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Imagining the Future:
A Sociocultural Psychological Study of Im/Mobilities in and
around Suðuroy

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Le doyen
Louis de Saussure

To **Lilja, Jesper,** and the **dinosaurs+**

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Abstract

The imagination enables individuals and societies to give form to the unknowable future and guide efforts in the present. Sociocultural psychological models of the imagination focus on abstract semiotic processes but situate them in tangible material and social initiatives. Moreover, just as imagination develops over time, so it does across, between, and in relation to spaces; that is, through and in contact with im/mobilities. I expand on attempts to introduce an im/mobility perspective to the study of the imagination by exploring how the latter is generative of, transformed in, and govern the former. While migration and im/mobility studies have identified the future's importance, they have primarily done so in a migration-centric and static manner, which lends further impetus to proposing a dynamic model. I adopt a sociocultural psychological perspective that assumes psychological development cannot be dissociated from sociocultural context. I present a case study centred on the Faroese island of Suðuroy characterised by what I describe as emptying. Based on participant observations, qualitative interviews, and extensive desk research, I explore the interaction between imagination and im/mobility at the interface between sociogenesis and ontogenesis. First, I identify several initiatives—conceptualised as technologies of the imagination—that address the emptying. Such initiatives engender sedentariness and stimulate mobilities, both of which became manifest in population and tourism increases from approximately 2013, though with uneven effects that create external synchronisation but internal desynchronisation. Second, I focus on the villages of Vágur and Suðuroy, where the emptying is accentuated by the wider societal transformation. I demonstrate how localised initiatives aim to synchronise and signal a hopeful future. Third, using a sub-sea tunnel's potential construction as an example, I illustrate how forces impinging on the imagination are refracted through people's experiences and positions. Fourth, I follow people's im/mobility trajectories, arguing that the entanglements of im/mobility depend on dynamic imaginings of the future. I conclude that technologies of the imagination ground the study in concrete initiatives and show the ways the relations between temporalities are altered, and I propose that imagination as a form of governmentality that shapes regimes of im/mobilities.

Keywords: Imagination, Im/mobility, Sociocultural Psychology, Future, Ethnography, Qualitative Studies, Life-Course

Résumé

L'imagination permet aux individus et aux sociétés de donner une forme au futur incertain et de guider leurs pratiques et discours dans le présent. Les modèles psychologiques socioculturels de l'imagination se concentrent sur des processus sémiotiques abstraits, mais les situent dans des initiatives matérielles et sociales tangibles. De plus, l'imagination se développe non seulement dans le temps, mais également à travers, entre et en relation avec les espaces, c'est-à-dire par le biais et en contact des im/mobilités. Dans cette dissertation, je poursuis les tentatives d'articulation d'une perspective d'im/mobilité avec l'étude de l'imagination en explorant comment cette dernière génère, transforme, et gouverne la première. Bien que les études sur la migration et l'im/mobilité aient identifié l'importance de l'avenir, elles l'ont principalement fait d'une manière statique et centrée sur la migration, ce qui incite à proposer un modèle dynamique. J'adopte une perspective psychologique socioculturelle qui suppose que le développement psychologique ne peut être dissocié du contexte social et culturel. Je présente une étude de cas axée sur l'île féroïenne de Suðuroy caractérisée par ce que je qualifie de *emptying* (vidage). Sur la base d'observations participantes, d'entretiens qualitatifs et d'une recherche documentaire approfondie, j'explore l'interaction entre l'imagination et l'im/mobilité à l'interface entre sociogenèse et ontogenèse. Tout d'abord, j'identifie plusieurs initiatives — conceptualisées comme des *technologies de l'imagination* — qui abordent la question du *emptying*. Ces initiatives engendrent la sédentarité et stimulent les mobilités, toutes deux devenues manifestes dans l'augmentation de la population et du tourisme depuis 2013 environ, mais avec des effets inégaux qui créent une synchronisation externe et une désynchronisation interne. Ensuite, je me concentre sur les villages de Vágur et Suðuroy dans lesquels le *emptying* est accentué par une transformation sociétale plus large. Je démontre comment les initiatives locales visent à synchroniser et à signaler un avenir prometteur. Puis, en utilisant la construction potentielle d'un tunnel sous-marin comme exemple, j'illustre comment les forces qui influencent l'imagination sont réfractées par les différentes expériences et positionnements individuels. Enfin, je suis les trajectoires d'im/mobilité des personnes, en argumentant que les enchevêtrements d'im/mobilité dépendent des imaginaires dynamiques du futur. Je conclus que les technologies de l'imagination ancrent cette étude dans des initiatives concrètes et montrent les différentes manières dont les

relations entre les temporalités sont modifiées, et je propose que l'imagination soit une forme de gouvernementalité qui façonne les régimes d'im/mobilité.

