

Pre-print version of:

Kapsalis, A., Floros, K., & Jørgensen, M. B. (2020). Migrants' Entrapment in a 'State of Expectancy': Patterns of Im/mobility for Agricultural Workers in Manolada, Greece. In *Coercive Geographies* (pp. 20-41). Brill.

Migrants' entrapment in a 'state of expectancy'. Patterns of im/mobility for agricultural workers in Manolada, Greece.

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1. Introduction

The strawberry producing village of Nea Manolada, whose name has become a synonym for undeclared migrant labour coupled with violence and compulsion on behalf of the employers' side, is the popular archetype of a coercive geography (cf. introduction this volume) in the Greek context. An outcome of enduring migration/labour policies on the national level combined with social and labour market particularities on the local level, Manolada constitutes a divisive and exclusionary geography, which facilitates the emergence of severe forms of labour exploitation of both legally and "irregularly" residing migrants. In the past 25-30 years, migrants have been living there in slum settlements working under harsh and unhealthy conditions. They have been shot at while asking for their salaries in 2013, workers have been severely injured or died in accidents during their transportation to the fields and they have witnessed the conflagration of three of their settlements and the subsequent burning of large amounts of money, personal belongings and administrative paperwork. Still, as many

as seven hundred Bangladeshi migrants stay there permanently throughout the year and up to nine thousand migrants (mainly of Bangladeshi origin) provide their labour during the peak of the harvesting season, which lasts from January to June.

This chapter investigates the causes which enable a steady supply of migrant labour in Manolada and outlines migrants' im/mobility (cf. Bélanger and Silvey 2019) patterns within the Greek territory. Our research is based on twenty-nine qualitative interviews with Bangladeshi migrants, through which we delve deeper into their aspirations and self-perception of their situation and agency. In order to analyze how such a geography has been stabilized for more than a decade we apply the aspiration-capability framework (Schewel 2019) into our empirical case. Moreover, we observe how legal frameworks create barriers to migrants regarding their integration in the labour market and impede their mobility. We especially focus on attempts to occupationally and geographically immobilize migrants within the Greek agricultural sector and institutionalize their precarious condition through recent policymaking (Floros and Jørgensen 2020), which introduced the concept of 'para-legality' (Kapsalis 2018) as a new category in stratified labour and residency statuses. Our aim is to justify the terming of Manolada as a coercive geography by providing a nuanced report on a) migrants' labour and housing conditions, b) the role of restrictive migration/labour frameworks and c) migrants' personal accounts about their situation and im/mobility.

In the Greek political discourse Manolada figures as the par excellence example of a coercive geographical space, mainly because of migrant protest against the exploitative conditions and the violent incidents of 2013 (Papadopoulos, et al. 2018). Nevertheless, through our research we became aware of several other coercive geographies within the Greek agricultural sector, as the same Bangladeshi migrants relocate by hundreds and by seasons across the country to

work and lodge, in circular patterns more or less similar to each other and in equally degrading conditions. Their consecutive back and forth in the same exploitative routes coupled with their current or original aspirations to reach some other European country, lead us to term this pattern as ‘mobility in immobility’ as an ongoing mobility in the frame of an institutionalized immobility both in the country and in their occupational activity.

We conclude that Bangladeshi migrants working in the Greek agricultural sector are entrapped in a constant ‘state of expectancy’ created by restrictive –yet under special circumstances promising- residence permit policies, which standardize their exploitation within diverse agricultural settings in Greece. This comes as no surprise. The restructuring of European agricultural production has been premised on maintaining “vulnerable legal status and social condition(s) of migrants” (Corrado, et al. 2016, 4) and Greece does not pose as an exception in this regional map of coercive geographies.

In our chapter we begin by briefly outlining the legal framework that shapes the agricultural labour market for migrants in Greece. We then introduce the concepts that constitute our theoretical framework and the methodological approach to our research. In the next part we present and analyse our empirical findings, arguing on the existence of a ‘state of expectancy’ and a ‘mobility in immobility’ pattern, before concluding by explaining the reasons for the perpetuation of Manolada’s coercive geography.

