism…but the contradiction between traditional society, with actions controlled by norms and authority, and modern capitalism, with actions controlled by self-interested rationalism" (1998,

365). Like Andersen, Sørensen divines the crisis of the social democratic welfare regime in a moral decay that coincides with the very inconvenient breakthrough of *homo economicus* in Scandinavian society.

In the Hall of the Welfare King

Naving is a practice that symbolizes to its critics not only the unleashing of material self-interest and rent-seeking but the erosion of an ethical commitment to work for its own—or society's—sake. It would therefore represent strong evidence for the kinds of moral decay in the social democratic welfare regime described by Andersen and Sørensen. Indeed, both furnish compelling frameworks with which to understand what *naving* is and where it comes from. Following Andersen, for instance, one might interpret *naving* as a symptom of the underlying, perhaps terminal, disease of a society purged of its personal ties and social networks by the bureaucratization of care. From this view, the willful avoidance of work and education through welfare-claiming is indicative of the user's rationality when confronted with a beneficent welfare system in the absence of institutions able to impose adequate restraints or costs on that claiming. Or consider a reading in the Sørensenian mode: *naving* is the result of a moribund ethos of obedience and respect, causing the public—or segments of it— to choose between work, school, or applying for benefits based on a simple cost-benefit analysis. From either perspective, *naving* is material self-interest run amok in Norwegian society. It is bad news for a welfare regime seemingly predicated on, if not the altruism of its users, then at least their willingness to contribute what they can and take only what they must.

Still, before *naving* can be declared a threat to the popular legitimacy and financial viability of the social democratic welfare regime, and treated as corroborating evidence for the pessimistic accounts sketched above, one must look beyond sensationalistic media coverage—which takes its existence for granted—to substantiate the *naver* as an empirical phenomenon. Norway may or may not have its share of able-bodied shirkers, but the size and significance of this population is unclear. That is, public fixation on *naving* may exceed the extent of the demonstrable problem. And if this is so, what might this tell us about the sustainability of the social democratic welfare regime in Norway and the Nordic countries more generally?

When one digs into the quantitative data, the picture which emerges hardly supports the notion that *naving* is the widespread "trend" or "fashion" people like Svein believe it to be. In fact, comparatively, the Norwegians come out looking favorably.[32] A comprehensive report by the OECD (2014), for example, found that among OECD countries Norway has maintained one of the lowest unemployment and highest employment rates during recent decades. Further, both the youth unemployment and NEET ("neither in employment nor in education and training") rates—both critical indicators, given the common association of *naving* with young people—are among the lowest in the OECD.[33] At the same time, Norway boasts both the OECD's highest rate of disability pensioning and sickness absence incidence. Further, the Norwegians that are employed rank toward the bottom of the OECD in terms of average annual hours worked, clocking 1,419 per person against the OECD average of 1,765. Also, while youth unemployment is relatively low, it is heavily segmented by skill and education. Moreover, as of 2014, the Norwegian upper secondary graduation rate fell just short of

the OECD average of 85% (OECD 2016, 46).[34] Finally, there are striking differences between non-immigrant and immigrant employment and unemployment rates, particularly if the immigrants come from Asia or Africa (OECD 2014).[35] In their own comparative study of labor market outcomes and welfare state use, Barth, Moene, and Pedersen (2015) weigh the evidence and characterize the Norwegian situation as follows:

> Norway has generous social security schemes (*trygder*), many on disability pensions, but a lower proportion of the population on benefits all in all. We do not have a particularly high number outside of work or education among vulnerable groups with low education, modest skills, and poor health—neither in the population as a whole nor among the youth. On the contrary, we have high employment and labor force participation in the vast majority of groups. The experiences of the Nordic countries seen in relation to the experiences of the rest of the OECD shows that the most generous social security schemes are not associated with having the most people outside of work or education (2015, 168-169). [translation mine]

With the accommodations for disabled and sick individuals aside, as well as the low employment rates of some immigrant groups, this hardly suggests that Norway is caught in the throes of the kinds of existential moral crises described by Andersen and Sørensen, or suggested by the more alarmist commentary on *naving*. Further, the notion that the social democratic welfare regime is uniquely vulnerable due to flawed incentive architecture lacks a strong empirical basis and inadequately accounts for the complex

effects on labor market participation and retention of benefit schemes based on social insurance principles (Pedersen, Finseraas, and Schøne 2015). Supplemented by others studies that show Norwegians—and Scandinavians generally—to be strongly committed to work (van der Wel and Halvorsen 2015; Svallfors, Halvorsen, and Andersen 2001), the statistical evidence for widespread *naving* seems inconclusive at best and somewhat unsupportive at worst.

Nevertheless, this is only part of the story. After all, as an object of everyday discourse, *naving* is genre of welfare-claiming that people associate less with practices and more with the motives behind these practices. For people in Norway, what seems to separate *naving* from legitimate dependency on NAV is its *deliberate* character. Or to put it another way, what makes a *naver* is the conscious decision to avoid employment and education through the exploitation of a legal entitlement to social assistance, unemployment benefits, sick pay, temporary rehabilitation benefits, or disability benefits. This point was confirmed for me numerous times during my fieldwork with the unemployed, who, despite the idiosyncrasies of individual experience and interpretation, expressed similar ideas about *naving* that circulate more broadly in Norwegian society and appear to be held in common across generational, gender, and ethnic lines.

One of these ideas, as has already been suggested, is that *naving* differs from ethical welfare state use due to the person's motivation and job-seeking effort. Hans Magnus, for instance, recently returned from business school in London and looking to work in finance, explained this:

KM: *Å nave*—can you tell me what that is?

Hans Magnus: Well, I think the expression is a—I don't really know how it became an expression, but the truth is that it means simply not having a job and receiving money from NAV because you don't want to work. And I think it's a very misused expression because obviously the key phrase is the not wanting to work. I think, like, if you're injured or if you're let [sic] off, you cannot claim that someone is *naving*.

This view was broadly shared by my other interlocutors, though some implied that because others do not know the circumstances of a person's joblessness, they might assume—mistakenly—the person is a *naver*. This misrecognition is frustrating and even painful because *naving*, they explained, is shameful. When asked about why he sought support from NAV instead of his parents, for example, Emil, a 21-year-old would-be retail associate from Hamar, stated that he did not want to be a burden on his family, who he believed had little money themselves. He nonetheless carefully accounted for the social costs of that decision:

Emil: I don't know. It's maybe a little better to get support from my parents than to be a '*naver'*—with how society, Norwegian society, sees *navers*. And so, I never say that I'm a *naver* when I come into the city and meet people, and [they] ask, 'What are you up to?' 'No, I *nav*.'

KM: You say that?

Emil: No, I say: 'I am doing self-work.' I never say NAV because NAV has—it's a very negatively-loaded word. People will get a very negative view of you if the first thing when you meet [is] 'Hi, I am a *naver*.' I don't want to say it. People will look very condescendingly on it. It is definitely not a comfortable [feeling].

Emil expressed a common view, one held also by some of the jobless immigrants I interviewed in Oslo. Martim, for instance, a Portuguese man who lost his engineering job in the oil and gas sector said that one hears talk of *naving* as soon as one is unemployed:

KM: Do you feel like there's a stigma attached to being unemployed in Norway?
Martim: I mean, one of the first words that I heard when I found out that I was being unemployed [sic]—everyone told me that you're going to be a '*naver*'. That was the first thing that I heard, so yeah, I think so.
KM: When you heard that, what did you think it meant?
Martim: It's like a bum that gets money to live from the benefits that other people pay. So, yeah, to be a *naver* is really, really bad.

The stigma experienced by some jobless individuals was so intolerable that it seemingly compelled them to draw very clearly the difference between themselves and the stereotypical *naver*. When asked how she would react to being called a *naver*, Ida, a young Norwegian woman struggling to find any position after losing her job as an activity coordinator, was unambiguous about how she would feel:

Ida: I would be very dissatisfied. Yes, right now [that is the case], but I don't want to be that because there's so much talk about those [people] who exploit the system and cheat the system and use other people's tax money and whatnot. And it's not because I want to, it's because I have to! So, that's the most important thing if someone calls me a '*naver*'… It is not something I want myself or do because I want to. It is something I have to do in order to survive.

Hans Magnus was similarly defensive:

KM: Do you know *navers*?

Hans Magnus: No, no one…in Oslo, I've never really met someone who didn't have a job. I mean, I may be the worst one I've met. I've gone without employment for a year and that's—

KM: But you don't feel like you're a *naver*?

Hans Magnus: No, I don't really feel like it. I admit that I'm probably closest I've come to one. But I don't feel like I'm exploiting the system because it's not like I write the five obligatory applications and then sit back and relax. I feel like I'm in a constant battle for jobs in Oslo and London, and that I do a lot of learning basically about myself and about the job market. So, I don't feel like the typical '*naver*.'

These selections, which reflect views that were largely shared among my interlocutors' reflections, signal the need for an alternative interpretation of *naving*. No empirical evidence suggests that *naving*, as the willful avoidance of employment or education to live on benefits, is widespread. Interestingly, however, its ubiquity in everyday discourse is incontrovertible, and it is in this form that I argue that its impact on the Norwegian welfare state is most profound. Above, I asserted that the cultivation of antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming would represent an existential threat to the social democratic welfare regime because of the incongruity of these patterns with the reciprocity that undergirds both the regime's popular legitimacy and financial viability. In light of this, I contend that the *naving* discourse, which is invariably pejorative, creates social and psychological costs for free-riding and rent-seeking behaviors, promoting the prosocial norm of contributing what one can and taking only what one must. It does so through, first, allowing for the collective representation of practices that are inimical to the functionality of the welfare system, and, second, stigmatizing them. The result is an imagined welfare-claimant, the *naver*, who looks like the photographic negative of the kind of good, ethical NAV user on which the social democratic welfare regime—and more broadly, Norway's version of the Nordic Model—depends.

One may interpret the deployment of this fictive entity as serving as an informal moral check on transgressive behavior—a collective means of monitoring and sanctioning (Wilson, Ostrom, and Cox 2013; Ostrom 1990) antisocial practices. In Norway, the moral code with respect to the use of benefits and services is given a certain structure and visibility through formal conditions enshrined in law and policy. Breaking these conditions has material consequences, such as the termination of benefits. There are

also conditions, however, which are not enshrined in law or formalized in policy. These conditions, as articulated in the flow of everyday life and interaction, constitute an informal and dynamic guide to the ethical use of welfare benefits and services. *Naving* unambiguously violates this code, and thus to be seen as a *naver*, is shameful. Even if one would prefer in the abstract to passively receive benefits instead of work or go to school, the social and psychological costs associated with being a *naver* are in many cases, my interlocutors suggest, a nonnegligible deterrent to doing so. Contrary to what one would expect from hyperbolic accounts of *naving*, as well as the pieces by Andersen and Sørensen, jobless individuals in contemporary Norway do not seem infected with the akrasia of self-interested rent-seekers. Rather, they approach welfare-claiming and job-searching with various and shifting motives, including material self-interest, the perception of reciprocal obligations (e.g. giving back, doing one's part, contributing to society), and, importantly, the aspiration to "organize their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good" (Robbins 2013, 457). Here, it is clear that this organization latter often involves the desire to be or become (Biehl and Locke 2017a) something: a good citizen, a good employee, a good social democrat, a good parent—anything but a *naver*.

Naving and "Welfare Queens"

While the invocation of *naving* plays a part in promoting sustainable patterns of welfare state use, it may also have understudied pernicious effects. There are at least three ways in which the *naving* discourse could be used to justify the implementation of more restrictive social policy that is antithetical to the social democratic welfare regime.

First, to the extent it fosters the perception that NAV users are motivated by material self-interest and engage in calculating, rent-seeking behavior, the *naving* discourse could nurture the idea that protecting the common good can only be achieved by harnessing or taming private interest through the manipulation of economic incentives. All social policy reflects 'folk anthropologies,' or shared beliefs and assumptions about the fundamental nature of human motivation and behavior (Le Grand 1997; Deacon and Mann 1999). Let us imagine, for instance, that policymakers believe that the public is motivated by a deep-seated goodness and behaves, on the balance, altruistically. Given that users of publicly-funded benefits and services would be most concerned about others or the sustainability of the welfare system itself, policymakers would be able to develop schemes that promote user autonomy via extended periods of eligibility and substantial benefits and services without having to worry that these schemes would be exploited or overutilized. On the other hand, if policymakers saw the public as full of self-interested, utility-maximizers, or "knaves," as Hume (1987) famously put it, the aforementioned policy would be both ineffective and reckless. To these users, work and welfare would be interchangeable means to the same outcome (i.e. money), and their participation in the labor market would be entirely dependent on whether employment or unemployment was more lucrative. For the knavish/*nav*-ish public, policymakers would be smart to use economic incentives, surveillance, and control "to induce self-regarding individuals to act in the common interest when market competition alone would fail to accommodate this" (Bowles 2008, 1605).

Norwegian policymakers would not be the first to succumb to this misleading view of human nature. In another context, Dubois (2014) shows that French bureaucrats

rationalize greater surveillance and control of poor social assistance recipients by invoking a dogmatic understanding of the typical claimant as a rational actor who will, if permitted, wring as much money from the state as possible. Whatever certainty this dogma provides to policymakers, however, it does so at the expense of radically simplifying and distorting representations of the poor and the decisions that shape their approach to welfare-claiming. Dubois calls this dogma an "economic vulgate" and warns that it "partly causes the symbolic violence that delegitimizes entire segments of the population" (2014, S146).

Embrace of this vulgate by elites in Norway could lead to the adoption of social policies that restrict or strongly disincentivize welfare-claiming. This would be problematic because while restrictions and disincentives—e.g. work-for-your welfare schemes—would spur some recipients to return to the labor market, they would harm those with no or diminished work capacity (Molander and Torsvik 2015). For these users, generous benefits are not a deterrent to work but rather the means to participating in society on equal or near-equal terms with their peers who can work. Further, social policy that aims to influence the behavior of rational actors through the use of economic incentives may actually achieve the exact opposite of what it intends. This occurs because of the flawed assumption that economic incentives and moral imperatives are separable and additive—much evidence suggests they are not (Bowles 2008, 2016). If they were separable and additive, appeals to a user's material self-interest—say, through minor fines for undesirable behavior—would incentivize desired behavior without reducing or distorting the efficacy of parallel appeals to a user's ethical and constitutive commitments be a certain kind of—good—person. In Norway, the embrace of social policy that reflects

the rational actor view and its attendant fondness for the manipulation of economic incentives could diminish the various—and variously felt—moral imperatives that already deter *naving*. The result would be more behavior that resembles *naving*, engendering the perception that what is needed is more restrictive policy and manipulation of economic incentives, and so on. The *naving* discourse, in sum, could ease the identification of knavishness with human nature, and thus risks both limiting and distorting the imaginative universe of social policy.

The second way in which the *naving* discourse might result in significant modifications to the social democratic welfare regime pertains to its effects on voter support. Recall that the legitimacy of the welfare system is in part contingent on its achieving what the public sees as the "just distribution of burdens." According to Rothstein, people will not endorse a system they feel is exposed to widespread free-riding—why give if others only take? In Norway, regardless of how burdens are actually distributed, the *naver* discourse suggests that a segment of the population is happy to live off public largesse without doing their share. It reinforces the impression that others—particularly young people and foreigners—are lazy and parasitic. Following Rothstein's reasoning, the spread of this belief among voters could lead to the withdrawal of the public support necessary for the relatively high taxes that allow the social democratic welfare regime to function.

Third, it is not difficult to imagine the *naving* discourse facilitating the deeper convergence of skepticism toward the distribution of burdens with skepticism toward immigrants. After all, it is already somewhat common to hear Norway's growing immigrant population associated with *naving*. In a 2015 hit song by Norwegian hip-hop

duo Karpe Diem, for example, the voice of an imagined Norwegian nativist shouts at an immigrant, "You'll never be Scandinavian, *naver, naver, naver, naver, naver*!" [*Du blir aldri skandinaver, naver, naver, naver, naver, naver*!]. The mapping of ethnic division onto patterns of welfare-claiming suggests that given the growing diversity of Norwegian society, along with the aforementioned disparity in employment rates between different ethnic groups in Norway, the *naver* discourse has the potential to join simplified understandings of welfare-claiming and dependency to pernicious stereotypes, stigmatizing the former and reifying the latter. In turn, this could augment support for welfare chauvinist and right-wing populist politicians, who do not hesitate to call for more restrictive forms of social policy aimed at ending the alleged voluntary dependency of the Other.