Mots-clés : Imagination, im/mobilité, psychologie socioculturelle, futur, ethnographie, études qualitatives, parcours de vie.

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Introduction

I first met Einar at a retirement banquet honouring the (now former) director of the local hospital. The event was being held at Seglloftið (literally translated as “the sail loft”)—one of the oldest buildings in the village. When we walked upstairs, a man with dark-framed glasses and white hair stood ready to greet us in a loose, dark blue suit. We were in a rectangular room with exposed wooden beams and a wooden floor that showed signs of use. Chains of small LED lights decorated the beams. At the far end of the room, a long buffet table covered in a white cloth presented a variety of finger food in front of a bar packed with beers, juice, and wine. The table’s bounty included salmon rolls with cream cheese, figs wrapped in bacon, and snack-sized bread with either salmon or smoked sheep. Along the wall to the left, another buffet table stood with coffee, tea, three cakes, crackers, and miniature doughnuts. There was a small stage covered in a pattern carpet at the other side of the room. Round tables were scattered around the room’s centre. We were among the first to arrive because a person from one of the bands playing had given us a lift, and he had to be there early to set up. We sat down at a table close to the stage. Soon after, a steady flow of people from all generations started to arrive, though I suspect those above 50 were overrepresented. People wore shirts and polished shoes. The venue filled quickly, and several people had to stand. The friend who had bought us explained who most people were. A horn orchestra played a couple of songs, after which a person from the municipality acted as toastmaster and welcomed everyone. People went to try the food, and a line formed while speeches and various short performances from local bands continued. Even the current health minister gave a speech. The food was great, although I must admit that fermented sheep is an acquired taste. At some point, our friend pointed to an elderly man sitting at the edge of the crowd with bright white hair and large framed glasses and said: “You must talk to him”. She explained that he had always lived on the island. This was the first time I met Einar and, in many ways, this meeting became instrumental to how this thesis materialised. As detailed elsewhere (Pedersen, n.d.; Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021), Einar is now 94 years old and, as he often jokingly reminded us, has never lived more than 500 metres from where he was born in Tvøroyri—a village on the island of Suðuroy. During Einar’s upbringing in the 1930s and 1940s, the island underwent tremendous socioeconomic and technological transformations. Diverse and entangled im/mobilities shaped the island, most of them

relating to the burgeoning industrial fisheries that positioned Suðuroy as one of the “powerhouses” of the Faroese microcosmos at the time (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). Though his family had limited means, Einar recalled his childhood and adolescence fondly and, throughout his life, continuously reaffirmed his decision to stay (Hjälmm, 2014). The world was figuratively arriving at his doorstep due to the influx of people, technologies, and ideas (Cresswell, 2006), signalling a hopeful future ahead. He described Tvøroyri as a young and lively village in which religious dogma carried less weight compared to other villages in the Faroes. Anglers and merchants from near and far moved through the village, and people from other villages came to work. Einar started working as a customs officer when the Faroes gained home rule in 1949 and nourished his imagination through contact with various forms of mobilities, developing an ability to explore the world without moving in space. High mobility in and around the island, combined with it being an epicentre of societal transformation, engendered the imagination of a sedentary future. That is, the imagination of staying is desirable. Einar also lived through various societal crises (Pedersen, n.d.) that produced the flight of both people and capital due to the future being increasingly thought of as located elsewhere—a phenomenon I characterise as emptying (Dzenovska, 2018). Nonetheless, he chose to stay because of his stable socioeconomic position and close affective ties to Suðuroy and the people inhabiting it. Einar only briefly contemplated leaving when the fishing sector went bottom-up in the 1990s. The emptying in the Faroe Islands and on Suðuroy grew exorbitantly in the post-crises period, challenging people’s hope in the future. Einar eventually decided to stay and ride out the storm because of his age and the fact that his brothers also remained on the island. However, since the early 2010s, the Faroe Islands have witnessed steady population growth comparable in several ways to Einar’s feeling of the world coming to him. I therefore set out to explore factors that drove this societal transformation and explore its unevenness, emphasising the role of imagination.

