



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Department of Social Sciences

## Individualization, Agency and Hope

### Chronicle of a summer of four women in Tromsø, Northern Norway

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## Abstract

In the Covid-19 summer of 2020 in the arctic city of Tromsø, four women embarked on a research and film project about their lives. Elisa (a 28-year-old Italian woman), Sunniva (a 31-year-old Norwegian woman), Magalí (a 36-year-old Argentine woman) and Tove (an 85-year-old Norwegian woman), engaged through intimate conversations with me a researcher/filmmaker, where they exposed essential aspects of their lives, the experiences and reflections that define them. The purpose was to cover their peculiarities, looking for common that gives meaning to their daily life, partly resulting in the film *"Let me hug you!"* and this thesis.

Through an intergenerational comparison, in these women we can observe dilemmas associated with changes in values from “classical” to “late modernity”. While values linked to the idea of responsibility are questioned, others linked to independence amplify. Depending on the social context from which they come, their self-realization is an essential factor related to simple or flexible choices, for example, love-based relations or living alone. Those are imagined worlds that, as with the real ones of their respective countries, they inhabit. Their practices and discourses are about dreams and desires, about persistent hope in and with those worlds, individually or collectively, to live the best possible life.

**Keywords:** Moral values, nation, individualization, self-realization, love, lifestyle migration, agency, hope

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In this thesis, I manifest it on various occasions. From the bottom of my heart, I thank Tove, Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí for letting me into their lives. May your energy in chasing your dreams and goals last until the last breath.

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# Introduction

## 1.1 Crushed dreams, new inspirations

On March 12, 2020, the Norwegian government decided to introduce a series of measures to stop the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). These were the measures that the majority of the Norwegian population had never experienced. Although they were less radical than those of some southern European countries, they were the “strongest-ever peacetime measures”, as the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg noted at a press conference mentioned in the various media reports. Suddenly, from one day to another, social interaction was getting very restricted. Schools and jobs were close down, and people were forced to spend more time at home and choose whom they could or could not see.

On that day, I was writing the proposal for my master's degree project in the faculty library. Suddenly I started receiving several emails informing me about the suspension of the physical tuition and fieldwork, and, subsequently, I was evacuated by the security guard. I went home to continue working without giving too much importance to all of this. With credulity and hoping that the situation would return to normal in a few days, I continued working on a project on minibus drivers in Santiago, Cape Verde, which I had already had the opportunity to work on before. It focused on studying of the social universe of passenger transport in Hiace vans, a vehicle widely used in Africa and driven mainly by men. For personal reasons, I wanted to return to Santiago to continue developing this project but also to live again among its splendid mountains, beaches, sea, music, but above all, for its people and good friends who made my experience there unforgettable.

On March 24, I had a meeting with my tutor via video call where he crashed my dream of returning to Cape Verde. The pandemic required to choose between remotely continuing the project in Cape Verde or proposing a new one. Do fieldwork through the screen was not an option for me. However, I reacted quickly and thought that if it could be possible here, in the safe bubble that Tromsø seems to represent, taking certain precautions, I would work in person with few selected participants of my project. Just as I wanted to do in Santiago, inspired by Rodion Ismailove's film *Third-class travel* (2017), I thought of a plan B that required me to collect intimate narrations through the camera. The director travels on the Moscow-Vladivostok

train, the longest train journey in the world, to portray the passengers on this Trans-Siberian route from an intimate, close range.

To reflect on a new project in the situation Tromsø, Norway and the world was in; I started thinking about the personal situation of several friends that I had made here (about Elisa, Sunniva...). In addition, I was motivated by two sources. Firstly, after eight months in Norway dealing with the challenges of new kinds of social interaction in social arenas, one was Erik Gandini's film *The Swedish Theory of Love* (2015), which deals with the Swedish value of individual independence and the loneliness that this has entailed in society. This documentary emphasizes the Swedish government's family project of the 1970s, which aimed to ensure the complete independence of people from their family relationships. The idea was to seek the independence of the children from their parents, the older adults of their children, and the women from men and vice versa, causing enormous effects in the current Swedish society. By relegating limitations and family values, self-realization prevails, leading to the recurrence of thousands of women to artificial insemination to become mothers without a man; or to the fateful fact that one of every four older adults live and die alone without anyone noticing. Zygmunt Bauman says at the end of the film that when you do not need anyone, happiness is lost since happiness means solving difficulties. Living in Scandinavia made me think about the confluence of the low level of expressiveness of emotions in social interactions and distancing or isolation reinforced due the virus.

The other source inspiring me was the novel by the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in Time of Cholera*, which resonated everywhere because it deal with love in times of pandemic. It is a story about the love between Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza, who meets again after the death of the latter's husband, that is, after more than 50 years, and that takes place during the context of an epidemic, plagues, misery and war. As one of the most memorable phrases of the novel says, "love becomes greater and nobler in calamity".

## **1.2 A guide, a detour**

As I was trying to design a new research project and having not much time to review literature, my starting point was the following: In these times when it is necessary to minimize social

contact, it could be assumed that we try to be closer to our loved ones and friends through social media and Internet-based communication, while feelings of loneliness intensify.

I thought of a project that would deal with how various young and older people see and interpret life right now in Tromsø; their reflection on feelings such as belonging, loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty, frustration, or love; and their use of social media. Specifically, it could be young people who would feel lonely or anxious and who use social media or video calls to communicate with their loved ones, or who use popular dating apps to meet people or to find a partner. On the other hand, as a comparative exercise, I wanted to consider older people, perhaps people with an “offline life”, living alone in their homes protected by the Norwegian welfare system.

My starting points were to compare this new “close down” life with life as lived before the Coronavirus pandemic; to identify of the feelings of belonging; to give evidence of the different causes and effects of feelings of loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty, frustration; to identify new practices and meanings of loving; to describe the use of social media and its consequences, and to give evidence of the differences and similarities between young and older people.

These ideas, concepts, objectives should have been a guide for the fieldwork, the path to follow. However, the Covid situation brought strict restrictions, and access to it was limited. I had to think and use my limited social network in a city new to me. As fieldwork developed, I realised that many of the concepts were taken into account by the project participants and me differently, and I discarded reflecting directly on social media. After the first meetings with my research partners, that is, with Elisa, Sunniva, Magalí and Tove, I discovered that social media were as important in the way I has thought. Instead, issues like the pursuit of personal purposes seemed more important.

I decided then that, instead of adapting these women to my research interests, the best thing to do would be the opposite, adapting my interests to them. I thought the best would be to let myself be carried away by them, embracing a serendipitous attitude. From the beginning of the research, I decided to pay attention to what they considered most important, trying, at the same time, to evoke intimate narratives by showing myself close to them and trustworthy.



### 1.3 From a pandemic context, great things come

Through the empirical data gathered through the research for the film “*Let me hug you!*”, I address past, present and future aspects that define the lives of Tove, Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí. In this thesis, I deal with the particularities of each one and relate them in search of common aspects that give meaning to their daily life.

I have relied on an analysis based on the changes in values associated with the transformation of the Norwegian society from a ‘classical modernity’ to another ‘transformed or in transformation’ (Gullestad 2006). Through an intergenerational comparison between Tove (an 85-year-old Norwegian woman), on the one hand, and Sunniva (a 31-year-old Norwegian woman), Elisa (a 28-year-old Italian woman) and Magalí (a 36-year-old Argentine woman), on the other, I will point at some dilemmas and effects that it entails. While traditional values related to the idea of responsibility are lost or questioned, others linked to the idea of independence amplify. While Tove appeals to values related to the community, the others appeal more to individualization. However, this is not a rigid set of values and both aspects can occur at the same time.

I discovered that the context of a pandemic allowed us to discuss significant personal issues. It is an exciting framework to analyse values that dimension the country, its politicians, institutions and society. The Covid-19 crisis has been an opportunity to learn about the practices and discourses of the four women and compare them. This project has a socio-ethnographic approach. Sociological and anthropological theories on individualization have been one of the fundamental lenses for analysing the lives of the four women (Bauman 2000, 2001; Beck 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991; Gullestad 2006). Through these perspectives, I analyse and describe their existential and moral reasons to have a ‘life of their own’ and build their own ‘identity’/‘biography’. Self-realization can lead to particular questions that imply the search for simplicity or complexity, for example, the longing for a stable life next to an ideal romantic love or relations based on reciprocity (Bauman 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992; Wiik, Bernhardt, and Noack 2010). Or, on the contrary, the enthusiasm for a more flexible life that appeals to singleness.

Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí dream of establishing a new lifestyle, living abroad. This can also be analysed as individualization, but if their imagined life in another country is understood as a factor that conditions their lives, agency and structure should be considered (Benson and

O'Reilly 2016; Benson and Osbaldiston 2016). If they inhabit imagined worlds elsewhere, their agency is created by the social context of these worlds. However, this not only happens with imagined worlds but also with real ones. They found ways to inhabit the socio-political and economic system in which they live (Mahmood 2006, 2005). A main difference between Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí, on the one hand, and Tove, on the other, is that the firsts act in those worlds alone, and the latter act with and thinking of her position in the community.

The anthropology of hope has been another of the critical frames of reference in this work (Kleist and Jansen 2016; Pedersen 2012; Zigon 2009). It has been a key resource in covering and making sense of all of the above and helped me deepening the comparison. Hope conceptualized as agency has helped me to find nuances in what differentiates the four women, but above all, what unites them. After all, their practices and discourses are related to dreams, desires and purposes in life. They, individually or collectively, are constantly 'jumping into new futures'. In and concerning the socio-economic and political context in which they live or wish to live, they persist in living the best they can (Asad 2003). They persevere in achieving a stable life, a life that defies monotony, or a life for and with the community, family and friends.

I have structured this master's thesis into six chapters. Chapter 1 corresponds to this introduction. Chapter 2 is a brief presentation/introduction of Tove, Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí. It is a starting point from which to start getting to know them. Chapter 3 is about fieldwork and some methodological considerations. Here I also try to distance myself to reflect on my relationship as a male researcher and filmmaker working with four women. Chapter 4 deals with the prism through which I have analyzed and tried to understand their lives. It is based on the sociological and anthropological theory of individualization and on the paradigm of changes in moral values, agency and hope. Chapter 5 is divided it into two sections. First, I make a detailed description of the main past, present and future aspects of each of the women. Secondly, in a more profoundly way I analyze them together. Chapter 6 is the conclusion. Here, I present the main aspects and results of this project to try to answer the following question:

*What is it that, regardless of their social context, gives meaning and vigour to the lives of four women?*

# The women

## 2.1 Elisa

Elisa is a 28-year-old Italian woman from a city located close to Milan, Italy. She decided to come to Tromsø because of her monotonous life, the conditions of her job as a receptionist, and life with her parents. Taking advantage of the fact that her boyfriend at that time went to do an Erasmus and that she wanted to improve her English, she packed her bags and came to live in Tromsø in October 2019. She chose this city because she had some acquaintances and, compared to other places where she had been, it is surrounded by a lot of nature. She came on vacation five years ago, and she really liked it.

I met her in January 2020 through a Facebook group of international students where she was looking for someone with whom to practice and improve her English. We met several times in the central library of the city. Then she invited me to eat at her house and, from the quarantine time, we began to see each other regularly at my house and for walks.

The quarantine was a difficult period for her. She lost her job as an office and hotel room cleaner because of the pandemic, broke the long relationship with her boyfriend, and felt very uncomfortable in the small house and room where she lived. Likewise, to all this must be added that she was conditioned by the weather, cold, snow, and loneliness. It is why she started using dating apps

In April, unable to pay the rent for her room, she went to live with her friends, a Norwegian couple whom she met by chance on the street on New Year's Eve. This couple, considering Elisa's situation, offered her their house for a season.

At the end of March, she started cleaning a pizzeria for one or two hours a day (at first in exchange for food), and, in May, she started with several kindergartens. Working as a cleaner was a thing that she did not like. It distressed her too much. She always wanted to work in something else, but it was difficult for her because of her level of English. In May, thanks to these jobs, she began looking for a new place to live. Moreover, at the beginning of that month, we began to work on the project, specifically on the 4th.

In July, taking advantage of the fact that one of the hotels where she worked rented out small apartments because of the lack of customers, she rented one. The work gave her some stability again. However, she was not happy in this city, and she rented one of those apartments for a short period. She decided to return to Italy after a few days.

## **2.2 Sunniva**

Sunniva is a 31-year-old woman from Tromsø. I met her just when I arrived in this city in August 2019, specifically in a language exchange group at the central library. She has lived for a long time in different Latin American countries, including Colombia, my country of origin, and speaks perfect Spanish. Then we met several times in a place where it was possible to go salsa dancing, and from there, we started to keep in touch and meet from time to time alone or with other friends. She is a very kind person and with her I learn a lot about socio-cultural aspects of Tromsø and Norway in general. When I told her about my project she accepted to participate without any hesitation, and we began to work together on May 13.

Sunniva studied photography in England and volunteered in different projects in Colombia, Honduras and Nicaragua. From a very young age, she volunteered at the Tromsø Red Cross, worked there seasonally and, after returning from her last trip and working at this institution for two years in a row, she got a permanent employment contract. Now she is in charge of managing projects related to refugees and migrants. Working there means a lot to her.

Thanks to her job, two years ago, she was able to buy her first apartment. After breaking up with her partner at the time and obtaining a bank loan, she bought a small apartment to which she has dedicated body and soul to reform, furnish and decorate as she likes. It is also another of the fundamental aspects of her life.

She has a very active social life, and she participates in various leisure activities. However, she wants to break with her routine and wants to embark on the adventure of travel again. Currently, she is in the process of searching and applying for projects abroad.

## 2.3 Magalí

Magalí is a 36-year-old Argentinian woman from the city of Rosario. I met her in August 2019 through a mutual friend with whom, just as she did for a while when she arrived in Tromsø, I lived and worked as a volunteer in a hostel. Precisely one day, that friend invited me to go with them and some of their friends to the pool of one of Hurtigruten's ships. After that, Magalí and I met a few times by chance. We never had a close relationship until, thanks to that mutual friend who sent her my project proposal, she contacted me to offer her collaboration.

She worked for several years as a flight attendant in Argentina, which allowed her to travel a lot wherever she wanted. In 2016 she travelled to Tromsø for the first time and fell completely in love with this place. Thus, after visiting Svalbard and Iceland in 2017, at the end of the same year, she decided to leave her stable job, her apartment and family and come to live here. To do this, taking into account that her family is of Italian descent, she first travelled to Italy with her brother to obtain Italian nationality. Then, after a quick process there, She arrived in Tromsø in January 2018.

As soon as she arrived, she wanted to settle down quickly and began to work intensely. First as a waitress at the Verdensteatret bar. Then combining this job with that of a clerk in a souvenir shop, to later dedicate herself entirely to the latter until the virus outbreak. In March, as a consequence of the quarantine and crisis, she stopped working in the store. The Coronavirus pandemic has affected her quite a bit. Working in the souvenir shop meant a lot to her. She liked what she did, her shifts were ideal, and she was very stable. Thanks to this, for example, she was able to rent her apartment.

