

Chapter 8. Lines of Differentiation and Connection in Translocal Lithuanian Lives: Stories about the Norwegian Child Welfare Service

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Abstract

Lithuanians have quite recently, and increasingly, started to emigrate to Norway. Thus, knowledge of Lithuanians in Norway is limited. This chapter asks specifically how Lithuanian labour migrants' translocal lives in Norway play out and are linked to life in Lithuania. In a study consisting of 26 semi-structured interviews with Lithuanians in Norway, 19 interviewees brought up a “fear of the Norwegian Child Welfare Service (NCWS)”, a much-discussed theme in Lithuania's media, when describing their lives in Norway. The chapter uses discussion of this fear, as well as a translocal framework and pluri-local migrant frames of reference, to explore the wide variety of Lithuanian translocal lives in Norway. We study the multistranded relationship between ‘here’ and ‘there’, finding that lives in Norway follow several intersecting lines of differentiation related to media communication and child-rearing. We show how these lines relate to class, education level, urban/rural upbringing, and age, showing the diversities of translocal lives among Lithuanians, between Lithuanians and Norwegians, and between Norway and Lithuania.

Introduction

While there have been some Lithuanian migrants in Norway since the 1990s, since 2004 the country has increasingly become a place to live and work for Lithuanians, so much so that they now form the second largest group of migrants in Norway following Poles, supplanting neighbouring Swedes in second position (Statistics Norway 2022). Rural municipalities and employers around the country find Lithuanians and other migrants from Eastern Europe to be an important part of the workforce, and many locals encourage Lithuanians to settle permanently in order to increase the declining number of inhabitants and reduce the stress of temporary immigrations on local communities (Milbourne 2014; Aure et al. 2018). However,

knowledge of the lives of Lithuanians in Norway is limited, not least on how the transnational and translocal aspects of their lives play out. For example there is little information on how they sustain and construct embeddedness in more than one place, society, and nation state (Glick Schiller et al. 1995), and hence the locations of people's everyday lives are little understood (Smith and Guarnizo 1998; see Chapter 1 in this volume). Our chapter asks specifically how Lithuanian labour migrants' translocal lives in Norway play out and are linked to life in Lithuania. We aim to understand Lithuanian lives and seek information on patterns, diversity, nuances and inequalities among Lithuanians in Norway. In our study, which used 26 semi-structured interviews with Lithuanians in Norway, we found that 19 interviewees (regardless of whether or not they had children) raised a "fear of the Norwegian Child Welfare Service (NCWS)" when talking about their own lives and the lives of other Lithuanians in Norway. Many referred to discussions they had had about the out of home placement of children by the NCWS, saying that the NCWS was "taking Lithuanian children just for nothing". This was therefore an important theme for Lithuanians, as it is for other groups of migrants in Norway (Fylkesnes et al. 2015). It pinpoints a specific feature of translocal lives that is much discussed in Lithuanian social and public media. Generally speaking the media is, according to Basch et al. (1994), significant in forming transnationality and therefore this fear of the NCWS can be seen a metaphor for certain dimensions of the interviewees' translocal lives.¹ In this chapter we approach stories of out of home placement and how people talk about their translocal lives as incidents that need interpretation. Some of the stories about the NCWS resemble what folklorists call rumour, urban legend, conspiracy belief or theory (Astapova 2020; see also Chapter 9 by Hakkarainen in this volume). We are interested in why people talk about these stories in the way they do and how (re)telling and adding to the stories produces understanding of their translocal lives in Norway. We question what these stories *do and mean to people*, the lines and links they produce and are results of, rather than whether they are 'trustworthy'. The talk about fear of the NCWS thus works as a heuristic device to understand variations, important differences and content of Lithuanian translocal lives in Norway today.

Fear of the NCWS among migrants in Norway is well documented (Gajewska et al. 2016; Hollekim et al. 2016; Bråten et al. 2020). The research on whether specific nationalities are disproportionately represented in NCWS interventions (which could be considered positive or negative) can be summed up as somewhat ambivalent (Aure and Daukšas 2020). Some register-based research on interventions does not differentiate between types of support activity, which by far outnumber out of home placement, which many fear. Neither does this research control