On this point, the American case is an instructive analogue. During the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration implemented an array of progressive reforms as part of the New Deal. Among them was Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). ADC, later Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was originally intended to provide support for destitute single mothers, and for decades, the program was a mostly uncontroversial part of the American social safety net. But as the demographics of AFDC use shifted, mainstream political sentiment toward the benefit and its users soured. Increasingly, policymakers held that AFDC caused dependency and discouraged marriage. By the 1980s, a growing share of Americans associated the typical AFDC beneficiary with the stereotyped, racialized, and gendered imagery of the "welfare queen"(Hancock 2004; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). An increasingly influential rhetoric "asserted a reading of recent history to the effect that civil rights law had already

effectively provided the legal tools for equality—and that the persistence of poverty was the result of a cultural pathology expressed as welfare dependency and other ills" (Greenhouse 2011, 29). In 1996, under pressure to solve the perceived problem with the welfare system, the Clinton Administration passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, dissolving AFDC and creating Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, a more restrictive, time-limited benefit. Though initially praised for trimming the welfare rolls, Clinton's welfare reform has been directly and indirectly condemned by subsequent studies that have told a darker story of life for the American poor in the post-reform era (Edin and Shaefer 2015; Desmond 2016; Morgen, Acker, and Weigt 2010; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).

The American case should indicate to Norwegian and other Nordic policymakers that interpreting the lower employment rates and disproportional benefit-dependency of some groups through the moralized—and sometimes racialized—lens of *naving* undermines the case for the universalism that is a constitutive part of social democratic welfare regime. If this case were to be further weakened, resulting in the increased use of means-testing or the restriction of benefits and services to particular groups, it would represent a significant institutional and discursive departure. Selective policy—i.e. policy involving means-testing—follows a different moral logic, and with it a different way of talking about social problems and solutions. In countries where selective policy is the norm, such as the United States, policymakers ask "how shall we solve *their* problem?" more often than "how shall we solve *our common* problems with social insurance?" (Rothstein 2001, 225).

Conclusion

There is widespread agreement that Norway's social democratic welfare regime has been successful at limiting socioeconomic inequality, reducing poverty, and promoting gender equality (Kvist et al. 2012). Skeptics like Svein wonder aloud whether these gains have grown the public's appetite for social support and promoted practices that ultimately undermine both its popular legitimacy and financial basis. Assuming that this wonderment is a product of good faith, this chapter offers a preliminary answer and an invitation for future study. Rooted in ethnographic investigation of the experiences of the unemployed, it has cast doubt on the idea that *naving*—as practice—is either a significant threat or unambiguous evidence of moral decay in contemporary Norway, while highlighting the important role the *naving* discourse plays in allowing people to collectively represent and stigmatize antisocial patterns of welfare-claiming. The welfare system is a common pool resource, and the discourse is a tool people use to informally monitor and sanction one another—and themselves. It is a sign, I think, of the system's viability.

This functionalist interpretation of the Norwegian fixation on *naving* should not obscure the discourse's more nefarious potential, however. In this chapter I have made the case that the popular tendency in Norway to use *naving* as a lens through which to grapple with human nature, the distribution of burdens in society, and the welfare-claiming patterns of the Other has potentially serious consequences for the social democratic welfare regime moving forward. What these applications share is an inevitable discrediting of the idea that one's peers, who have received support, can be trusted to reciprocate. In promoting this belief, the *naving* discourse may erode the sense

of obligation to give, upon which the social democratic welfare regime rests. I have thus argued that the greatest moral threat to this welfare regime—and thus the Nordic Model in Norway—as we have known it is not *naving* per se, but the unreflexive deployment of the *naving* discourse. One need look no further than the American case to see what monumental effects the marriage of anxious resentment and a stereotype can have on social policy—and thereby on the lives of society's most vulnerable groups. Recalling the constitutive role played by Ronald Reagan's "welfare queen" on the American road to Bill Clinton's 1996 welfare reform should give Norwegian policymakers pause. By casting all or some users as weak-willed layabouts or pursuers of short-term self-interest, the *naving* discourse has similar potential to justify the turn toward residual and ineffectual social policies that would fail to uphold the values of equality, material security, and individual autonomy enshrined in the social democratic welfare regime.

Like any another welfare regime, the Norwegian welfare state is rooted in reciprocity. Both its popular legitimacy and fiscal viability require that the distribution of benefits and services to the public be supported by contribution in the form of labor market participation, which results in higher tax revenues and lower social expenditures. Labor market participation is shaped by many factors, including both economic incentives and moral imperatives. The challenge for those who would replicate the successes of the Nordic Model is to construct comparatively generous, universal institutions that promote labor market participation through cultivating prosocial norms that lead people to identify certain practices—e.g. contributing what one can, taking what one must—with the 'good' and 'desirable.' That the everyday discourse of *naving*

appears to be more widespread than the behaviors associated with it suggests that in Norway there are both formal and informal mechanisms that undergird that identification.

Chapter 5
THE OIL KIDS

"It makes no small difference, then, whether one is habituated in this or that way straight from childhood but a very great difference—or rather the whole difference."

Aristotle (2011), *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 2, Chapter 1, p. 27

A well-known Norwegian writer once complained to me that while others work, her unemployed stepson had managed, thanks to the welfare system, to enjoy a rough approximation of the communist society imagined by Marx (1978)—the world where one would be able "to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic" (1978, 180). To her consternation, her stepson did as he pleased—and only as he pleased. This was not the only complaint I heard about *de unge*, or "young people," a category that covers everyone from roughly 15 to 30. There was also the magazine editor, a believer in the social democratic order, who protested to me that young people are "used to tablets and smartphones…[and] a kind of life level on top of the world." He lamented that "youngsters" do not—of all things—paint fences. Remembering his own youth, he shared that there was a time when Norwegians would not dare hire others to do such menial work. "We did it ourselves," he recalled. What is more, "when I was a youngster, I worked every summer." He meant this as a point of contrast: kids today, he observed, refuse to do routine, uncompensated work like painting fences, as well as the annual, waged summer work that for previous generations represented the first, transformative

experience of financial independence. To them, a job was more than just a way to pass the weeks between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next. It was a rite of passage that saw a child remade into an adult—a dependent into a wage-earner.

To the dismay of some of their elders, Norway's youth seem perpetually determined to go their own way. When any conversation about the welfare state or work touches the topic of youth, it is quite likely, regardless of a person's political sympathies, for an ethnographer to hear some bitterness or bafflement about children or grandchildren who do too little of this (e.g. working, studying) or too much of that (e.g. sleeping, playing videogames, shopping, etc.). Sometimes the culprit is materialism: young people, one hears, are acolytes of the cult of H&M, Helly Hansen, and Apple. They are said to have replaced the *arbeidsmoral*, or "work ethic," of their parents with an insatiable and conspicuous consumerism. Another common explanation is their weak will and lack of discipline. Youth, one hears in a very common refrain, *stå ikke opp om morran*—"don't get up in the morning." And if they do manage to get up in the morning, they annoy older people with their expectations about how much money they will make or how much they will actually have to work. These complaints crystallize in a negative stereotype of Norway's millennials—the *oljebarn* or "oil kids"—as self-obsessed and lazy consumerists. To their critics, these young people represent a failure of moral socialization, thanks largely to Norway's remaking by globalization, technology, and its profitable petroleum industry.

These complaints, though often based on a single observation or a story heard second-hand, should not be dismissed. It is true that the unemployment rate for young people (ages 15-29) is higher than it is for the general working-age population (Statistisk

sentralbyrå 2018b).[36] Still, the complaints should not be treated as reliable assessments of the moral condition of young people in contemporary Norway. Like the 19th and 20th century bourgeois griping about indolent natives, unruly servants, and lazy workers, grumbling about the oil kids represents the incandescent byproduct of a grinding friction between cultural worlds (Frykman and Löfgren 1987; E. P. Thompson 1967). The complainers recognize—rightly, I think—that Norway's youth *are* different. They have come of age in a country that is wealthier, more globalized, and more technologized than the one their parents and grandparents grew up in. They are accustomed to greater variety and turnover in consumer goods and participate in perpetual, self-esteem-crushing 'tournaments of disvalue' set on popular social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook.

The complaints about young people tend to presume that difference between the young and the old is the product of the young's refusal to be the same (Frykman and Löfgren, 15). It is as if young people, like the author's languid stepson, could conform if they wished to. This is, in the aggregate, wrong. In many—perhaps most—cases, young people share a version of their parents' moralized orientation to formal wage labor, seeing a job as a distinctive social good. But unlike their parents, they appear more likely to struggle to live in accordance with this ethic, thanks largely to structural impediments like limited social networks, poor education, few role models, and viable alternatives to accessing the social and psychological rewards (Jahoda 1981) of formal wage labor. It is not that young people have *en masse* rejected the employment ethic but that living up to the employment ethic through formal wage labor has proven increasingly difficult in a post-industrial society.

In this chapter, I reflect on what is at stake for young people when they are out of work. To do so, I examine the stories of two jobless young people: Ida and Kjetil. In the course of my fieldwork, I met many young people without jobs, mostly while shadowing StåPå and through one NP job-seeker course, which, unlike the others I observed, targeted young people. I met Ida and Kjetil there. Their stories, though unique, highlight key themes of my broader ethnographic study of the challenges faced by unemployed youth. Ida is 24-years old. She is a person of color, though she talked little about her background, other than to tell me that her parents divorced when she was 12 and she has lived away from home since she was 15. Her story foregrounds the problems of inadequate education and a kind of ambivalence about finding a job: more than most of my interlocutors, Ida seemed, despite some half-hearted protest to the contrary, unhurried with respect to finding work. Still, her experience of not living but "surviving," as she put it, motivated her to imagine that a job might actually allow her to live without constantly having to think about how to spend what little money she received from NAV in the form of social assistance. Kjetil is 20-years old and white. He grew up with a single mother in what he described as a Muslim-dominated milieu in eastern Oslo. His story revolves around videogames and offers insight into how the displacements discussed in Chapter 1 allow habits, activities, and social ties disconnected from formal wage labor to colonize one's life, at times with debilitating social and psychological consequences. The central argument of the chapter is that generational differences in contemporary Norway do not represent a failure of moral socialization, so much as the growing gap between the industrial world of the employment ethic and the post-industrial world of contemporary Norway.

Ida

Ida's first experience with NAV was in 2010. She had just finished high school in Drammen, a small city west of Oslo, and returned to her hometown, Fredrikstad, a small city southeast of it. She had studied musical theater and had mulled staying in Drammen to continue her education, but her boyfriend owned and managed a business in Fredrikstad and offered to hire her as a receptionist there. She had no plan for life after graduation, so she agreed to go. It lasted only six months before he sold the business. During that time, she seriously injured her knee in a snowboarding accident, closing whatever avenue she hoped might still be open in musical theater. Again, she was directionless. "It really sucked," she told me while recounting the period in April 2016. "I wondered if I should start school again, or what in the world I should do."

Ida re-enrolled in high school, albeit this time on the culinary track (*restaurantfag*). She planned to become a pastry chef, and after a year she was offered an apprenticeship (*lærlingplass*). Things at her apprenticeship went well for six months, and then one day she felt very ill. She struggled to breathe. She went to see an asthma and allergy doctor, who explained that she was allergic to flour. That was the end of her apprenticeship and the beginning of her first stint as a NAV user. She explained it like this:

> First, I got sick leave…through NAV, so that they would pay the rest of the money… NAV said that I couldn't go back to the job because I'm unable to do it. NAV Fredrikstad isn't very helpful. It wasn't something they *said*. They just said that I should study something else, even if I had already done high school twice

> and have 150,000 NOK left [in debt] because the first the time I went high school it was to a Steiner School, which is a private school… I didn't know what I should study, as I had tried two different directions…[and] I didn't live at home with my parents, so I had to pay rent and for food.

Ida lived with her boyfriend, the former business owner, who by this point was also on sick leave for an unspecified reason. He hated NAV passionately, she said, because they would not give him the money he felt he was owed for all of the years he worked. "[It] was because he had a sole-proprietorship (*enkeltmannforetak* [sic]) he didn't work for a company and get a paycheck every month, he *took* a paycheck." Ida's feelings about NAV were not very positive either. NAV Fredrikstad was chronically understaffed, and if she did not arrive at 9am or earlier she would have to wait half the day before she could speak with someone who she inevitably found unhelpful.

The couple's circumstances changed when Ida's boyfriend got a job in Oslo. They moved to the capital in May 2014, and Ida found a part-time job as an activity coordinator, which she really enjoyed. But it was only one day a week—a "20% job" as a Norwegian might call it—and she was shooting for 40% or 60%. At that point, she explained, she did not want to work full time. Or rather, her boyfriend did not want her to work full-time. He did not even want her working half-time. He wanted her home cooking, cleaning, and taking care of his dog. Ida assented to this lop-sided arrangement for more than a year, spending one day of the week as an employee and the other six as the full-time domestic manager of their apartment.

In early December 2015, a few months before she and I met, she lost both her job and her relationship. The former was a matter of an unrenewed contract. She knew it was coming but still, she said, it ended too soon. The relationship was something she chose to end—and it had not ended soon enough. In any case, she was crushed and disoriented. She moved in with a friend in Tøyen, a borough just east of downtown, and lived on a mattress. She had no desire to do anything and eked out an existence by withdrawing the vacation money (*feriepenger*) associated with her previous job. In January, she registered with NAV. The day she visited the office, a youth advisor happened to be there. She was told could that she could find an apartment, and "as long it isn't super expensive," NAV would help with rent. She found a room in a collective with two others in Oslo. The youth advisor followed up with her. Ida recalled that "she was very engaged and was curious about everything about me: about what had happened, about where I had lived before…about what I wanted to do." Ida felt that the youth advisor actually *heard* her, so when the advisor asked her if she would be interested in participating in a job-seeker course, Ida said sure. Ida, like most participants in job-seeker courses, did not find work during her course.

During the last time we spoke in April 2016, Ida shared that she was applying for jobs at schools, seeing if "someone will have me." She was also looking at retail positions but complained that "shop jobs (*butikkjobber*) are difficult to get and exhausting to have" because of the "people, being 'service-minded,' and customers the whole time." It did not help that she "isn't interested in clothes and fashion" and does not "understand why people need more than three pairs of pants." I asked her how she feels about her prospects. "I hope that it will work out," she said, but added "I don't know, I don't have a

plan." After she described her efforts to save money by living frugally, I said it sounded like she was in "survival mode." "Yes," she said. "But survival is pretty good…Food, which is first, then rent, and then the power bill…you get little, but I think it's fine because it is more motivating to get a job. You will earn more by having a job."

I asked why she wanted to work.

"Why I want to work?" she said. "I want to do something. I want to have routines. I want to meet people…I don't have routines for what I do [now]. Frode [her roommate] is an artist. He has no routines for when he paints and doesn't paint. But he can imagine living on NAV, paint regularly each day, and then sell pictures and earn extra."

"Is that what he does now?" I asked.

"Yes." Later in our conversation she shared that "NAV isn't ideal. I don't make enough, and I'm very happy that I don't make enough to be able to—I make enough to be able be 'on NAV' and live a completely okay life if I am satisfied with just surviving. But I'm not satisfied with just surviving. I could do something more."

"If NAV gave you 20,000 a month," I began, "would you work?"

"I don't know. I assume—I volunteer. So, I think I would work. If I received 20,000 a month, I would volunteer a lot more than I do now. Because then I would think, 'I make enough to be a volunteer and do voluntary things. That's good.' I think Frode would be satisfied with his life painting pictures and feel that things just move along. And Laura [her other roommate]—I don't think she would work more than she does now. She would maybe use even more money on Lush-products and makeup."

Ida intimated that Laura, an American, was essentially a *naver*, wanting the money to consume without having to earn it through actually working. I mentioned that

some older people think their generation has less of a work ethic (*arbeidsmoral*). Ida laughed:

> I partly agree. Because there are many people my age who think it is a choice to work (*et valg å jobbe*). And as long as they have enough money, they have enough to be able to party and pay rent, it's not a problem. They won't save and they don't necessarily have goals. And they have no problem taking out loans because it's easier to take out loans than it was before. I have very few friends my own age…Most friends I have are 28+, so it's noticeable when I hang out with people my own age…I am not interested in being drunk. I'm interested in sitting and having good conversations and drinking a beer and being satisfied. And then there are many people my age who pretend that they can study everything in Norway because it doesn't cost anything to study. They get stipends and loans—it's fine to be a student…But it's also difficult for those who would rather have a job. Before, you didn't necessarily need such a high education—you needed experience. But now it's so much—you have to have a lot of education, and experience doesn't play such a large role.