Likewise, she also had to interrupt a trip to Argentina in March to visit family and friends since it had been more than two years when she saw them last time. Although she has tried to stay calm and enjoy the summer and nature of Northern Norway with her friends, her work situation and not being able to visit her family have affected her a lot, including other aspects such as the fact of not having someone by her side with whom to share her life.

## 2.4 Tove

When I told Sunniva that I also wanted an older person to participate in the project, she put me in touch with the head of the Tromsø Red Cross volunteers, who, in turn, put me in touch with Tove, an 85-year-old woman from a place near Oslo, but who has spent much of her life in Tromsø. She is very kind; she is a lovely person. After talking briefly with her through a call, we met to start working for the first time on May 15.

When she retired, she began working as a volunteer for the Red Cross on different projects. Before the pandemic, together with other volunteers, she organized and carried out once a week a social gathering for older people between 80 and 100 years old. Given the current context, her role and that of her colleagues has been to call those older people to ask how they were and talk a bit with them. Participating in the Red Cross means a lot to her, since, for example, it allows her to be in contact with young people and to do “extraordinary” things, such as being able to meet the royal family.

Tove lives alone in the house where she lived with her husband and raised her two sons and daughter. Her husband died in 2006, and each of her children formed their own families. The death of her husband was a great challenge for her. Fortunately, her daughter and one of her sons lives in Tromsø, and she has been surrounded by them, their grandchildren and friends. Likewise, despite some health problems that appeared with age, she says she has had a very good life, largely thanks to the country in which she was born.

# Them, me and the camera

## 3.1 Intimate conversations mediated by the camera

For this project, I did fieldwork from May 4 to August 29, 2020. Every week, I tried to meet each of the women.

During all that time, my objective was to build and maintain close ties with them and thus be able to compile intimate narratives through the camera. When I asked to Elisa and Sunniva to participate in the project, they accepted immediately. Without any conditions, but due to the trust that we have gained since I arrived in Tromsø, Sunniva embarked on her friend's new adventure. Perhaps also to get out of her Covid monotony characterized by absence of social life. Elisa, also joined wanted to do something different from her routine of little work and few social ties. In her participation in this project, her need to spend time with someone in the solitude of a pandemic context played an important role. She expressed a need to meet with people and do things with them. She was very enthusiastic and proposed activities such as filming her at work cleaning a restaurant or looking for a room to rent, for example.

The coronavirus was the cause and effect of the need to search for social contact and sources of inspiration for self-realization. Magalí offered me her collaboration when she found out about the project through a mutual friend. She had much free time since she lost her job, and she identified with many aspects of the project. She contacted me offering her help, and she told me that she found it interesting. Nevertheless, she wanted to do something different. She probably wanted to do something different from what she had been doing even before the outbreak of the virus. As she says in the film *"Let me hug you!"*, in the dock scene where the plane passes over her: "it's yes to everything. Part of encouraging yourself". On the other hand, Tove agreed to participate thanks to the mediation of Sunniva and the Red Cross. She is a woman who is encouraged to participate in many of the things of that organization. But above all, she said, it is essential to be in touch with young people because of the little opportunity that older people have of it.

I did all fieldwork with the camera in hand. Before, I worked with field diaries for other projects, but I wanted to take filming as the primary source and main research medium. Barbash

and Taylor indicate that “[r]egardless of where you will film – [...] – you should remember that making a film is much more cumbersome and conspicuous than doing fieldwork with a notepad and pencil, or even a still camera” (1997: 39).

As an ethnographic practice, my main research method was to maintain as much long-term engagement as possible with the four women and intimate conversations mediated by the camera. At the beginning of each meeting, we started a small conversation that, after preparing the camera and starting to record, we tried to deepen as enjoyable as possible. Little by little, I tried to gain their trust personally and filming – especially with Magalí and Tove.

I based these conversations on guides that I prepared and memorized before each meeting. I wanted these to be close. As I said before, I was inspired by Rodion Ismailove's intimate approach to capturing stories and anecdotes of ordinary Russians on the Trans-Siberian. However, for the new project I made, I also was moved by Jean Rouch's film *Chronique d'un été* (1961). In it, Jean Rouch and his colleague Edgar Morin creating situations that evoke feelings, thoughts and attitudes of a group of people during summer. Therefore, regarding the film style, apart from an Observational mode, I could also say that the Cinéma Verité inspired me. Observational mode is a style embraced by the Cinéma Verité and Cinema Direct. In these cinematographic movements, the directors gave priority to a spontaneous and direct observation of reality. The observational mode allowed the filmmaker to record reality without getting involved with what people were doing when they were not explicitly addressing the camera. Unlike this model, *Chronique d'un été* has a participatory model where the director's perspective becomes more evident. It shows the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmed subject<sup>1</sup>. The director becomes a researcher and participates in the lives of others, gains direct and profound experience and reflects it from the cinema. Cinéma vérité can involve the interaction between the filmmaker and the subject, even to the point of provocation. The filmmakers of Cinéma vérité saw their presence as a way to reveal the truth.

The four women understood and felt at ease my way of relating to them with the camera. Little by little, they got used to it, and they wanted to help me with my project.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed approach of *Chronique d'un été* see Rothman, W. (1997). *Chronicle of a Summer*. In *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge Studies in Film, pp. 69-108). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



### 3.2 A certain serendipitous attitude

In the first meetings, I tried to follow the ideas and goals that occurred to me for the new research project. We started talking about their perceptions of the pandemic and how it was affecting them while I tried to address issues as loneliness, anxiety or uncertainties. However, the conversations gave rise to other aspects that seemed more relevant to them and, consequently, I decided to adopt a certain serendipitous attitude. That is, I decided to let myself be surprised with ideas or things that acquired new meaning from explanations of other things. But, “[w]hile serendipity is often misunderstood as referring only to the accidental nature and the delight and surprise of something unexpected, the masterful synthesis into insight by drawing novel connections is equally important” (Fine and Deegan 1996, as cited in Rivoal and Salazar 2013: 178). Two of the factors that it requires is an “inquisitive mind” and “creative thinking” (Rivoal and Salazar 2013: 178).

In a way, I could say that I relied on *inductive* research. In other words, I started with an open mind and as few preconceptions as possible, which led to the theory – and the film – grew out from the data (O’Reilly 2012: 29). Nonetheless, I could also say *iterative-inductive* (O’Reilly 2012: 29-30). Since although I was open to surprises, there are always preconceptions, and I was trying to read and find literature that would serve as a prism to see and understand the lives of four different women. In O’Reilly own words, ethnographic research is *iterative-inductive* in the sense that is “informed by a sophisticated inductivism, in which data collection, analysis and writing are not discrete phases but inextricably linked” (2012: 30).

### 3.3 “Drawing novel connections”

After each session with Elisa, Sunniva, Magalí and Tove, talking in their houses, we plan when, where and what activities to do next time. Sometimes after each session, I would take notes, simple remarks to remember. One of my main jobs was to develop a log sheet after each encounter or shortly after. Sometimes combining personal and work life with fieldwork made it difficult for me to do so, but overall I tried to be rigorous, and I could say that the log sheet served a kind of field diary function.

Before each session I prepared a plan to follow with questions, ideas, or themes based on what each of the women had told and concerning all of them. In an *iterative-inductive* way, before the meetings, I analysed the small notes, footage/log sheet and some not concrete literature I thought was going to work. Likewise, doing this exercise, my research questions and problems emerged over time, for example, about the job and financial/material stability, personal well-being and emotional stability, romantic relationships and interaction with men. I had a serendipitous attitude, but at the same time, I was trying to draw ‘novel connections’. Following Spradley, I tried to move from *descriptive questions* to more *structural questions* and *contrast questions* that would guide me to make more focused observations (1980: 32-33). To some extent, I was conceptualizing serendipity as Rivoal and Salazar indicate, that is, “as a research tool or process rather than as a concept merely indicating how observation unfolds. In other words, sagacity has to be reinstated as a principal component of serendipity” (2013: 183).

### **3.4 A responsible work**

According to Davies, “[r]eflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference” (2008: 4). In my attempt to carry out this exercise, I am sure that working with different women as a Latin American man has had some impression/result both on them and on the research itself. Surely my origin, age, sexuality, social class or political ideology influenced how I perceived and filmed each of the women and how I and my attitude influenced them and was perceived by them. All this determined the film and this thesis. There is sure to be much literature on men doing ethnography with women that would have been worth reviewing. This project is about intersubjectivity and meaning-making. It is about exchanging thoughts and feelings between the four women and me as a researcher, facilitated by empathy (Cooper-White 2014). Through this process the experiences were commented, discussed and signified. Somehow, they changed my life, and I changed theirs by reflecting and putting words on thoughts and feelings. Together we created meaning. This project was a collaboration. I developed a project that caught their attention, touched their consciences and concerns, and together we followed the discussions that gradually emerged from it. But were we on an equal footing?

Nowadays, cooperation between the filmmaker and the filmed is widespread. In deep reflexivity, the latter defines the rules about the film that the first will make about them. An

example of this can be seen in Sarah Elder (1995). Elder and her partner, Kamerling, did not want to determine the representation of the people they work with, the Eskimo communities; but at the same time, they did not want to put aside their aesthetic and technical control or their ethnographic concerns (1995: 97). She says that: [i]n our collaborative approach, we have attempted to design a process where accountability is formally built into the filming relationship, where basically a filmmaker cannot film without meeting community accountability” (1995: 97).

I would have liked to have had enough time to establish a deep collaborative work regarding the film’s editing. However, my goals, concerns, and ideas during fieldwork and recording were always precise. Elisa, Sunniva, Magalí and Tove were always informed about it. My responsibility has always been to convey what I wanted to do rigorously, and throughout the whole process I had their approval and support. In a sense, I could say that the four women defined the film and the research I wanted to do on them, without questioning my recording style and technical issues or, if any of them required it, reaching agreements on the matter.

Was my reflexivity based on a condition of equality with each of the women? That is, did I guarantee them the same level of power that I had as a researcher and filmmaker? In Elder's case, she wonders if that power is a real power or a colonial hoax. For Elder, unlike a filmmaker who comes from a different place, one who works with his community can make much more intimate and politically responsible films about it. Nevertheless, she also comments that the problem about in-depth representation does not depend on the origin of the filmmaker. Instead, it depends on the relationship of power of him with his characters. I considered the utmost respect, prudence and good sense in each of the meetings with the women. I believe that this is reflected here and in the film. That was the key: respect and prudence. If we consider it as a method and essential factors of equality, I could say that my work has been responsible.

Jay Ruby (1991) is another author who emphasizes that there are different levels of power among all participants in a collaborative film. He doubts that true collaboration is possible since there is no “technical parity” between the filmmaker and the filmed (Ruby 1991, as cited in Borjan et al. 2013: 26). The author says that even when it comes to teaching shooting techniques to indigenous communities, are western filmic conceptions taught (2013: 26). In Borjan’s own words, Ruby states that an “ethnographic film is a tool for exerting power and control over the Other” (2013: 26). I have been aware that sometimes some of them feel lonely and therefore vulnerable. I have tried not to explore it and be trustworthy. I hope and wish that the power

level between the four women and me has dissolved between the bonds of friendship and trust that we have lovingly created between ourselves.

### **3.5 Fieldwork with four wonderful women**

Elisa is a lovely person. She is a very nice and funny woman. She always wants to do activities and hang out. However, due to her situation in Tromsø, her attitude was often somewhat negative. She always wanted to participate without any qualms, but on some occasions, when we met to work, there were confusions. On some occasions, she wanted to discuss aspects of her life in-depth and be filmed, but on other occasions, she just wanted to be in company and have a good time talking, cooking or taking a walk with me as a friend without the camera. In those moments when I did not know if we were going to work on the project or not, I had to make a great effort to understand her. Despite her confusion regarding the project, I always felt that I could learn something from her. Although I could not delve much into her life because she decided to leave the city after several months here and realize that Tromsø was not her place, she spoke to me of crucial aspects to which I would pay more attention in the last part of my fieldwork. She told about her wishes for financial and sentimental stability.

Sunniva has been my friend since I came to Tromsø. She is an amazing woman, helping me in many ways. Especially in the beginning, she was a bit shy in front of the camera, quite reserved and always paying attention to her words. Unlike Magali and Elisa's spontaneity and ease, she wanted specific questions and activities. Because of her lack of confidence in front of the camera, she preferred that I use the tripod so that she could have more direct contact with me. Nevertheless, in general, we always felt very comfortable filming.

Tove is a wonderful and successful woman, full of energy and vigour at 85 years old. She was always available and accepted my proposals. She was always attentive to the development of the project. She always waited for me at her house with a coffee and something to eat. It was very nice of her; she made me feel very comfortable. She took very seriously what we were doing. At the beginning of the fieldwork, she was a bit nervous due to her level of English. However, sometimes when she could not find the words or doubted if she was doing it right, I tried to help her and emphasize that her explanations were very understandable.

Magalí is my South American compatriot. I understand her immediately; I see myself reflected in her many times. She has also become my soul mate in Tromsø. She was always very available and participatory. She is a very passionate and enthusiastic woman. In her, I found much inspiration. She was my kind of Marceline Loridan-Ivens in *Chronique d'un été*.

In general, concerning what I have done, I could say that, following Elisa, Magalí, Tove and Sunniva during the summer, I have tried to discover the main aspects of their lives that they constantly define and make sense of. The film is about the last three of them since Elisa left to early to be portrait. With Magalí, Tove and Sunniva I had the opportunity to follow their emotional life and then connect the three of them at the end of the fieldwork. They wanted to meet. They were curious about each other. Sunniva, Magalí and I met first, and a few days later, with Tove. In a nutshell, both meetings were about a pooling of the topics we talked about during the summer.

# The prism to understand their lives

This section will delve into the different themes that I presented in the introduction through. My goal is to give the maximum possible meaning to the principles on which I have relied to analyse the lives of Elisa, Sunniva, Magalí and Tove. One of the possible prisms to understand their lives.

## 4.1 A new world, new moral values

Predominant analysis in the social sciences have described the essential characteristics of today's Western societies concerning a transition from a 'classic modernity' (Gullestad 2006) to a 'postmodernity' (Bauman 2001), 'late modernity' (Giddens 1991), 'post-traditional' or 'second modernity' (Beck 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), to name a few terms. That is, a new world of social and cultural changes "related to an accelerated globalization of capital, information, ideas and lifestyles, as well as to changes in economic investment and production processes" (Gullestad 2006: 34).

According to Marianne Gullestad, Norwegians have since the 1960ties been experiencing the changes associated with that transition or, as she point out, changes associated with the "transformation from a classic modernity to a transformed and transforming modernity" (2006: 69), which means that changes have taken and are taking place. The author focuses on changes within the context of the family, specifically "changes from a popular rhetorical emphasis on 'obedience' to an emphasis on 'being oneself' in the upbringing of children" (2006: 69).