for socio-economic background, which strongly effects the findings, showing that a disproportionate number of children with immigrant-background are involved with the NCWS (Bø 2010; Kalve and Dyrhaug 2011; Dyrhaug and Sky 2015). However, Staer and Bjørknes (2015), adjusting for socio-economic background, find no ethnic differences in NCWS involvement in families with or without Norwegian background. Berg et al. (2017) differentiate between support activities and out of home placement and find very small differences between children with and without migrant backgrounds in out of home placements. Thus, these latest and most refined studies show that migrant families do not receive a disproportionate number of out of home placements as compared to Norwegian families. In fact, children and families, with backgrounds from Poland, Russia and India, countries where media attention on out of home placement in Norway is huge, experience disproportionately low numbers of out of home placements. Poles, the biggest group of migrants in Norway, experience fewer out of home placements than the mean population, while Eastern European migrants overall experience less involvement from the NCWS than any other group (ibid., p. 43). However, adult migrants' fear of the NCWS is higher than in the majority population (Fylkesnes et al. 2015). This fear is also prevalent among many Lithuanians, although far from all. Some migrants raise the question of whether Lithuanian children received the rights and protections they are entitled to. Children with migrant backgrounds may, due to stressful situations, be more exposed to violence than those without such a background (Chand 2008; Sommerfeldt et al. 2014). Discussion of the NCWS in the interviews generally revolved around whether Lithuanians in particular, and migrants in general, receive disproportioned, illegitimate and hence discriminatory, attention from the Norwegian authorities, as we will see in the analysis.

Method and description of the participants

This chapter draws on 26 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Lithuanian migrants conducted between 2016 and 2017. The Lithuanians we interviewed live either permanently or temporarily in two different municipalities in Norway, one located in the southwest and one in northern Norway. The interviews were conducted in Lithuanian by Daukšas, the Lithuanian author. The two authors jointly prepared the themes, focus and questions and discussed and analysed the interviews during fieldwork combining their knowledge and experience. In both locations in Norway we used the snowballing techniques to recruit interviewees, drawing on the Aure's, the Norwegian author's, network in one of the locations. The participants were aged between 20 and 59, and some of them had children. Fifteen interviewees were women and 11

were men. Both men and women addressed issues related to the NCWS; women tended to give more details from their family lives. Many of the male informants in both municipalities worked in the construction sector (5). The remaining worked in education (2), ran their own business (2), and worked in other industries (2). The women worked in cleaning services (3), medicine (2), the service sector (8), and as workers in other industries (2).

Most interviews took place in people's homes, some in public places and some at the participants' workplaces. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews focused on identity, family life, and transnational relations among Lithuanian labour migrants in Norway. The two authors analyse the interviews thematically with a focus on descriptions of feelings and reflections on the NCWS, which came up in most interviews even though not introduced by Daukšas, the researcher conducting the interviews. Living with children in Norway and the differences in child-rearing between Norway and Lithuania were other themes discussed, following on from issues relating to the NCWS.

Overall, an atmosphere of fear was more prevalent at one of the field sites since some families had had direct contact with the NCWS just before the fieldwork started, while others knew the NCWS from the media or their social networks. Lithuanians in the other municipality mainly knew about the NCWS from the media, as we didn't hear about any cases of direct NCWS intervention in this social environment.

Lithuanians in Norway

In 2016, the time of the first period of fieldwork, more than 800 Lithuanian immigrants were living in the south-western municipality. This is 0.6 percent of the total population or 2.6 percent of the immigrant population in this municipality. About 300 migrants from Lithuania lived in the municipality in the north in 2017 when we conducted the second fieldwork. This is 0.4 percent of the total population, or 2.9 percent of all immigrants in that municipality, a pattern that reflected the overall situation in Norway. The number of Lithuanians in Norway increased rapidly after 2004, when Lithuania and other EU-8 states became members of the EU, although the free movement of labour from these countries was hampered until May 2009 by Norway transitioning to full implementation of the protocols. By 2022 there were 49,703 Lithuanians living in Norway, making up 0.8 percent of Norway's total population, and 6.1 percent of all foreign residents (all numbers from Statistics Norway 2022).

In general, labour migrants are geographically distributed all over Norway, with a higher percentage living in rural areas than the rest of the population, resulting mainly from the geographical pattern of available jobs and lack of labour force (Aure 2011; Rye and Slettebak 2020). A study among labour and family migrants from Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania found that most of these migrants planned for or considered it likely to stay on in Norway longer than they initially expected (IMDi 2008). A study examining labour migrants' motivations to stay and their experiences of life in *rural* Norway report similar results (Søholt et al. 2012). These studies, as well as Rye and Andrzejewska (2010), Andrzejewska and Rye (2012) and Stachowski (2020), mainly studying Poles doing farm work in Norway, identified several problems with Eastern European immigrant life in Norway. They highlight the divide between the dominant majority and the new immigrants, implying structural segregation, exclusion and isolation both in the labour market and geographically as well as lower payment and poorer working conditions than laws and regulations prescribe. Van Riemsdijk (2010) studied Polish nurses in Norway, finding similar ambivalence and only partial incorporation of Polish nurses into what she termed the Norwegian nation. IMDi (2008) found that Lithuanian migrants felt more discrimination based on national background than Poles, Latvians and Estonians, without offering any explanation. Our study of Lithuanians translocal lives adds important knowledge, nuances and a local focus to this limited understanding of Lithuanian lives in Norway.