2. Greece’s restrictive legal framework and the introduction of ‘para-legality’

In Greece, socio-legal constraints are the outcome of a thirty-year long restrictive immigration regime, which curbed the acquisition of citizenship and at the same time tied residence permits and their renewal to a certain ‘amount’ of declared work performed by

migrants (Gemi 2013; Triandafyllidou 2013). It is not our intention here to provide a nuanced map of migration policymaking in Greece, but we need to stress out a series of policy provisions which have shaped the agricultural labour market for migrants. Greece has forged a fragmentary and preventive migration policy in the past 30 years, dealing with migration in “purely instrumental terms” (Triandafyllidou 2014: 122). Migrants cover 95% of the need for waged labour in the agricultural sector (Kasimis, et al. 2015), yet undeclared labour is widespread. The only legal pathway for a migrant to enter the Greek labour market has been the invitation procedure (in Greek *metaklisi*) and the seasonal work scheme, which both applied almost exclusively to agricultural labour. Nowadays, these schemes tend to be replaced almost entirely by work-permits corresponding to article 13a. According to unpublished data obtained by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the number of permits issued through 13a has risen from 1.100 for the period 2015-2016 to 9.500 for 2017-2018. Permits issued for *metaklisi* or seasonal work for agriculture were only 5.400 in 2017-2018.

In 2016, an amendment (13a) to the Immigration Code provided the granting of six-month-long work permits to irregularly residing migrants, almost exclusively for the agricultural sector. These work permits can be renewed but are not coupled by residence permits. This new socio-legal status for migrants has been termed ‘para-legality’ by Kapsalis, since 13a “constitutes a parallel state of tolerance (of labour) into illegality (of residence) [...] as it appears that the residence status remains irregular throughout the duration of the work permit” (Kapsalis 2018, 78). Migrants, who once possessed a residence permit or whose deportation has been suspended due to humanitarian or technical reasons, need a certificate of employment and a deportation postponement by the police authorities. If completely undocumented, migrants first sign a deportation confirmation, followed by a 6-month postponement. The permit has occupational and geographical limitations, since a migrant can

only work in the prefecture which issued the permit, thus entrapping possibility of legal work in designated areas.

Agricultural labour is almost exclusively declared through the *ergosimo* (Williams, et al. 2016; Kapsalis 2018b), a payment voucher introduced in 2010 allowing employers to “contract” migrant workers mainly in the agricultural and domestic care sectors. Labour according to 13a provisions is mandatorily paid through *ergosimo*. Nevertheless, this employment relation is not declared in the official digital registry for dependent employment (ERGANI). It only appears in social security registries, when –and if- the voucher is redeemed by the migrant. The *ergosimo* minimizes social security costs and facilitates employers’ arbitrary behavior, given the fact that it is a means of labour payment essentially –and typically- detached from the obligation to declare real working hours, employment location, job specification or any other data on the employment relation. Flexibility and contingency are intrinsic to this voucher, since this kind of employment relation is almost uncontrollable from labour inspections. Conclusively, 13a reinforces hyper-flexibility and augments migrants’ dependency on the employers, rendering migrants susceptible to exploitative labour conditions, while at the same time temporally entrapping them geographically and occupationally.

3. On im/mobility, unfree labour and precarity

The concept of globalization as well as its contestations produced extensive theoretical debates around the turn of the millennium. Bred in this context of constant flux of people, products, ideas and information, one of the most influential contributions within social sciences was the ‘mobility turn’, which called for mobility to be placed at the epicenter of theory and research (Urry 2000; Cresswell 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). Although this

theoretical paradigm emphasized the existence of constraints in mobility –and especially when referring to the issue of migration- very soon scholars pointed out the need to use immobility as a theoretical lens, in order to “challenge the grand narrative of hypermobility, flux, and fluidity associated with modernity” (Schewel 2019, 5). Jørgen Carling theorized on immobility through his research in Cape Verde (Carling 2002), concluding that our times should be outlined as an age of ‘involuntary immobility’, an approach that contradicted the popular concept of the ‘age of migration’ introduced by Castles and Miller (1993).

Indeed, mobility and immobility coexist in empirical cases of migration and sometimes even share common causes, thus raising the need for reflective and nuanced approaches regarding their conceptual use. Spatial and temporal factors are key to conceptualizing accounts of immobility. A migrant may travel thousands of kilometers only to be confined in a detention camp or s/he can be stuck for a long period of time in a certain place (of origin, transit or destination) but still aspire to move. Aspirations are crucial when investigating migration. In our research we use the aspiration-capability framework (Schewel 2019), so as to investigate patterns of mobility and immobility for Bangladeshi migrants working in Manolada’s strawberry-producing agricultural sector. Firstly introduced as aspiration-ability model by Carling (2002) and further elaborated by de Haas (2014), who replaced ‘ability’ with the more dynamic term ‘capability’ and Schewel (2015) who added the ‘acquiescent immobility’ category to it, this framework is characterized by a methodological two-step approach, which first evaluates migration as a potential action and then observes categories of mobility or immobility in a given spatio-temporal context (Carling and Schewel 2018).