Gullestad studies the lives of women of very different ages, of different generational stages. As an analytical resource, she uses two bibliographies written between 1988 and 1999, one of a fifteen-year-old middle-class girl from a small town, Cecilia, and the other of a working-class Oslo woman in her sixties, Kari. The first is a narrative about an adolescent's process of creating a 'self' outside the family. The second is about the contrast between the moral values of an older woman's childhood and the moral values of the present. If I draw a parallel, the author's reflections on these two women can help us understand the life of Sunniva and Tove. Considering their ages, if "Cecilia grew up in the period when present-day social and cultural transformation started to become particularly evident in Norwegian social life" (2006: 79), one

might say that Sunniva (31 years old) grew up in the period when these transformations were fully evident. On the other hand, Tove is in the intermediate generation between Kari and Cecilia. Considering her age (85 years old), one might say that she lived the same childhood as Kari's daughter in the 1950's when a new 'conventional wisdom' was emerging (2006: 76). However, since the patterns that Gullestad draws in a Norwegian context result from the transition from one modernity to another, they would also correspond to a European context and contemporary society in general and, consequently, to the lives of Elisa and Magalí. Both would be part of the Cecilia and Sunniva life period.

Kari grew up and raised her children through the moral values of obedience and sharing. "These values concerned responsibility and a Protestant work ethic, tied to the idea of 'being use[']'" (Gullestad 2006: 72). In opposition to the values of her childhood, she tries to understand and adapt to the current values. While 'being obedient' was the educational ideal of her time, 'being oneself' has become popular. "Of particular interest in Cecilia's narrative is the centrality of the idea of independence and how it is linked to the idea of 'finding myself' ...", and the need to do so far from the restrictive limits of the family (2006: 82)<sup>2</sup>. Gullestad qualifies the collective and independent character of moral values as follows:

When being obedient is valued, the individual is clearly and explicitly a *social* being... When 'being oneself' is valued, the center is within each individual. The social anchoring of the individual becomes conceptually less visible. But 'being oneself' is also anchored in social relations (2006: 77).

The author affirms that in many of the autobiographies that she analyses, the Norwegian nation-state appears as a frame of reference, for example, when their informants use concepts as 'society', 'being Norwegian', 'people' or 'the country'.

"The idea that a self can be 'found' now seems to be ubiquitous in the Western World" (2006: 82). The shift from obedience to that idea, in fact, "can... be characterized as increasing individualization" (2006: 92). However, in general, what are the causes of this shift? Following Gullestad, they must be sought in the effects of capitalist production and the new trends of flexibility and creativity that it requires, the effects of consumption, and the erosion of class

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<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) are other authors who investigate how this shift came about from 'living for others' to 'a life of one's own', especially by focusing on education, work and women's sex and relationships.

consciousness instead of the increasing importance of personal network and alliances. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) also refer to the same and similar aspects, and Ulrich Beck (1999) indicate that the freedom, the 'radicalized democracy' calls into question the foundations of everyday life, the paradigms of the 'first modernity' (1999: 10), of the classic, modern era.

## **4.2 A brief approach to the theorists of individualization**

Individualization is a notion that can be interpreted in different ways. Here I consider essential the clarification of Beck (1999) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). Individualization does not mean individualism or individuation. It does not mean the process of becoming a unique person. Neither does individualism mean the same as the free-market liberalism or atomization. I have to clarify that my intention is not to integrate the women I work with into certain categories that could delegitimize them. Following these authors, here I am going to talk about individualization as a *structural* concept, what Talcott Parson has called 'institutionalized individualism' (1978: 321, as cited in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 11). Central institutions of modern society as paid employment and the education and mobility that both require are oriented to, designed for the individual rather than for the group or family. Elemental conditions in society as the job market or training leads people to constitute themselves as individuals.

### **4.2.1 A life that has to be continuously negotiated**

Besides Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, other prominent authors of sociological theories on individualization are Antony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman. The contributions of all these authors are relevant and are often brought into dialogue by scholars. These contributions are not very empirical, but can still be a source of inspiration and complementation of ethnographic material.

According to Giddens, today, in the context of a "diversity of options and possibilities", the self "has to be reflexively made" (1991: 3). It has to be "routinely created" (1991: 52). Individuals have to continuously negotiate their own lifestyle and, therefore, build their own identity, their own biographies. For the author "[m]odernity is a post-traditional order, in which



the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions...” (1991: 14). However, Giddens also emphasizes the importance of the past for defining the future. Taking into account to Charles Taylor, “[i]n order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going” (1989, as cited in Giddens 1991: 54).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim express, reflecting themes of my project, the following words:

There is hardly a *desire* more widespread in the West today than to lead ‘a life of your own’. If a *traveller* in France, Finland, Poland, Switzerland, Britain, Germany, Hungary, the USA or Canada asks what really *move* people there, what they strive and struggle to achieve, the answer may be money, *work*, power, *love*, God or whatever, but it would also be, more and more, the promise of ‘a life one’s own’. Money means your own money, *space* means your *own space*, even in the elementary sense of a precondition for a life you can call your own (2002: 22). (italics added for emphasis).

A central aspect of our time is the aspiration of the human being “to be the author of his or her own life”, to be “the creator of an individual identity” (Beck 1999: 9; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 22-23). The authors indicate that the institutional pressures in modern Western society are rather incentives for action and, between scripts, they take as an example the welfare state with its mortgage relief, among other aspects (2002: 3). Unlike traditional society and its preconditions, “[f]or modern social advantages one has to do something, to make an active effort...” and, consequently, the one’s normal biography becomes the ‘reflexive biography’ (2002: 3). Also, this kind of biography is always a ‘risk biography’ because if one fails, it can easily become a ‘breakdown biography’ (2002: 3).

#### **4.2.2 Ambitions or a world of simple choices**

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim state that the more options, the greater the need to decide between them, and the greater the need for individuals to take actions (2002: 4). Furthermore, “[i]f they are not to fail, individuals must be able to plan for the long term and adapt to change; they must organize and improvise, set goals, recognize obstacles, accept defeats and attempt new starts...” (2002: 4). On the other hand, Bauman (2001) points out the paradox that arises when individuals face multiple preferences and reflects on the concept of ‘ambivalence’. For him, this concept, like ‘ambiguity’ and ‘equivocality’, conveys the feelings of ‘mystery’ and ‘enigma’ and indicates aspects such as ‘uncertainty’ and ‘indecision’ (2001: 57). More specifically, “[w]hen

we say that things or situations are ambivalent, what we mean is that we cannot be sure what is going to happen, and so neither know how to behave, nor can predict what the outcome of our actions will be” (2001: 57). In other words, it is a problem about what identity strive for. Moreover, the lack of clarity, the unknow, means ‘risk’ (2001: 69), and risks must be faced and are the responsibility of each individual (Bauman 2000, 2001; Beck 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

Uncertainty is an overwhelming feeling typical of contemporary life. Today everything results in anxiety; this is the effect of “new individual freedoms and new responsibility”, a result too expensive for people (Bauman 2001: 88). In Bauman’s own words:

They would rather opt for a world less complex and so less frightening; for a world in which choices are simple, rewards for good choices assured and the signs of a good choice clear and unmistakable. For a world in which one knows what to do to be in the right. A world which hides no mysteries and does not take one by surprise. For many people cast into freedom without being asked, the offer of a ‘great simplification’ is one they find tempting and difficult to refuse (2001: 88).

However, Bauman also talks about ambition, that is, not conforming. “One can now dream of a different life – more decent, bearable or enjoyable. And if in addition one has confidence in one’s power of thought and in the strength of one’s muscles, one can also act on those dreams and perhaps even force them to come true...” (2001: 142).

#### **4.2.3 From ‘romantic love’ to ‘pure relationship’**

Love plays a crucial role in this project. It has also been an essential aspect of the analysis of late modern theorists. From their perspective, Detraditionalization (Giddens 1992) and individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995) are transforming intimate life. In today’s reflexive modernity, where the traditional is challenged, individual solutions are more and more emphasized to define and experience intimacy. Contrary to the ideal of romantic love, which was based on finding the “only one”, Giddens has theorized the emergence of a *pure relationship* as the ideal model of the intimate relationship. In other words, a model based on emotional equality between partners combining *confluent love* (reciprocity, unconditionality, communication, disclosure...) with *plastic sexuality* (tolerant, open...). A *pure relationship* is an outstanding commitment that is maintained as long as both parties in a relationship are satisfied.

Giddens is optimistic in betting on the democratization of intimacy. However, stressing the importance of the individualization process, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) are pessimistic about its consequences on intimacy. According to them, love is challenging in a world that values individuality over communion despite its idealisation. In a world of individualized 'biographical' constructions, one partner can be an obstacle for the other, and it can be difficult to build a shared biography from different authenticities. A pure relationship might be contradictory because of the authenticity and aspirational autonomy of the individual. On the other hand, Bauman (2003) states that *pure relationships* are becoming obsolete and shallow. He analyses modernity as *liquid*, that is, in fast transformation and never stable. According to him, *love* is liquid because of the uncomplicated entrance and exit of people in relationships.

In tune with the criticism that individualization does not necessarily break people's ties to tradition, some research on cohabitators and married couples suggests that this modern trend may strengthen the value of love and intimacy (Wiik, Bernhardt, and Noack 2010; Gell 1996). Furthermore, in the same way, that we will see with the next section about lifestyle migration, Alfred Gell (1996) states, "love, far from being unacknowledged, is structurally essential".

### **4.3 Agency and structure: a particular conceptualization**

Individualization theory is often criticized for privileging agency and masking the role of social structures and institutions. One of the main characteristics of the three young women in this project is travelling for self-realization. Like other real factors, that dream must be understood as an influencing factor by which they act. In the following two sections, I will try to focus on two particular sources that will help us later to understand this feature.

#### **4.3.1 The dream of a different lifestyle abroad**

Travelling, or emigrating is for many people a dream to be realized to change their lives. It can be for economic reasons, searching for a job, for the lifestyle that one seeks. For example, as according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, it may be for the desire to have 'a life of your own'. A recently discussed concept in migration studies that considers lifestyle as one of the main reasons for emigrating is the concept of lifestyle migration. It focuses on the motivation to emigrate, or as broadly this motivation has been described, as searching for a 'better way of

life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 20; see also Benson and Osbaldiston 2016). This concept has been widely developed to think about emigration of relatively affluent people from the Western world. However, Benson and Osbaldiston indicate that the first ambiguous definition of lifestyle migration provided by Benson and O'Reilly (2009, as cited in Benson and Osbaldiston 2016: 409) that focuses on wealthy individuals offers researchers the possibility to explore the concept further both theoretically and empirically. Later on, Benson and O'Reilly indicate that "... lifestyle migration is not intended to identify, demarcate and define a particular group of migrants, but rather to provide an analytical framework for understanding some forms of migration and how these feature within identity-making, and moral considerations over how to live" (2016: 21). It is a lens through which to look at the existential and moral dimensions of migration decisions.

Lifestyle migration differs from others approaches based on social or economic characteristics such as labour migration or retirement migration (2016: 21). It focuses on migration as a form of consumption, not as a form of production (2016: 22), although it does not avoid economic considerations. But why lifestyle migration and not lifestyle mobility? Lifestyle mobility has also been a widely developed concept (see Duncan, Cohen, and Thulemark 2013). It is an approach that privileges the 'impermanence' of migrants and criticized lifestyle migration for privileging the opposite (Benson and Osbaldiston 2016: 415). However, lifestyle migration takes an approach that considers migration as a process, as an ongoing quest, not as a single act that ends with arrival in a particular place (Benson and O'Reilly 2016; Benson and Osbaldiston 2016).

Lifestyle migration has frequently been analyzed through the conceptual framework of individualization and reflexivity. Nevertheless, as Benson and Osbaldiston state following O'Reilly (2014), "the question of whether these choices [travel] come free from structure in the first place is debatable" (2016: 411). As O'Reilly (2012, 2014) has discussed, Benson and O'Reilly (2016: 30) emphasize that "there has been something of a paradigm shift in the social sciences in recent years towards understanding social life as the outcome of the ongoing interaction of structure and agency". O'Reilly's effort to develop concepts based on what is known as practice theory, and following Rob Stone (2005) structuration theory, "involves viewing structure and agency as epistemologically discrete, for research purposes, but as ontologically co-creating. The author, using this distinction, lifestyle is to some extent the

imagined style of life after migration and as a such can be considered as a social structure” (2016: 30). Influencing the individual.

Furthermore, lifestyles are about social imaginaries, as it is a set of individual or shared ideas and conceptualizations influenced by social and physical structures such as marketing brochures, services, infrastructure and environment (2016: 30). For example, “places come to have shared meanings mediated through language, symbols and other significations” (2016: 30). The general idea of a place, its representation, the appeal of a particular landscape is a social construction that informs and shapes the style of life that a person imagines that could live in that new destination (Benson and O’Reilly 2016).

#### **4.3.2 Agency “detached from the trope of resistance”**

Personal discovery and the struggle against the power that this entails could respond to a conceptualization of agency framed within the limits of a ‘binary model of subordination and subversion’, a model that Saba Mahmood (2006) has questioned and tried to overcome. According to her, feminist scholarship understands freedom as a policy issue, idealizes instances that represent women’s desires to be free from relations of subordination, and, consequently, conceptualizes agency concerning acts that promote the individual's moral autonomy against the power that oppresses him. The author acknowledges the benefits that this model has provided but clarifies that it limits the understanding of women’s lives whose lives are framed in nonliberal traditions, as is the case of the women’s mosque movement that she studies. These women practice and follow Islam’s ideals. A tradition that has historically viewed women as subordinate and seek to cultivate shyness, modesty, perseverance, and humility, that is, virtues of feminine passivity and submissiveness. For Mahmood, “it is only when the concept of agency is detached from the trope of resistance that a series of analytical questions open up that are crucial to understanding” (2006: 34...) the sense of self, aspirations, desires and projects of these women.

Mahmood’s study of agency is based on poststructuralist feminist theory. Nonetheless, she also departs from it as it responds to the logic of the binary model. Instead, she focuses on Michel Foucault’s analysis of ethical formation. Following her review of this analysis, she states that Foucault’s later work draws on an Aristotelian tradition to formulate what Claire Colebrook (1998) has called a “positive conception of ethics” (Mahmood 2005: 27), that is, ethics not as

a set of norms, but as a set of practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself to reach a state of being, happiness, or truth (Foucault, 1990, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Martin, Gutman, and Hutton 1988; see also Davidson 1994, Faubion 2001, and Rabinow, 1997, as cited in Mahmood 2005: 28). It is not about a ‘voluntaristic’, ‘autonomous’ subject who fashions herself. On the contrary, it is about a subject formed through a ‘historically’ set of norms and practices. In other words, it is about what Foucault calls ‘modes of subjectivation’. For him, subjectivity is not a space of self-cultivation but an effect of practices through a set of moral codes that influence the subject to constitute herself concerning its precepts. Therefore, for Mahmood, if ethics is conceptualized as the techniques on which a subject is based to change her life, and if this subject is historically and culturally formed through certain norms (or rules, values, injunctions) through which she relies on to carry out her transformation, ‘the capacity for agency is entailed not only in acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms’ (2006: 42) I will delve into this review of agency later by addressing the hopes of the four women I have worked with.