Theoretical approaches: Translocal frames of reference

Most Lithuanians in Norway started their immigration journey in an era of accessible digital communication, relatively easy and cheap travel, and open borders. Most have thus had the opportunity to maintain contact and relations with places and people in both Lithuania and Norway. According to Pries (2001, p. 23) such relations form a transnational social space of “pluri-local frames of references which structure everyday practices and simultaneously exist above and beyond the social context of the national society”. This points to how norms, routines and practicalities from several places to which people are connected, affect their lives, hence we use the term *translocal* social space. This social space mentally connects places in Norway to places in Lithuania, leading to the “co-existence of multiple social spaces within the same geographical space” (Aure et al. 2011, p. 138). We see these spaces of inbetweenness, translocal communities, etc., as the result of multi-stranded social relations forming translocal lifelines

between and among migrants, countries, 'here' and 'there'. The content of this social translocal space will depend on the intensity, type and scope of links and breaks in people's lives.

These lines and frames of references offer different opportunities and resources in individual lives, and may vary to a great deal, with the meaning of translocal lives varying accordingly. Inspired by Pries (2001) we see "social space as configurations of *social practices* and *systems of symbols*" (Aure et al. 2011, p. 128), forming lines and connections through relations between people, media, rumours, narratives, etc.

The concept of lines stresses movement and process, but also continuity, the everyday practice and disruption of translocal families. Both to access the empirical data and as an analytical approach, we follow these lines, i.e. the people, the metaphors and the stories circulating across borders (Marcus 1995) and related explanations, practices, memories, ideas, etc., that the informants consider relevant in and between both countries. We use this approach to ask how links and breaks in the lines connect and divide countries, places and people in forming translocal lives.

We see the prevalent stories of the Norwegian authorities taking Lithuanian children for nothing as part of these "multi-stranded social relations that link together ... societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al. 1994, p. 7). They are both the result, and formative forces, of Lithuanians' translocal familyhood in Norway. As Yuval-Davis (2011) would say, people use stories to make distinctions, constructing similarities and differences. Exploring how these lines intersect give us the opportunity visualise both varieties and similarities among Lithuanians in Norway.

These lines also structure the chapter. We first present and analyse how people talk about the news stories relating to the NCWS taking Lithuanian children. We ask how the stories are intertwined in people's lives and how people use them to construct similarities and differences in these translocal social spaces. Next we analyse the ideas and practices of child-rearing, following these stories as they often seem to present explanations and understandings. We sum up by discussing how the stories, ideas and practices form intersecting lines of identity, class, belonging and education.

Lines of media communication and the Norwegian Child Welfare System

While much research on translocal families (Assmuth et al. 2018) focuses on family relations and how they link migrants between countries, Basch et al. (1994) in their seminal work also focused on home country associations, transnational politics, media and newspaper coverage. In this section we in turn focus on and analyse how people talk about media stories covering the NCWS.

Many Lithuanian immigrants in Norway actively follow the Lithuanian media, this being their main news source on life in Norway and on the wider world. It is more popular than the Norwegian media, especially among Lithuanians who say they feel less integrated in Norway and/or have limited education (Daukšas 2013). As one of our informants, a woman (32) working in the cleaning sector in south-west Norway, explains: “We do not have Norwegian TV, we watch the news every night – but only in Lithuanian.” Many Lithuanians don’t access local news from or about the places they live in, meaning that virtually all the information they get about Norway is from a Lithuanian perspective. Their everyday orientation in a specific place in Norway therefore relies on and relates to Lithuania and connects life in Norway to Lithuania. Contrary to the time before the internet and digital communication, this means that living in a particular place doesn’t imply that most aspects of everyday life take place or are oriented towards life in that place. This is visible in the attitudes toward the Norwegian Child Welfare Services.

The Lithuanian media has published negative stories about the attitude of the NCWS towards Lithuanians and people from other Eastern European countries, something that many informants refer to when talking about life in Norway. Following Lithuanian media coverage both produces and reinforces an ‘atmosphere of fear’, to which several people referred. All the interviewees are very familiar with the Lithuanian discourse on how Norwegian authorities “are taking children just for nothing”. A woman, 32, who works as a cleaner, tells me that she believes Lithuanian children, and more generally migrant children, get more attention from the NCWS than Norwegians, explaining: “You are still not Norwegian. I think they [the NCWS] look at them [migrant children] more like through a magnifying glass than they do to other children.” She connects the presumed illegitimate NCWS attention to issues of (not) being a Norwegian, i.e. the authorities, in the form of the NCWS (a state body), treat immigrants differently to Norwegian nationals. In her understanding they deny immigrants the rights of Norwegian nationals and categorise them as ‘others’ in opposition to Norwegians. This relates

to what gender and migration scholar Yuval-Davis (2011) calls the politics of belonging which, in this case, makes a distinction between immigrants and Norwegians, and immigrants and the Norwegian authorities.