Spatial dimensions of immobility have been investigated in recent literature from various different angles (e.g. Tazzioli 2018; Suter 2013; Mata-Codesal 2018). ‘Im/mobility’ -as an ambiguous term- has been used widely in order “to underscore the mutually constitutive relationship between particular forms of movement and the regulations and disciplinary

pressures that delimit that movement” (Bélanger and Silvey 2019, 2). The same scholars engage with the term ‘immobility in mobility’ (ibid.) so as to highlight im/mobility patterns for migrant care workers all over the globe and describe situations of confinement or restriction of movement in employers’ homes. In our case we detect a reverse condition. Bangladeshi migrants are circularly mobile within specific different coercive geographies of rural Greece, yet immobilized to a great extent inside the country’s borders and moreover socially and occupationally immobilized in the aforementioned geographies. It is what we coin as ‘mobility in immobility’.

Another crucial feature of migrant im/mobility is waiting (Conlon 2011). Waiting is very often imposed on migrants who ‘get stuck’ for indefinite periods of time in countries they originally considered as transit points, blurring distinctions between transit and final destination (Collyer, et al. 2012; Suter 2013). It has also been widely enforced to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in a number of contexts (Mountz 2011), creating what Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) have coined as ‘waiting zones’, namely “holding zones and funnels” which facilitate the regulation of the “timing and tempo” of migrants’ differential inclusion (ibid, 68-69). Such analysis complements Mountz’s, who speaks of “fixation of mobile people in limbo through exclusionary processes” (2011, 383). Waiting, though, sometimes comes as a deliberate strategy by migrants who voluntarily enter exploitative labour conditions in order to achieve benefits regarding their socio-legal status (Axelsson, et al. 2017). Through combining these two points of view, one should always consider the exclusionary processes at play, which facilitate differential inclusion of migrants in the countries of the global North. The institutionalization of migrants’ precarity is achieved through a series of constraints, fracturing of citizenship and stratification of statuses and permits (Floros and Jørgensen 2020).

In line with this literature and the theoretical approaches that take into account migrant agency in its multifarious expressions, we consider that the majority of Bangladeshis working in Manolada live and work in what we term as a ‘state of expectancy’. They are not in a ‘waiting zone’, since they are already included in the labour market, nor do they wait for a concrete outcome, but rather share a general expectancy for the improvement of their socio-legal status. They lag in a nexus between involuntary and acquiescent immobility -or more precisely ‘mobility in immobility’- with the constant hope of navigating through a tunnel of demeaning and exploitative labour conditions, appalling housing conditions and hyper-precarity. At the end of the tunnel there is a flickering light, since a few migrants finally achieve the “residency permit for exceptional reasons”, nevertheless, this permit which requires seven years of consecutive and well-documented presence in Greece is not awarded to everyone and is also at stake through the change of policies or governments. This uncertainty and the behaviors that derive from it is what we term ‘state of expectancy’.

Our chapter also draws on the concepts of ‘unfree labour’ and the ‘hyper-precarity trap’ (Lewis, et al. 2015a) to “show how neoliberal labour markets and highly restrictive immigration regimes intersect to produce multidimensional insecurities that underpin the demand and supply of forced labour subjects” (Lewis, et al. 2015b, 144). Unfree labour has been conceptualized by the ILO (ILO 2018) and various Marxist theorists (e.g., Brass 2011) in dichotomizing ways. In our analysis we follow the theoretical angle of critical unfree labour studies (McGrath 2016), which eschews strict binaries of freedom/unfreedom in order to delve deeper into the variety of unfreedoms that characterize labour relations within coercive geographies. Therefore we prefer to emphasize the multi-dimensional particularities of coercive labour relations by projecting our findings on continuums; what Lerche (2011) has termed the ‘continuum of unfreedom’ or Skrivankova (2010) ‘continuum of exploitation’.

The creation and preservation of certain enclaves is frequently encountered within intensive agricultural production systems in Europe, where low-wage labour is performed by migrants, living and working in hyper-precarious conditions. The ‘hyper-precarity trap’ is formed at the intersection of socio-legal constraints imposed by restrictive immigration regimes within neoliberal economies and the imperative need of migrants to encounter any available employment so as to subsist on it, but also to settle their debts or cater for families back home. Their adverse incorporation (Philips 2013) in the labour market coupled by their exclusion from welfare provisions marks their ‘hyper-precarious’ status (Lewis, et al. 2015a). Nevertheless, by highlighting this ‘hyper-precarious’ status we do not mean to portray migrants as mere victims of the labour market. We agree that “migration policy and research that privileges the analysis of migrants primarily as jobseekers and refugees fails to adequately represent the subjective diversity of migrant mobilities, the dynamic power of migrants themselves, and the analytical value of taking mobility seriously as a starting point for understanding border policies” (Casas Cortes, et al. 2015, 896). A growing body of scholars has taken up this ‘Autonomy of Migration’ (AoM) approach, recognizing migrants’ agency as constitutive of border, migration and labour policies (ibid 2015; De Genova 2017). By employing AoM as an analytical tool we wish to avoid the objectification of migrants and their im/mobility.