## **4.4 Theoretical approach to the anthropology of hope**

The sociological and anthropological theoretical framework that I use so far shares interesting concepts. It is about the notions of dreams, ideals, goals, utopian visions, aspirations or desires, which as a whole can be determined in the concept of hope. The publications on hope and the future as an object of anthropological analysis are innovative and suggestive contributions through which to make an alternative analysis of the lives of Tove, Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí. My idea is not to frame them in a particular theoretical approach but rather to open different understanding paths. Their lives are very different but similar in terms of how hope can be seen as an agency by how they are and how they act in the world. These paths allow us to delve further into discovering the lives and the similarities of these women.

### **4.4.1 ‘Living in the present’ versus ‘living for the moment’**

Following Pedersen (2012), according to Day et al. (1999), a category of people from different social and cultural contexts may be classifiable as living in the present, with little presence of the past and the future in their thoughts. Nevertheless, for Day et al. the present is “the short

term [and] a ritual transcendental moment outside durational time altogether... that celebrate[s] the evanescent nature of accomplishments” (1999, as cited in Pedersen 2012: 143). The presentist does not mean the suppression of a “practical sense” of anticipating the future, as Bourdieu (2000) suggests with the marginal groups he analyzes (Pedersen 2012).

Revising Bloch’s (1977) ritual model, Pedersen indicates that living for the present renders ‘duration’ (the short term) into a “transcendental value” (2012: 143). Likewise, the author is critical and indicates that although Day et al.’s presentism theory is valuable, they make ambiguous use of ‘living in the present’ and ‘living for the moment’ (2012: 143). That is, they conflate these two temporal concepts, but both might represent different forms of presentism. What occurs in ‘the moment’ is not the same as what occurs in ‘the present’ (2012: 143). According to Pedersen, each moment overflows the present by compressing and exposing “cracks” from the future (2012: 143). Quoting Ansell Pearson, he points out: “cracks” that “com[e] from the future as a sign of the future” (1999: 120, as cited in Pedersen 2012: 143).

Pedersen, highlighting the above with other authors and trying to deepen the explanation, is based on the concept of *la durée*, developed by Henri Bergson ([1908] 1990) and later by Gilles Deleuze (1990,1994). He states that (2012: 144):

To better understand how and why each moment can contain “the thought of the future” (Deleuze 1994: 8) by transcending the present as a “sign which creates itself out of the future” (Maurer 2002: 18, citing Brian Rotman), it must be remembered that *la durée* is defined, not as an extensive spatio-temporal container within which events chronologically happen (i.e., as linear time), but as a dynamic field of potential relations without beginning or end, from which the present is actualized, or, as Hodges (2008) has expressed it, pumped out in the manner of a pulsating heart.

A similar representation of the beating heart can be done with the past. According to Rebecca Coleman’s analysis of Bergson’s model, remembering is the necessity for the past to ‘jumped’ into (2008: 94, as cited in Pedersen 2012). Pedersen’s goal with this analysis is to apply it to his Mongol Informants in the city of Ulaanbaatar, who, despite their optimism, never see their interests realized. The author indicates that a similar temporal ‘jumping’, or ‘trampolining’ (Pedersen 2007) may be identified in Ulaanbaatar but concerning the future. He sees his informants as urban *trampoliner[s]*, “constantly leaping into new futures, pre-experiencing what has not yet happened” (2012: 144).

Kleist and Jansen point out that, given the global present of “generalized uncertainty” and “lack of a sense of direction”, academics should be perceptive to identify hope in the world, and that there is an expectation that they should write affirming it (2016: 378). The authors emphasize that

[f]or the articulation of any hopes for different futures to be possible, there must be a degree of uncertainty, an awareness of it and a willingness to act in it. At the most basic level, then, hope is, as a phenomenon, characterized by simultaneous potentiality (in its broadest sense) and uncertainty of the future (2016: 379).

Miyazaki takes into account hope as a “method” of knowledge production. He studies the role of particular hopes in the life of financial traders in Japan (Miyazaki 2006) and how these develop over time. Pedersen describes the case that Miyazaki analyzes of a senior Japanese trader who, through aspirations and plans that never materialize, appropriating the future as a “model for actions in a present moment” (Miyazaki 2006: 157). Inspired by Miyazaki, the Bergsonian/Deluzian concept of durational time, Pedersen suggest that (2012: 145):

hope works by continually invoking “after-effect[s] of the future in the present” (Cooper 1998: 116). If, within the non-chronological temporal ontology of *la durée*, “what comes after [is] also the condition under which anything can come to be in the first place” (ibid.), and if, by tapping into the unique temporal attitude known as hope, one is made able to “reimagin[e] the present from the perspective of the end” (Miyazaki 2006: 157).

Through the mixture of various authors and ideas, Pedersen would emphasize that tomorrow is constantly in the present and vice versa. The present is constant in the future.

#### **4.4.2 Hope as passive and active**

Let us go a bit beyond this temporary character of hope as a future orientation. In anthropology, in line with previous studies on “resistance”, there has been a "revitalization of explicitly politically committed studies" where hope is not a specific aspect of the analysis, but rather, it is detected in people's resistance to oppression and in that their lives are not so determined by “structural” factors (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 378). “This often entails a focus on ‘agency’, whether defined as such or not” (2016: 378). For its radical political alternatives, that is, for their hope, there has been an interest in work based on activist groups and their collective



visions of revolutionary change and the ethical processes of self-creation of the activists themselves (2016: 378). Kleist and Jansen (2016: 378-79) emphasize that the interest in ethics is also relevant “in much less politically outspoken subfields of anthropology”, where “the analytical lens has been turned onto the way in which subjects’ fashion themselves from a variety of perspectives, for example with an emphasis on questions of freedom (Laidlaw 2014) or on questions of ‘the good’ (Venkatesan et al. 2015)”. Furthermore, concretizing, the authors refer to Moore’s “theory of the ethical imagination” (2011) and Zigon’s phenomenological approach to morality, as “[d]irect linkages between a focus on ethics and understanding of hope” (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 379). “Dwelling predominantly on questions of subjectivity and on people’s capacities for “self-making”, methodologically and epistemologically, this turn to ethics entails at least an initial focus on individual experience and reflection” (2016: 379).

I think that through Jarrett Zigon (2009), the analysis of hope can be developed further. It will help us to discover more profoundly what the lives of the four women are telling us. This author questions the academic understanding of hope as passive, active, and utopian, that is, the hope for a better future. Crapanzano (2003), along with Miyazaki, is another of the authors who has contributed to the rapid development of the anthropology of hope. For Crapanzano, hope is passive not because of its "patience" or "perseverance" but because it depends on other factors that are alien to one, for example, God, fate, luck or another person (Zigon 2009: 256). Nonetheless, Zigon emphasizes that “[at] best, ‘resigned hope’ can be transformed ‘into active desire’ through the presence of a concrete hoped-for object” (2009: 256).

Zigon, through an ethnographic research in Moscow with artists and Russian Orthodox Christians, tries to demonstrate that hope is a “vital force behind one’s ability to act and be in-the-world” and, thus, disagree with Crapanzano and his conceptualization of hope as passive but also with Miyazaki for sizing the activity, that is, hope as attitude for something better or ideal (Zigon 2009: 257). Zigon sympathizes with some scholars who use hope for progressive politics (Hage, 2003; Harvey, 2000; Zournazi, 2002). Still, he claims that they conceive it too much as a future orientation toward the good (2009: 257).

For Zigon, the conceptualization of hope should not focus on its passivity or activity but its sliding character towards one and the other. He tries to demonstrate hope as:

on the one hand, an existential stance of being-in-the-world. In this way hope can be thought of as the temporal structure of the background attitude that allows one to keep going or persevere

through one's life. This aspect of hope can be seen as similar to what is often characterized as the passive nature of hope. On the other hand, hope is the temporal orientation of conscious and intentional action in moments of what [he] call moral breakdown, that is, those moments when social and moral life is reflectively and consciously called into question and posed as a problem. This aspect of hope is similar to what is often called the active nature of hope. As such, this aspect of hope is the temporalization process – the intentional and creative uses of the past and the future – that allows for intentional and ethical action (2009: 258).

Through this approach, hope is not only oriented towards the future, towards the achievement of good, and emphasizes “the perseverance of a sanely life” (2016: 258). The author conceptualises hope through the axiom of ‘keep going!’, as the perseverance “to maintain the world as it has been found and lived-through”, although Zigon also clarifies that “new worlds can be established”, that is, the future, the better (2009:258-259).

Zigon also draws on Talal Asad (2003) and suggests thinking of both aspects of hope as way to maintain "a sane life". Zigon claims that much of the hope expressed to him by his Muscovite informants was similar to how Asad (2003), Mahmood (2001) or Yurchak (2003) have described as agency aimed toward continuity, stability, or living sanely. The author also rejects the conceptualization of agency framed within the limits of a "binary model of subordination and subversion", or as actively working for an ideal future, or in other words, to reach happiness. Following Mahmood (2001) Zigon states that:

“[r]ather, it is to be an active agent in the attempt to live acceptably both for oneself and others, and to do so within the world in which one finds herself. Living sanely, then, is a creative process of living acceptably in the social world that is already there and in which one already finds oneself” (2009: 259).

# **Their lives, my look**

## **5.1 The essential aspects that characterize them**

In the next section, I try to describe the main aspects that define the lives of the four women, thus beginning to carry out an analytical reflection.

### **5.1.1 Elisa's need for independence**

#### **5.1.1.1 "I want to change something..."**

Elisa's motivations for coming to live in Tromsø were diverse. She could serve as an example of the hundreds of thousands of young people from southern Europe that travel to northern European countries to experience life differently while doing low-skilled jobs to support themselves. It is about a great adventure to earn a living and give it a different meaning. Elisa's existential and moral dimensions impetus to come to Tromsø were based on the "unhappy" life she was having in Italy. She was "*bored*"; every day was "*the same*" for her. She "*escaped*" from Italy because she had very little social life. She was almost always with her boyfriend. She was "*tired*" of her job as a receptionist because of the poor working conditions, low payment and a bad schedule. Elisa was tired of living in the same house with her parents and siblings. She really wanted and wants "*to change something, experience other things, other places...*". For her, it is vital to take control of her life. She needs to discover her "self" outside of her family... She wants "to be the author of her own life" (Beck 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

Considering that she always wanted to experience a new lifestyle far from Italy and improve her English, taking advantage that her boyfriend went to do an Erasmus study exchange in Iceland, Elisa decided to travel and come to live in Tromsø. Although she knew some people here, her conception of this place in Northern Norway was undoubtedly influenced by nature. She was in this city five years ago on a vacation trip and, unlike Milan and other cities where she had been, here she experienced nature like never before. However, she was also aware that the idea of coming to Tromsø would be "*crazy*" because of the harsh winter.

### **5.1.1.2 “I really wanted to go back to Italy”**

Two weeks after arriving, living at a house of an Italian friend she knew from before, looking for work intensively and getting “*bored*” in a period when it was snowing heavily, Elisa found a job as a cleaner, something she had never done before. Then, after a month, she rented a room in another house with several other tenants and tried to settle down for a long period. However, the true face of her cumbersome situation in Tromsø began to manifest itself from that moment.

Elisa only had close contact with one of her roommates; her room was tiny, and she had to eat in it; the kitchen was tiny, and there was no living room. The polar night, the extreme cold and the constant snow anguished her. She worked a lot as a cleaner, a job she did not like. She missed her boyfriend and felt tremendously lonely. Elisa was “*a little depressed*”. She said: “*I really wanted to go back to Italy. From the beginning it was bad. I was thinking: why did I come here? Am I crazy maybe? Look at the sky, snowing all the time*”. We could say that her ‘own biography’ in Tromsø was showing the symptoms of being about to fail.

Two aspects made her momentarily change her mind. One the job she found in December as a cleaner in hotels she liked more than the one she had elsewhere. The other was meeting the Norwegian couple on New Year’s Eve. That night they invited her to a party where she met different people and got excited. From that night on, she thought it would be worth staying longer in Tromsø, as she realized that the people here were “*nice*” and maybe she would have the opportunity to meet many others. Later, in February, she visited her boyfriend in Iceland, and when she returned, she began to work a lot in hotels, almost every day, until the virus arrived.

### **5.1.1.3 “I was thinking he was close to the right one”**

With the lockdown, Elisa lost her job. From that moment on, it was difficult for her again. She was worried that she would not pay the rent and support herself. Although she tried to be positive and keep her mind busy, she felt useless. Her family told her to return to Italy, but she decided to stay here and wait with a desire to continue being independent. In her own words: “*I just didn’t follow the advice. I want to act on my own... For me to give up is to think that there is nothing good for me here, to go back to my past life and start over from the beginning*”.

As a consequence of an unexpected factor, the virus, her plans and decisions were entirely at risk, and she chose to face it alone. She decided to be solely responsible for the risk and consequences of this ambivalent situation. Even in times of crisis, when she could not hope for new social contacts and despite the weather, she decided to stay.

At the time, her relationship with her boyfriend was not good enough either, and the virus just made it worse. After three years of relationship, the distance and a virus that seemed not to allow them to meet would separate them forever. Elisa stated that:

When I arrived here, I was engaged; I really was engaged... I thought he was close to the right one, close to the right one with whom to spend my life. But I never imagined that distance would separate us... When I arrived here, I never imagined that this would happen to me. It was sad because it was during the quarantine time, the virus had just arrived. I was so sad inside... I had to break up with him because I didn't feel the same anymore. I was starting to think of other guys, and that wasn't fair to him...

In Elisa, we can perceive the ideal of romantic love based on meeting the right person forever and that of a pure relationship that ended because of the interests that she and her boyfriend pursued separately. In her case, we can say, one is not consecutive to the other, but instead, they converge. Maybe they are not the same?

Elisa blames herself for what happened, but also him. She thought that her ex-boyfriend stopped having feelings for her. She said that *"he was stupid, he was silly, he didn't take care of me... when you are in a distant relationship, you have to be more careful, be more present for your girlfriend..."*. According to Elisa, her ex-boyfriend's aspirations were counterproductive to the common relationship they were both building. In her own words:

He was thinking about his studies, and that's it. I think he stopped thinking about me, about us as a couple. When he went to do the Erasmus, everything was ruined. Of course, he has to think about his life, about his career, his future... But I'm a woman, and I need basis for a relationship, a guy that is sure about a relationship... I don't think he's ready for a big commitment to a girl.

Heartbroken and lonely because of frustrated 'romantic love' and a world in alarm over the pandemic, Elisa began using dating apps to fill her void and, as a form of entertainment, to improve her English. There she met a person with whom she became excited, they met several times, but he ignored her shortly after. Others asked her to talk about sex or send them nudes.

On many occasions, she thought it was a mistake to download these applications on her mobile phone. She wants stable relationships, not ‘liquid love’ (Bauman 2003).

Without work and considering her precarious economic situation, Elisa went to live with the Norwegian couple she met on New Year’s Eve. They decided to open the doors of their big and nice house until the situation improved and she could get a new job. Little by little, after a month, she began to go back to work cleaning a restaurant and kindergartens. She found another flat, a small and depressing hotel studio flat compared to the Norwegian family’s house. She decided to rent this flat temporarily, as in June, after eight months in Tromsø, she decided to return to Italy. Her dream of a different lifestyle in another idealized country was over.