Einar’s story and im/mobility trajectory foreshadow many of the theoretical and analytical points I raise throughout this thesis. His story and trajectory also establish an interesting link between past and present. Indeed, they demonstrate how changing social and material circumstances transform imaginations (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b) and im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) by changing the temporal relations that can prevent imagining sedentary futures. Einar’s story further

epitomises how the imagined futures that both guide and are transformed by im/mobility practices are always situated and dynamic. I therefore aim to explore the future with reference to the concrete conditions and power structures that constantly impinge on and alter what is imaginable—elements largely absent from the sociocultural psychological model’s focus on abstract semiotic processes.

Imagination, particularly of the future, is ubiquitous in politics (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018), travel advertisements (Salazar, 2011a), social movements (Hawlina et al., 2020), infrastructures (Larkin, 2013), and people’s im/mobility (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020). It is always perspectival (Glăveanu, 2018a), although not everyone can be agents of the future (Pels, 2015)—an aspect that is evident in totalitarian regimes’ attempts to funnel the available cultural elements used in the process of imagination (Marková, 2017), or when violent institutional structures fix people in uncertainty (Griffiths, 2014; Lindberg & Edwards, 2021). While some futures are silenced, others are promoted. Examples are plentiful. Consider Extinction Rebellion or Greta Thunberg’s now-famous words at the UN: “You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words”¹. Climate activists are driven by a dystopian future that uses scientific evidence to imagine the unhindered continuation of irreversible mass extinctions caused by neoliberal fantasies of infinite growth on a finite planet. However, climate activists’ imagined alternatives are silenced by ideas of “green growth” or “technological fixes”. Despite growing social movements worldwide, calls for fairer and sustainable distribution systems are diluted or suppressed by structurally and institutionally entrenched interests. Futures are always contested. The climate crisis illustrates that imaginings of the future are never equal but have multiple vectors of power and that separate temporalities can clash. By extension, I also propose that the regimes of im/mobilities differentiating who can move and how (Charmillot, 2021; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) also function through the imagination, making questions of the future an instrument of governmentality (Bröckling et al., 2010; Hage, 2009b; Rose et al., 2006). Migration (e.g., Carling & Schewel, 2018; Chambers, 2018; Pine, 2014) and im/mobility (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020; Salazar, 2011a; Schrooten et al., 2016) have linked forms of human movement in space with (imagined) futures, predominantly through the concept of imaginaries

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>

(Salazar, 2020). Mobility is often romanticised and assumed to bring about better futures (Salazar, 2021b), but people do not possess the same right to “aspire” (Ellis, 2018). For example, temporality can govern people in detention centres (Griffiths, 2013) or Kafkaesque bureaucracies (Cwerner, 2004; Eule et al., 2019), with direct implications for how people imagine the future. Rundell proposes that “We all wait for futures—yet not for the same ones, nor in the same way, nor at the same tempo” (2009, p. 51). Some are made to “wait” for the future (Hage, 2009a; Jacobsen & Karlsen, 2020) or have it outright stolen (Khosravi, 2018). Imagined futures are a pertinent research subject because they guide people, societies, and im/mobilities while prompting questions concerning who can imagine what, on which social and material basis, and according to which temporalities. I am particularly interested in the forces that impinge on the imagination and how it relates to people’s im/mobility.

A plethora of epistemologically incompatible definitions of what constitutes the imagination have emerged over millennia (Abraham, 2020a; Stevenson, 2003). Such definitions range from the more cognitive and individualistic accounts that define imagination as filling a gap in human perception (e.g., Pelaprat & Cole, 2011) or as a maladjustment to reality (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) to sociocultural psychological models that conceptualise imagination as a process that expands people’s experience (Vygotsky, 2004; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013). Philosophers have debated whether imagination is dissociated with or anchored within a paramount “reality” (Kind, 2016), and the consensus remains indecisive at best. However, I am less interested in redrawing the lines of what constitutes the imagination. Rather, I intend to build on the existing sociocultural psychological model using interpretations and insights from related social scientific fields.