I asked if there was a place for her in this kind of society.

> "No, not without higher education...It [her biggest obstacle] is that I don't have education. And at the moment, I can't afford to take a year in pedagogy…to be able to work in an elementary school…I need food…I've been at a kid's camp,

> for kids 11+…it's a big part of my life, and it is an educational experience for kids. I work with peace education (*fredsutdanning*) in my free time. I work just with the kids and teach them things and am a pedagogical person, but I don't have an education that shows that. But I've done that since I was 21…I love working. I don't need money for it, but I need to survive! Surviving is really cool (*kjempe kjekt*).

When I asked her what she learned about herself during this period out of work, she answered:

> That I can survive on very little. I don't need a lot of money to get by. When I had a boyfriend who made up to 30,000 a month, he complained he was left with only half after paying for the apartment and his car and those kind of things…and he only complained because he never had enough. And we never earned enough together…But as an unemployed person, I found out that I don't need so much. I need enough to cover one room in a collective, so I have a bed to sleep in because a bed to sleep in is nice to have. One's own door to their bedroom is also cool. Not a must, but very good. And I need money for food, but one can get far on canned food. A lot of soup and beans and lentils and chickpeas… the body doesn't have a need to be full (*mett*)—the body has a need to not be hungry. And so it's fine as long as I'm not hungry.

"That's a good thing to hear in one of the world's richest countries," I responded. In truth, she could not actually survive on what NAV gives her—at least, not without borrowing from friends like Frode to cover a temporary shortfall here and there. She explained that he routinely lent her cash to help make ends meet until the NAV payment arrives. She would do the same for him.

"It's just a matter of sharing," she said. Ida, unlike many of my interlocutors, did not report paring back on social engagements due to a tightened budget. Rather, she said that she saved bits here and there to afford to go out with friends and have a beer, to:

> …go out and be social, and see other people because it's important to be out...If I stay in and think long enough about the fact that I'm unemployed, and think long enough about the fact that nobody wants me, there will be a vicious cycle (*ondspiral*) where negative thoughts become even more negative thoughts that become even more…I feel it is a personal attack (*personlig angrep*) on me that I don't have a job.

Kjetil

Kjetil is a heavy-set, heavily-freckled 20-year old. By his own admission, he is a recovering videogame addict. Do not get him wrong: he still loves games, and plays them almost every day, but he has it under control. It is not like it used to be, when he would spend almost all his waking hours questing in *World of Warcraft*, accumulating champion levels and unlocking special abilities in *League of Legends*, and spraying his virtual enemies with virtual lead in *Call of Duty*. That was a different time.

In high school, Kjetil did not have a problem with video games. He graduated, avoiding the ignominious distinction of becoming part of Norway's persistent drop-out problem (NOU 2018:2 2018, 84-85).[37] But he came up empty when looking for his first job. Unsure of where to turn, he reached out to his local NAV office. In retrospect, it is probably good that he did not expect much: a representative from the office offered little more than encouragement and the advice to keep trying—or more realistically, failing—to find a position somewhere. To make things worse, without a previous work history, Kjetil was, like Ida, ineligible for unemployment benefits. Even social assistance, a relatively stingy benefit awarded based on a means-test, was out of reach because he owns a car—a luxury in a country where non-electric automobiles can be taxed up to 100%. Kjetil grudgingly continued his job-search while living at home with his mother and older brother, Mikkel. Mikkel also did not work because of anxiety that was so severe he could bear to be on a bus. He had received an official diagnosis for his condition and lived on "work rehabilitation allowance" (*arbeidsavklaringspenger*), a transitional benefit provided by NAV to bridge the gap between short-term sick leave and a permanent disability pension.

Kjetil later remembered that those days passed with "lots of applying, no response." Growing desperate, he contacted friends and family—did they know of any openings? Did they have a connection somewhere? There was nothing useful. As he put it, he "stood a bit on [his] own legs." Unemployment took its toll. He noticed that his routines, long molded by the early mornings and active, social days of high school began to atrophy. Dressing, for instance, became an afterthought, as he frequently opted to toss

the same stale, New York Knicks jersey over his husky frame. He recalled a typical day during that time like this:

> Maybe I got up at 2, 3 in the afternoon…went to get some breakfast, watched a little TV, sat down and played videogames…*World of Warcraft*, it's a little dangerous because it's very easy to fall in. It was 5, 6 in the morning when I would go to bed…[I] had no desire to apply [for jobs]… You sit and think, 'I don't give a shit if I apply for jobs today. I would rather sit and play videogames.' So you sit. You are by yourself so much when you are unemployed because most people actually have something to do during the day. That's what I think is the biggest challenge when you don't have a job—it's that you actually have nothing to do with anyone. You have to occupy (*sysselsette*) yourself.

So he occupied himself with gaming, the same way thousands of other young people in Norway occupy themselves. The popularity of videogames—including both console and computer games—in Norway is staggering. According to a 2018 study by the Norwegian Media Authority, a staggering 96% of boys and 63% of girls, ages 9-18, play games on computers, gaming consoles, smartphones or tablets (Medietilsynet 2018, 3).[3839] Of those surveyed, 77% of boys and 47% of girls had played games the day before (Snakkomspill.no 2018). Of these, 45% of the boys and 22% of the girls had played for at least two hours (ibid.).

NAV has noticed. At one back-office meeting I attended at an Oslo NAV branch, for example, employees voiced serious concerns about the growing problem of

spillavhengighet, or "game addiction," and mulled strategies for breaking its grip on young men like Kjetil. One employee shared the story of her own brother's obsession with games, and the comprehensive familial intervention it took before he went out and got a job at Dolly Dimple's, a pizza restaurant. Still, she and the others remained puzzled about how a hobby like gaming becomes an addiction that leads to *naving*. More importantly, they were not sure how to prevent or overcome it.

Kjetil seemed to know. He explained to me that it was a matter of "personality" and grew from an inability to grasp that the "fun" can interfere with the "important." He said:

> I have been very addicted to videogames myself. I could sit for twenty hours playing *World of Warcraft* before. I don't do that any longer because I have begun to make it a priority a bit that I set a fixed time for gaming. But that is based on personality because not everyone is strong enough to think, 'Ok, I have to actually put down this thing which is fun to do something that's important.' It's very easy to be absorbed into a game-world (*spilleverden*) if it's encompassing enough and you have tons of friends who sit and play. It's very easy to think that, 'Yeah, but everyone else is sitting and playing, why can't I also play?'

The problem, he explained, is that this is an illusion. You convince yourself that the people you play with play as much as you do. But they do not. He said:

> Everyone else games for maybe three, four hours a day, so it's just a lot of different people who sit and play. But you sit there and play with everyone the whole time without actually grasping that the others don't play as much as you do. I know a couple people that are unbelievably game-addicted (*spillavhengige*)...Before, when we were younger, it was normal just because it's fun and we didn't have a lot of important things happening. It wasn't the end of the world if we missed a day in fifth grade. But now afterward, now that we've gotten older, I have noticed who is still addicted to games and who has put it to the side and made it more of a hobby. The ones who are still addicted are loners, kind of…They look for friends and a social life in another place because they can't handle it outside of a computer.

But it went beyond just contact or finding an environment where one felt comfortable. Kjetil explained that games created a space for you to be part of something:

> I believe that they [gamers] maybe feel a different kind of belonging (*tilhørighet*) from the one they do in the real world. Because my brother and I, and my cousin, we sat a lot, we played the whole day. But we had time for it. We were children—we can do that. But it's something you grow out of—most people, in any case. And those that are still very game-addicted today, it's people that have been kind of pushed out of social things in reality and now search for a kind of circle of friends in another place. Because they can't make it entirely in a normal social setting.

Another important point is that the individual game like, say, *World of Warcraft*, is less important than what many kinds of games have in common with respect to the social and psychological needs they fulfill. He put it this way:

> I know people who have sat for 20 hours a day and played *The Sims*. People can become addicted to whatever game because in a way we just need to feel that there is a self (*et selv*) we fit into…It's a little safe space, and that's what the problem is…I think that some people maybe have kind of a hard time coming out of it again. They create a comfort zone that they can't manage to break out of later. They're too used to the fact that it's so safe and good at home in front of the computer that they don't jump out into what is ordinary life, the ordinary everyday (*hverdag*).

This returns us to the issue of personality and the seemingly arbitrary capacity some people have to understand that excessive gaming is in fact a problem. Kjetil linked a certain personality-type with introspection, which he believed is a necessary factor in breaking loose from the computer or the console:

> Most of them, they aren't able in a way to look into themselves. It's a little bit the same with someone who abuses drugs. They say, 'No, I'm not addicted. I just think it's fun to use it. No, I'm not addicted to games. I just think it's fun to play games.' There's no shame around it really. But I've noticed that with many

> people, it's maybe the family around them that gets hit the hardest by it. Because, putting it simply, they lose a family member in the game world. And it isn't so much that the family members look down on the person, it's actually more that they just feel sorry. I actually had my friend's mom ask me if I could help because he wouldn't leave his computer. He just sat and played. He didn't go out of the house—did nothing. I said, 'Yeah, sure. I'll try.' He's making it now. He doesn't play so much anymore. In fact, he sold his computer.

Kjetil, like this friend, felt that he needed to change his life, even if unemployment created those long, empty hours—hours that it would be effortless to fill by booting up, logging on, and dropping out. He was desperate to find a job, and though NAV had offered nothing the first time he contacted them, he decided to try one more time. He told them plainly, "this isn't working—I can't find a job on my own."[40] This time, however, there was something they could offer him: a spot in an upcoming job-seeker course for young people. He would learn to create a proper CV, write an application, and even interview, if an employer happened to pluck his CV and application from the pile. With no other options, Kjetil decided to give it a chance.

"Everyday Philosophers"

Ida and Kjetil's stories are not drawn from a representative sample, they do not lie at opposite poles, and they certainly do not exhaust the variety of experiences, obstacles, and impressions that characterize youth unemployment. But they are in their own ways instructive, expressing some of the key challenges and common attitudes one discovers

when studying young people who are out of work in Norway. From Ida's story, we see how a kind of passivity follows from a punctuated entry into the labor market. Here, her first job after graduation fails to register as the rite of passage that would initiate her into the middle third of life, when one is expected to participate in formal wage labor full-time. Instead, she experiences two seemingly random and unfortunate twists—a snowboarding accident and the discovery of a flour allergy—that reduce the market value of her specialized education to zero. With debt from attending private school—which is quite unusual in Norway, she cannot borrow more money to cover her cost of living while attending university. This leaves her in a bind: though motivated to work in education and building experience through volunteering, her applications for elementary school jobs do not get anywhere. Her belief that it has to do with her lack of a certified credential is probably accurate.

In Ida's story, we also see that job-seeking is a decision constrained by social relations. After moving to Oslo, Ida was not interested in working full-time but wanted more than a "20% job." The greatest impediment to adding more work days was her boyfriend, who disapproved of her working outside their home. To put it more technically (and certainly more obtusely), her relative share of commodified to decommodified labor power was determined by her desire to maintain intimate ties to a person who desired that she do uncompensated work in their home. This indicates that youth unemployment is not necessarily a matter of individual choice or will: the overall commodification of labor power reflects a person's management of the obligations they feel they have to other people in their life.

Kjetil's story, by contrast, is a study in how the sociality emergent in new technologies has created unprecedented functional substitutes for the latent goods of employment. Education in Norway—and throughout the world—is an extended period of socialization. Through the way it structures achievement, assessment, and advancement, it essentially primes young people to understand social personhood, belonging, value, and that ever-vague but all-important idea of "success" in terms that comport well with those that circulate in the world of formal wage labor. And yet, here is precisely the reason that, as NAV has observed, so many cases of persistent youth unemployment involve games: modern computer- and console-based multiplayer games have provided a viable platform for the rewarding expenditure of productivist energies. The paradox of videogame addiction is that kids like Kjetil 'do nothing' precisely because they are doing too much in virtual contexts that often have not only fully-fledged social structures and political economies (Boellstorff 2008), but *other people*. This, I think, is precisely what makes young people susceptible to building a life beyond the displacements of unemployment in virtual space. Kjetil himself suggests that videogames inhibit job-seeking, largely because today's gameified virtual worlds are in many cases also fully-realized social worlds. For a person who has experienced the multiple displacements of unemployment, videogames, coupled with a source of income from NAV or a parent, provide various functional substitutes for benefits—certainty, constancy, a defined role, progressive ladders of achievement—that are increasingly scarce in post-industrial, post-Fordist economies (Sennett 1998; Standing 2011; Kalleberg 2008; Allison 2013).

In an innovative study, Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (1996) held a national writing contest to solicit autobiographies from ordinary people, or "everyday

philosophers," as she would call them. In the resulting book, she compares the life stories of two women, "Kari" and "Cecilia." Kari is an elderly woman, and in her autobiography, she reflects explicitly on two ways of understanding oneself and one's purpose. On the one hand, one can strive to *være til nytte*, or "be of use." This approach, Gullestad surmises, was the orientation that was common among Kari's generation, who recognized that their prescribed roles involved particular obligations. Alternatively, one can aim to *være seg*, or "be oneself"—an orientation that involves the discovery of an authentic self to which one must be true in one's actions and relations. Cecilia, a young woman, offers such a striking counterpoint to Kari because these latter terms are precisely those in which she narrates her life. She does not know what her obligations are, one senses, because she subscribes to the idea that the self is elusive.

Gullestad is careful not to reduce the differences between Kari and Cecilia to their generational positions. She reminds the reader that class, gender, and education undoubtedly influence how people see themselves and their purposes. But she does assert that Kari's deontological understanding of self is only possible in a society characterized by a continuation of values and roles via the reproduction of a social structure. By contrast, Cecilia's drive to be herself implies a certain discontinuity or enervation of tradition, a corresponding valuing of (self-)invention and experimentation, and the significance—but absence—of peer recognition. This last point is critical. Gullestad sees a correlation between expansion in the possibility of self-creation and a growing dependence on others for recognizing the authenticity of one's self. She notes that many of her autobiographers express a desire for "anchoring points", "roots", "a home", or "a place to belong" (1996, 225).

Jobs still anchor young people in society, in part because they still possess the status of a rite of passage—at least according to Marte and Gunnhild, two young women who manage a program in downtown Oslo for young job-seekers. Their clients are not like Ida and Kjetil, both of whom grew up in Norway, speak fluent Norwegian, and have Norwegian educational credentials (even if they might be inadequate). SøkNå!'s volunteer-run job-seeker courses are aimed at young migrants. Marte and Gunnhild believe that they face the same pressure to find a (first) job without the advantages of their native peers. These advantages are largely social: like almost everyone who works directly with employment assistance, they believe that the majority of jobs are found and filled because of an individual's network. This was not true for Ida or Kjetil but it was for others I met. One young person, for instance, found a job as a mechanic by posting about his availability to work on Facebook.

All networks are not created equal. Young migrants *may* have the support of an extensive ethnic community but the concentration of migrant groups in certain sectors of the economy, as well as the disproportionately high unemployment rates of some—but by no means all— migrant groups potentially limits their usefulness with respect to job-seeking. One's network is also where much of the knowledge needed to thrive in the labor market is transmitted. While forums and other parts of the internet offer information, only other people can act as responsive primers able to share information and answer questions in real-time. Further, as certain aspects of the applicant 'performance' can be rather complex and idiosyncratic, it helps to have someone who can tell you what should and should not go on a CV, what to wear to an interview, or how to

negotiate effectively once an employer has made an offer. SøkNa! has made it its mission to help young people from migrant backgrounds with all of this.