Another woman, 51, who has lived in Norway for ten years, recalls from her line of biography how her husband went to Norway first to earn money, and how she followed later with their sons. She says she feels fully integrated into Norwegian society and calls Norway her home. However, one of her sons decided to return to Lithuania. According to the woman, he had a good job and had started a family in Norway with a Lithuanian woman, and had a child. There were several reasons for his return: he found life in Norway “too quiet” and boring, while, as he saw it, life in Lithuania was challenging and dynamic. Apparently he was also worried that his own son could be taken away from him. She explains:

... maybe not so important, but he listened to [these stories], as well as all sorts of things here about Barnevernet [the NCWS]. It seems to me that it influenced [him]. (Woman, 51, nurse)

This woman pointed to how some people, such as her son, listened to and acted on stories reported by the media. For the son, media stories about the NCWS constituted a line between life as difficult, unfair and boring for Lithuanians in Norway, and life in Lithuania as joyful, connecting, but also differentiating between, Lithuania and Norway. The mother makes a distinction between herself as “fully integrated” and her son as paying too much attention to stories from Lithuania about the NCWS. To her, he is mentally more connected to Lithuania, and thus less integrated in Norway. Belonging becomes a line of emotional connection making distinctions based on the feeling of Norwegian-ness. This emotional connection is neither associated with being economically integrated into the Norwegian labour market, nor with being granted the right to belong as a citizen. Rather, it deals with integration as a question of feeling at home (Gullestad 2002) in Norway *or* Lithuania. This line also intertwines with the son’s evaluation of how the NCWS treat people with immigrant backgrounds, i.e. to him the NCWS doesn’t treat immigrants as Norwegian and hence doesn’t grant them belonging.

One family in our set of interviews had had experiences with the NCWS themselves. Their child was interviewed and examined by the police based on a report from kindergarten. As a

result of this they decided to take their children to Lithuania (see Aure and Daukšas 2020). The mother (30), who worked as an administrator in a hotel, explained:

I do not feel safe here. How can you now go to work, take the children to the kindergarten and sit quietly at work? [Would we] sit and think whether we would find our children in the kindergarten?

Before this happened, she and her husband planned a future in Norway. They decided to buy a house, were learning Norwegian and had a feeling of being accepted. But everything changed. Now their children live in Lithuania while the woman and her husband continue to work in Norway, taking turns so that one parent is always in Lithuania with the children, altering the social translocal space for all members of the family.

Another interviewee, a male construction worker aged 35, talked about what he said was a close friend's direct experience of the NCWS. He explained how the NCWS took his friend's child away from home for three weeks. After this the interviewee himself decided to send his children to Lithuania, while he continued to work in Norway. His partner was mainly in Lithuania, but did continue to work irregularly in Norway, forming a new translocal family life. In the informant's view, the incident made a disruption in the family biography and lifeline, and in his feeling of belonging and acceptance in Norway. According to these and other informants, several Lithuanian families reacted the same way, although others did not. The reactions to the stories about and experiences of the NCWS drew distinctions between Lithuanians who sent their children home, and those who did not.

The stories about personal experience of the NCWS spread in the migrant community, both locally and through social media. In some people's opinion the personal stories prove both that the NCWS take children without reason, and that other (news) stories about the NCWS and illegitimate attention towards Lithuanian children are accurate. Personal stories like these serve to validate other stories, or to make stories that would otherwise be thought of as rumour, even by those telling the stories, more compelling. Leaning on personal experience stories is a well-known dynamic in verbal transmission of conspiracy stories (Astapova 2020). Some informants oppose this, saying that one can't know everything about other people or what takes place in their families, also pointing out that these stories are very often not the whole story.

The man who took his children to Lithuania after his friends' experiences with the NCWS echoes a (spurious) theme in the Lithuanian media regarding the NCWS:

That's why they take those kids, I think. Well, here's our thinking: it's all about incest. And they [the Norwegian authorities] have legalised lesbians and gays, and they need children. They do not have orphanages in Norway. They need children, if they get children, they get very big benefits. They buy those children – they pay big money, they get big benefits. There is such a vicious circle here. There is a child mafia here. (Man, 35, construction worker)

The main plot and the meaning this man ascribes to NCWS practices follows other international stories on Facebook, although the interviewee does connect the experiences of his acquaintances with such media stories. To him this forms a trustworthy explanation, or at least a story he forwards to a researcher asking about Lithuanian lives in Norway. The story presents an assessment of the NCWS and of Norway, but may also express how this man feels that Lithuanians in Norway are treated. It could be read as his example of the costs of transnational lives. This message was directed towards the Lithuanian researcher even though he had the impression that the man suspected his story follows an urban legend. The story serves to portray Norway in a monstrous way by connecting liberal values with evil activities and creating an opposition between dangerous Norway and moral and traditional Lithuania, positioning Lithuanian children as victims and Lithuanian parents as paying the costs. It also produces a schism between Lithuanians who seriously tell and retell these stories, and Lithuanians who dismiss them, pointing to the diversity of opinion among Lithuanians in Norway.