#### **5.1.1.4 “I want a really big commitment”**

In Tromsø, she was never happy because of her work, the few social relationships she had, the poor conditions of the house she lived or the short possibility of accessing affordable rent. Unlike her negative and skeptical attitude visible in her every time we met, in the last meetings, she seemed more optimistic. For her, “*it has been a lesson not to give up on the first problem you have*”; and despite everything, wanting to continue with a lifestyle migration, she said that she would “*never stop travelling...*”, that *maybe [she] will go somewhere else after Tromsø*”. Nevertheless, in her desire to continue changing her life, she also opposes a lifestyle of continuous mobility to a more fixed one concerning work and a future ‘romantic love’. She said that:

I don’t know if I will stay long in one place. I don’t really know because you may not stop when you start travelling. But if I am to find a good job, a husband, a boy... I want to start a family and be stable in a place. Yes! I’m thinking about it now because I’m not very young. Yes! I really want to start doing something nice in a place. It can be Italy or in another country...

In her ‘new beginning’, in building her new life, her ‘biography’, she looks to the future, wanting to live alone and get a good job: *I don’t really care about money. If they pay me a normal salary, that’s fine. I don’t want the best house... I just want my salary and my life, pay the rent and everything...*. Lifestyle migration is a risky option, but she also seems to strive for simple and achievable ones. She strives for a life “less complex” (Bauman 2001). Maybe, that simplicity also depends on a stable life with the ideal man and in a family, that is, on a

traditional posture that leads to a paradox when putting the search of oneself in between, the self-realization. Elisa wants to find the ideal man to share a life project with. She feels mature enough for it. She expressed:

I want a really big commitment. I just started thinking about making a family... laying the foundations, just a little bit, step by step... I want more; I want a person who really feels me, who really feels who I am and with whom to create the foundations of something: a house, living together... I really need it to share with someone... It's very difficult to find this kind of guy now, you know, for a big commitment... When I go back to Italy, I won't waste my time with someone who doesn't care about me... I think I'm mature enough now. What do you think? Am I a good woman to marry? I'm a good cook; I can offer you... So yes! I'm ready. Will you marry me? I'm kidding.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves how much Italian socio-economic and cultural factors influence this position of harmony with a certain traditionalist character. Maybe we should ask ourselves to what extent Elisa's desire to being herself – and the risk she has run in pursuing it – is the cause of that position. Maybe we should ask to what extent her desire for independence has the opposite effect of wanting to return to create a self that relates to the values of something similar to the traditional structure of a family. We also have to think about the low degree of independence that the Italian employment context allows.

Elisa is trapped by boredom, by being in her family's house and by the lack of personal development when she tries to find a new path, follow her dreams, find something better, change her life.

## **5.1.2 Sunniva's need for a different life in a tropical country**

### **5.1.2.1 "The independence to make all the decisions myself"**

In the film "*Let me hug you!*", when Sunniva is in the harbour taking photos, she explains that she had an "unstable" life until she got a steady job and bought her flat. When she talks of instability, she refers to her time as a student in England and the period after her return to Tromsø. During that time, like many other students, she had little money, did different jobs, and shared houses with different kinds of people.

When Sunniva returned from her last stay as a volunteer in Colombia with the Red Cross more than five years ago, she started working in this organization with temporary contracts until she was offered a permanent contract two years ago. It coincided with the breakdown with her ex-boyfriend, with whom she had planned to buy a house. Having obtained a permanent contract, she saved a little more on her own, obtained a mortgage loan and bought her beautiful and tiny flat, thus being able to stay calmer. She said that:

Suddenly everything became a little calmer. I spent many years thinking about what I was going to do, whether I would have enough money to pay the rent, food expenses. I was always saving a lot... I already have the flat, I have a job, I have a very quiet life, I have everything I need. But I've been very stingy all my life, I couldn't go out, I couldn't buy things... and now I can.

Her stable job and flat mean a lot to her. They both fill her with pride. They are signs that represent maturity and *self-realization*. According to her, it is widespread to buy a house in Norway when you are twenty-something, thirty years old. Many of her friends have bought a house or a flat as a couple or been single. In her own words: *"This is something of the Norwegian soul. Having a house is one of life's goals. Obviously, I was influenced by the fact that all my friends started buying a house or flat years ago"*.

She also highlights the role of the system, that is, the bank and other institutions and social pressures, which acts as a motivating force of a lifestyle that has to be continuously negotiate (Giddens 1991). We could say that she makes it clear that agency and structure act in an interrelated way. For example, she said that:

The whole system is fixed for this. If you have a house, you pay less taxes ... it helps you pay less taxes. It is also very normal to have a mortgage. The fact of paying debts all the life is something normal and common here. That's the way it is, hopefully when you retire you will no longer have debts.

Sunniva's appreciation for her flat is reflected in the film scene, in which she is organizing her kitchen. In that scene, she talks fondly about what it means to her. It represents and gives her an aura of independence. She appeals to the need to be alone to make all the decisions that she wishes, for example, arranging the furniture as she wants and at what time to eat, when to go to sleep, or when to get up. She said: *"The independence to make all the decisions myself"*. Her flat shapes the frame for 'being herself'.



### 5.1.2.2 “[T]he other side of the same coin”

Sunniva’s job stability is something that makes her feel very safe. The quiet life that her work and home offer her is something of the utmost importance. However, she says that it also supposes “*the other side of the same coin that scares [her]*”. She has gotten a little tired of her daily routines and wants to reorient her life. In a way, we could say that she feels stuck, that after several years in Tromsø, she has run into a barrier that has to be crossed both physically and mentally. That is what she means when she takes photos in the harbour. She talked about a contradiction, about the dilemma of wanting stability when you don’t have it and, conversely, waiting for flexibility when you have it.

In a world where daily decisions have to be made, she must rethink her lifestyle and go further. She deeply thoughtful about her quiet life, stated that “*... you can stay like this all your life and the years would go by without being able to distinguish them... if you don’t do other things, you wonder: that happened five years ago? It seems like it happened just a few months ago.* She does not want to look back and realize that nothing has happened. Placing herself in the present and looking to the future, she says that she is “*a little afraid of being old and being at home questioning what [she has] not done. Not having stories, not having experienced different things, not having seen different places and people*”. When building her identity, her ‘biography’, Sunniva does not want to be conformist. She expressed that: “*[t]ime passes quickly because I returned to Tromsø five years ago and I’m still here. I have felt comfortable working in the same place and living in the place where I was born, and I have my family and friends. It’s very easy, but I think I will regret it if I stay here my whole life.* Self-realization for her is a priority.

### 5.1.2.3 “All the interesting... [is] from when I got out of the ordinary”

Sunniva wants to do and is trying to do something that takes her out of everyday life. Going back to her passion for photography, cameras, and related books is one of her goals. She wants to “attempt new starts” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). She wants to leave her job in the Red Cross, in which she has participated since she was 16 years old and is like her other home, her other family. She wants to work on other kinds of projects. Although she pointed out that you have to do something even in your own country or city, to some extent, she dreams of going

back to her past as a volunteer and adventurer in Latin America. From there are and belong many memories of her for life. An important part of the constitution of her 'biography' comes from that period.

In her desire to continue finding herself, she wants to travel and participate in other projects. Unlike opting for *simplicity*, she is *ambitious* and dreams of a different life in some tropical country (Bauman 2001). It is worth remembering her words in the opening of the film: "*I feel like I need to travel, see more things. Live in a warmer climate*". Maybe it, even when she is old. The lifestyle migration she dreamed of near the planet's equator will shape the reality of her return to Norway or when she reaches old age. The lifestyle she dreamed of is structuring her future here, just as it did in the past. Sunniva stated:

When I returned to Norway after England, I really wanted to live and be in my country with the winter, the snow; and after a year and a half, I was ready again to go to Nicaragua, to go to another country where I did not know anyone or knew nothing, and it was very hard, but I also needed it. When I returned from Nicaragua, I was very happy with my hot shower, with all the luxuries that I didn't have there. The same when I went to Colombia. It was to do something, so that life does not fly by and when I am 80, I wonder what I did not do.

Likewise, the lifestyle Sunniva imagines in another country is related to her desire to work in a non-governmental organization NGO. Not only the experience of the trip but the institutions themselves – the Red Cross and other organizations – are also important factors that have helped her *constitute* as an *individual*. In Sunniva's considerations on living both in Tromsø and abroad, they also play an essential role.

Sunniva wants to challenge herself, get out of her comfort zone and take new paths. She wants to venture out and go in search of the "*energy*" she lacks. She wants to break her calm life and be "*super confused*". She may seek to be less rational and rigid, get rid of her shyness, and be laxer. In a nutshell, she wants to take the *risk*, and taking risks has its consequences. However, it has been difficult for Sunniva to make decisions as she does not want to lose the security of her permanent job. She cannot be as "*spontaneous*" as she was before. If she leaves her job, some of the highest *risks* are *uncertainty* of how will she pay her flat, her mortgage; how will she be able to support herself? Will she be able to rent her flat to someone easily? But she does not give up and recently applies to participate in different projects abroad. She is

focused on achieving her goals, although even the same journey is also risky. As she said, “*what is interesting is seldom certain and known*”. But she also emphasizes that:

All the interesting, weird and funny stories I have are from when I got out of the ordinary. They are from times when I had cried a lot; for example, when I went to Nicaragua, I cried and cried at the airport. It continues to be one of the most shocking experiences of my life... I have had very nice experiences because I have made difficult decisions ... and I think I have never regretted having made them.

#### **5.1.2.4 “Sometimes I think that it would be good”**

Every summer, Sunniva participates in a project in which she wins a mug to reach various mountain peaks. The cabin scene belongs to one of those trips in which I had the opportunity to accompany her. As we can see in that scene, Sunniva sometimes hesitates, but she does not want to be romantically involved with anyone right now. Since she broke up with her ex-boyfriend, she has had brief and sporadic relationships without any commitment. That trip to the mountain was the moment when Sunniva was most open in front of the camera. It was the moment when she allowed me to enter into the more intimate part of her life. Perhaps, in her sense of getting things under control, this was the right time for it.

The night before the recording of that scene, she told me that she would like to meet someone, feel excited. Nonetheless, when I reminded her of it, she responded that she would like to have “*the feeling of butterfly*”, but “*that’s all*”. At another point outside of the film and in keeping with her sense of independence and self-realization, she said that: “*[t]he idea of having a boyfriend, of being with a person all the time and not having the free time that I have now to do my things ... I feel that meeting another person and always having to be aware of him would not be good for my right now. It would bother me more than benefit*”. However, she is also conscious that sometimes she would like it. In her own words: “*Sometimes I think that it would be good, for example, to deal with situations such as quarantine and all that implies. I have thought a lot about the people who have or live with their partner, who have had emotional support that I have not had. I have needed it. Maybe, her embroidery project with the popular Colombian phrase “vení te apapacho!” (let me hug you!) is a reflection of that contradiction, of the need to be alone while missing somebody. In it, Sunniva expresses her longings for South America, for her international connections, and, to some extent, for a pure relationship, a sentimental relationship based on mutual support.*

In the cabin scene, Sunniva also says that she has tried to fight the feeling of needing someone. In line with the previous ones, her main argument is that she must challenge herself alone, with no one by her side. She says that with a man, her shyness will not disappear. She bought her flat alone and fixed it with the help of her family. She does not need anybody to fix the practicalities in life, do her projects, and realize her dreams of going somewhere. Concerning her plans and lifestyle migration, she states that:

“If I’m going to go out and do other things with my life, I don’t want to have any more long-distance relationships, which is what I’ve always had because I’ve always gone from country to country. I’ve always had relationships with... For example, with someone from Norway when I was in England”.

Giving up a stable job for life, leaving her house, and breaking the monotony is a vital decision Sunniva must make before it is too late and she reaches a later age. She has to chase her dream of self-fulfilment in other countries as soon as possible. Love can wait.

### **5.1.3 Magalí’s dreams of stability**

#### **5.1.3.1 “The end of the world, the beginning of everything”**

Many of Magalí's tattoos represent her adventurous spirit, her tireless desire to visit exotic and remote landscapes. These are vintage tattoos that delight the eye. Some of them deal with the maritime world, such as that of a caravel and a lighthouse. When we were filming at Prestvannet, a lake near the centre of Tromsø, she explained to me that this lighthouse is located in the Argentinian city of Ushuaia, in the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, in the southern tip of South America, “The end of the world”. According to her:

Ushuaia is a place with many similarities to Tromsø ... many people say. Obviously, it is Argentina, from the urban point of view, much messier, but nature is very reminiscent of Tromsø... It is a place with a lot of magic. Thanks to the airline, I had the possibility to go many times, to explore it... There is a mural that says: “The end of the world, the beginning of everything”.

Magalí’s life was about aeroplanes and airports. She was a flight attendant for 12 years. She started working on it at age 21 without ever having flown before. She said that she “*didn’t know*

*what it was like to be on a plane, and it occurred to [her] to be a flight attendant*". She worked in several companies, the last of which was "Aerolineas Argentinas" (Argentinian Airlines), a company that she "loves" for the people she met there and the doors and opportunities it opened for her. Her work in the world of aviation has had a significant impact on her; in fact, she stated that she "wouldn't be here if it weren't for [her] work on aeroplanes".

Magalí said that she always leaves everything she starts and is "unstable" in several ways. She started on several studies but did not finish them due to a lack of perseverance and dedication. She gets "bored" so quickly, for example, social communication or photography. She finished high school and started university in 2001, in the severe economic, political and social crisis that affected Argentina. Her family's situation has always been complicated since the 90s and, after the 2001 crisis, it got much worse. Like many lower-middle-class South American families, Magalí said hers is humble and lives with a minimum of resources. What motivated her work as a flight attendant was that it allowed her to visit many places in a context in which taking vacations was impossible for her family. In her own words:

If I managed to spend 12 years doing the same thing, it was because it gave me the freedom to have a lifestyle that allowed me to meet people all the time, get on aeroplanes, and travel... It was crazy, almost impossible. In the context in which I grew up, it was impossible. As I told you, I started flying without ever getting on a plane before, and I got to know the sea when I was 21 years old. The concept of vacations in my family was impossible due to our economic situation of living with the minimum.

In her constitution as a person, airlines have played an important role, and other structuring factors such as that of a Latin American state in decline, if not in failure, that has subjugated her family's life. What Magalí was looking for is something of the utmost essence, freedom, and she has used her strength as a woman and has taken advantage of the system for it.

### **5.1.3.2 "I felt a connection and an energy that was very difficult to explain..."**

In "Let me hug you!", in the scene where a kayak passes near the shore and a plane over her, Magalí refers to the opportunity she had to travel thanks to her work. Maybe, because of the ideas and conceptualizations that she had of Tromsø, influenced by shared ideas about the similarity of this other side of the world with Ushuaia, she had recurring dreams at night for almost a year with this "geography, the auroras, and the snow". She even dreamed of the

moment when she first came here, October 20, 2016. She expressed that she always pays close attention to “*signs*”. Upon landing in Tromsø, she said she “*felt a connection and an energy that was very difficult to explain...*”. From that moment on, it was the first time that she considered leaving Argentina, her home, family, friends, and her stable job.