They do so in large part because they believe that jobs—and particularly the first job—are a rite with even greater stakes for migrant children and the children of migrants. Whatever criticism is leveled at someone like Kjetil or the writer's stepson, no one will doubt their right to be part of Norwegian society. But in a country where migrants are at times discussed in terms that call into question the legitimacy of their place in the national community (McIntosh 2015), the boundary between employment and unemployment seems to often overlap with the boundary that separates Norwegian from non-Norwegian. More will be said about this in the next chapter, which focuses on the experiences of unemployed migrants in Norway. For now, it is enough to note that a weakness of the will that critics suggest keeps young people from getting up in the morning, tends to be treated as an essential aspect of a migrant's "culture" when he or she is unable to find a job. The difference is important: whereas to critics a young white Norwegian can be taught discipline through *krav*, or "demands," they may see a migrant as in the thrall of a culture that makes overcoming the weakness of the will all but impossible—or if possible, too costly. To nativist Norwegians who take this view, such as Chapter 4's Svein, a job may be an indicator of "Norwegianness," its absence an indicator of non-Norwegianness.

First jobs in Norway are commonly still summer jobs, typically low- or no-skill, and found in segments of the service sector where employment is temporary or seasonal. For this reason, young people in Oslo can regularly be found selling hot dogs and cups of machine-made coffee at ubiquitous convenience store chains like 7-11 and Narvesen,

scooping ice cream at Deli de Luca, selling newspaper subscriptions across from the National Theatre, and soliciting donations on behalf of Unicef or *Redd Barna* (Save the Children). In a sense, the content of the job—that is, what one actually *does*— is less important than the fact of being employed. As was discussed in Chapter 1, having a job orientates an individual in society along financial, temporal, spatial, and social dimensions that will remain the fundamental coordinates of one's life until retirement or an accident or illness permits one to transition legitimately into non-employment. It also provides a hands-on primer with respect to the relationship between these dimensions and remuneration. Though different jobs will involve different configurations in these dimensions, nearly all forms of formal wage labor share features that, at the very least, distinguish them categorically from those forms of activity that may be grouped under the heading of "unemployment." A first job also has the critical distinction of inaugurating an individual's "work history," providing the basis for the CV, an indisputable symbol of adulthood in Norwegian society and the de facto passport for moving within the labor market. The first job may also spawn the rudiments of a professional network, a social web of coworkers and managers that increase the likelihood of learning about and, through the institution of the "reference" actually attaining, future jobs. In sum, much of what makes finding work easy is associated with having had work before. And as Ida and Kjetil's stories demonstrate, it can be, for various reasons, that first leap into a stable position that proves the most difficult.

"Went to Sea"

Though complaints about young people in Norway are common, they are perhaps less indicative of widespread contempt than one might believe. In January 2017, the official Facebook page for the Progress Party posted a photo of a young man passed out on a black leather couch. He is wearing a white dress shirt, a tie, and, oddly, jeans. On his chest rest the remnants of a hamburger and a pile of French fries, some of which have spilled onto the couch. Drool is visible at the corner of his mouth. Below the young man, white letters on a blue field proclaim: *"Krav til unge på NAV"* – "Requirements for youth on NAV." The caption for the photo says a bit more: "Now, young people must make an effort to get money from NAV. We have implemented activity requirements for young people on social assistance. Good?" This does little to explain the image. Is the man exhausted because NAV's failure to make demands on him allows him stay up all night partying or playing video games? Or is he exhausted because he has had to work for his benefits? If he is supposed to represent the country's lazy young people, why is he wearing a tie? If he is working in the kind of place where he needs to wear a tie, why is he wearing jeans? It is less a picture than a puzzle.

The ambiguity of the image's message, it turned out, would be the least of the problems the post would cause for the Progress Party. Immediately, it drew a strong backlash, turning a social media *faux pas* into a minor scandal. Even those most willing to accept that Norway's millennials lack the previous generations' reverence for work found the image tone deaf at best and offensive at worst. One commenter wrote "Low point for frp [the Progress Party] and not least bullying of many people who struggle." Another pointed out that "One phone call to any NAV office would have been enough…

They could have certainly told you a great deal [*hel del*] about their 'young people on NAV' –and it would have hardly been stories about men in a white shirt and tie who sleep on a leather couch with a half-eaten burger on their stomach. But knowledge and facts are not FrP's style." Another wrote, "That was too much. Hope you lose more than just my vote."

The strange incident created an opportunity for the public expression of views that dissent from the youth-critical ones that seem to get the most attention in the media. The Facebook users who criticized the post emphasized that it misrepresented young NAV users, many of whom wish to work but for a variety of reasons cannot. In doing so, posters indicated, it demeaned them and their struggles.

Their rancor gestures toward a "sympathetic" interpretation of youth joblessness and benefit dependency. This interpretation was articulated most clearly for me by Mette, a veteran politician. She explained to me that those unskilled, unemployed young people who struggle to get up in the morning are not new to Norway. They were around during the heyday of social democracy as well. What changed was not their will or their work ethic. It was the economy and the labor market. A generation or so ago, she observed, they would have "gone to sea" (*gikk til sjøs*) as sailors in the country's labor-intensive shipping sector. It was an industry with low barriers to entry, where no resume or diploma could possibly say more about an applicant's suitability than their physical strength and endurance, as well as a willingness to live for long stretches within the confines of a ship or in foreign ports. Perhaps fifty or sixty years ago, Kjetil would have gone to sea.

But, Mette emphasized, just because it would have been easier to employ young people who today are criticized, not everything about the old society was better. The material standard of living was lower, but she liked that people were equal and believed in work. In the 1950s, she remembered, most people had little money. Nobody in her class ever had a new bicycle. Her family was poor, but everyone's family was poor. It was an *arbeidersamfunn*, or "worker society," where it was considered normal and important to work. There was solidarity among workers but there was also a great deal of intolerance for people who did not conform to shared ideas about what constituted an ordinary, working person. Psychological disorders, she explained, were taboo.

Mette explained that the old worker society is gone, replaced by *forbrukersamfunnet*, or "the consumer society." The hallmark of this society is the inability to see oneself as anything more than a consumer. This society's moral prejudices are different from those of the worker society but are no less effective at making people feel isolated. To make matters worse, though work has been socially devalued, it is no less essential to the reproduction of society. Further, it is becoming more precarious, she told me, and as Norway grows richer, it is becoming more like America in that both greed and racism seem more common—and entwined. It is no longer the case that everyone is poor. Rather, the poor are racialized. Mette complained bitterly that the richer Norwegians become, the more afraid they are to lose even a single *krone*.

Conclusion

To many in Norway, young people like Ida and Kjetil who struggle to make the transition to *selvstendighet*, or "independence," are cause for concern. They seem to their

parents and grandparents unwilling to work—and thus unwilling to become adults. In this regard, they are easy to represent as the opposite of their hard-working forebearers—not only Norway's fence-painting baby boomers and Gen-Xers but the intrepid generation who rebuilt Norway after the Second World War and constructed its vaunted welfare state. These people, who are today in their 90s or older, came of age during the Great Depression, propelled AP's electoral breakthrough, survived the Nazi occupation, and enjoyed a decades-long economic boom. Their political leaders, drawn almost exclusively from the labor movement, managed industrialization, the construction of a universal welfare system, and, from the late, 1960s onward, the extremely lucrative extraction and export of oil and natural gas from Norway's slice of the North Sea.

It is critical to remember that their lives were lived alongside an implicit refrain: "*Hvem skal bygge landet?*"—"Who will build the country?" Their answer, reflected in the extraordinary patrimony left to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, was "we will." And the oil kids like Ida and Kjetil? They have come of age in a country where nobody asks who will build it—it has already been built. Their Norway has undergone a multidimensional cultural revolution: ethnocultural diversity, the internet, social media, the gig economy, American English, fast fashion, international travel, Michelin-star restaurants, home-brewed beer, craft beer, new pairs of cross-country skis annually, reality television, "slow television," and celebrity bloggers. Norway's millennial generation have come of age in a moment that an observer can only assume must feel like a localized "end of history." They have only known one of the wealthiest, safest, and most egalitarian large-scale societies in the history of humanity. If there is a motivational deficit or a creeping sense of anomie in some cases, perhaps it stems from

the disappearance of a societal horizon: the "Giant Evils" (Beveridge 1942) of industrial society are, if not wholly banished, then at least significantly domesticated among the Norwegians.

What domesticated them was a welfare regime that made its moral center the institution of *employment*. To be employed, as has been argued in this dissertation, is to have one's skis firmly within the pre-cut tracks of the dignified and moral life. It is something without which one risks becoming socially unintelligible and deviating from the standard life narrative. To an observer, what seems obvious is that the oil kids are a generation whose skills and experience are increasingly unnecessary but whose dependency cannot be afforded. This signals that the viability of the employment ethic in contemporary Norway is contingent on the actual possibility of reciprocating state support via labor market participation. Yearning to do so is not enough: young people like Ida and Kjetil need a labor market that meet them where they are.

Sometimes opportunities do appear. In Kjetil's case, the opportunity was NP's job-seeker course. For some reason, I expected that Kjetil, who always appeared half-asleep, would be among those who saw the course through—one of the unlucky 'graduates,' like Ida, who would not find work and thus would have his name called to collect a certificate of completion. But one day, approximately two weeks into the course, the group took their seats, leaving one seat conspicuously empty: Kjetil, who could hardly bother to change his outfit from day to day, had found a job. He would be a street salesman, working on commission. It was not his "Plan A" or his "Plan B" of course, but it was no less important: it was the exit from the unstructured, stagnant lifeworld of unemployment.

I wrote to him to ask if he would be willing—and, given his shifts, able—to meet at a café near the NP course center to reflect on his experience. Happily. The Kjetil that walked through the door was a different person. He seemed taller and older. The loose-fitting Knicks jersey had been traded for a well-fitting, button-down shirt. He responded to my questions like an expert: he was no longer going through unemployment but had gone through it and come out different. Given the bleak description of his days while unemployed, I asked him to tell me about a typical day now. He said:

> Most often, I have to be at the office at 9. Get up at 7. Begin to eat a little breakfast, maybe take the dog on a walk. Wash my hair…trim my beard, put on a little deodorant, a little cologne—get myself ready for the workday. Get in the car, drive down to work, find a parking place, go to the job. Am at work as long as I want to be there. Come home. Eat a little dinner, maybe go to play pool for a few hours, then come home. There are maybe two, three hours left in the evening. Watch a little Netflix or play videogames. That's how my day looks now. There are maybe two, three hours with my computer every day, sometimes maybe I'll play games all three hours, but most often I play for an hour and then watch Netflix…you're able to change your priorities a bit. You experience a dramatic change in what's important for you when you have other things to focus on.

A dramatic change. It is tempting to dismiss the idea that a job—particularly the first job—possesses its own unique alchemy. And yet, in the space of just a few weeks, here was a young man—a slob, if we are honest—who had been transformed by the

experience of being paid for convincing wary pedestrians to sign up for repeating donations to this or that charity. These "other things to focus on" had not rid him of his fondness for videogames but put it in a temporal container—a couple hours a night—that he felt was socially acceptable. And, more importantly, there was a further lesson about money and time. Kjetil said:

> The value of a *krone* is that you have to see how hard you work. What do you earn in an hour? How many expenses do you have? Then you learn quickly the value of a *krone* because you know how hard you have to actually work to make ends meet. You do not pay for things with *kroner*, you pay with your time. How much time did it cost me to buy this car here? How much time during the month do I have to pay for my apartment? Money is loosely translated into time, and what you have to sacrifice to get that money—that's the value of the money. And that's a kind of value that you will never learn if you always just receive money.

So, here is Marx once more: not the utopian, expounding on the uncoerced existence under communism but the cool explicator of commodified labor under capitalism. Sitting with me in the café not far from the job-seeker course where I met him, Kjetil, the kid who could play *World of Warcraft* for 20-hour stretches, described a new understanding of work, time, and value congruent with the social democratic welfare regime and its needs. He was now living in accordance with what I have termed the "employment ethic," and the signs of his satisfaction—the fitted clothing, his posture, the confident voice—with the new situation and its rewards communicated plainly that he

accepted his obligation to colonize so many waking hours with what society considers "important," rather than what he sees as "fun."

Chapter 6
GOING NATIVE

A promise—not yet broken—brought Martim to Norway. It was 2013, and Portugal, his home, teetered on the edge of the financial cliff over which the hapless Greeks had tumbled only a few years earlier. Jobs were rare, good jobs were rarer. Amid high unemployment (17.5% in 2013), stagnating wages, and uncertain public finances, Martim and other young Portuguese recognized that working abroad had long ceased to be a gamble—the gamble was staying and trying to make a life in Portugal. One day, hoping for much and expecting little, Martim traveled to Lisbon for a job fair. There, he met a recruiter from a large, well-known multinational corporation looking to fill an engineering position in Trondheim, Norway. The recruiter seemed to know exactly what he and the others in the long queue wanted to hear. "A job for life," Martim remembers the person saying. An "El Dorado," he remembers thinking. He applied. Shortly thereafter, he received word that he had been chosen. He bid *tchau* to his parents and the Mediterranean warmth and sun for a professional opportunity in a "cold, very cold" country he knew little about.

In 2014, the price of Brent crude oil plummeted. At Martim's office, "the bomb hit" in September when the staff was notified that half of them would be laid off. A month later, Martim learned that he had not made the cut and his contract would be terminated in January. *That* was the broken promise. Still, he was undeterred. Life in Trondheim, both in the office and outside of it, had suited him. He decided to move to Oslo to look for other another job, possibly even something outside of engineering. When

he and I met there in early 2016 to discuss the experience of being unemployed and foreign in Norway, I asked him why he stayed. After all, it had been a year since his last day on the job—a year of cold calls, unanswered emails, unsuccessful interviews. Moreover, there were certainly opportunities for experienced engineers elsewhere in Europe. Why tough it out in Oslo?

"I still believe in the Norwegian dream," Martim insisted. I asked him to clarify. He continued, "It's if you work, you get rewarded for it—and you can evolve. As I see it in Portugal, in Spain, in Greece, in Italy right now, I think you work to make ends meet. You work to get to the end of the month…. Here, you make enough to really establish yourself, settle in, start thinking about a family, start looking for houses. You really evolve in a short period of time. You see your life going forward. *That's* why I want to be here."

For a young person coming from a distressed part of Europe, where work is increasingly precarious and the future uncertain, Norway presented Martim with a contract with clear—and to his mind, fair—terms for building a life. He articulated these terms by alluding to and modifying the trope of an "American dream" to reflect the Norwegian promise of stability and predictability. This was not a dream of riches or even social mobility, as in the American case, but of decent recompense for a reasonable amount of work. In a subsequent conversation, Martim also seemed to appreciate that the chance to 'evolve' even extended to periods of joblessness, when comparatively generous unemployment benefits kept him afloat while he participated in a Norwegian language class he hoped would improve his prospects. To him, all of this—this Norwegian dream—was something to stay and struggle for.

If Martim were an anthropologist, we might say that he was showing signs of "going native." The comparison is not far-fetched. In an article on foreign au pairs in Norway, Tkach (2016) argues convincingly that migrants are like "amateur anthropologists" (231), whose close contact with the native population over an extended period furnishes them with copious amounts of 'data' on how local norms, values, beliefs, and taboos govern things like parenting, gender relations, and social protection. This data provokes critical self-reflection among Tkach's interlocutors, who come to see more clearly the particularity—and relative desirability—of their own cultural lenses. Moving "from fear and hostility towards the Other" (ibid.) to fascination and even admiration, the au pairs engage in idiosyncratic processes of appropriative "boundary work" aimed at improving their class positions.

But managing boundaries is rarely simple. A rich literature on migration and integration in contemporary Scandinavia shows that navigating cultural difference and the desire for sameness is frequently challenging and awkward for migrants, propelled by the necessity of making a life in a new place but fraught with uncertainty. Newcomers, for instance, may be caught between the radically divergent embodied dispositions—or "habituses"—of their ethnic communities and host society (Engebrigtsen 2011). They may confront irreconcilable conceptualizations of personhood, often leaving their children, who come of age in Norway, struggling to strike a balance (Eriksen 2015). And depending on the color of their skin, they may discover that recognition, as a full member of the community or even as a human being worthy of basic respect, is impossible (McIntosh 2015) due to the interpersonal and institutional racism (Gullestad 2006) that undergird a tacit and exclusionary system of "cultural citizenship" (Rosaldo 1994; Ong

1996). In sum, migrants in Scandinavia and elsewhere often live on the threshold between "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991), and though they may grapple with expectations—their own or those of others—to weave themselves, at least partially, into the "webs of significance" (Geertz 1973) of the majority, they may find doing so undesirable, unfeasible, or both.