While the outputs or externalisations of the imagination are omnipresent, the actual process is elusive because it is psychological (Zittoun, 2015c). This raises the question of how to study the imagination when it is not directly observable. Following others (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b), I focus on externalisation and the symbolic resources feeding the process. I concentrate on instances of the imagination’s actualisation in speech, art, writing, infrastructure (Larkin, 2013), political projects (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018), and im/mobilities (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020). However, I add a new angle by considering the “construction” of these symbolic resources through the concept of

technologies of the imagination. This entails situating the imagination in the context of people's experiences. I relied on abductive reasoning and the integration of various methods to theorise the imagination and its interaction with im/mobility. First, abductive reasoning reflected my commitment to seeking the optimal possible theoretical explanations while maintaining a constant dialogue with emergent ideas, different strands of literature, the people I spoke to, and my (changing) interests. Second, integration provided a means of holistically capturing and analysing the imagination from different angles. Specifically, I conducted 30+ qualitative interviews, one year of recurrent participant observation, and a substantial quantity of desk research. In other words, I identify salient and often contested imaginings in and around the island of Suðuroy through different modalities. This enabled an exploration of people's imaginations—using imagined futures as an indicator—in relation to societal transformation and personal experiences over time and across space.

NCCR – on the move's doctoral school constituted an important source of dialogue that introduced me to the fundamentals of migration and im/mobility research. I worked in an interdisciplinary team tasked with studying mobilities on the “outskirts” of Europe. Instead of categorising people and their im/mobility or defining a place *a priori*, we did not want to assume the “where” and “who” but made defining these part of the research objectives (Charmillot & Pedersen, n.d.). However, as I discuss later, we started from several indistinct theoretical orientations (imagination, boundaries, im/mobilities). Identifying as a sociocultural psychologist also demanded establishing a dialogue between largely separate fields. As Glăveanu states:

What a mobilities focus would require of the discipline [psychology], though, is not only to see its themes of research in movement, but as constituted by movement. And this is where psychology in particular, with its largely static, abstract and universalistic focus, has difficulties adopting ontologies based on states of flux, transformation, and the role of context. (2020, p. 187)

Sociocultural psychology's *raison d'état* is to study developments, which several claim occur in irreversible time (Valsiner, 1994; Zittoun et al., 2013). The field intends to break away from attempting to map the universals that preoccupy psychology more generally in favour of studying processes—a point that resonates with mobility

scholars' advocacy of a so-called "nomadic metaphysics" (Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2007). However, the research on imagination and im/mobility from a more processual perspective remains scarce, albeit with certain noteworthy exceptions (e.g., Cangià & Zittoun, 2020; Zittoun & Levitan, 2019). Through this thesis, I argue that integrating insights from im/mobility studies can widen the analytical scope of sociocultural psychology by nurturing a sensitivity to the entanglement of im/mobilities and power relations. Migration and im/mobility have undergone a so-called "temporal turn" (Bhatia & Canning, 2021; Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths et al., 2013) and studies of the future in the present have proliferated. However, the dynamic process of the imagination and its potential developmental impact have not been central. I therefore propose a bridge between the two perspectives. Furthermore, sociocultural psychological studies on the imagination have largely focused on abstract processes and the symbolic resources that nourish them. However, I seek to situate the imagination more firmly within the sociocultural and material circumstances that condition and impinge upon it. Based on these points, three questions structure this thesis:

- i. How does the interaction between imagination and im/mobility unfold over time and in changing contexts?
- ii. How do different social, material, and symbolic initiatives alter the relation between the imagination and im/mobility?
- iii. How is the imagination generative of and transformed along people's im/mobility trajectories?

The first question is transversal. The second is more specific to Chapters 4 to 6. The third is the focal question of Chapter 7. Admittedly, while I intend to address these questions, they were not defined before the start of the research but evolved continually (Valsiner, 2014b). The specific context of the Faroe Islands, Suðuroy, and the people I met were decisive factors in this regard.