In 2017 Magalí returned to Norway. This time to Svalbard to witness the midnight sun, and from there to Iceland. However, she kept thinking about Tromsø, and over time, she decided not to be left with doubts, step out of her “*comfort zone*”, and venture to live here. Likewise, during the last years, she was not “*happy*” in Buenos Aires, where she resided for her work. It was a city that did not fill her because of noise, pollution, or the “*energy*” of the people. Magalí is of Italian descent, and in her longing to start a new and better lifestyle in Tromsø, she travelled with her brother to Italy to apply for Italian nationality. A few days later, just over a month, they got an Italian passport and could travel to Tromsø, which she did in January 2018.

Concerning her personality and energy, Magalí is very able to grasp the moment, to get the things started from where she is. For the first three months in Tromsø, she lived in a hostel as a volunteer and met many people. For her, this is a small place that has allowed her to meet people who have become good friends. When she arrived, she rushed to find work, “*to root, to settle,*” and things went quite well. She worked in bars, and since the summer, in a souvenir shop. She said that her “*life was very active, with a lot of work, meals, beers, friends, laughter...*”. Her life with “*planes is a closed stage.*” Now, in her dream of self-realization in Northern Norway, she wants to continue working in customer service, but she seeks a normal work schedule and routine, unlike her previous job.

### **5.1.3.3 “[T]o live in the present”**

In building her ‘identity’ in Tromsø, Magalí is trying to find stability. She stated: “*[m]aybe I got tired of moving so much. I would like to know what it feels like to live in a specific place and have routine work...*”. The small flat she rents is a step towards that dream. She is trying to make it her permanent residence, her “*home.*” Nevertheless, stability is something that has always cost her a lot. According to her, she is “*very impulsive*”. Having into account her following words, we can say that she is ‘constantly negotiating’ her lifestyle (Giddens 1991):

Sometimes I still have this gipsy thing of... well, maybe another year or two and... I still think that I have to be light of baggage because I don't know when I will go again... maybe at this moment, for me, stable life is being able to be calm in a place, without always contemplating a plan B... I'm always in conflict with the place where I'm living.

In March 2020, with the virus outbreak, the little stability that Magalí had both at work and personal level was cut short. Her job at the souvenir shop was suspended until further notice, and it never came back. Also, the flight she had booked to visit her family after almost two years away was cancelled. She said that: *"I felt quite down... the day I had to be on a plane to go see my family"*. Her situation was of job and economic uncertainty. She felt it was like a *"starting over."* Working at the shop, she felt comfortable and fulfilled. She didn't want to go back to working in bars because of the work schedule.

During the following months, during the summer, Magalí tried to *"feel free"* and visit different places near Tromsø with her friends. In her attempt to balance herself through a routine and in tune with her contradiction of always wanting 'new starts' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), of her travelling spirit, one of her most prominent reasonings is to live in the *"present"*. That was what she tried to do during that period. In her own words: *"I tried to position myself in the present, on a day-to-day basis"*; *"I'm trying that any thought is very day to day..."*; *"to live in the present"*. Likewise, as it happens in the museum scene in the film, that is what she would say to the Magalí of the future, to the old Magalí, that is, *"stop waiting, stop waiting, to live life"*.

#### **5.1.3.4 "Everything you keep rots"**

In the lake scene, Magalí emphasizes her naturalness and simplicity when expressing her feelings. She exemplifies it with the sincerity she had with her grandfather before leaving Argentina. She is open and frank with what she feels. She has no trouble telling what she thinks to those around her. She said: *"[W]hen I left Argentina, I said everything I had to say, I gave all the hugs I had to give, I didn't keep anything. I remember when I was little, I was told that everything you keep rots"*. Maybe her tattoos are also a representation of her sincerity. Her high emotional expressiveness, characteristic of Argentina and other Latin American countries with varying intensity, so to speak, clashes with the rigidity and reserve of the emotional expression of a Scandinavian country, especially when it comes to establishing emotional ties. As she states

in the film: here, *“love costs a little more”*. Nonetheless, she is also aware that it has always been the case regardless of where she lived. She said that she is *“not going to blame Tromsø,”* that *“relationships just cost [her]”*.

One summer night, some friends and I accompanied Magalí to what she calls the *“inframundo”* (underworld), that is, to various bars in Tromsø to drown her sorrows. She was sad because she had a meeting about her situation as an employee of the souvenir shop without getting a concrete answer and, in addition, because of unrequited love. A few days later, talking to one of those friends about that night, she expressed that sometimes the *“inframundo is like going to therapy”*; and her friend responded: *“I think the fact that you can sit in a miniskirt in front of the whole town and cry ... that makes us very comfortable ... You live with examples, you were an example of someone who was very screwed up. I mean, Norwegians are not very good at showing emotions ... ”*; and Magalí concluded, saying: *“I'm not good at pretending, that's why I get hurt so often”*.

#### **5.1.3.5 Something “pure, real...”**

In the film, at the bar terrace, I asked Magalí about the day she had the meeting with her former employer of the souvenir shop and went to the underworld. I referred to the fact that she was sad about something and, as can be noticed, she was a bit reticent but decided to talk about the background of that sadness. As she points out in the film, she was not sad about a particular situation or person. Magalí was sad because she felt alone. Concerning what she said at the lake, that relationships are challenging for her; she was sad because she has not had the opportunity to know what it is to have a partner.

Magalí had a relationship that lasted three years, but at all times, she and her partner were *“disconnected.”* Now, in tune with her new lifestyle, Magalí would like to try again. She wants something more stable, but at the same times, she clarifies and manifests her sense of independence. She expressed that: *“I don't depend on a man to act in my life. All the decisions that I have made I have made alone”*. Likewise, she emphasizes the ease of getting in and out of relationships and the lack of commitment; she talked about *liquid love* (Bauman 2003). She said that: *“I consider that I have a lot of love to give... as I told you the first time, to everything, yes, but it is difficult, it is difficult to meet someone outside the environment of the night or the*



*ephemeral*”; and referring to dating apps, she expressed: “*everything here is very Tinder... I have nothing against Tinder or casual sex... but I want something else*”.

The sense of independence, of ‘a life of her own’, is another essential characteristic of her reasoning. We could say that the ideal relationship Magalí wanted to have with her ex-partner was that of a *pure* one. However, her life as a flight attendant and doing what she wanted, according to her, getting off one plane and getting on to another, had obstacles to it. She was very “*absent*” in the lives of others. In her own words: The job as a flight attendant was “*beautiful, but a job in which you are never there for others... it was a price that I have paid*”. In building her old ‘biography’, she could not connect closely to others. Today she wants to correct the defects of the past and to restart. Now that she is 36 years old, she admits that she is doing very well on her own, but having someone close would add to her life. She wants a *pure relationship*, a relationship based on *equality* and *confluent love*. She stated: “*I want connection and reciprocity, that the same things happen to us, wanting to share the same things. That's what I always miss. That's the word, reciprocity*”. She is looking for “*someone with empathy, someone who is not going through the same thing because that is very idyllic; it is a very idyllic conception of love*”. She is looking for something “*pure, real...*”

Magalí had the challenge of continuing to surpass herself on the other side of the world. In Tromsø, she lives in the present but reorients herself in the future. She seeks a job, and she seek emotional stability. She dreams of finding someone with whom to share her time and energy reciprocally. Magalí dreams of returning to Argentina and showing her people coming here has been worth it. In one of our meetings, she told me excitedly that she dreams of returning and hugging them. By then, her grandfather was waiting for her. Unfortunately, now it is too late. Last winter, he passed away.

#### **5.1.4 Tove’s beautiful life thanks to the nation-state**

##### **5.1.4.1 “Is it necessary to struggle so much?”**

One of Tove’s most prominent reasonings is that she has “*a good life*”, she has what she needs, and she is “*a free person*”. Nevertheless, she also highlights that not everything has been easy, that she also went through difficult times. Specifically, she focuses on the period when she left

her job as a nurse in Oslo to follow her husband in developing his career as a doctor in Finnmark and later, in 1974, in Tromsø. Considering that her husband had to work a lot, she spent several years taking care of her *home* (cooking, cleaning) and her children. She was not always “*happy*” with that. According to her, this was the most normal and most expected by women after getting married. In her own words: “*that was a lucky stay for every girl, and I thought: is this the life? Then I think I want to go back to my old life*”. Also, following these words, she refers to her social life. She states: “*talking with women and drinking coffee... no, I didn't think it was so interesting...*”. To a certain extent, her reflection deals with value conflicts that expose frictions in modern individualism and changes from ‘classic modernity’ to a ‘transformed modernity’. Her words glimpse her clash with the traditional value of women as protector and “moral centres of their home” by subordinating their interests to the family (Gullestad 2006: 108). It could be said that Tove was experiencing the shift in the separation between home and the market with the entry of women into the latter (Gullestad 2006). She was a woman who had been encouraged to take education; she was reasoning according to the paradigm of the Norwegian context of the 1970s.

Thirteen years passed before she was able to return to work as a nurse, and it was not easy because of the pressure and the great effort she had to put in to regain her skills and make her best work, as well as the difficulty of reconciling it with her family life. Her retrospective thinking points to the fullness of a social model where competition for success and recognition is essential (2006: 79), but also tremendously exhausting. Tove states that “*life is very good if you have learned a little bit earlier to keep it down. Sure, you have to work and work hard, but could it be a little more down. There have been years where I couldn't do that... Running and Running, and doing... You have to do, and you have to do*”. Likewise, she reflects (huge recommendation): “*Is it necessary to struggle so much? Because you lose so much power when you struggle. Take it a bit easier...*”. Luckily, she had a supportive husband. Through his contacts, he helped her find work at the hospital and learned to cook and take care of the house for when she could not.

#### **5.1.4.2 “We are lucky people in this country”**

Based on the first idea that I had as a project, that is, to interpret life concerning the pandemic, and taking into account that I wanted to work with older people, in a meeting with my tutor, we

agreed that an important topic in which to focus was the sense of belonging. In a pandemic situation, where society is more or less closed down, ordinary spaces for interaction are questioned/challenged. Therefore, it is a time to reflect on the importance of society and community in people's lives. We thought that if I were going to work with a woman over 85 years old, one of the aspects in which I would have to focus would be the presence of the notion of the Norwegian nation-state ('society', 'people', 'the country') in her discourse as a frame of reference.

As a starting point, in my first meetings with Tove, camera in hand, in her kitchen drinking coffee and eating buns, we focused the conversation on the situation in the country in relation to Covid-19. Specifically around quarantine measures taken by the government. My questions made explicit references to the country and the government, and she emphasized both concepts differently and spontaneously.

Tove stresses that her family, friends and she were impressed by the performance of the "politicians", for example, with how well they reported on the situation. She encompasses "politicians" in crisis management and, related to them, expresses her feelings of pride for the institutions and the "the country". In her own words:

"what has been good to see and watch is that politicians from different parties are talking together, trying to find a way together, and not this quarrelling, silly quarrelling that we are used to... I've been talking a lot with friends about what they think of politicians, and they are all impressed by our prime minister and her leaders... As very many of us are saying, we are lucky, we are lucky people in this country. Not too much of the virus... The politicians and the leader of the health service and hospitals have done a very, very good job...".

She certainly trusts politicians. She was a little scared with the situation because she is old, but she thought: "*no, Tove, you have to use your head and think, this is not the beginning of the end. Stay on, struggle, do what they are telling you to do*". Now she is "*very satisfied*". In the film, when she refers that from the age of 80, she began to carry various types of health problems and that, in a tremendously moving way, thought she was dying, she also reflects, valuing the nation-state. She thinks that she has been "*lucky*", that "*we have a very good health service*", that she "*has got help the whole time*". She remarks: "*We are lucky to live in this country because we have the possibility to get help. Sure, it can fail from time to time. That will be normal I suppose, but I think we always will be picked-up*".

Concerning the Covid-19 crisis, Tove also refers to the role of society. In her own words:

We're here, up in the north, apart from Norway too... we have been well safe. But I hope we can learn a bit from it because the daily life of society stopped a bit. It wasn't so difficult for us who are elderly, but naturally, for the younger families, everything changed. The school stopped, the kindergarten stopped... everything had to change, and that wasn't so easy for everyone. But I hope we can learn. Society and the whole of Norway could learn about this time...

We could say that Tove significantly values her life with the nation. Moreover, there is a tendency to link the nation and the local community. The self, the community and the nation "are connected as congruous entities" (Gullestad 2006: 100). Tove emphasizes that the country is struggling a lot because of the labour and business situation. As a pensioner, she says she is lucky and cannot complain, and what she has to do is try to be more helpful to society. She claims that "*As many older are saying, now we have to keep together and struggle together, help each other... We have learned this after the war*". Also, she thought that if she had been young (and here too, we could understand, as a Norwegian), maybe she would help some of the countries with a hard time.

#### **5.1.4.3 "Everybody of us want to be used"**

One of Tove's most outstanding statements is that she has had "luck", she has "*a good life*", that she has what she needs, that she is "*a free person*". She explicitly and implicitly relates it to living in Norway. As an example of that stable and beautiful life that the nation-state makes possible, she refers to her house. She expresses her satisfaction to open the door of her house and enter after a while outside: "*walk into your house... I feel that it's good every time... To have your own house and stay*". Likewise, she says: "*I hope to be able to stay in my house as long as possible, but that we will never know, that can change suddenly*". Furthermore, her well-being also depends on being "in peace" with her family and social life with friends. For her, it is essential to keep the door open and invite people to celebrate, that is, "*for small parties, big parties, talking, drinking good wine...*".

In the film, after Tove explains that her husband died in 2006 and that she felt a bit lonely at first, she says something that she repeats many times. From an individualistic position, she states that living depends on what you want to put into your life and what you would like to do.

On another occasion, for example, she says: *“Whatever you want, there are possibilities, but you have to go, to do it yourself. Don’t wait for others...”*. Her learning and development of the artistic technique of golden leather are because of her impetuous independence and her constant desire for self-realization. Her works of art are beautiful, of great admiration. She has made 24 chairs with golden leather, mainly for her family and children. She started ten years ago and has not stopped since it requires a lot of technique and effort. *“you are never good enough”*. She was travelling to Oslo for a week and a half once or twice a month for 3 or 4 years to learn it. She also teaches her grandchildren and anyone who wants to learn.

The theory of late modernity often gives the impression of being based on rigidity. That is, it exposes changes that have occurred or are about to occur without the possibility of reversal. Through Tove, we can observe the tensions that occur in the transition from one modernity to another. However, through her, it is also possible to observe the traditional moral values of sharing and giving. Her individualism is contrasted with her way of acting, always thinking of the community. We could say that she acts thinking about the collectivity. In the film, we can see how vital the Tromsø Red Cross has been to her. When she retired in 2000, and thanks to her daughter’s encouragement, she started collaborating with the Red Cross on different projects. For the last few years, she has been working with older people planning and organizing activities. They meet once a week to exercise a little, have coffee, eat sandwiches and cakes, but above all, to interact. They also leave Tromsø during the summer to go to dinner or go to the cinema to watch a film, although many fall asleep. For Tove, participating in the Red Cross is a great experience since she has the possibility of being in contact with young people. In addition, emphasizing her values of responsibility, she claims that she has been lucky in that organization because *“they have used [her] for different kinds of work”*. She says: *“I’ve learnt a lot from them, and I could be used, and everybody of us wants to be useful”*.