Nevertheless, it is done—or attempted. People like Martim, confronted with the opportunity to live another kind of life, oriented toward a different kind of dream, change their personal and professional priorities. They "go native." But how and why does it happen? How does someone come to conceptualize and believe in something like a "Norwegian dream?" What makes it "Norwegian" and worth believing in? And what does this tell us about multicultural Scandinavia and the processes through which migrants integrate—or do not—into increasingly diverse Scandinavian societies?

These questions are not only valuable for helping us to better understand the experiences of migrants in contemporary Scandinavia. They are also worth engaging for theoretical reasons. Emerging from ethnographic research, they offer the opportunity to build on the literature cited above to further refine scholarly understanding of integration as a complex, everyday process with economic, as well as social and cultural dimensions (Eriksen 2007). Currently, our accounts of these dimensions are inadequate, if only because they too often insist on seeing them as separate or separable. In practice, the economic, social, and cultural aspects of integration are so interwoven as to be nearly indistinguishable. For instance, for a middle-aged, able-bodied person to integrate 'economically' in a country like Norway, it is necessary to have a job. But finding a job often requires one to be integrated 'socially,' with a local network, and integrated

'culturally,' with a working grasp of certain practices, beliefs, norms, and taboos of the host population**.** In this case, it is not clear where each dimension of integration begins and ends.

Further, with respect to the Scandinavian case, scholars have only recently begun to explore the role that Scandinavia's unique welfare model plays in shaping the sociocultural and moral conditions under which migrants integrate (see Olwig and Paerregaard 2011; Olwig 2011). This mode, variously called "social democratic" (Esping-Andersen 1990)or "universal" (Rothstein 1998), features comparatively generous, tax-funded benefits and services administered by an extensive public sector. Except for newcomers from certain northern European countries, none of the migrants one encounters in Norway come from places where one can expect the state to provide significant, long-term material aid during difficult life events like unemployment. Rather, in other countries, jobless people typically turn to the immediate family, extended kin-network (Stack 1983), informal sector, trade union, or religious/sectarian organization (Cammett 2015) to make ends meet when work is not an option. For migrants, the material and normative shift from dependency on these actors to the Scandinavian state happens with little fanfare, and yet the implications for individuals and families are potentially quite significant. Material exchanges after all mark and maintain relations and reciprocal expectations (Zelizer 2010, 2012), which in turn shape identity, opening possibilities for remapping the coordinates of belonging.

In this chapter, I consider the experiences of unemployed migrants in contemporary Norway. Through connecting their impressions of Norwegian norms of work and welfare with their desires and aversions to integrating, or 'going native,' I

develop an ethnographically-grounded conception of integration that emphasizes three points. First, integration is an active and creative process that involves assembling representations of the "culture" of the host society and population. Second, these representations are rooted in first-hand experience, as well as stories, gossip, and other kinds of information circulated in the migrant's social network. The concept of "culture," which has become a common cross-cultural trope (Hannerz 1999; Wikan 1999), serves to tie these otherwise loose 'fragments' together into coherent, intelligible, and transmissible representations. Third, in Norway, in particular, and Scandinavia, in general, these experiential fragments are shaped in significant ways by the cradle-to-grave welfare system and the various ways it normalizes certain ethical orientations to work and welfare dependency.

In what follows, I will attempt to illustrate these points by examining how unemployed migrants develop and articulate impressions and representations of Norwegian culture based on their experiences as former employees of Norwegian companies and current "users" of the welfare state's main agency, the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV). The discussion begins with their reflections on the Norwegian culture of work and what they perceive to be the native emphasis on the paramount significance of having—rather than necessarily *doing*—work, as well as the importance of conflict-avoidance. Paralleling my interlocutors' loss of work, the chapter then looks at the experience of becoming a NAV user and how this fosters the impression of dependency as something both legitimate and socially undesirable. Finally, building on these previous sections, I look directly at reflections on going or not going native in contemporary Norway, focusing on the obstacles posed by racism and discrimination.

Working to Live

Unlike Martim, most migrants do not come to Norway chasing the promise of a permanent job. That is not to say, however, that they are not chasing the promise of something: an education, steady or well-paying work, under-the-table cash, a reunified family, safety from persecution. As of early 2018, roughly 750,000 of Norway's 5.3 million people—or about 14%—were born abroad (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2018a). The vast majority of these came from either the EU/EEA countries (approximately 331,000) and Asia (approximately 228,000). They live predominantly in urban areas, such as Oslo where the non-ethnic Norwegian population of some eastern boroughs exceeds 50%. Their reasons for coming are diverse. Of the 789,000 immigrants who arrived between 1990 and 2016, about 35% came under the family reunification scheme, 33% as labor migrants, 20% as refugees, and 10% as students (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2017b).

Regardless of what brings them to Norway, however, people soon discover that behind the small Nordic country's popular reputation as a generous 'welfare society' is a broadly-shared commitment to the right—enshrined in §110 of the country's constitution (*Kongeriket Norges grunnlov*)[41]—and obligation to achieve self-sufficiency through formal employment. Employability, in fact, is the philosophical core of state-driven initiatives aimed explicitly or implicitly at the integration of foreigners (Rugkåsa 2010; Hagelund 2005; Hagelund and Kavli 2009). On a webpage for the Introduction Program, for instance, a two-year activation and education scheme for refugees and their family members, the government states that its aim "is to increase the chances for participating in working and social life for immigrants, along with enhancing their economic self-sufficiency" (Regjeringa.no 2016).[42] A similar goal orients the Qualification Program, a

one-year activation and education scheme open to non-refugees, as well as the various state-sponsored *arbeidsrettede tiltak*—"labor market services"—migrants participate in, including formal evaluation schemes (*avklaring*), job-seeker courses, vocational training (*yrkesrettet opplæring*), and education.

In each of these settings, migrants are introduced to the norms, rhythms, values, and meanings ascribed to work—and by contrast, worklessness—in Norwegian society. They learn that work is a central feature of what is considered a dignified life, as it provides not only the "manifest" benefit of an income but the "latent" benefits of a structured schedule, performance measurement, regular feedback, and social contact (Jahoda 1981, 1982). Norwegians themselves, however, are often quick to clarify that their relationship to work is quite different from that of other people, particularly Americans. During my fieldwork in Oslo, conversations with Norwegians about work inevitably prompted the sharing of the same distillation of the difference: In the United States, you live to work; in Norway, we work to live.

For my migrant interlocutors who had themselves worked in Norway, this distinctive Norwegian work ethic was all too familiar. In fact, among those who had previously been employed in Norway, there was near unanimity that Norwegians themselves were not particularly hard workers—at least if effort is measured in time and initiative. A common view is that of Szymon, a Polish engineer who, like Martim, had immigrated to Norway to work for a large multi-national corporation in the oil and gas industry. Based on his experience, he felt that Norway possesses a distinctive work culture where it "doesn't matter how much you actually do at work." Further, "you don't receive any kind of feedback when you work here, and it's not actually very well

communicated what you actually should do." For Szymon, this lack of structure was maddening. For Martim, however, it was ideal. He told me:

> I love it…The deadlines here are always dynamic, and we don't feel the pressure like we feel in Portugal. For instance, we're used to saying that if you give a big project like this to a Portuguese company, it would be done in a year. People would be completely stressed. That's the other thing—if you compare the professional life with the quality of life outside the work, there's no comparison at all. But at least [in Portugal] the work would be much faster and with a lot less money, of course. I think that's the major difference. But here it's much more relaxed and people want you to rest. For instance, I had a week that I declared that I worked for 52 hours and my manager said, 'You can never do this again. This is impossible. This cannot happen in Norway.'

For Diego, a Chilean engineer, it was his company's employing of more Polish engineers—always paid less than their Norwegian counterparts—that shaped his understanding of how Norwegians see work. He shared that "the Polish engineers were more experienced and more hard working than the Norwegian ones." For their part, the Norwegians had no interest in competing or trying to outdo the new arrivals. In fact, he explained, "they [the Norwegians] are very proud of this job culture and working culture—how they perform."

The other feature of Norway's work culture that recurred in my conversations with migrants was the Norwegian aversion to conflict and dissensus. Szymon recalled

spending much of his time trying to get everyone in the office on the same page with respect to the problems they needed to solve. This was made challenging by the fact that the staff was rather diverse and that, as he put it, "Norwegians tend not to see problems at all" or "prefer not to see them." If nevertheless confronted with a problem, Szymon said, "they immediately provide any type of solution" in order to make it disappear. This point was echoed by another Portuguese engineer, Christiano, in one of the job-seekers courses I observed. "Never create a conflict in Norway," he told me. "You will be fired!" To illustrate the point, he shared the story of a confrontational Austrian who made his Norwegian colleagues uncomfortable. On the day the Austrian was fired, the Norwegians took sick leave *en masse* to avoid the office. Juan, who, like Diego, had immigrated to Norway from Chile, shared with me that he was fired due to a workplace conflict with a non-Norwegian co-worker. He stressed, however, that conflict itself would never happen with a Norwegian colleague: "With a Norwegian person, you'll never have these kinds of problems. It's impossible."

According to Leila, an unemployed entrepreneur from Dubai, this greater concern with managing social relations over maximizing productivity—or, in her case, with focusing on people over 'the pitch'—also extended to the Norwegian culture of business and entrepreneurship. Based on her experience trying to get a new company off the ground in Oslo, she observed that Norwegians possess a "social-based kind of culture" where "they think more about humanity than business." In certain respects, such as when it came to accessing elites, she said that she preferred this culture**.** "I like this very much," she told me, "being able to go knock on the door of the prime minister and see her." In contrast, the elites surrounding Sheikh Mohammed in Dubai were "very difficult to get to

unless you know people, right? That culture doesn't sit with me. For me, [a] human is a human."

But as an entrepreneur, Leila also found Norway's "social-based kind of culture" stifling. She made her point by citing a failed business deal: "These people are not business-minded people…they don't have the vision…For example, I got [sic] to a meeting for this business I'm doing. I explain a business opportunity that can actually profit them in a very short time, but very high money, right? Instead of looking into that prospect and the proposal, they're looking to *who* is doing it, *who* is behind this company, what is their credentials. I mean, they have to pass beyond that! You have to look at the company as a company."

In sum, despite different experiences and feelings about these experiences, my unemployed migrant interlocutors seemed to draw relatively similar conclusions about the sociocultural significance of work and productivity in Norway. What they came to believe is that most Norwegians appear to value *having* work more than *doing it*—a view my Norwegian interlocutors themselves expressed with the cliché about "working to live." Szymon summarized the approach by comparing it to the Polish and American approaches: In Poland, "people care much more about the work, they're much more involved, engaged in what they're actually doing." Americans are distinguished by a "can-do attitude," where problems and conflicts are tackled head-on. By contrast, "In Norway…you have to work, but people are not really much involved in their work. Work is just to support yourself, to have the money to live."

Active Dependency

If the experience of being employed in Norway suggested to my migrant interlocutors that Norwegians value having work that allows them to "live," then the experience of being unemployed made it clear that work—or at least employment—is nevertheless a core feature of Norwegians' shared conceptions of what constitutes a dignified life. After losing their jobs, my interlocutors 'did as the natives do' and turned to NAV for material support and advising while looking for work. In turn, depending on certain factors, such as previous work history, they were granted cash transfers in the form of unemployment benefits, social assistance, housing assistance, or course money. To aid their job-search process, many, including all those named thus far in the chapter (except Leila, who was enrolled in the Qualification Program), were sent to job-seeker courses—four-week endeavors revolving around polishing CVs, sending job applications, building LinkedIn profiles, and other activities associated with navigating the digital and analog terrain of the Norwegian labor market. The experience of unemployment thus stretched across various spaces: the home, the NAV office, the job-seeker course center, the job interview, and so on—all yielding new fragments to assemble into to the broader whole of an intelligible "Norwegian culture."

Reflecting on the period when he and many of his native-born Norwegian colleagues were laid off, Diego observed that, comparatively, "they were very concerned about not having a job." The reason, he surmised, had less to do with money than with applying for unemployment benefits and being seen as NAV users: "I have heard in the good times, people talking down about…social clients. I heard several times that as…small talk at lunch, and I heard [it] all the time from Norwegian people really… 'The

social clients, they are so bad. They have so many problems with drugs and they don't want to work hard,' and that [sic] kind of things."

Later, Diego became, unbeknownst to some of his employed friends, a NAV user himself. At that point, he noted a common tendency among people to speak of NAV's clients as if they constituted a homogeneous group. After becoming a NAV user and interacting with other NAV users in a job-seeker course, he came to see this view as gravely mistaken. Though grouped by NAV into the same categories and sent for the same kinds of interventions, the unemployed were individuals with different backgrounds, skills, levels of motivation, and aspiration. Behind his Norwegian colleagues' dread of unemployment, he suspected it was not only stigma but social isolation they feared. "Norwegians are usually not very skilled in social connections," he insisted, "so many in unemployment become fast alone and isolated."

Aside from behavior and statements that suggest that being a NAV user is shameful, the significance of employment is underlined for some by the fact of its ubiquity. Lena, an Estonian architect who had worked in London before she was laid off in the wake of the financial crisis, came to Norway when her husband's employer transferred him there. Though pleasantly surprised that she was eligible for some support from NAV—despite never having worked in Norway—it was not long before she began to feel a strange pressure. "Everyone works," she explained to me over coffee on a pale Oslo winter afternoon. **"**So, if you don't work," she stopped the thought and suddenly broke into a mock dialogue between herself and an imagined Norwegian: "'Ok, are you home with kids?' 'No, I'm not.' 'Okay, are you looking for work?' 'Yes.' 'Fine.'" She concluded, "But if you're not on this strict course, then you're almost not accepted."

Though perhaps surprised by the generosity of the benefits and services provided by NAV, some of my interlocutors soon discovered that there was indeed a social cost to becoming a user—they were seen as "*navere*." The term "*naver*" is derived from NAV and refers pejoratively to people who exploit their eligibility for benefits and services to avoid work or education. Though *naving* is hardly as widespread as some histrionic politicians have claimed, the *naving* discourse, which imposes reputational costs on receiving NAV benefits, appears to function effectively as an informal means of tabooing involuntary dependency. Martim remembered that when he lost his job, for example, "Everyone told me, 'You're going to be a *naver*'," which he learned is "like a bum that gets money from the benefits that other people pay." His impression was that "to be a *naver*—it's really, really bad." Nina, a young Lithuanian woman who came to Norway as a student, recalled that "I don't know many Norwegians who had any business with NAV, but the impression that I have from five years of living in Norway is that it's not something to be proud of." She recalled the well-publicized case of the woman who later became head of Innovation Norway, a prominent state-owned enterprise: "She was in NAV's system for a while and she was describing it always as a traumatic and teaching experience. It is never something natural, like, 'Yeah, well, I was unemployed, so I got to use a bit of NAV and then came back to the labor market again.' It's not like that. People are a bit, sometimes, ashamed, or sometimes they see it as being down, in a way."

Ahmed, an unemployed translator who came to Norway as a refugee from Somalia when he was ten, offered a reflection that ties much of the other interlocutors' reflections on the Norwegian relationship to welfare dependency together:

> The thing is that the Norwegian person, he doesn't have many friends. And if he moves from where he was born…[where] he had the kids where he went to kindergarten and primary school, he's more isolated. The Norwegians who are not from Oslo are more isolated here in Oslo than the foreigners because it's easy for the foreigners to attach a bond or network based on like where they come from, maybe religion, all of this, because they are also a minority. But, the Norwegian, he has to have a job in order to have friends. And if he switches jobs, it's not difficult. He will have his old job's people, and he will have the new job's people. But the day he loses his job, he will lose his wife, and he will lose his friends because he doesn't feel like he has the dignity to sit around them anymore because he doesn't have as much money to spend as them anymore. And he thinks that people look about him differently. And Norwegians care much about how people look at them.

What is striking from this statement and the others shared by my interlocutors is the sense that being unemployed in Norway, though rather comfortable materially, is not supposed to be pleasant and should make one feel ashamed. But knowing that one *ought* to feel a certain way and actually feeling it are rather different things. Sometimes, the "right" feeling is provoked by the "wrong" situation or encounter. For Viktoria, another young Lithuanian woman and entrepreneur, it was not so much the fact of being unemployed that she found distasteful as interacting with NAV's employees, who made her feel like she should be ashamed of being out of work. As she explained: "It was at first when I started talking to NAV that I realized the stigma is there. Or I felt a stigma. I

had heard about it, but I never experienced it in my own skin before I actually started to work with NAV. So, it was NAV itself that sort of injected me with that stigma."