4. Methodology

Our chapter is based on 29 semi-structured on-site interviews with Bangladeshi migrants working in the strawberry-producing area of Manolada in Greece, as well as extensive desk-based research on Greek legal texts, parliamentary debate, policy papers and existing literature on the case of Manolada. We also conducted an interview with the mayor of

Andravida-Kyllini (which is the administrative municipality of the greater strawberry-production area) as well as several informal interviews with lawyers and NGO members providing legal assistance to migrants in the area. Our research benefits from insight we have already gained by investigating the enactment of recent legislation through expert interviews with officials of Greek ministries regarding 13a (Floros and Jørgensen forthcoming) and extensive desk-based research on labour legislation regarding migrants in the Greek agricultural sector (Kapsalis 2018).

We decided to take a two-step approach according to the aspiration-capability model (Carling and Schewel 2018; Schewel 2019). First we evaluated potential aspirations and plans of Bangladeshi migrants regarding their mobility within and beyond Greek borders. For the second step, which requires observation of categories of mobility or immobility in a given spatio-temporal context, we did not only use qualitative data from the interviews but we also interpreted it in combination with socio-legal constraints on mobility deriving from Greek legislation. The two ways of conceptualizing migration capability are “as potential or revealed” (Carling and Schewel 2018, 955). Quantitative data on irregularly residing Bangladeshis’ migration patterns are not accessible, since a lot of migrants’ trajectories within and through Greece remain undocumented, so ‘revealed’ capability was out of this research’s reach. Therefore we focused on ‘potential’ capability, also reflecting on the fact that all interviewees were obviously unable or unwilling –up to date- to migrate out of Greece.

The first three interviews with Bangladeshi migrants date back to June 2018. Another eleven were conducted in October 2018 and the last fifteen in May 2019. Our first interviews were with contacts facilitated through trade unions and antiracist organizations and were carried out in Greek. We immediately realized that our interlocutors were hierarchically above –if not exploiting- their compatriots. As we later found out, their seniority of presence in the

village and their ability to communicate in Greek allowed them to hold a mastura position. Masturas are intermediaries between migrants and local bosses, who profit from supplying labour positions, accommodation and mediation to the rest of the labour force. In order to encounter less biased informants we attempted to establish new connections at the local café, where Bangladeshis hang out. Through these connections we arranged the second on-site visit, this time with a translator. We carried out eleven interviews, three of them with masturas, one of which was our new liaison. In order to recruit informants avoiding gatekeepers (Sixsmith, et al. 2003), we visited again Manolada in May 2019, at the peak of the harvesting season, together with a Bangladeshi NGO translator that had already worked in the field and helped us evade masturas. So as to circumvent the gatekeepers we went straight to the slum settlements and took a site-based approach to recruit informants. The last fifteen interviews were divided in two groups. In order to recruit participants that would ensure a diversity in our sample (Eide and Allen 2005) we conducted eight interviews with migrants employed in Manolada for more than five seasons and seven with newly-arrived migrants; five of which had only been in Greece for a few months.

All participants were Bangladeshi males between the age of 24 and 50. The oldest was one of the first Bangladeshis to arrive in the village, whereas the youngest had entered Greece less than a month ago. Our questionnaire was divided in four sub-categories, namely personal information, socio-legal status, labour conditions and housing conditions. Three of the questions followed the aspiration-capability framework typology, so as to detect and evaluate a) “aspiration, desire or preference to migrate”, b) “conditional willingness to migrate” and c) “likelihood of migration” (Carling and Schewel 2018, 948). We preferred semi-structured interviews to surveys, in order to ensure that participants would fully engage with delicate and ambiguous concepts. Several open-ended questions were formulated in such a way so as to ensure that migrants could provide answers in their own terms (Qu and Dumay 2011),

within a cross-cultural setting of communication. We considered vital for our research to pursue a deeper understanding of the subjective diversity of Bangladeshi agricultural workers, in line with our use of AoM as an analytical tool. Against a victimizing approach on migration, we strived to discern migrants' self-perception of concepts such as coercion, entrapment, unfreedom and agency and to gain insight in the ways they navigate, resist or succumb to the restrictive immigration regime enforced by the Greek state within Europe's neoliberal framework.

Before each interview we clearly stated the fact that we are researchers and that our only contribution through this research is the dissemination of knowledge regarding the demeaning and exploitative working and housing conditions that they experience. In conducting our research we engaged with sensitive data of people who are predominantly in a precarious socio-legal situation. We respected the anonymity of our informants and abstained from enclosing any information that could reveal their identity or in any way prove harmful to them. We wish to thank all of our informants, but especially the ones in our last visit, for welcoming us into their tents during their resting time and offering us food and tea.