That same scene, together with the majestic explanation of her unforgettable encounter with the king and the queen, we can interpret it at its maximum splendour, so to speak, that symbiosis between her “self”, the nation and the local community.

## **5.2 A closer consideration, a closer look**

So far, I have tried to summarize the essential aspects of Tove, Elisa, Sunniva, and Magalí’s lives by briefly following Gullestad, the late modernity, individualization and lifestyle

migration theorists. Next, I will focus on specific aspects, deepen the analysis and work on agency and hope through Saba Mahmood, Pedersen and Zigon.

## **5.2.1 Self- making in / with the system and future**

### **5.2.1.1 Between the nation-state and individualization**

As I have described above, Tove always emphasizes that she has had a good life, has been free and has always done what she wanted. However, she also stressed that not everything has been easy. She spoke about the period in which she left her life in Oslo to follow her husband in developing his career in Finnmark and later take over the house and their children in Tromsø. Her words suggest conflicts of values typical of the changes from ‘classical modernity’ to a ‘transforming modernity’ of which Gullestad (2006) and ‘late modernity’ theorists speak (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002...). As a Norwegian woman of the 70s, she wanted to continue developing her career as a nurse and contribute economically to the household. However, her desire clashed with the traditional values of women as ‘moral centres of their home’. We should remember that considering her age (85 years), Tove lived the same childhood as Kari's daughter (the woman whose biography Gullestad analyses) in the 1950s, when a new "conventional wisdom" was emerging contradicting the traditional values of Norwegian society (Gullestad 2006).

If we compare the age of Tove with that of Kari's daughter, we could say that she lived a childhood where the ideal of ‘being oneself’ had become prevalent. Nevertheless, although independence is central in her discourse, she appeals to the collectivity (nation, state, community, family and friends) in times of crisis such as the current pandemic or to value her life. Sometimes the theory of late modernity gives the impression of linear temporality; it gives the impression that things began to change a long time ago without regressions. However, as we have seen with Tove and the other three women, the traditional and modern values and ideals can go back and forward. Tove appeals to the value of finding oneself and, at the same time, to values where the individual is a *social* being (Gullestad 2006).

Making an intergenerational comparison, unlike Tove, in key moments of need to find themselves, in moments of existential crisis, “the social anchoring” of Elisa, Sunniva and

Magalí “becomes conceptually less visible” (2006: 77). We can say that these last three women are feeling stuck. Elisa was not “*happy*” in Italy. She was “*bored*”, and her social life was monotonous. She was always with her ex-boyfriend. She was “tired” of her job, poor working conditions, and living with her family. Sunniva grew weary of the peace of mind that her home and work provide. She got “*tired*” of her passive and conformist state after several years of continuous living in Tromsø. She had stability in a life she was not feeling happy. She feels stuck. She wants to do something different so that when she gets old and looks back, she does not realize that she has not done anything of value, significance for herself/others. Magalí was not “*happy*” in Buenos Aires because of the noise, the pollution and the “*energy*” of the people. Unlike Sunniva and Elisa and, despite the contradictions of wanting to travel, she wanted to stop doing it, at least for a long time. She wanted to stop moving, settle down, and find a job with regular working hours. She wanted to balance herself through a routine out of the aeroplane world. Her travels made her realize that she wanted to try life in a different place that attracted her.

When Tove had to take over her home as a homeworking housewife and wanted to go back to her past as a working independent woman, she was experiencing the shift in the separation between home and market with the entry of women into the latter (Gullestad 2006). Later, when she returned to her nursing profession, she felt the pressure of master both her profession and her work as a housewife in a social model where competition for success was required. The postmodern value of ‘being oneself’ influenced her. Nonetheless, and maybe because of her age, she appeals for a less competitive world through her question: “*Is it necessary to struggle so much?*” Perhaps because of her 85 years or because the changes from ‘classical modernity’ to ‘late modernity’ are not fixed, she appeals to traditional character aspects, so to speak.

When Tove talks about the Covid-19 crisis, she does not place herself at the ‘centre’ as an ‘individual’ (2006: 77), but rather, she emphasizes the role of the country, politicians and institutions. She values her life, values her health, concerning the nation, and links the latter with the local community and her family. We can say that her ‘self’, the nation and the local community form a whole (Gullestad 2006). When Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí talk about changing their lives, ‘being oneself’ is valued, and, consequently, they place themselves at the *centre* as *individuals*. In their speech and actions, independence is significant. It is related to the idea of ‘finding myself’, or in the words of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), “to be the author of [my] own life”, “the creator of an individual identity”, of an own “biography”.

Elisa wanted to discover her 'self' outside of her family and experience a new lifestyle in another country. Somehow, in building her 'identity', she became aware of her situation and where she wanted to go (Taylor 1989, as cited in Giddens 1991: 54). Considering her possibilities, she was *ambitious*, *dreamed* of a *different, more enjoyable* life, and *acted* to achieve it (Bauman 2001: 142). Escaping her "*unhappy*" life in Italy was a momentary solution to her wishes.

Sunniva also wants to reorient her life in another country. In a world where the 'self' has to be "routinely created" (Giddens 1991), she wants to go further and work with other projects. After five years in a row living in Tromsø and having found a permanent job and bought her flat, she is ready to move on again. She has guided her 'actions' through the path of any young Norwegian her age. In a practical sense, these 'actions' have not failed. In an existential sense, they have tied her to routine and boredom. Sunniva has to "attempt new starts" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In building her 'biography', she is thinking of a new destination. She got tired of the monotony in her life, and she wants to 'risk'. However, 'risk' means uncertainty (Bauman 2001), that is, not knowing with certainty what would happen if she leaves her job and if she will not have any inconvenience in paying her mortgage. In her desire to continue finding herself, she is also 'ambitious'. She wants to be "*confused*", less rational and rigid, to stop being shy. Perhaps in a Latin American country, where emotional expressiveness is greater than Scandinavia, she might achieve it. She believes that in Latin America, she can be more inspired and live more a sensorial life than now in Northern Norway.

As for Magalí, she is also continuously negotiating her lifestyle to create her own identity. She dreamed of Tromsø as she was not happy in Buenos Aires, but it is also true that she wanted to stop travelling and wanted a job with regular hours, unlike her job as a flight attendant. She started working on a plane without ever having gotten on one before. It allowed her to visit remote places that she would not have been possible to reach due to the financial situation of her family, due to her social class. Becoming a flight attendant was a triumphant 'action' in her life. However, she had to set new goals and take new paths. We could say that she was ambitious in planning her life in a new country, but now she seeks simplicity.

Elisa also wants to opt for simple options (Bauman 2001: 88). She and Magalí want to settle down, take root in a place and have a normal job. They are looking for simple choices, for a world without mysteries (2001: 88). Instead of opting to take 'risks' and for confusion now in



their lives, they opt for clarity. Nevertheless, what looks and sounds simple is actually not – and vice versa. They invest a lot of energy to achieve it.

### **5.2.1.2 The potential to inhabit the social system and imagined worlds**

Tove explicitly and implicitly relates her “*good life*” to the fact that she lives in Norway. Her life is related to the potentiality of the nation-state and her family and friends. But also to independence. One of her main reasoning is that living depends on yourself, on doing what you set out to do without waiting for others. We could say that her discourse easily slides between the nation-state and independence, without a specific weight on one or the other. Although Tove appeals to a certain individualization, it is also possible to observe the traditional values of sharing and giving (Gullestad 2006) through her. As I pointed out before, she acts with the collective in mind.

Through Tove, we can observe the conceptualization of the kind of agency that Saba Mahmood (2005, 2006) analyzes. That is, agency in relation to acts that promote the moral autonomy of the individual in cooperation with the power, in this case, the nation-state and the local community. The author criticizes the conceptualization of the agency in feminism scholarship as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination. Through her study among faithful female Muslims in Cairo, Egypt, she suggests agency as a capacity for actions that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create. In their constitutions as a subject, these women pursue practices and ideals within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status and seek to cultivate virtues associated with feminine passivity and submissiveness as shyness or modesty. They use spheres previously defined by men for their self-realization and adaptation to modern Egyptian life.

Suppose we follow Mahmood’s analysis connected to Foucault of ethics as practices legitimating change in life, to achieve happiness, and of the individual, as historically formed by norms on which she relies to carry out her transformation (Mahmood 2005). In that case, we can argue that the capacity for agency of Tove is entailed in the multiple ways in which she inhabits norms (Mahmood 2006: 44). In the Norwegian of the 80s, she tried to be a good housewife while trying to develop her career professionally. Currently her discourse, her ethics, is based on the preponderance of government, institutions and society. When she evaluates her life through the nation-state, she is grateful and proud. Her practices, her techniques make sense

within the local community. She is happy with her golden leather artwork, which she produces and teaches to others. The Red Cross is an institution of the utmost importance to her. There she helps and is helped. By participating in the Red Cross, she transformed her life somehow. Being a volunteer there, she is happy. Tove acts and is altered by the norms.

Although sociological theorists of individualization refer to the important role of central institutions in people's constitution as individuals, they place too much emphasis on agency. As I indicated earlier, lifestyle migration has often been analyzed from the perspective of these theorists. However, Benson and Osbaldiston (2016: 411), following O'Reilly (2014), point out that the individual decision to travel free of structural factors is debatable. Similarly, Benson and O'Reilly underscore the paradigm shift toward understanding the interaction between structure and agency (2016: 30). Now, in O'Reilly's effort to develop concepts, she regards to structure and agency as an ontological co-creation. Taking into account this distinction, lifestyle is the imagined style of life after migration and, as such, is a structure (2016: 30). By superimposing Mahmood's understanding of agency on this statement and taking Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí as an example, we could delve into it.

Suppose these three women are culturally shaped through imagined lifestyles upon which they draw to transform their lives and achieve happiness. In that case, their agency capacity is implicated in how they inhabit imagined lifestyles, dreams. Agency and aspirational structures intercommunicate. Elisa and Magalí's discourses are based on the imagination of a lifestyle based on stability. Sunniva's discourse is based on the opposite, on the imagination of a lifestyle centre on unpredictable adventures. Their potential, their agency is governed by the different ways in which they live those desires.

Lifestyles are also social imaginaries, that is, individual or shared ideas influenced, for example, about landscapes (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 30). The general idea of a place and its appeal responds to social constructions that influence the style of life that a person imagines having in that place. A concrete example of it is the case of Magalí. Let us remember that she had recurring dreams for almost a year about the geography and meteorological phenomena of the north of Norway, perhaps influenced by shared ideas about its similarity with Ushuaia, Argentina.

Apart from the imagined lifestyle, apart from the aspirations in another country as a structure, In Sunniva and Magalí, we can find other factors that intercommunicate with agency. We can

conceptualize agency framed within the limits of the 'binary model of subordination and subversion' that Mahmood (2006) questions through the case of Elisa and Magalí. Elisa resisted a poor-quality work system that made her live with her family. Magalí resisted a declining political and economic system that subjugated her life and that of her family. However, she also found ways within this system to inhabit it. Thanks to the airline's companies where she worked, she led a better life within it by travelling the world in her spare time. In Sunniva's case, this intercommunication between agency and system can be seen in the central role played by the bank, the State and society in the purchase of her house, and other institutions such as the Red Cross and different NGOs in Tromsø and abroad. In Sunniva's ethics, in her discourse and practice, all these entities have been fundamental in transforming her life.

## **5.2.2 From hope**

### **5.2.2.1 The constant leap toward new futures**

Similar to Pedersen (2012) I would like to consider Tove, Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí as “jumpers into new futures”. According to Kleist and Jansen, “[m]uch inspiration for the anthropological study of hope can therefore be drawn from writings that do not explicitly work under the rubric of hope...” (2016: 380).

As I have hinted before, Elisa's attitude were sometimes negative. We could say (speculate) that during her stay in Tromsø, she maintained a presentist or even “fatalistic” attitude. If we follow Bourdieu (2000, as cited in Pedersen 2012), we could say that she kept her practical sense of creating realistic perspectives on her future abeyance. It is true that here she was not happy because of her work situation, lack of friends, the houses where she lived, the break with her ex-boyfriend and the situation with the pandemic. However, she was also sceptical because she was not happy with the surroundings and even people. She did not like it in the city, and she was conditioned by the polar night, the cold and the snow. Her negativity showed even in her constant repetition of words like “*bored*” or “*tired*”.

Sunniva's attitude to life is totally different. She is positive and optimistic, but she also complains about her conformist attitude after getting her steady job and buying her house. Apart from having her family here, her work and home have tied her to Tromsø. They have given her

much stability. In the last few years, she has felt very comfortable, but now she needs to get out. However, although she has felt stuck, she has found it challenging to make decisions to get her out of that situation, decisions to change the monotony of her life. In a way, could we say that she has maintained a certain degree of presentist attitude recently? Her stable situation with a permanent home and job while still dreaming of going somewhere would define her as ambiguous.

The declaration of 'living in the present' is made clearly and forcefully by Magalí. She never says that she is bored or tired but is always "searching". She constantly emphasized a presentist attitude as she lost her job and could not visit her family because of the Virus. "[*To be in the present*]", visiting the surroundings of Tromsø and being in contact with nature and her friends was her position during the summer. However, perhaps due to her social condition and Argentina's political and economic context, it is a strong postulate constantly present in her discourse. "[*To be in the present*]" is related to structural factors that conditioned her life and that, in turn, did her act, made her go out and travel the world. Her presentist attitude is combined with her travelling character. In other words, live in the moment, live the adventure. Although perhaps also with her need to settle in a place and find a standard job and a stable partner, the same that perhaps would also happen with Elisa. Her desire of being in a specific place, without too many complications and living day by day.

Going beyond the presentist attitude of these women, if I have come this far analysing it, it is for a single and straightforward reason. It is to detail that, "[I]ike a sort of [...] trampoliner", Elisa, Sunniva, Magalí and even Tove are "constantly leaping into new futures, 'pre-experiencing' what has not yet happened" (Pedersen 2012: 144). A good job, a house, a romantic or pure relationship, a life in South America. When Magalí talks to old Magalí in the museum, it is an example of a concrete moment when she jumps into the future, or perhaps into the future of the future. That old Magalí has taken care of herself; she kept herself well. That old Magalí continues thinking about tomorrow, In the same way Tove does, wanting to continue living for a long time, as she states in the last part of the scene in the kitchen of her house after talking about her health problems. These four women don't have a concrete plan, but they are always hoping.

'Living in the present' is not the same that 'living for the moment'. That is what Magalí refers. Following Pedersen, living for the moment the four women "[exalt] awareness of the virtual potentials in the present – the tiny but innumerable cracks through which the promise of

another world shines” (2016: 145). What they do is practice hope as a method (Miyazaki 2006). They *reimagine* their present from what is to come.