A sense of shame is supposed to spur one to seek work, to be dependent but active. But its effect on behavior is sometimes diminished when users sense that the time and resources provided by NAV create the possibility for realizing other, unsanctioned objectives. For example, Nicolae, a Romanian who had worked as a consultant in Oslo, had long aspired to start his own company. He decided he would use the first year of his eligibility for unemployment benefits to make it happen. At the same time, he understood that this violated the spirit of the policy, which aimed to provide material support only for as long as one was involuntarily unemployed: "Usually, I think what I felt is that they look [at] you as unemployed, and [that] you might spoil the system. I talked to somebody from NAV, and he was really stressed about my situation as well, and he told me at one point, 'Look, there are many people exploiting the system that go to Grand Canaria and just have money from NAV and live a good life in Grand Canaria.' I tried to keep it as secret as possible…[that] I'm *naving*, doing *nav*... I'm exploiting the system. But I cannot work a lot or work [at all], and in the same time develop my business."

Szymon observed that among his unemployed friends there were two approaches to being a NAV user. One was to say nothing about it—a potentially wise move given that, "it seems to be perceived as you were just fired from a job, and you are not successful in your job search. So, maybe there is something wrong with you. This is unfortunately the impression that we get from some of the employers." The other option is to "candidly and openly" proclaim "I'm a *naver*." But why would someone do that? Szymon suggests that friends and people who know you well will not mistake candor

about NAV as a sign of failure or deficiency. That said, as "there are many other topics" to discuss with friends, NAV does not come up much. When it does, it tends to be about grievances and "frustration."

No two unemployment experiences are the same. And yet, in Norway, these experiences—for both migrants and natives—are clearly patterned by the comparatively generous benefits and services provided by NAV, as well as encounters with practices and statements that suggest a widespread Norwegian aversion to being able-bodied and jobless. Perhaps confusingly, migrants discover that while they are entitled to significant support, they are supposed to *feel* uneasy until they find formal employment. From their work experiences in Norway, however, they also know that the Norwegian commitment to work has little or nothing to do with the intrinsic rewards of work itself. After all, as Norwegians are fond of repeating, work is not life; they work *to live*. It is only when one loses a job that one begins to understand that by "to live" Norwegians do not just mean materially. Work—or employment—is the avenue to other, more abstract sociocultural goods. Otherwise at a loss to understand why natives appear highly committed to finding work despite relatively weak material incentives, migrants draw on experiences and things they have heard to develop creative—and perceptive—explanations that highlight the specificities of Norwegian society and culture.

Avenues, Open and Closed

In the previous sections, I have attempted to give some sense of the experiential fragments and associated impressions and representations that permit migrants to locate themselves with respect to what they perceive to be Norwegian culture, their own culture,

and the boundary between them. Here, I consider reflections on cultural difference that focus specifically on that border and its potential permeability. The whirl of desire, aversion, and uncertainty that characterizes the anthropological struggle with going native is not uncommon for some migrants in contemporary Norway, who may begin adopting what they believe are ways of seeing and doing things characteristic of the majority population. Sometimes the changes which come over a person are imperceptible to anyone but those who remember the person as they were 'back home.' Nina said that her mother will sometimes tell her, "You have become so Norwegian." Nina said that she retorts, "No, I didn't. I just found my place because I see my values being more at home here than in Lithuania actually." When I asked her about these values, she focused on Norwegians' tolerance for others, particularly refugees and those from the LGBT community. She also shared with me the story of the first time she encountered a gay pride parade in Oslo. She was with her Norwegian boyfriend, Magnus, who passed the parade as if it were something completely unremarkable. "Why are you so excited?" she remembered him asking. "It's just a pride parade."

"Yeah, but you don't understand, Magnus," she said. "That would not be possible in Lithuania." When sharing the memory with me, she interrupted the narrative here to explain: "In Lithuania, in the last pride parade, there were two members of parliament that were throwing eggs at people. I mean, seriously, and I was so ashamed." Later in our conversation, she admitted that she's "much more happy in Norway. Mentally I don't see myself [as] a Lithuanian anymore because I would be frustrated every day. I would be in culture shock there, not here…it's not that I've become Norwegian. It's just something that—I don't know. I just love it…So, maybe I'm become [sic] more Norwegian.

Maybe." What to Nina's boyfriend Magnus was completely ordinary was to her a sign that pointed toward the sociocultural bridge between where she had been and where she wanted to be—or, to put it in terms of going native, who she was and who she wanted to be.

For others, however, whether they would like to cross this kind of bridge or not, they find it inaccessible. Chen, a Chinese woman who had worked in the oil and gas industry, told me that while she planned to stay in Norway for the next five years or so, she could not imagine growing old there. Part of the reason is indeed cultural: she and her husband, who is also Chinese, are both only-children, and they share the familial obligation to someday care for their aging parents in China. But even if this were not the case, there is the racism, encountered first-hand and related by friends and acquaintances. She recounted a number of incidents for me, including two that directly involved her and her family. In one, her NAV caseworker—who she emphasized was not ethnically Norwegian—told her that she will need to learn the Norwegian language for the kind of work she can reasonably expect to get in Norway—that work being custodial or domestic. Chen insisted to me that the caseworker had seen her CV, which prominently features her impressive educational background, including a PhD from a Norwegian university, and experience in the oil and gas industry. She interpreted the caseworker's advice as a racist sleight based on a not uncommon stereotype that East Asians are unskilled labor migrants who come to Norway to work as cleaners or nannies.

Chen's second anecdote involved another 'welfare space,' the *barnehage*, or "kindergarten." Chen explained that her four-year old daughter was teased by other children, who said that because she has black hair, she must be a boy. At once, her

radiant child, who delighted in singing and dancing, became sullen and withdrawn. But Chen did not blame the children. Rather, she blamed the teacher, another foreigner, who failed to intervene in the way that she was convinced her daughter's previous teachers, all Norwegians, would have. "They [Norwegians] protect her well," Chen emphasized. "So, she got into each group in a very short time."

Chen's stories bring to mind something Ahmed once told me**.** "No matter where I go," he said, "people will ask where I'm from. And I go 'Norway.' They will always look at you differently." For people like Chen and Ahmed, who do not look the way many people believe Norwegians are supposed to look, racial difference is layered on top of cultural difference, making the imagined boundary between Norwegian and non-Norwegian culture—at least in Chen's case—seem, subjectively, less permeable. Ahmed, however, refused to accept that his skin color or place of birth precludes him from being Norwegian—from 'going native.' His case proves that even racism and discrimination cannot stymie a desire to be part of a place that feels like home. Lena expressed this as well. Like Chen, she had an upsetting run-in with a NAV employee who ignored her stated desire to get help finding work and treated her as if she were a covetous foreigner looking to sponge off hard-working Norwegians. Ultimately, Lena could take this in stride, perhaps due to the overwhelming sense of gratitude she later felt when NAV provided her with a small benefit for participating in a job-seeker course. Still, the incident served to remind her—as the constant questions about where he comes from do for Ahmed—of her status in the eyes of many Norwegians as a "stranger," a figure near to the collective 'we' without being part of it (Simmel 1950).

For foreigners, particularly those who come from outside of Europe, everyday life in Norway is punctuated by pervasive, sometimes unintended or unconscious, forms of racism and racialization that all too often go ignored (Gullestad 2006; McIntosh 2015). At the same time, the recognition and acceptance of the host population is critical if migrants are to imagine a majority culture in which they can be full participants and contributors. Worryingly, this implies that one can largely adopt or appropriate the ethics of work and welfare characteristic of what one perceives to be Norwegian culture without gaining the corresponding acceptance from Norwegians themselves. Or to put it another way, you might believe in the Norwegian dream, as Martim does, but the Norwegian dream may refuse to believe in *you*.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism is a political project that aims to manage diversity through the cultivation of mutual respect and harmony between ethnic groups. But can a multiethnic Norway be managed? This question signals aspiration to control over the diversity of Scandinavian societies that will likely prove as elusive as the definitive answer to whether migrants are, in the final analysis, economically beneficial to the modern welfare states. Still, at a time when an unprecedented number of labor migrants, refugees, and others are crossing Scandinavian borders, policymakers and publics will find it necessary, if not particularly easy, to grapple with the miscommunications and disharmonies that arise from cultural difference.

The same holds for migrants themselves. Though Scandinavia was never as homogeneous as most people imagine (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008), there is no

denying that the region has entered a new era of multi-dimensional "super-diversity" (Vertovec 2007), particularly in large cities like Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Malmö. Adjusting to the ever-changing sociocultural composition of Scandinavian publics is made even more difficult for everyone by the acceleration of the global processes behind that change (Eriksen 2014). Nearly a decade ago, scholars in Norway began to write about "*det nye Norge*," or "the New Norway" (Alghasi, Eide, and Eriksen 2012; Eriksen 2011). At the time, the phrase was identified primarily with Oslo's multiethnic eastern suburbs, popularly maligned as a distressed ethnic ghetto where it was said that crime was rife, listless teenage drop-outs spent their time smoking hash, and kindergarteners stammered out an ethnolect called *kebabnorsk*, or "kebab Norwegian." Looking back from the vantage point of 2019, after the horrific xenophobic violence of the July 22, 2011 attack on the Labor Party's youth wing, the entry of the welfare chauvinist far-right Progress Party into government in 2013, and the massive surge of refugee arrivals in 2015-2016 due to the carnage of the Syrian Civil War, it seems necessary to accept that in the space of just a few years, the "New Norway" has become even newer, even more complex, even more unwieldy.

What remains a constant, however, at least for now, is that for migrants, the day-to-day navigation of cultural difference in Norway will inevitably unfold on an experiential terrain shaped by the country's social democratic welfare regime. Regardless of their country of origin, gender, age, or reason for migrating, they will have to at some point grapple with that welfare state's enormous influence over the meanings, norms, values, and taboos associated with work, social protection, and the relationship between them. The modest aspiration of this chapter has been to show that this grappling does not

make migrants passive. Rather, they are agents in an active and creative process of imagination. This process is rooted in experiences and relations that yield representations of Norwegians and Norwegian society directly tied to their perceptions of the desirability and possibility of integration—of in some sense "going native." This perspective emphasizes that integration is simultaneously economic, social, and cultural; quotidian and interactive; and ultimately contingent on the belief that the "imagined totalities" (Graeber 2001) of Norway and Norwegianness are things that they can reasonably expect to be part of.

This is worth highlighting, in part, because of the long-standing and not uncommon fear, usually fomented by populists on the right, that migrants do not understand and properly value Norway's welfare system. My conversations with unemployed migrants, particularly those who had been 'down and out' in another country, suggest that few people in contemporary Norway are better equipped to understand how special and rare this system is. I once asked Martim, for instance, if he felt Norwegians really appreciated what they had. Still out of work, he had recently moved to a new apartment and was living with two young Norwegian women who offered him, an unwitting 'amateur anthropologist,' unparalleled perspective into how the natives actually live and think. "No," he said unhesitatingly to my question, "I think they don't really." He continued:

> They have no idea how the job market works outside. They are shocked when you talk about money, for instance, in Portugal. What's the minimum wage? They are shocked. If you have to explain to them that along with that comes days of 10, 11,

> 12 hours of work, and if you miss one day then the person in charge starts to look for a replacement, and they expect you to do the job that two or three people do around here, and more, and more, and more. They can never understand something like that.

If Norwegians did not appreciate how bad it could be, they also did not appreciate how good their way of life was. As Martim put it, "Their system is cool because they want you to have a quality in your life. They want you to have quality *of* life. That's very good, but they don't appreciate it because they never lived anywhere else. They never worked anywhere else."

As Norway continues to undergo monumental economic, political, and demographic shifts, one wonders what will become of the welfare system and ways of life—the dreams—it makes possible. It may come to pass that the system's most ardent supporters and defenders in the future will be the country's newcomers, who bring not only skills, needs, family obligations, baggage, and trauma, but also the experiences needed to truly measure the value of the security, predictability, and balance that some Norwegians, who have known no alternative, may take for granted.

Conclusion

While conducting research for this project, I must have heard the maxim "*gjør din plikt, krev din rett*"—"do your duty, demand your right"—uttered at least a hundred times. It always seemed to be at hand in conversation, a tidy way to distill for a curious anthropologist the philosophy behind Norway's welfare state into six words of consensus. In addition to its brevity, the phrase's perceived power no doubt lies in its provenance and age. As I was also told again and again, these words were a rallying cry for the early labor movement, echoing through streets filled with marching workers, emblazoned on banners that stretched across their vanguards, hoisted on placards above the throng. Or that is how I—and I think they, my interlocutors—imagined it. But I was skeptical. Do your duty, demand your right. Just as I wondered at the Labor Museum's emphasis on the transhistorical experience of working people, I questioned whether my early 21st century interlocuters could really be referring to the same "duty" and the same "right" as their forebearers. And who exactly was the "your" in a multiethnic Norway? Was it not more plausible that those early socialists, social democrats, agitators, and activists had possessed their own understanding of duties and rights, of doing and demanding? And if so, could it—like "morality" in MacIntyre's (2007) account—have been lost or warped with the passage of time?

I sensed that if these older meanings still dwelled somewhere, it might be in *Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, the Labor Movement Archives and Library, also known as "Arbark." Founded in 1909, Arbark is the main repository for documents, literature, and media related to Norway's labor movement. Appropriately enough, it is

located on an upper floor of The People's House, the Trade Union Confederation's sizeable headquarters, which along with the Labor Party's main office, forms part of the perimeter of one of the city's largest public squares, Youngstorget. I had little time to spare due to other field research commitments, so an extended rummaging in Arbark was out of the question. Instead, I arranged a meeting with a resident historian, Jostein. I hoped that his expertise regarding the early social democratic movement and first-hand knowledge of Arbark's history and collections would provide some rare insight into the origin of *gjør din plikt, krev din rett*, and its elevation to the status of a 21st century chapter-and-verse means for summarizing the moral philosophy of Norway's welfare state.

As it turned out, our meeting was among the last of Jostein's duties at the archive. As a preamble to our conversation, he shared that he had reached the age of mandatory retirement.[43] In my research I had not engaged at any length with someone who stood at the threshold between a permanent job and the pension, between working life and a permanent unemployment. I asked if in Norway the proper response to learning of a person's retirement is "congratulations" (*gratulerer*) or "condolences" (*kondolerer*). His face showed no hint of excitement or enthusiasm. No, he explained grimly, this was not something to be congratulated. It was a loss, and we dealt with it like two strangers deal with something too awkward to talk about: by changing the topic. Remembering the reason for my visit, I asked about the history of *gjør din plikt, krev din rett*. He at once confirmed my suspicion: whatever "duty" meant to the men and women of the early labor movement, it certainly did not mean a duty to modern capitalism, as many now appear to believe. And whatever "right" meant, it referred to more than a brief respite from

capitalism's mandate to sell one's labor power for a wage. Jostein believed that somewhere in the past century the original meanings had been lost, though the words themselves survived to perpetuate the idea that social rights are embedded in a broader logic of reciprocity.

How did this happen? Jostein was not sure. I have a theory, however. Between the days when industrial workers and labor militants filled Norwegian streets and the present, a social democratic revolution took place, rewiring the circuits of obligation and dependency that run between the individual, the family, the labor union, the labor market, and the state. Each welfare regime-type is in part based on the logic of "do your duty, demand your right." What distinguishes one from another is who owes what to whom and under what conditions. The creation of a social democratic welfare regime shifted the primary axis of obligation from its former place between the individual and the family to its present one between the individual and the state. The state thus became the individual's patron during critical periods of nonwork, such as unemployment but also illness, injury, disability, and retirement. The cash transfers and social services provided by the state became the currency of right, and taxes, paid on incomes earned through formal wage labor, the currency of duty. Recall Khalid's words from the Introduction: working and paying taxes is a way to "contribute to society" and support the "welfare system." This is certainly not the "do your duty, demand your right" of the old labor movement but rather the catechism of employment institutionalized by the welfare regime it helped to create.