5. Living and working in the strawberry-producing zone

Nea Manolada is a village in the Peloponnese with less than two thousand inhabitants. It is located in a small plain which is intensively cultivated to produce 90% of Greece's strawberries (Manoladawatch 2019). The harvesting season begins in January and ends in June. During its peak more than six thousand migrants –predominantly Bangladeshi, but also Pakistani, Afghans and some of Balkan origin- live in the village and work in the surrounding

fields and around three thousand more reside in nearby villages such as Lappa and Psari, also seasonally harvesting strawberries. When the season comes to an end, only seven hundred migrants remain in Manolada.

Bangladeshi workers are hardly ever accommodated in houses in the village; locals are unwilling to rent their property to groups of single men and prefer hosting migrant families from the Balkans. The Bangladeshis set up slum camps in the fields at the edge of the village, built with iron arches, reed, greenhouse PVC plastic and carton boxes. The capacity of each tent is a matter of size, cost and availability and it ranges from four to twenty people. The larger camps can host up to 700 workers during high season, without toilets, with only a non-drinkable water supply for cleaning and showering purposes. Due to the constant use of the water supply, stagnant cesspools are formed next to the settlements. Chickens and goats bought for feeding purposes also live inside and around the camps.

The interior of the tents is humid and cold in the winter, but as temperature rises in the springtime living conditions become more unbearable, especially during the daytime. Indoor temperature is ten to fifteen degrees Celsius higher during the day, flies and mosquitos are ever-present and everyday cooking in the improvised gas kitchenettes of the tents' antechambers further worsens the situation. Workers sleep on rugs or blankets on the floor, next to each other. Their belongings are stored in bags hanging from the ceiling and a big part of the free space in the tent is occupied by six-packs of plastic bottles of drinkable water.

These tents do not come for free. Each worker pays a monthly rent to the compatriot who set up the tent. A part of this money is paid to the landlord of the field. Prices in 2019 ranged from 10 to 25 euro per capita per month.

“I built the tent on my own, but do not ask for money from my fellow countrymen. I am not a scum to live on commissions. The four of us live here and pay altogether 35

euro/month to the field-owner. I am not like the masturas that live off other workers' sweat" (worker B 2019).

A mastura is a migrant intermediary. Also referred to as group-commanders, the masturas (a word deriving from the greek word mastoras, which translates into skilled craftsman) are the backbone of the migrant labour market in Manolada. They are usually veteran workers who live in Manolada throughout the year and have basic conversational skills in Greek. A mastura sets up his own group of workers, negotiates jobs with bosses by guaranteeing availability of workers and is responsible for payments and handling of claims. A mastura hardly ever performs manual labour, he is a foreman usually yelling and swearing at the workers to achieve better productivity. Bangladeshi workers pay 100 euro per season to a mastura, in order to secure an employment spot for the season. A mastura also makes money through arranging deals with field-owners for settlements, as well as from building up tents or securing declared labour for migrants striving to achieve or maintain residency permits:

"I renewed my permit last year by giving the mastura 150 euros to convince the boss to declare me. [...] Money does not guarantee you a paper. Only good relations with the mastura does" (worker C 2019).

"Nowadays bosses pay on time. It is common practice though that the last salary of the season gets paid the next season. So it goes, every year. The mastura says that this is the boss' doings. It is a common pattern this way of paying, so as to ensure that workers will come back the next season as well" (worker D 2019).

Wages are fixed at 24euro/day for a seven-hour shift. Overtime is hardly ever paid for (2-3 euros per hour when it is rarely the case) and payments are performed by the mastura and usually delayed. Working conditions are harsh and exhausting. Most of the migrants complain about back pains, respiratory problems and skin irritations. Gloves and masks are never provided, not even during the spraying of pesticides in greenhouses. Migrant protests are scarce nowadays. Claims are made to the mastura, a worker never gets to demand or negotiate anything with the boss. Complaints and demands usually lead to a week-long deprivation of employment:

“Whenever I protest about something... anything... the mastura cuts off eight to nine days of work” (worker O 2019)

“Once I asked for a mask and gloves and the mastura told me I should call my family back home and ask them for money to buy some gloves (worker M 2019).

Lately, there has been an effort –with the help of an NGO- to build a trade union of Bangladeshis working in the area. Almost all workers were aware of this effort and said they would like to contribute and speak up against their problems. Only two stated that they are not interested, because they said that the masturas will take over the association and control it.