Some of our research participants, such as a woman who grew up in Norway and is currently studying at university, make critical assessments of Lithuanian media stories about the NCWS:

Everything started with the media coverage around 2012, which intensified what people had already begun to fear. The child protection service was also in operation before this, but in these years someone started to talk and write about these stories. It is very complicated when the families can say whatever they want, while the institutions can't say anything. There is no dialogue here

– it's only a monologue. As a result, that image is one-sided. (Woman, 21, student)

This young woman makes a distinction between stories presented in the media, based on parents' perspective, and the untold side of the story from the state institution, pointing to how such stories are produced. She later highlights how there is no voice for the children at risk and their rights to protection in these accounts. Another woman (59), teaching Lithuanian children at school, is married to a Norwegian. She argues that the atmosphere of fear is created by the Lithuanian media:

At one time there was a boom in [Lithuanian] families travelling with children. But then, when the newspapers began, families bringing their children became fewer. Families also went back with the children. Scared, apparently. (Woman, 59, teacher)

Like the man above, she connects the high number of people taking their children back to Lithuania with the increase in negative media coverage. Opposing him, she and others suggest that the Lithuanian media ran these stories deliberately to encourage Lithuanian families and children to return. This fed into critical popular assessments of increasing emigration from Lithuania (and other countries) to well-off Western countries in the global north as betrayal of the home country (for similar examples from Estonia see Siim, and from Russia, Hakkarainen in this book).

Stories about the NCWS produce several connections and lines of distinction in the translocal social space between Lithuania and Norway. One such line is between the Norwegian authorities (NCWS) and immigrants, where by treating migrants differently to Norwegian nationals the NCWS dismisses immigrant rights to belonging. Another distinction is made among Lithuanians based on their individual feelings of connection and belonging to Norway. A third is made between the human rights of parents and children, which may not always be the same. Yet a fourth is between Lithuanians who consider the (media) stories trustworthy and those who do not, and a final distinction is between those who stay on in Norway with their children and those who decide to take their children back to Lithuania. These lines of differentiation are all connected in Lithuanians' translocal lives in Norway, and according to our informants, to questions of levels of integration in Norwegian society.

The next paragraphs search for lines, “intertwinings”, and disconnections in these assessments of the media stories, focusing on the role of child-rearing practices and highlighting further understanding of translocal lives in Norway.

Lines of child-rearing: ideas and practices

Participants in the study often stressed some sort of clash between the ways they rear their children and ideologies of child-rearing predominant in Norwegian society. We approach the participants’ talk of ideas and practices of child-rearing as symbolic statements that need interpretation and which are related to immigrants’ fear of losing their children. It is, however, not clear what interviewees mean when they point to different ideas of child-rearing. Križ and Skivenes (2010) found, for instance, that social workers in different countries talked about (culturally) “different ideas of childrearing”, in order to explain differences between majorities and (ethnic) minorities with reference to values. This may indicate that *different values* mean *we are different people*. But it could also describe differences in child-rearing methods indicating that *we are quite similar*, but that *our practices differ*, in fact highlighting similarities over differences. The latter option is less essentialising and more dynamic than the former. Referring to “cultural differences” may easily turn into cultural stereotypes and essentialisation of differences, while overlooking differences may become a suppression of difference (Sawrikar and Katz 2013). We will attempt to understand how the informants speak about differences in child-rearing between countries and how this influence translocal lives.

Tereškinas (2021) describes two styles of child-rearing in Lithuania. The first, ‘concerted cultivation’, is mainly associated with the middle-class and employs adult-organised activities with strict schedules. Most importantly, this approach treats children as projects to be developed. The second, the ‘accomplishment of natural growth’, defines practices of child-rearing more prevalent among working-class parents and is based on an open-ended schedule and less control by adults. However, there are no strong differences between social classes in child-rearing practices in Lithuania, as most working-class families in Lithuania apply child-rearing practices that are usually associated with the middle-class (ibid.). Differences in parenting styles may be more associated with lines of differentiation than class. Daraškevičienė (2018), finds two parenting styles – ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ – in contemporary Lithuania. Soft parenting shows “respect for the child and [invites] equal dialogue between an adult and a

child”, while hard parenting sees “upbringing as communication based on the principle of hierarchy, and believes it cannot be effective without strict discipline” (ibid., p. 128). Daraškevičienė connects these two styles to an urban–rural dimension, finding that the ‘hard’ parenting style is more often employed in rural areas while the ‘soft’ style is more common in the cities. She concludes that 75 percent of families in Lithuania use ‘soft’ parenting while 25 percent use ‘hard’ (ibid.).