This is the principal finding of this dissertation: the hegemonic "work ethic" in Norway is actually an "employment ethic" that reflects the meanings, values, and norms

ascribed to formal wage labor in the social democratic welfare regime. The corollary finding is that this ethic is learned and affirmed by the experience of life events that force individuals to shift their locus of dependency from the labor market to the state: losing a job and becoming a NAV user is a moral education. The dissertation's other core argument is that the employment ethic is not stable. In the foregoing chapters, I have described a quiet struggle between the social democratic welfare regime and its alleged adversaries, including advocates of delegated governance, young people, and immigrants. I have examined the case for seeing the latter two groups as promoting harmful alternatives to the employment ethic and found it empirically dubious. The idea that young people or immigrants lack or reject the mainstream understanding of duties and rights vis-à-vis the state, or possess one that is incompatible with that of the social democratic welfare regime, is not substantiated by my ethnographic data. Rather, for better or worse, both groups largely accede to the employment ethic, desiring the fulfillment that only a job can bring, despite structural impediments that make it more difficult for both groups to find permanent jobs. This is evidence of the social democratic welfare regime's capacity to integrate people into a loosely-delineated but encompassing moral imagination. Though migrants may adhere to certain practices associated with their home countries, they largely 'do as the Norwegians do' when they lose their jobs.

By contrast, the advocates of delegated governance do offer a stark alternative to the moral imagination of the social democratic welfare regime. As discussed in Chapter 2, their drive to redistribute administrative territory from the public sector to for-profit firms and social entrepreneurs is justified by a rhetoric that instantiates a novel boundary between the concepts of "state" and "society." In this societal ontology, who owes what

to whom? This struggle suggests that processes of "disembedding," as described by Polanyi (1944), go beyond the economy. Rather, "disembedding," or the discursive emancipation of one societal realm from another, is a more general process of chopping and joining categories to authorize new practices, new actors, and a new distribution of responsibility. In Norway, erecting a conceptual wall between the state and society involves, as the activist Linn Herning (2016) notes, a parallel discursive razing of the conceptual wall between welfare services and other services. Should the proponents of delegated governance succeed, and already they have found meaningful success in the world of labor market services, then it may someday come to pass that Norway's unemployed understand their debts and duties as owed to firms like New Possibilities rather than the welfare system, civil society rather than the state. This would signal the coming of a new welfare regime with its own way of weaving the individual into relations of dependency and obligation with other actors. For people who live through the transition, the experience of significant welfare reform be similar to the experience of migrants who move physically between welfare regimes. It is a process of untying, severing, and refusing one set of normative social ties in favor of another. With these new ties come new questions of identity, personhood, responsibility, and moral obligation. This, I believe, is all at stake in the political struggle over delegated governance.

This dissertation is thus a study of a social body in motion, a welfare regime that retains many of the features of its ideal-typical form while pushed by new conditions—the end of social democratic hegemony, oil wealth, and immigration—to either become a new version of itself or something else. I have traced this movement not only for its own sake but to contribute something of value to the theoretical and methodological debates

that have given shape to its questions. I see these contributions as falling within four areas: cultural anthropology, the comparative social science of the welfare state, policy studies, and Scandinavianist anthropology and Scandinavian studies.

As a work of cultural anthropology, this dissertation offers a synthesis of two important theoretical currents. The first is the anthropology of morality, which is in the midst of a resurgence or "third wave" (Csordas 2013). From this multi-tendency subfield, my work draws an appreciation for the variability and systematicity of moralities (Edel 1962), the rooting of the ethical in the ordinary (Das 2012; Lambek 2010), the tension between moral imperative and individual agency (Robbins 2007; Laidlaw 2002), and the centrality of the "good" (Ortner 2016; Fischer 2014) in the ceaseless struggles and projects through which people become other than what they were (Biehl and Locke 2017a). Throughout this dissertation, this scholarship has prompted me to argue that the meanings, values, and ethical commitments that the unemployed typically ascribe to work and worklessness are diverse, embedded in everyday discourse and practice, mobilized to both conform and deviate from social expectations, and expressed in narratives that connect pasts to open-ended but aspirational futures.

But despite its value in drawing these insights out, the new anthropology of morality provides little help for thinking about why certain moralities emerge, mutate, and disappear. Why, for instance, do the same people sometimes think as deontologists and at others as consequentialists? Why do they find themselves arguing with proponents of, say, virtue ethics? A second issue is a tendency to 'de-economize' morality, uncoupling projects of self- and community-formation from institutions and practices of production, distribution, and consumption (Hann 2018). This dissertation overcomes

these issues through the concept of "welfare regime." Borrowed from the comparative social science of the welfare state, the welfare regime concept offers a theoretical language with which we can begin to think about morality as a feature of the diverse sociocultural worlds of modern capitalism. Where cultural anthropologists typically see welfare systems in terms of decline or retrenchment (see Fennell 2012; Muehlebach 2013; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003), welfare regime scholars emphasize qualitative differentiation (Esping-Andersen 1990; Arts and Gelissen 2002; Goodin et al. 1999), adaptation, and resilience (Pierson 1996, 1994, 1998).

The welfare regime concept is all but nonexistent in cultural anthropology. The key to integrating it effectively into our accounts is grasping that a welfare regime is essentially an institutional terrain, and thus a means to updating Polanyi's (1957) substantivist economics. This is the theoretical current I aim to synthesize with the anthropology of morality. To the substantivist, an economy is "defined as an instituted process of interaction between man [sic] and his environment, which results in a continuous supply of want satisfying material means" (Polanyi 1957, 248). This environment, which varies from place to place and period to period, is "natural and social" (1957, 243), though both nature and society should be understood as culturally-constituted (Sahlins 1976). This could almost be a description of the welfare regime, which is a variable environment where wants—and needs—are provided for by institutionalized exchanges between the individual and different actors. Where the welfare regime concept extends substantivism, however, is in its centralizing of the institutionalization of want-satisfaction within the mix of public and private sources of provision characteristic of modern industrial and post-industrial societies. In turn,

approaching the welfare regime as a substantive economy permits us to move from the macro- and meso-levels to the micro-level to see that different institutional architectures of welfare have significant consequences for how people make a living that coheres with shared meanings, values, ethics, and norms. More broadly, emphasis on the centrality of institutions permits us to reflect on how the formation of a particular welfare regime shapes shared "thought worlds" (Douglas 1986) and "changes not only what…actors will regard as rational action…[but] changes *what they will regard as morally correct action as well*" (Rothstein 1998, 139). In short, welfare regimes, conceived substantively, help account for some of the moral variability ethnographers typically discover in the field.

Braiding the anthropology of morality, substantivist economics, and the welfare regime concept also advances the comparative social science of the welfare state. Following the publication of Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, scholars have been engaged in a multi-decade project of parsing data to substantiate, disprove, or propose the existence of various welfare regimes. This fixation on models, modelling, and typologies has made it possible for scholars to write, only half-jokingly, of a "welfare modeling business" (Powell and Barrientos 2011). But while the field does not lack for new insights, some scholars see it as stuck in a cul-de-sac of Kuhnian "normal science" (van Kersbergen and Vis 2015). What I have proposed in this dissertation are two ways out. One is methodological. Welfare regimes were always intended as Weberian "ideal types" (Esping-Andersen 1990). These, Portes (2010) argues, are most useful when "'rubbed' against empirical evidence to put order in actual experience, highlight its most salient features, and establish whether theoretical expectations—implicit in the concept—actually hold (2010, 3)." With ethnography, we

can collect particularly coarse data for refining our understanding of how welfare regimes—specified using quantitative data—are in fact experienced, perceived, designed, and administered. Reciprocally, provisioned with strong ideal types, ethnographers of social policy and social ills will have a useful analytical framework with which to account for observed patterns of motivation and action without having to mimic their more cynical interlocutors and invent causal and pathological cultural forms or dispositions for the sake of explanation.

The other benefit to the comparative social science of the welfare state pertains to broadening our understanding of what welfare regimes do. In the wake of *The Three Worlds*, there has been a persistent interest in the extent to which various welfare regime-types "decommodify" (Esping-Andersen 1990) labor power and social rights, emancipating the individual from material dependency on the labor market (Bambra 2006, 2005; Holden 2003; Esping-Andersen 2000; Scruggs and Allan 2006; Room 2000). Feminist scholars, critical of this singular focus on decommodification, introduced the concept of "defamilization" (Lister 1994; see also Orloff 2009), or the extent to which different welfare regimes liberate individuals from material dependency on the family. This dissertation goes beyond both decommodification and defamilization to ask how welfare regimes shape the meanings, values, and norms ascribed to the commodification of labor power. The chief innovation here is to push the welfare regime concept to conclusions anticipated by works that have argued that decision-making, cognition, and morality are institutional (Douglas 1986; Rothstein 1998). By bringing these works to scale, I have shown that with respect to work and worklessness, the 'worlds of welfare capitalism' may in fact be cultural and moral worlds as well. This finding has important

implications for understanding how people in different societies will process work's future transformation by new economic forms and technologies.

And if this is the case, then this project also has something important to contribute to policy studies. Policy, according to one seminal definition, consists of "the principles that govern action directed toward given ends" (Titmuss 1974, 140). The hegemonic theory of governing action in contemporary Western policymaking is based on what Dubois (2014) calls the "economic vulgate." Rooted in neoclassical economics, it holds that the clients of welfare systems are self-interested, materially-driven utility maximizers who must be controlled and disciplined via sanctions and surveillance. Its ascension to the level of commonsense helps explain why wars on poverty have in various cases been transmuted into attempts to discipline (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011) or punish (Wacquant 2009) the poor into compliance.

The problem with the economic vulgate is not only the suffering it has caused via various welfare reforms but its fundamental misunderstanding of human action as only or mostly determined by economic incentives. A mounting pile of empirical evidence, collected by economists, anthropologists, and others (Gintis et al. 2005; Henrich et al. 2004) suggests that people make decisions based on economic incentives, *as well as* ethical commitments and social norms (see also Sen 1977). Further, these things are not additive: poorly designed economic incentives can displace non-pecuniary motives or norms, fostering the exact outcomes policies sought to avoid (Bowles 2016, 2008). This dissertation not only adds further empirical support to this pluralistic understanding of motivation but posits that the experiences shaped by labor and market policies are themselves productive of ethical commitments and affirmative of social norms. Or to put

it more simply, the experience of being out of work and receiving comparatively generous support from NAV is likely to engender a sense of debt or obligation; meeting with bureaucrats or other job-seekers is likely to make a person feel that the norm is not to remain jobless for the full two years of their eligibility for unemployment benefits but to find a job. The experience of unemployment, as shaped by Norwegian social and labor policy, discloses a particular ethics of unemployment. For this reason, policymakers who would cultivate non-pecuniary motives in people would be smart to craft policies that adopt the features of Norwegian policies—universalism, generosity, long eligibility periods—that encourage a view of formal wage labor as moral practice.

Finally, with respect to Scandinavianist anthropology and Scandinavian studies, this dissertation offers a novel account of where certain documented 'cultural' proclivities in the region come from. As a disciplinary "culture area" (Lederman 1998), Scandinavia has allowed anthropologists to sustain a rich dialogue revolving around themes like equality and egalitarianism (Lien, Lidén, and Vike 2001; Bendixsen, Bringslid, and Vike 2018; Vike 2013; Gullestad 1992), the home (Gullestad 1984, 1992), and sociocultural inclusion and exclusion (Alghasi, Eide, and Eriksen 2012; Eriksen 2011, 2007; Gullestad 2006). This study adds to these previous studies by tracing the connections between the meanings, values, and norms of formal wage labor and the region's distinctive welfare model. In contrast to studies that credit Scandinavian exceptionalism to a transhistorical culture (Witoszek 2011; Trägårdh 1997), this dissertation argues forcefully for seeing the typical features of national and regional character as reflections of the commitments and norms encouraged by the institutional arrangement of the social democratic welfare regime. The "employment ethic," for

instance, is no cultural possession, and I would doubt strongly that even the most ideological Norwegians would take it with them to a place like the United States. Rather, it is an ethics of work and worklessness that only makes sense in a given context, where having a job is recognized by others, including the authorities, to possess specific values.

Looking forward, this analysis points to three avenues for productive future research. The first would involve comparative ethnographic study aimed at describing the relationship between the institutional features of other welfare regimes (e.g. the liberal, conservative, sectarian) and the ethnographically-documented practices, meanings, values, and norms associated with formal employment and other work relationships. The insights from this research would be particularly illuminating alongside scholarship aimed at understanding the implications of post-work and post-productivist futures. Many commentators on the digital technology-driven "fourth industrial revolution" (Schwab 2017) tend to focus on the quantitative effects of technological unemployment, such as the number or share of tasks, jobs, or professions that will be eliminated (Frey and Osborne 2013; Arntz, Gregory, and Zierahn 2016; Pajarinen, Rouvinen, and Ekeland 2015). A task for cultural anthropology is to determine what exactly that elimination will mean to people, given the variety of welfare regimes and the meanings and values currently ascribed to different categories of work.

A second avenue would look to other relations, such as parenthood or associational membership, and examine the semiotic, ethical, and experiential effects of different welfare regimes. Though the primary relational package that sees people through unemployment in Norway links the individual and the state, this is a very rare arrangement. In other places, the primary axes of expectation and responsibility run

between individuals and their parents, individuals and their extended kin, individuals and their clans, and, of course, individuals and themselves. Each of these arrangements helps define different roles and rights and obligations of the people who hold them. In linguistics, a "false friend" is a word that resembles one from another language but which possesses a different meaning. It is my belief that the worlds of welfare capitalism are full of sociocultural "false friends." Both Americans and Norwegians speak of being a parent or a client/user of the welfare system, for example, but in practice, they often mean very different things that cannot be excavated and understood without setting them in sociocultural context.

A third avenue for future research would attend to how institutional modifications and policy reforms change how people understand themselves and others as actors, as well as practices (e.g. of work, care), life events like unemployment, and phases of the life cycle, like childhood or retirement. Privatizing pension schemes, for instance, may put more or less money in the pockets of some older people, but what does it mean for how people conceive of old-age and its boundary with middle-age, the meaning and affect associated with retirement, and the details and saliency of the intergenerational contract? Our treatment of welfare reform should not fixate on the sociological or economic and ignore that there are cultural and moral implications to whether a policy is publicly-administered or privately-administered, means-tested or universal, employment-based or public, defined benefit or defined contribution. While disbursing money, policies also distribute dignity, responsibility, well-being, possibility, and stigma.

By taking any one of these paths and looking beyond Scandinavia and the Euro-American world, future ethnographic investigations of welfare regimes could help build a

new field of global, interdisciplinary inquiry. But we might also look beyond the academy. The foregoing gestures toward one effective way that anthropologists can contribute to the development of better social policy (Goody 1984). The most effective way to create policy for the "human economy" (Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010) is to not only critique individual policies for their assumption and effects (Wedel and Feldman 2005; Wedel et al. 2005; Shore and Wright 1997; Shore, Wright, and Però 2011) but to demolish the flawed ideas and simplistic axioms of the economics that make them thinkable and legitimate in the first place. Ultimately, this is a call for leveraging the insights of ethnography and anthropological theory to build a 'moral microeconomics' grounded in the plasticity, heterogeneity, contingency, and morality of economic action. My hope is that this study will serve as a model for future ethnographic research that will look beyond Europe and North America to trace the connections between other welfare regimes, particularly those emerging in the Global South (see Ferguson 2015), and their associated moralities, between other social safety nets and other moral fibers.

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Notes

[1] These are not their real names. All figures, unless identified with a surname (e.g. Linn Herning), have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Note that Norwegians commonly use double first names, which I have incorporated into pseudonyms like "Hans Magnus" and "Bjørn Erik."

[2] The *bunad* is Norway's national folk costume, an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm 1983) of the 19th century based on various forms of contemporary peasant dress. *Bunader* come in different styles associated with different regions, making them a particularly effective symbol of the diversity and unity of the Norwegian nation. Today, it is customary to wear a *bunad* for important rituals, such as christenings, weddings, and the massive annual celebration on May 17, Norwegian Constitution Day. In recent decades, *bunader* have also become artifacts of conspicuous consumption, as a strong market led to greater diversity in terms of quality of materials and production (Eriksen 2004).

[3] And, following the Napoleonic Wars, Sweden. Norway was King Karl Johan's reward for siding with the Seventh Coalition against Napoleon. The triumphant powers of Europe no doubt appreciated the fact that before accepting the Swedes' invitation to become their new monarch, "Karl Johan" had been "Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte," a marshal in Napoleon's army.