Except for interviewed masturas, who claimed that relations among Greeks and migrants are perfect, the rest of the workers said that there is no kind of relationship between them and the Greeks; they hardly ever speak to each other. Everybody agreed that the police never

performs paper controls inside the village and they feel totally protected and safe within the broader strawberry-producing area:

“The police only comes when labour inspections take place, because they have to. The police is being paid by the bosses. Chief K...’s daughter runs a farm with 700 workers” (worker C 2019).

When defining labour as unfree or terming a geography as coercive it is important to substantiate such allegations. In our case, apart from interviewees’ personal narratives and judgements on unfreedom and coercion, there also exist judicial decisions on the issue. The unfreedom that characterizes migrants’ labour relations in Manolada can no longer be questioned, since such forms of forced labour are defined with clarity in the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (2017) on the case of Chowdury vs Greece, which referred to the 2013 incidents. Moreover, in June 2019, a decision of the Greek Supreme Court on the same incidents, annulled the initial acquittal of the employers of the shot Bangladeshis by the local court, on the grounds of human trafficking for labour exploitation according to Greek penal legislation. Summarizing the literature regarding these court decisions, employers apparently take advantage of the vulnerability of migrants in order to exploit them. The cause of this vulnerability is migrants’ irregular socio-legal status and harsh living conditions (Asta 2018; Stoyanova 2018).

Recently, 355 workers who lived in the camp which burnt down in 2018 were awarded residence permits on ‘humanitarian grounds’. According to the District Attorney they worked in the strawberry-fields under “particularly abusive terms”. This development was based on Greek legislation (4052/2012) which transposed into national law the European Directive 2009/52, providing for minimum standards on sanctions and measures against employers of

illegally staying third-country nationals. Nevertheless, for thousands of their fellow workers, who did not lose their tents and papers in the fire, the prospect of a residence permit remains a very difficult task.

6. State of expectancy

“Do something, write something! We need legal papers and different housing conditions. Our situation here is unbearable” (worker R 2018).

The desire of the majority of migrants to acquire residence permits is obvious from the fact that the ones residing for years in Greece either once had a valid permit which expired or have already filed applications to obtain ‘residence permits for exceptional reasons’. Eight out of twenty-nine Bangladeshis interviewed were rejected asylum seekers. Many others wanted to file an asylum application in the past but were told by swindlers that they needed to pay a lot of money for the application, so they never did. Even those who have never even applied for a residence permit, aspire to acquire one through a law where an application is possible once you can prove through documents that you have resided in Greece for seven consequent years.

As stated above, this ‘residence permit for exceptional reasons’ requires proof of strong ties with Greece and seven years of consecutive and well-documented presence in the country, but is not awarded to every applicant. All traces of existence in public documents are of extreme importance to them and especially the ones related to social security issues.

A migrant can invoke a large range of public documents such as asylum applications or even personalized monthly transportation tickets in order to file his/her application, but documents

which certificate strong ties to Greece are among others Greek tax number acquisition documents, social security stamps, health cards and deportation papers, as well as redeemed ergosimo vouchers. Ergosimo vouchers are very popular as proof of administrative existence. Migrants who possess a tax registration number but have no valid residence permit can be paid with ergosimo. In any case -except for domestic labour which is almost exclusively feminized- the only possibility for irregularly residing migrant males to obtain administrative traces of existence is in the agricultural sector, where payment through ergosimo is mandatory.

Almost all Bangladeshis were aware of the existence of 13a, yet very few had realized that when applying for 13a one also signs his/her deportation postponement. The majority of them had asked their mastura or boss for a 13a spot but were denied one:

“I asked my boss in Lappa for a 13a spot. He said no. I came to Manolada to find one but I can’t. I want a 13a permit so that one day maybe I will be able to acquire a proper permit” (worker X 2018).

“Yes, I want a 13a spot, but have no steady employer. They told me that bosses ask for 200 euros in order to file the application” (worker Y 2018).

Most of the migrants interviewed –except for masturas and the majority of the newly-arrived- said that 13a spots are awarded to people who pay for them (150-200 euros) and are selected by the mastura. Due to this fact, 13a is losing its popularity as a pathway to legalization. Seven of the interviewees said they prefer to wait until they can document a seven-year

presence so as to apply for a ‘residence permit for exceptional reasons’. The possibility of acquiring such a permit dictates patterns of behavior for a lot of the Bangladeshi workers. Seeing this as their only hope of achieving a legal status that will enable them to live and work wherever they want without the threat of imprisonment or deportation, they agree on their exploitation from masturas and bosses in return for proof of legal existence (and waged labour off course), definitely in Manolada and also in other coercive geographies:

“Last year I was working in the Mesolonghi area (Western Greece) with some friends. The boss withheld 5000 euros from our payment. We went to the police but they told us we can’t do anything, we are illegal” (worker D 2019).