In Norway, according to Stefansen and Farstad (2010), middle-class parents tend to see the child as robust, flexible and independent, and the role of the parents as supporting their development, much in line with middle-class ideologies in Lithuania. Working-class parents tend to focus on children’s need for a sheltered space for care, understanding the child as more vulnerable and dependent. Both styles can be described as child-centred. According to Hollekim et al. (2016), Norwegian child-rearing also builds on principles of zero tolerance for violence and force as well as treating every child as an individual with his or her own rights. From these principles follows an obligation for the state (the NCWS) to ensure the child’s position, hence the NCWS is both authoritative and contentious. Brandth and Kvande (1998, 2016), and later Aure and Munkejord (2016), discussed rural parenting and masculinities in Norway and hold that rural and urban parenting in Norway, perhaps in contrast to other countries, do not seem to differ. This contrasts with Lithuanian practices of child-rearing in some respect, as described by Daraškevičienė (2018), who sees ‘hard’ parenting as still present in rural Lithuania.

Most of our interviewees would advocate ‘soft’ parenting as described by Daraškevičienė (2018). Most of them also lived in towns and cities in Lithuania before coming to Norway, and while many experience deskilling in Norway, many of them have higher education. Yet many still differentiate between Norwegian and Lithuanian parenting styles, as with the female student, who came to Norway at the age of 8 with her mother. She positions herself in the midst of what she and others talk about as a Norwegian ‘mentality’, and distinguishes between Norwegian and Lithuanian ways of thinking, using her father – who lives in Lithuania – as an example. She claims her father would not support the taking of children from their families:

My father would say that all the conflicts and trials that are in the family must be overcome by the family. He would not agree with the position that some authorities could intervene in family life: the parents decide how to raise the children. (Woman, 21, student)

She disagrees with her father, explaining that “sometimes things go too far. People have different understandings of how far it can go”. She relates this to ideas of children belonging to and being the property of families:

I think we are all human beings, we are not someone’s property; although I am very grateful that my parents and my grandparents helped me grow up and I love them very much, I don’t belong to them. They don’t belong to me either – we are different individuals.

She connects parenting styles to the cultural concept of a child as property. To our knowledge, this concept has not been studied in social science in Lithuania. However, it depicts the (historical and ideological) idea that women and children were the property of men, fathers and husbands, which has deep roots, for instance in different variations of Christianity (Horn and Martens 2009). Studies in Poland conclude that even today there are conceptions of children as the property of the family (Ryndyk and Johannessen 2014). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Norwegian focus on children’s individual rights may represent an opposition to such ideas (Hollekim et al. 2016). However, how this could restrict the parents’ child-rearing practices is not always made explicitly clear in Norway. According to Hollekim et al. (ibid.), there is a hidden standard (controlled by the NCWS) of parenting that includes distinctions between immigrants, between some immigrants and their home country’s authorities, and between the individual rights of the child and the family. According to the woman cited above, the concept of violence also differs between Lithuania and Norway:

In Norway, violence is completely intolerable. This is not the case in all Lithuanian families. The belt is not always seen as violence. A raised voice can also be mental violence. I think not all families understand this, and they don’t realise that [using violence] once is enough. (Woman, 21, student)

Again the woman makes a distinction between Norway and Lithuania rather than totalising or essentialising this as a Lithuanian way of thinking. However, the statement about Norway seems more essentialist, although it can also be read as relating to legal hegemony. After all, problems, abuse and neglect in Norwegian families constitute the majority of the NCWS’s

work. Another young woman, 20 years old, also a student, from a mixed Norwegian and Lithuanian family, also stresses her support for the Norwegian approach to childcare:

In Norway, people are very concerned about the well-being of children. The statements that [the NCWS] only focuses on Lithuanian children is nonsense. There are families in Norway where you also have to go through the process of showing that the children are fine, because the well-being of the child is paramount. That bubble [suggesting Lithuanians are mistreated] is inflated in Lithuania, I can't believe it. (Woman, 20, student)

She supports the Norwegian authorities, stating that their main goal is to ensure the welfare of the child:

Take care of your children, look at their well-being and no one will take them away ... I'm really surrounded by families with young children – that's never been an issue.