### **5.2.2.2 Hope as a way of life, as the need to persevere**

Zigon (2009) can see how the Russian proverb "you can put your hopes in God, but you still have to act" articulates the hope of many of his interlocutors. “For as the proverb suggests, one can indeed have hope in God, and in doing so remain, for the most part, passive” (2009: 259). According to Zigon, this passivity can be understood as “the background attitude that allows for the nonconscious sociality of everyday life” (2009: 259). That is, the ‘temporal structure of unreflective being-in-the world’. Tove can serve as a clear example of this type of hope when she, tender and moving, indicates in the film that maybe she is dying, that maybe suddenly she dies, and she wants to live. The hope to live as long as possible depends on one to a certain extent: how one takes care of oneself with the food that one consumes or the physical exercise that one does, for example. It is in the hands of destiny. Let us also remember Tove's satisfaction when she returns to her house after some time away from it and her “*hope*” of being able to live there as long as possible. Nevertheless Zigon also refer that “even in this most abstract of all hopes... one must perform some actions...” (2009: 259), for example, in the case to believe in God, prayer.

Tove always says that living depends on yourself, what you want to bring into your life, what you would like to do. Her development of the artistic technique of making golden leather is an example of this claim. She went to great lengths to learn something that she was inspired by, even having to travel to Oslo for several years. The same we could say of her participation in the Red Cross. Both art and volunteerism were a great encouragement to her after the death of her husband. If we consider her impetus to stay active, we could say that her hope is not based on a single objective or act, it is not only ‘the temporal orientation of action in moments’. But is it the same for Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí?

Before, inspired by Pedersen (2012), I have spoken of a certain presentist attitude in them. However, this was to emphasize that, considering that ‘living in the present’ is not the same that ‘living for the moment’, they, as well as Tove, are constantly jumping into new futures. If they are frequently *reimagining* their present from the future, is because their hopes are not grounded on a single goal. Taking into account Zigon, “Hope is also a way of life; it is the need

to persevere” (Zigon 2009: 260). That is also what we can say that hope is for the women of this project, ‘a way of life’, ‘persevere’. I strongly wish that it is understood in this way.

### **5.2.2.3 Hope for oneself and hope with and for others**

For his analysis, Zigon exposes the case of Irina, a 26-year-old theater actress who had recently moved to Moscow from a small city in central Russia. Her story could help us shed some light on Elisa story. In the author's own words (2009: 260):

Irina had experienced much recent hardship. Her experiences of being far from home in a large, demanding, and at times, unforgiving city, her general lack of success in finding work in the theater, and her recent separation from her boyfriend would be enough, so it would seem, to leave her disheartened.

Irina’s hopes, according to Zigon, are ‘contingent’ on others. The author emphasizes factors beyond her potential as a person, of her agency. He affirms that “[h]ope is not centered on the individual will [...], but is instead, [...] a social relationship imbued with shifting levels of power” (2009: 261).

Apart from other case, the author highlights that “Irina’s focus on the necessity of individual’s working on [herself] to realize [her] hopes [...] clearly has cultural and historical roots” (2009: 261). In the same way, we could say that in Norway, the Western society and other parts of the world in general, there have been social and cultural changes associated with a transformation from a classic modernity to another; in Soviet society, there was a project to build a New Soviet Man based on the Orthodox tradition of working on the self (Kharkhordin 1999, as cited in Zigon 2009: 261). According to Zigon, it is this connection between hope and working on the self that helps many of his informants to live their live as best they can despite their personal difficulties and the social context of contemporary Russia (2009: 261). Something similar to what happens with Elisa and Magalí in relation to their respective contexts. In moments of existential crisis, Elisa’s idea of independence and its relationship with ‘finding herself’ by going to live abroad was and is linked to her monotonous life, the need to live outside her family and the precarious Italian employment situation. In the second case, Magalí hope to have ‘a life of her own’ travelling the world and coming to live in Tromsø is related to her tired life in Buenos Aires and an Argentine economic-political system in crisis

that complicated her life and that of her family. In crucial moments of need to find themselves, in moments of hope, “the social anchoring” of Elisa and Magalí is less “visible” (Gullestad 2006). Nonetheless, their hope is also related to factors external to their capacity to transform their lives.

Zigon reaffirms that hope does not only consist of perseverance but also of an effort, of activity to maintain perseverance. The author, appearing to borrow Badiou's concept, also speaks of ‘fidelity’. He states that hope for his Muscovite interlocutors “is the fidelity to the social life trajectory on which one finds oneself” (2009: 262). Moreover, having into account the case of Elisa and Magalí, we can say that it is fidelity to the social life on which one wants to find oneself. Of course, the Norwegian socio-cultural context of Sunniva is completely different from that of Elisa and Magalí. Apart from independence, another Norwegian value has influenced her: the need to have her own house. In her case, we can say that the link between hope and self-realization through the purchase of an apartment has been an essential factor in the development of her life, and it is in relation to the possibilities that the Norwegian state and the banking system offer to young people like her.

Tove appeals to individualization. However, also to traditional values of sharing and giving, we can say, to live well, to be hopeful. In her case, there is no doubt that the relationship between her hope and the responsibility to be of use is narrowly in tune with the Norwegian Nation-state. Tove's self-realization is based on being helpful and helped by society and institutions such as the Red Cross that, at the same time, put her in contact with other institutions such as royalty, for example. Concerning the Soviet project, apart from an individual effort to work on oneself to become a proper socialist person, it is necessary “to participate in the collective hope of realizing socialism in one country” (2009: 261) . That is what Tove does, to participate in the collective hope, clearly, through the Red Cross, to promote the excellent functioning and spirit of the nation.

Pedersen distinguishes two different conceptions of hope in his informants from Ulaanbaatar. The first is “passive, introspective, and essentially individualistic” (2012: 146). Although it is indeed cognitive, although it has no place within the social world, could be assimilated to the hope of Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí. We could say that they practice a kind of individualistic hope — a kind of hope concerning one’s good. The second involves action with and – through – other people, that is, a kind of hope that is entirely social. In the author own words, “hope clearly is something that must continually be put into the world through a concerted and

collective effort” (2012: 146) . This second kind of hope could be assimilated to Tove – a hope concerning to others – but also to the other women. For example, Magalí is learning to climb, hoping something will happen in this collectivity, in addition to the climbing itself.

#### **5.2.2.4 The vibrant energy of trying to live well in the world**

Zigon highlights that the difficulties that his Muscovite informants go through, as in the case of Irina, took some socio-economic form in their narratives. For this reason, and we can extrapolate it to Elisa and Magalí, hope was often about aspects such as family, a reference that is, according to him, an expression of hope for “stability”. In the case of Elisa, as I have been saying, her hope is to start a family and settle down in some place. She hopes to have a job with a normal salary and a common life with a partner, with a *romantic love*. She hopes with a kind of traditional values, we could say, with collective hope, perhaps, result of the same process of individualization. On the other hand, Magalí hopes with similar aspects. After dedicating herself to travelling, in a way, to overcome the conditioning factors of her country, she seeks routine, to settle down and a *pure* and *confluent* relationship.

As Zigon affirms “hope is born out of the socio-historic-cultural, as well as the personal, condition of struggle. If for Magalí and Elisa, according to the social context of their respective countries, hope is related to stability in a position they don’t have/they are searching for; for Sunniva, it is related to get rid of the feeling of being stuck, and to Tove to her having good days, with her family, within the local community (where she still is useful) and within the frame of the nation-state. Let us remember that Mahmood and her conceptualization of agency inspire Zigon. Through the perspective of both authors, the hope, the agency, of Magalí and Elisa is framed in the different ways in which they inhabit a stable life. In Sunniva, it is framed in how she inhabits a lifestyle based on the unpredictable. In Tove, in how she inhabits the collectivity.

Hope for Zigon's informants is necessary to live through bad times (2009: 262). However, concerning this project and taking into account the stable Norwegian socio-economic and political context, we can say that hope is also related to living the good times. Likewise, the author stresses that in moments of moral breakdowns, whether they are related to the social context or for personal reasons, active hope allows one to live-through it and return to the state of persistent hope.



In the case of Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí, we could identify their feeling of being stuck as a moral breakdown. Elisa was not happy in Milan, and neither was she in Tromsø. Sunniva grew tired of her comfortable and secure life with her job and apartment. Magalí was not happy in Buenos Aires, and she got tired of airplanes. In Tove, we can identify three critical moments of moral breakdown. The first, when she had to take over her home and childcare and wanted to go back to her past as an independent woman. The second when her husband died, and she had to get used to his loss. The third, from the age of eighty, when she began to carry different diseases and realized how close death was. Hopefully, Elisa went out to discover herself far from her country and family, explored Tromsø, did not like it, and came back with new plans and ideas. Sunniva began to get inspired by going back to photography and applying for different projects in South America. Magalí, inspired by the social imaginary about Tromsø, left everything in Argentina, and here she makes her life. Tove endured her life as a homemaker for 13 years until she returned to her nursing profession. When her husband died, art and volunteering were her new alternatives. When she got sick, in response, as comfort, she thanked the universe, or the nation-state and the local community. Emphasizing Zigon's postulate, in moments of moral breakdown, the temporal orientation of intentional reflective ethical action allows one to return to the temporal structure of the background attitude that allows for living sane life in a specific social world, or, as I said before, the social world to which one appeal.

In the author own words, “[a]s the unreflective temporal structure, the background attitude, of being-in-the-world, hope is revealed as that striving-toward the not-yet-but-expected of the promised socio-historic-cultural ideal” (2009: 267). Although I will say also, of the socio-historical-cultural ideal that is imagined, dreamed. In a way, hope in another hope. Magalí wanted to live in Tromsø, she has succeeded. Now she has hope, she perseveres in a stable life that at the same time hopes that Norway will bring her. Zigon states that the promise ideals are not utopias, as other authors suggest (Bloch 1996 [1959], Havery 2000, as cited in Zigon 2009: 267). Rather in mundane aspects such as family or a career, that is, stability. Following Talal Asad (2003), he points out that “hope as the unreflective temporal structure of being-in-the-world is the temporality for living a sane life” (2009: 267). It is what Elisa, Sunniva, Magalí and Tove wanted to tell me through this project, in front of or off-camera. It is what, from the depths of their being and with vibrant energy, they try every day: to live sanely.

# Happiness

Independence plays a fundamental role in Tove's discourse. However, after appealing to it, she emphasizes her moral values of responsibility and acting for and with the local community. In presenting herself, she ties in with the idea of being there for society and shows a strong sense of trust in it. Concerning both exceptional moments such as that caused by a pandemic and evaluating her in general life, Tove appeals to the country, the people and the Norwegian institutions. In her moral reasoning, she underlines how she feels being part of a nation-state she trusts.

Unlike Tove's practices and discourses in which she is a social being, in moments of existential crisis, the social anchoring of Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí is less visible. Tove, with the collectivity, and Sunniva and Magalí, in a way, individually, have found ways to inhabit their social context. Tove being a volunteer, learning and teaching her artistic technique; Sunniva being a member and working for NGOs with her own house; and Magalí working for airlines and travelling the world. Elisa resists Italian working and economic conditions, but she finds ways to escape.

Depending on the socio-historical and political-economic system to which they belong personal conditions, the search for self-realization is based on a large repertoire of options than it seems Tove and her generation had. In moments of existential crisis in which Elisa, Sunniva and Elisa feel stuck, they try to find a way out. They want to go abroad. Sunniva's desire to live in a tropical country is based on her language and professional skills and experiences – facts that are also related to the educational and employment possibilities she has had as a Norwegian. Nevertheless, it also depends on the monotony and conformism to which her steady job and apartment tie her. Now she wants to go on a new adventure into the unknown. She wants to be confused in a Latin American country where emotional expressiveness is laxer. Magalí's philosophy of living in the present is related to the Argentine crisis context that has conditioned her and her family. To work as a flight attendant was a triumphant action in her life, but now she is looking for simple choices, for a more stable life. She got tired of moving around, and not having stable relations with others. Now she seeks a normal work schedule and routine. Even though she contradicts herself sometimes, she wishes to put down roots in a specific place. In the case of Elisa, she wanted to live abroad because she got tired of her boring life in Italy, but also because of the economic context and low job quality, which, in turn, condition

her possibility of independence. The two women from countries with lower quality of life standards than the Norwegian and whose moral and existential dimensions to emigrate are related not only to the search for astonishing natural landscapes but also to economic factors, are looking for a less complex world. The other one, who has her own home and stable job, is ambitious, in the sense that she has a lot, but it is not enough. She needs something completely different.

As we have seen in Elisa, taking directions and changing life in a foreign country carries its risks. Lifestyle migration can fail, and failures are the responsibility of each person. However, this is also an apprenticeship. After her experience in Tromsø, her conviction of having a good life in Italy seems strong. She plans to find a good job and romantic love with whom to create a family. Magalí also, in tune with her pursuit of a stable life in Norway, looks for a pure relationship. Moreover, in Sunniva's case, a partner would complicate her independence and desire to live abroad.

It must be said that these women's choices are also based on age and conception of maturity. Elisa and Magalí consider that they are at the right age for a relationship based on commitment. Sunniva, to have a new experience elsewhere before she grows old, and it is too late. Likewise, it is very relative to what extent individualization weakens or reinforces the value of love and intimacy today. What we could say is that, in the case of Elisa, the Italian economic context makes independence difficult and perhaps leads to the longing/search for a partner with whom to be successful in that aspect.

Living in the present is not the same that living for the moment. Here I have tried to explain that Tove, Elisa, Magalí and Sunniva live for the moment they are constantly jumping into new futures. They practice hope as a method. They constantly reimagine their present from the future. Their hopes are not based on a single goal. In and concerning the socio-economic and political context in which they live or hope to live, they persist in living the best as possible. Like a beating heart, these women touch the future as a way of living. Otherwise, what is it to constantly dream of a life in South America? What does it mean but to dream of having your own home, a good job and a person by your side who loves you? What does it mean to long for a tomorrow like a day before so you can see your children, grandchildren, and friends?

According to the social context of their respective countries, For Magalí and Elisa, hope is relating with self-realization through stability; for Sunniva with getting out of her comfort zone

and finding herself in a country with a warmer climate and another ambience; and for Tove with having good days with her family, local community and within the frame of the nation-state. The collectivity, a stable life or life of plenty adventures abroad, condition these women's lives respectively. Their hope, their agency is framed in the different ways in which they inhabit these worlds.

In moments of moral breakdowns, whether related to their social context or for personal reason, active hope allows the four women to live-through it and return to the temporal structure of the background attitude of being-in-the-world. As the temporal structure, hope is revealed as that striving-forward the not-yet-but-expected of the promised socio-historic-cultural ideal and the socio-historical-cultural ideal that is imagined, dreamed. The ideals of stability; life now and when one reaches old age in a warmer country; or to live as long as possible while being helpful for the country are ideals of persistent hope that allows for living a sane life. It is what profoundly gives meaning and vigour to the lives of Tove, Elisa, Sunniva and Magalí. It is what, from the depths of their being, these women strive every day: to live sanely. That is what Tove and Magalí refer to specifically at the end of *“Let me hug you!”*, where they are drinking coffee:

- Tove: Maybe suddenly you’ll find someone...
- Magalí: I hope so, I hope so. I’m open to that possibility
- Tove: Live your life the best as you can. You don’t need a man, but it’s nice to have a man, at least as a friend
- Magalí: Special friend!!!

In a nutshell, to live sanely means living well both mentally and physically. It is about personal well-being based on physical, mental or emotional pleasures, among other aspects. It is about enjoyment with someone or a group of people who understand, joy or balance. It is about happiness.

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