[4] When Mary Wollstonecraft (2009) visited Oslo (then called "Christiania) in the mid-1790s, she found it "a clean, neat city; but it has not of the graces of architecture, which ought to keep pace with the refining manners of a people" (2009, 83). Among the regrets of her Scandinavian adventure, Wollstonecraft mentions missing the opportunity to travel north of Christiania and visit the country's freeholders. These fiercely independent and egalitarian peasants—or at least the myths of them—are seen by some scholars as a decisive factor in the distinctive Nordic path to modernity (see Sørenson and Stråth 1997; Witoszek 2011).

[5] The City Hall was itself a "new suit" on an old city when it was built. The land for the project was once the site of the Pipervika slums, vestiges of the hardscrabble, pre-social democratic city. Before building commenced, the slums were cleared, both physically and from the popular imagination and memory.

[6] So spectacular was this era in Western Europe, that it has earned a sobriquet in multiple languages. The French, for instance, speak of *les trentes glorieuses*, or "the glorious thirty." The Italians remember *il miracolo economic* and the Germans the *Wirtschaftswunder*. What distinguishes the Norwegian memory of this time is its emphasis not only on economic prosperity but the almost unbroken political hegemony of AP.

[7] Under the direction of Martin Tranmæl, AP moved to join the newly-formed Communist International (the "Comintern") in 1919. The so-called "Moscow theses," which required dramatic restructuring of member parties and fealty to Moscow, proved a problem, however. Following the departure of social democratic moderates from AP in 1921 and Moscow's refusal to negotiate new terms of membership, AP voted to break formally with the Comintern in 1923. In response, a minority of AP's delegates left to form Norway's Communist Party (NKP). The wayward social democratic moderates, who had created their own toothless party to contest elections, rejoined AP in 1927. The

next year, the party formed its first government under Christopher Hornsrud, who confirmed in his *regjeringserklæring*, or "governing declaration" that "The Norwegian Labor Party's objective—developed in the party's program—is to implement a socialist social order in Norway" (quoted in Lorenz 1970, 95). See also Lorenz 1972.

[8] The intense cultural attachment to work has also been cited as a cause for suicide in Scandinavia—or, at least in Sweden. In the 1960s, psychiatrist and suicide expert Herbert Hendin (1964) observed that the suicide rates in Sweden and Denmark were approximately triple what they were in Norway. In analyzing national differences in suicide etiologies, he discovered the incredible pressure that many Swedes feel to be independent and find fulfillment and joy in their professional lives. He argued that Sweden's comparatively high suicide rate could be credited in large part to the outsized psychological damage inflicted by professional failure. This contrasted markedly with the Danish case, where, Hendin asserted, there was an equally powerful pressure to avoid personal and relational failures. Hendin found that Norway was, as it seems to be in almost every conceivable area of comparison, Scandinavia's middle road.

[9] A year, though comparatively short by the standards of anthropological research, was more than enough time to investigate the questions that animate the study. It was hardly enough to develop them, however. That work has taken place over the span of years, beginning with my first visit to Norway as an undergraduate in summer 2009, continuing through 2010-2011 as a U.S.-Norway Fulbright grantee, as well as annual summer research trips through 2017. My formal scholarly engagement in Norway was born with the Fulbright project, which aimed to document ethnographically the relationship between the individual and the state over the life-cycle.

[10] I recognize the limitations of the interview format. Briggs (1986) argues persuasively that anthropologists and other social scientists often fail to understand that interview data is a product of the interview encounter itself. Rather than furnishing the researcher with value-free information, the interview strips out the specificity of the metacommunicative context and 'makes' data conducive to the interview format itself. Mindful of this issue, I approach interviewing and the data collected thereby with a reflexive appreciation for "what talk is all about" (1986, 119) in the concrete situations and encounters where talk takes place. In this study, my recorded interviews took place almost exclusively in bakeries, cafes, and restaurants: non-domestic spaces where purchasing a few cups of coffee permitted my interlocutors and I to linger and discuss the specifics of their experiences. The interview creates the opportunity to narrate, and the narratives cited throughout these pages bear the impressions of the context in which they were created. These stories were not meant to entertain, persuade, provoke, or deceive—at least, not primarily. They were shaped to satisfy the curiosity of a probing ethnographer, a white American man, a person willing to listen, the guy who paid for the coffee.

[11] Firms and NGOS that offered me access as a participant observer have been given pseudonyms to protect the privacy and anonymity of all associated people.

[12] It is critical here to note that not all jobless individuals receive unemployment benefits. The other benefit scheme used by people out of work is *økonomisk sosialhjelp*, or "social assistance." This is a means-tested benefit, the amount of which is determined by local bureaucrats on a case-by-case basis. In 2015, the average social assistance payment per month was 8,975 kr, or approximately $1,050 (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2016).

[13] Some individuals without a job receive neither unemployment benefits nor social assistance. One of my interlocutors, for example, Lena, was out of work when her husband was transferred to Oslo by his employer. With no previous earnings history in Norway, she did not qualify for unemployment benefits. At the same time, her husband's salary was adequate to cover their basic expenses, making social assistance, which is means-tested, impracticable. She did ultimately receive "course benefits" (*tiltakspenger*).

[14] There are of course other, latent functions. Bakke (1934), for instance, suggests that during the Great Depression the UK's unemployment insurance scheme "prevented any serious breaking down among the needy of a respect for the law" (1934, 59).

[15] All information in this chapter on eligibility, replacement rates, and benefit duration are pulled from the current (April 2019) page for *dagpenger* on nav.no. That URL is: https://www.nav.no/no/Person/Arbeid/Dagpenger+ved+arbeidsloshet+og+permittering/dagpenger-n%C3%A5r-du-er-arbeidsledig--893. Note, however, that this webpage and/or its URL is likely to change in the near future, as the web portal is regularly updated.

[16] These thresholds are relatively easy to meet for people with some work history. In 2017, for instance, the median annual net household income was 490,000 NOK, or approximately $57,000 (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2017c).

[17] The law makes an exception for a person "who has quit her position in order to move with a spouse or domestic partner to another part of the country, if the person can be regarded as a real job-seeker. See *Lov om folketrygd* § 4-10.

[18] This is particularly striking given the experiences people in Norway typically have with their public healthcare system. Here, one chooses a local general practitioner as their "permanent doctor" (*fastlege*), makes appointments online or by phone, and pays no expenses beyond 2369 kr (approx. $280) a year. The process comparatively seamless and predictable—something that may create expectations for the relationship with NAV that are bound to be disappointed. Some users manage to empathize with NAV's overworked employees. Viktoria, for instance, said that "the thing is that you come into NAV's office and everyone is just pale and characters without faces… But these are people with their own issues…with their own limitations and capabilities."

[19] I could not resist asking what makes one LARP better than another. Isak said it was about three things. First, he said, the physical location should match the genre. One celebrated Harry Potter-themed LARP, for example, was set at an actual medieval castle in Poland. Second, for a good LARP, you have to get a good role. The problem is that you do not typically choose who you will be. This is up to the organizers, he explained, "who have to make a kind of context (*sammenheng*), with certain roles and relationships and potential conflicts and alliances." Third, you need other players who are believable, outgoing, and willing to drive the drama. LARPing does not work if people do not engage with others, stoke controversy, and try to get what they want at the expense of others.

[20] The *krone* was particularly strong during my first research period in Norway, 2010-2012, peaking against the United States dollar in July 2011 at 100 NOK to $19 (compare to 100 NOK to $11.75 in April 2019). Someone told me then that Norwegians only found one other country expensive to visit: Switzerland.

[21] "Sharp" here is relative. At its height in January 2016, Norway's unemployment rate touched 5.1%—a figure many other countries, stuck with perpetual double-digit

unemployment, would celebrate. Before the oil crash, however, Norway had enjoyed roughly two decades of annual unemployment rates that remained almost exclusively under 4% and went as low as 2.56% (in 2007) (OECD 2019).

[22] Notably, I experienced this guardedness with some NAV offices and an NGO that assists young job-seekers. In both cases, I believe that representatives feared that interacting with me might lead personal, potentially sensitive information about their jobless users/clients to be exposed. In the case of NAV, one also sometimes encounters a kind of defensiveness or sense of perpetual besiegement, as if the agency's employees have learned to keep their guard up after letting it down too many times—to people from the media—and getting burned for it with negative coverage. Still, I never knew what exactly to expect when contacting NAV. At two NAV offices, for example, I was warmly welcomed for multiple visits and candid conversations with employees.

[23] Though, in truth, he was not so glad to actually show up for our first scheduled meeting. That day, I arrived at the NP office and waited, in vain, for him to appear. Eventually, one of his befuddled coworkers walked over to say that Terje was on the phone and hoped we could reschedule. We picked another date without issue, but I was frustrated by the experience of traveling to the office, waiting, and being stood-up. I recalled the accounts of my unemployed interlocutors, which featured no shortage of annoyance with a welfare system that through interminable lines, transferred calls, and redundant requests seemed indifferent to the value of their time.

[24] In the course of my research, I attended a number of meetings in NAV offices where *all* of the employees present were women.

[25] *Attføring* is one of those unusual terms that are not readily translatable into English. It is often glossed as "rehabilitation." This is ironic because, as Leikvoll and Herning (2017, 7) point out, the post-war decision to call these services *attføring* was in part motivated by the desire to avoid the negative connotations of the word "*rehabilitering*." Allegedly, Karl Evang and Gudmund Harlem, two prominent AP figures, discussed the matter on a ski trip. One of them suggested that they use the neologism "*attføring*," a shortening of the phrase "*å føre folk attende til arbeidslivet*"—"to lead people back to work-life." The use of the *nynorsk* (New Norwegian) word "*attende*," rather than the *bokmål* (Dano-Norwegian) word "*tilbake*," was a nod to the party's contemporary embrace of *samnorsk*, a proposed—but never realized—reconciliation of Norway's two official written languages. In 2010, the term *attføring* was largely deposed, at least officially. "*Yrkesrettet attføring*," or "occupation-oriented rehabilitation" became "*arbeidsavklaringspenger*," or "work-rehabilitation allowance." "*Attføringstiltak*," or "rehabilitation measures," received various new monikers, including "*arbeidsrettede tiltak*," or "labor market services."

[26] What the company's five partners earn is almost impossible to determine given that they move money between the firm, their holding companies, and their sole proprietorships. What is clear is that they receive not only salary and dividends but also money from invoices sent from their holding companies. In 2018, *Din Utvikling* was sold to Credo Partners, an investment firm, for an undisclosed sum.

[27] The Progress Party, which was born as a tax-protest party, has long had a semi-libertarian wing (Arter 2016). This wing became somewhat less influential once the party discovered in the 1980s and 1990s that its recipe for electoral success consisted of a combination of racist paranoia and welfare chauvinism.

[28] Once, after hiking with friends in *nordmarka*, the large forest that wreathes Oslo, I spotted Jonas Gahr Støre, AP's current leader, standing between his car and a dumpster, sorting his garbage. Deniece William's "Let's Hear It for the Boy" could be heard playing on the car's stereo. My friends and I had left the forest by a new way and entered a pleasant suburb we had never visited before. We were not sure where exactly the closest metro station might be. I figured that asking directions was an acceptable pretext for approaching the person most Norwegian politicos then believed would become the prime minister following the 2017 parliamentary election. I walked up to Støre and asked in Norwegian if there was a metro nearby. Yes, he said, just a short walk *that* way. I thanked him and we continued on our way. For what it is worth, Norway would not 'hear it for the boy' in 2017. In a surprising loss reminiscent of Hillary Clinton's to Donald Trump, Støre and the left narrowly failed to displace "Iron" Erna Solberg and her broad center-right coalition.

[29] The exception to the three-person team norm was a two-person team for a course for young job-seekers.

[30] Curiously, this is not the first time a neologism for jobless dependency has been so recognized in Europe. For its 2009 "Youth Word of the Year" (*Jugendwort des Jahres*), German publisher Langenscheidt chose "*hartzen*," a term which takes its name from Germany's 2000s labor market and welfare state Hartz reforms.

[31] This description is only valid for the ideal type of the social democratic welfare regime. In reality, many of the benefits and services provided by the Norwegian welfare state, including unemployment benefits, sick pay, and paid parental leave, are contingent on a history of labor market participation. Kolm and Tonin (2014) argue convincingly that income equality and favorable labor market outcomes in the Scandinavian countries are in part attributable to the institutionalization of work-conditionality.

[32] Unsurprisingly, on a variety of measures, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland either cluster or are on the same side of the OECD average.

[33] The data, from 2012, shows Norway's youth unemployment rate was 8.6%, nearly half the OECD average of 16.3% (OECD 2014, 80).

[34] Norway is not alone among its Nordic peers in this regard. Sweden's upper secondary graduation rate is also below the OECD average. The good news is that recent data shows a growing share of Norway's students are completing high school within five years (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2017a). Between 2011 and 2016, for instance, 73% of students finished within five years. This represents an increase of 4.5 percentage points when compared with the five-year completion rates for the period 1994-1999.

[35] In 2012, for instance, the employment rate for non-immigrants was 69.7% while for African immigrants it was 42.5%. It is worth noting that the non-immigrant employment rate is not actually the highest in Norway. In 2012, the most-employed group was immigrants from the other Nordic countries, 76.1% of whom were working. The native population is also less employed than migrants from EU countries in Eastern Europe, 73% of whom were employed. The extreme differences between the employment rates of various migrant groups reflects not only demographic factors and the circumstances under which group members came to Norway, but the nature of the labor market, the distribution of skills and education within the migrant population, and labor market discrimination. For the full breakdown of 2012 migrant employment rates, see OECD 2014, 125.

[36] Not that they necessarily receive unemployment benefits. The terms of eligibility, duration, and behavior criteria for unemployment benefits have changed during the last thirty years. For young people, the most significant changes pertain to eligibility (Lorentzen et al. 2014, 46). With lower annual incomes and shorter work histories, young people are less likely to qualify for unemployment benefits. In fact, there is a discernable downward trend in the coverage rate for unemployed people under the age of 25. In the early 1990s, more than 60% of unemployed people under 25 received unemployment benefits. By 2010 it had decreased to 45% (ibid.).

[37] The government's chief concern is that dropping out will lead to greater direct dependency on the welfare system: "The risk of being unemployed, receiving benefits (*trygdeytelser*), and being outside of the workforce is more than twice as high for the group with elementary school as its highest education as it is for the group with a completed high school education" (NOU 2018:2, 84) [translation mine].

[38] The study finds that among 9-year-olds, 93% of *both* boys and girls play games. Among 18-year-olds, however, the rate is unchanged for boys but only 42% for girls.

[39] One should note that the Norwegian propensity for gaming is not exclusive to children: on multiple occasions, Erna Solberg, the country's Prime Minister since 2013, has been caught in public playing cell phone games. In 2016, she made international headlines when someone photographed her playing Pokemon Go during a parliamentary debate. That someone was Trine Skei Grande, leader of the Liberal Party, who herself was caught—and chastised for—playing Pokemon Go during a parliamentary hearing on foreign affairs and national defense.

[40] After being admitted to a course in January 2016, Kjetil was notified that there must have been an error—it turns out that he did not actually have a spot. He was told he could join a class that would start in April. "I can't wait that long," he explained. "I need a job." He was rewarded for his persistence. A special youth advisor at NAV was given his case and made sure he could participate in an earlier course—the one, in fact, where he and I met.

[41] The original text from 1954 reads: "Det paaligger Statens Myndigheder at lægge Forholdene til Rette for at ethvert arbeidsdygtigt Menneske kan skaffe sig Udkomme ved sit Arbeide." In 2014, the language was modernized and the right to public assistance for those unable to support themselves added: "Statens myndigheter skal legge forholdene til rette for at ethvert arbeidsdyktig menneske kan tjene til livets opphold ved arbeid eller næring. Den som ikke selv kan sørge for sitt livsopphold, har rett til støtte fra det offentlige."

[42] The Norwegian text reads: "...er å styrke moglegheitene for deltaking i yrkes- og samfunnsliv for innvandrarar, samt å styrke deira økonomiske sjølvstende."

[43] According to Norway's Work-environment Law, employers have the right to terminate employment at-will once an employee reaches the age of 72. Prior to a 2015 amendment to the law, the age cut-off was 70. See *Lov om arbeidsmiljø, arbeidstid og stillingsvern mv.* §15-13.