She refers to her own experiences and does not recognise the situation described in the Lithuanian media. She rather makes this an issue related to how some parents neglect their children, and hence differentiates between parents.

In her interview, an adult woman who works as a doctor in a city in northern Norway talks about 'soft' and 'hard' parenting in relation to stories about the NCWS. She connects this with what she calls the post-Soviet mentality. She finds that this is visible among (some) Lithuanians and that this poses problems raising children in Norway:

... for both Lithuanians and Russians, to slap the backside is quite normal. Screaming at a child is also completely normal. This is a mentality thing. ... And those Lithuanians; Russians, who are not at all interested in the local mentality, culture – they get caught up in these [stories of the NCWS]. They apply their own [cultural norms] to raising their children. (Woman, 35, doctor)

This well-educated woman who works among Norwegians and immigrants in Norway, distinguishes between what she sees as a Lithuanian/Russian mentality and the Norwegian mentality, between a post-Soviet mentality and a contemporary mentality. However, these mentalities are not Lithuanian or Norwegian *per se*, it is more a question of changing traditions related to class, urban–rural divisions, etc. In their study of rural masculinities, Aure and Munkejord (2016) suggest focusing on the difference between hegemonic (authoritative) and dominant (common) norms. Similarly the doctor points to what she describes as normal, i.e. not uncommon, in the slap the backside. This is forbidden by law, yet occurs in both countries. The doctor believes it is more common in Lithuania, and uses this as an explanation of why some Lithuanian families in Norway receive the attention of the NCWS.

According to a woman in her 30s, working as a hairdresser, adaptation is not mainly learning the rules and organizing life according to these rules. It is about simulating behaviour, that makes it possible to pass the standards and not get caught. “Those standards are very different here” she says. Several informants with children tell that they teach children what they can and cannot say at school, in order not to raise suspicion among the teachers. Such ‘mechanical’ obeying of rules can be contrasted with ‘organic’ integration of migrants into a new society, and in this case it shows that the idea that Norway and Lithuania are different is strong and that Lithuanians in Norway cope with this in different ways.

Some well-educated immigrants who feel that they are well integrated tend to describe other Lithuanians as reluctant to change and meet new cultural norms. A woman working in education sees a lack of (Norwegian) language skills as the main reason for misunderstandings and possible problems with schools or with the NCWS:

It is important for parents to speak the language so that they can communicate with the kindergarten teachers to avoid these problems ... The language barrier prevents any dialogue ... – and thus the misunderstandings. (Woman, 59, teacher)

Learning Norwegian may relate to workplaces and social networks. When asked how long it took to learn Norwegian, a man in his 50s, working in industry, says: “Well, I didn’t fully learn it. Maybe it was harder with us, many Lithuanians worked in the factory. There were no Norwegians. We spoke Lithuanian and Russian”.

This may also intersect with gender. A man (30) working in the agricultural sector with a higher agricultural education, speaks relatively good Norwegian and describes himself as quite integrated, but his wife, according to him, is less integrated:

The children were born very quickly [after coming to Norway] – my wife became very isolated. She had little contact with Norwegians and worked with a Lithuanian colleague. And the communication is so one-sided – I usually communicate [with Norwegians] at work. I do not feel the language barrier.

Childbirth, caring for young children along with divisions of labour in the household may isolate immigrant women in the first years after emigration (Aure 2013). A combination of the labour migrant's position in the labour market, which is dependent on a scarcity of labour in certain industries, and the lower segment of the labour market in Norway, limit and confine immigrants (Aure 2011; Andrzejewska and Rye 2012).

Another informant, who claimed to be well integrated in Norway, further explained:

Lithuanians do not know those rules. They don't want to change anything... to adapt. They do not try to look for such a consensus. (Man, 36, kindergarten teacher)

He talks about Lithuanians in general, although obviously distancing himself from the group. Using nationality as a short hand is common and easy to slip into (also analytically). This reinforces an essentialistic understanding of countries, people and cultures as different, set, uniform and total, while the meaning of such statements can in fact vary. The informant probably claims that some Lithuanians hold on to some norms acquired in Lithuania and point to three aspects that may play out in translocal lives. First, some migrants lack knowledge because they are new to the country and lack the necessary information, positioning them on the fringe of the society. In contrast to refugees, migrants from the EU and Schengen visa area are not offered a free introductory program when moving to Norway, which among other issues discusses child-rearing regulations and gives information about the NCWS. While such information is available digitally in different languages, it is difficult to find. Secondly, he

claims that Lithuanians may not want to adapt to life in Norway and prefer to orient their lives to Lithuanian rules and norms. Andrzejewska and Rye (2012) also make this claim in their study of Poles doing farm work in Norway, relating it to temporality, segregated labour markets and segregated living quarters. Thirdly he points to the struggle for cohesion in life born out of the mix of orientations necessary, according to him, to live a translocal life. This translocal social space implies an intermediate position for some Lithuanians in Norway, introducing issues of belonging and homeliness.