This resembles the tactics of Chinese chefs in Sweden (Axelsson, et al. 2017) who endure years of exploitation as part of a tactic to acquire a permanent residence permit. The difference in our case is that there is no legal certainty of a permanent residence, since small details can lead to a rejection of the application and also a change in policy can prove disastrous to seven-year planning. A conviction for some minor offence can also lead to a rejection. Nevertheless, hundreds of ‘residence permits for humanitarian reasons’ have been awarded to the victims of the 2013 shootings and the 2018 camp conflagration, while at the same time there are numerous Bangladeshis who already achieved ‘residence permits for exceptional reasons’ by documenting ‘strong ties to Greece’ through their presence in Manolada’s labour market. According to data from the Ministry for Migration Policy, in June 2019, male migrants throughout Greece possessed 900 valid “residence permits for humanitarian reasons” (one third of which belonged to the burnt camp victims) and 13.900 for “exceptional reasons” (many of them awarded –and hundreds still pending- to male Bangladeshi agricultural workers).

Uncertainty coupled with hope shape a ‘state of expectancy’, which usually dictates Bangladeshi migrants’ choices. One of these choices is their constant move in search of employment and administrative traces, what we term ‘mobility in immobility’. Manolada is a stable point of reference in these trajectories.

7. Mobility in immobility

An official at the Greek Ministry for Migration Policy stated in 2018 that:

“If the state would properly legalize the status of these Bangladeshi workers (in Manolada), then they would all leave to Athens in the next day, to look for a more decent job” (Floros and Jørgensen forthcoming).

Sixteen out of twenty-nine interviewed migrants agreed on that. They said that if they had a residency permit they would look for a job in Athens. Five did not answer definitely and eight said that they would stay put. Four out of these eight were masturas who live in Manolada throughout the year. The other four justified their decision on the feeling of security and community that Manolada provides. However, Manolada is not the only agricultural labour market that provides a safe haven from police controls. Several interviewees pointed out that there are also no controls in destinations like Arta (orange production), Lakopetra (peppers), Sofades (peppers) and Thiva (beans).

“I’ve been in Greece for 8 months and have no papers. Most of the time I work in Manolada. I only saw police once, in Kalamata where I was picking olives. They saw I was from Bangladesh and they let me walk”. (worker J 2019)

All workers are aware that in most destinations they will not face police controls, but they are very afraid of the in between journeys. When the season comes to an end, only very few labour opportunities are available in Manolada. The vast majority of Bangladeshi migrants know that they have to take the risk of a possible detention en route towards one of many destinations except for the ones already mentioned. Karditsa, Molaoi, Sparta, Monemvasia, Kalamata and Halkida are also places that attract a large number of Bangladeshis. In some of the aforementioned areas as many as three thousand Bangladeshis live and work in situations fairly similar to Manolada.

Last year I worked at Lakopetra harvesting peppers. Early in the season it was 1 euro/crate, later on 0,5 euro/crate. The masturas there owe me 800 euros from last year. In Thiva the masturas are also very bad, actually wherever I work there exist masturas. (worker C 2019)

I pay 100 euros to masturas in Manolada to secure a labour spot. In Arta the price is negotiable. If you cry a little, they usually cut off their commission. (worker N 2019).

A common finding in all interviews is that each Bangladeshi worker leaving Manolada tends to follow his/her¹ own route within the Greek territory and many times returns to the same employer, due to networking with certain masturas or to personal acquaintance with small-scale producers. In few cases labour conditions are better, but the majority of workers seems entrapped in a vicious circle of coercion: Withheld wages, masturas, poor housing conditions, lack of police controls, employers who do not respect labour laws. Nevertheless, Bangladeshi migrants traverse these geographies and almost every year end up in Manolada. We refer to this situation as ‘mobility in immobility’.

From January to May there are very few labour positions for Bangladeshis all over Greece. Maybe a few in Amaliada. This is the only available mass labour market (worker O 2019).

I am not feeling well here. I have psychological problems. I only work here because I am afraid. I have no papers and the police does not bother me. Otherwise I wouldn't stay here a day longer. Also in Sofades, from July to October, I have no fear of police controls. Only the journey is a problem (worker E 2019).

Bangladeshi migrants are socially immobilized. For a certain part of the year they are also geographically immobilized within Manolada's labour system. The ones signing up for 13a schemes are also institutionally immobilized, both occupationally and geographically. Hence, their mobility between Greece's agricultural coercive geographies is within a spectrum of multifarious immobility.

¹ Only one female Bangladeshi presence -and for only one season- has been recorded in the past 10 years in Manolada. She was the wife of a worker and did not work in the fields (worker P 2018).