A man (58) tells of how he has lived in Norway for fifteen years, working as a driver for a large company. He has a vocational education having also worked as a driver in Lithuania. He and his wife were encouraged by their sons, who live nearby with the grandchildren, to come to Norway. This man does not link his future to Norway. He plans to work and stay until he has earned his Norwegian pension and retires, and then return to Lithuania. He explains: “we are strangers here, we are immigrants”. The interviewer replied: “But you have already been here for fifteen years. If it were bad, you would probably have gone back already?” “No”, he says “not bad. But still, in Lithuania – your language, your homeland. All the laws are known, and here, we know nothing”. He adds that he feels inferior and find himself incompatible with his new society. He bought a house in Norway seven years ago, yet during the interview, he constantly pointed out how he would prefer to live in Lithuania. He repeatedly emphasised, and hence legitimised his living in Norway by the fact that his sons live nearby. He and his wife can often see their grandchildren. However, when asked where he felt he was living he replied: “We all live in Kaunas”. The interviewer again pointed to the 15 years he had been living in Norway, but the man answered, “still, the house is there, everything is there”. He maintains his house in Lithuania during the holidays, and considers the house in Norway an investment, but not a home. During the interview, the television is tuned to a Lithuanian channel. When asked why he watches Lithuanian TV, even though he has lived in Norway for the last 15 years, he replied “we are Lithuanians”. This position of physically living in Norway but belonging emotionally to Lithuania is quite widespread and part of some immigrants’ translocal lives.

Some also feel that they will forever be recognised as Lithuanians, or they identify as both Norwegian and Lithuanian. The student (21) who arrived in Norway as a child feels accepted in Norway and calls Norway her home. At the same time, she indicates that she can’t treat herself as a ‘true’ Norwegian because she is often reminded of her Lithuanian name, indicating that she is ‘other’. Another young woman with a Norwegian father and Lithuanian mother lived

in Lithuania until she was 16 years old, at which point her family moved to Norway. She feels that she is recognised as Norwegian and that it is up to her if she wants to present herself as Lithuanian. She says: “I see myself as Lithuanian and Norwegian at the same time, I can’t explain it otherwise”. This is in line with Daukšas’ (2013) discussion of how many immigrants from Lithuania maintain a strong relationship with what they consider Lithuanian identity and ethnicity, while they also feel part of Norwegian society.

Tereškinas (2021) highlights how parenting styles and ideas develop and are deeply embedded at the intersection of national, local and international structures. We have shown that these structures and ideas about how to live translocal lives may also relate to intersecting lines of belonging, class, education level, identity, urban–rural distinction.

Concluding reflections

Focusing on the way some Lithuanians in Norway talk about the NCWS point to several lines of differentiation in the Lithuanian–Norwegian translocal social space. The analysis has shown how Lithuanians live quite diverse lives in Norway and relate differently to norms and regulations both in Lithuania and Norway. Some of this intersects with issues of education and class, often related to what kind of work they do in Norway, the age when they came to Norway, how long they have been in Norway, urban–rural distinctions, whether the workplace offers them the possibility to work with Norwegians, whether they are able to learn the language and gain knowledge about Norwegian society. Following our interviewees, we have used discussion of, and explanations related to, child-rearing ideologies and practices to gain a wider understanding of this.

We find that to some Lithuanians in Norway, issues of belonging, identity and feeling at home are very important and clearly present in their everyday lives, yet even if we can see connections in people’s biographies, there are no clear-cut patterns of such intersections and connections. However, the diverse lines of distinction and disruption in the translocal social space also draw lines of distinction between Norwegian authorities (NCWS) and immigrants regarding the collective right to belong, or whether or not immigrants are considered inhabitants by the authorities. Our findings are that Lithuanians’ translocal lives in Norway differ greatly, and that some of these differences are expressed in the way they speak of and use stories about the NCWS. In this way these stories can work as a symbol of integration, although these

expressions also connect, as well as make distinction between, different ways of being Lithuanian in Norway. There seem to be many translocal social spaces stretching between Lithuania and Norway with different shapes and significances, whether woven together or disrupted by few or many lines, making up variations of densities and topographies. This includes making, and living in, a local social Lithuanian space in Norway, as well as living a mainly local Norwegian life as a Lithuanian, and the wide variety in between.

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¹ Referring to the everyday practice of living between several places in different countries we use the term translocal, while Basch et al. (1994) uses transnational to denote a life lived between several nation states. See Chapter 1 for discussion.