Almost half of the people interviewed aspired to reach another European country. Out of the ones that wish to stay in Greece, only eight would prefer to continue working in Manolada. In spite of such aspirations to exclude Manolada from their mobility patterns, all migrants were interviewed on-site. Having the aspiration but not the capability to migrate (outside Greece, or at least to an urban center like Athens), most of these migrants should be placed in the category of ‘involuntary immobility’ (Schewel 2019). Others, mainly masturas with residency permits, have the capability but no intention of migrating; they belong to the ‘voluntary immobility’ categorization. Interestingly enough, there are also several irregularly residing migrants who have no capability to migrate, yet expressed no aspiration to leave Manolada. These people, pertaining to the category of ‘acquiescent immobility’ justify their choice with a cynical acceptance of their status. They are either afraid of further trouble with police authorities and prefer the safety of the strawberry zone or have built bonds with Manolada’s social environment and have developed a “place-attachment” (Lewicka 2011).

I have lived here for nine years. I love the earth and the fields. I want to stay. (worker O 2019).

I have stayed five consecutive years in Manolada and wish to stay. In Athens it is more difficult, you face problems with fascists and the police. Here, nobody bothers you (worker AB 2018).

There is no better way to sum up the empirical part of our research than in the words of worker L. He is forty-nine years old and recently left his country for the first time. He lived in Silet province, a place deeply affected by climate changes, as he stated. L reached Greece six

months ago, leaving his family and four children behind. He aspired to reach some central European country, but has been stuck in Manolada for the last six months.

I had never imagined that I would have to live this way. I always thought of Europe as a completely different place. I want to reach France or Spain.

Q: What if nothing changes and you find yourself stuck in Greece for the next ten years in the same situation. Will you work here?

Well, yes. I have no choice. I must keep sending money back home and I still owe the money for my trip to Greece (worker L 2019).

8. Conclusion

The labour market of Manolada bears some stable characteristics. It offers a lot of job opportunities every year within a fixed period and employers prefer hiring male Bangladeshi migrants (Floros and Jørgensen forthcoming). Wages are better than the ones offered in many other jobs or places, yet payments are erratic and subject to commissions withheld by *masturas*. Working and living conditions are unacceptable. These characteristics coupled with the aforementioned Greece's recent migration policies create a 'state of expectancy' for migrants. In Manolada's case this situation goes beyond the individual state and for many migrants transforms into a collective socio-spatial locus of expectancy. The entrapment of thousands of Bangladeshi agricultural workers in this exploitative geography is primarily based on these 'fetters of expectation' for a long-lasting and uncertain regularization procedure. For the time-being, this procedure is fruitful for some of them, but for the majority it will prove to be vain hope.

Thus, Manolada – a ‘de facto Special Economic Zone’ (Kerasiotis 2019)- is socio-legally transformed into a geographical zone of entrapment and immobility, where migrants’ capabilities (and aspirations) for further mobility remain in limbo. However, during the year, this geography expands to more agricultural spaces, where mass temporary relocation takes place. All these enclaves of seasonal work add up to create a wider interconnected geography of coercion and immobility coupled with hope. This forms a continuum of im/mobility, where migrants are mobile within short-term relocations to predefined spaces of administrative and policing tolerance, yet socially, occupationally and spatially immobilized in Greece’s agricultural settings.

Conclusively, more than other factors presented and accounted for in this chapter, we argue that migrants’ hope/expectancy and its reinforcement/perpetuation from state and employers through doses of moderate optimism (13a, exceptional or humanitarian residence permits) is the main reason for this constant supply of labour force, despite hyper-exploitative working conditions and inhuman housing conditions. Nea Manolada is the epicenter of a coercive geography with multiple temporary relocation inscriptions, which benefits from the existence of a strong pole of attraction: the expectancy of acquiring a residence permit, which could be used as a passport to new pathways of aspired mobility towards new geographical spaces and occupational sectors.

Off course, the state and the employers do not have the least interest in the further mobility of Bangladeshi migrants. Their main concern is the development and sustainment of the successful strawberry sector, which goes hand in hand with ensuring the continuation of labour supply in the area. It remains to be seen if this will be achieved through imposing further obstacles to the –already difficult- acquirement of special residence permits or if this phenomenon will perpetuate through the continuous arrival of new migrants from the large pool of labour force flowing in from the same country of origin.

While we were writing our final draft on the conclusions for this chapter, there was a change in office after the Greek elections. One of the first moves of the new conservative cabinet was to dismantle the Ministry of Migration and demote it to an agency under the control of the Ministry of Citizen Protection. At the same time, acquisition of tax numbers for irregularly residing migrants became inaccessible due to new legislation. Greece's migration policymaking seems to become even more restrictive and preventive. The effects that this changes in policy might have underline the fragility of migrants' 'state of expectancy' and presage further obstacles to their mobility.

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