I was already interested in how people imagined the future before this project started but had little concept of how that might relate to the Faroese context—a place I had only visited once many years ago in elementary school. However, the memories of different modes of mobility remained with me, particularly a ferry ride with tables and

chairs sliding from side to side, drives standing on the back of a pickup truck, and rolling down a grass-covered mountainside dodging sheep excrement, several classmates not as agile as I. Only much later did I realise that Suðuroy was the island I visited back then. Located in the middle of the North Atlantic, the Faroe Islands are a self-governing nation within the Danish realm: a relation with a complex and sometimes strained geopolitical and colonial past (Hovgaard & Ackrén, 2017; Kočí & Baar, 2021; Sølvará, 2003). The population hovered below 50,000 inhabitants until around 2013, when it began steadily increasing to the extent of crossing an almost mythical threshold. Whereas economic prosperity undoubtedly played a role, I illustrate that this sudden change was largely prompted by initiatives that widened the imaginable, enhanced synchronisation, and instilled hope in the future.

Driving around the islands in a white Honda with a spoiler alongside my colleague, Emmanuel Charmillot, we attempted to establish a “base camp”, ultimately deciding on the village of Tvøroyri on Suðuroy. We were initially drawn by the island’s geographical isolation and the growing socioeconomic and demographic disparity indicated by the relevant statistics. Tvøroyri was the natural choice because it is the primary mobility hub of the island. The ferry docks in the fjord and the village had multiple points of access (cafes, sports clubs, etc.). Choosing Tvøroyri and Suðuroy shaped the question we asked more generally. For example, descriptions of a decades-long process of emptying and the island’s primary route to the “mainland” being a ferry named Smyríl became paramount to understanding whether people could imagine a future on the island. Simultaneously, the choice also underscored the necessity of exploring the frequently debated initiatives aimed at countering emptying. Moreover, the rapid socioeconomic and demographic transformations that had swept the Faroe Islands over the previous seven to 10 years accentuated the relative sense of emptying on Suðuroy. These circumstances produced divergent and politicised imaginings of the island’s future. Some advocated extending past and present into the future (Ringel, 2014b), while others actively sought a break with the past to embrace uncertainty. People engaged in time tricking (Ringel, 2016b) that was intended to alter the relation between temporalities (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017). I grew interested in the forces that impinged on people’s imaginations and how these forces might refract based on experiences and positions. An example of this is how the promise of greater connectivity could manifest in people’s imaginations if Smyríl is replaced with a sub-

sea tunnel. I had little knowledge of how infrastructure entangles with politics and promotes some futures at the expense of others. I ventured to investigate after hearing the contestations related to a possible sub-sea tunnel and what to build more generally. Studying imagination “in the wild” and without a clear emphasis demands an openness to imaginings of the future that are salient to specific contexts and examining how such imaginings change over time. In many ways, this thesis resembles what Ringel calls an “ethnography of the future” (2018, p. 7), placing the future at centre stage.

I divided this thesis into three major sections. The first section (Chapters 1 to 3) elaborates on the theoretical, methodological, and contextual points of departure. The second section (Chapters 4 to 6) embeds the imagination in sociocultural and material initiatives, exploring how these impinge on the process and produce uneven imaginative effects. The third section (Chapter 7) explores how the imagination unfolds in and along people’s im/mobility trajectories, with reference to the conditions discussed in Section 2. In Chapter 1, I present the general epistemological approach and theoretical cadre. First, I define the sociocultural psychological principles. Second, I introduce its model of the imagination and the “mobility paradigm” (Sheller & Urry, 2006) to permit the synthesis proposed at the end. Chapter 2 details the methodological framework in two steps. First, I elaborate on the abductive reasoning that permeated the entire research process before justifying why the methodological design facilitated an integration of methods appropriate for studying the imagination. Second, I share an account of the improvisational messiness that inevitably characterises studies of a more ethnographic nature and conclude with several reflections on ethics. Chapter 3 provides an eclectic account of the Faroese context (past and present) that centres on Suðuroy’s changing geopolitical and economic position in the Faroes and beyond. I present a brief and general historical overview of the circumstances that led to the island becoming a “developmental centre”. Subsequently, I elaborate on three periods that are emblematic of the slow relative emptying. Chapter 4 explores several of the initiatives that helped instigate the socioeconomic and demographic growth that reversed what I characterise as emptying. I identify four constituents of emptying (material, social, symbolic, and temporal) in the Faroes in the early 2010s and show how different technologies of the imagination countered emptying, if unevenly, and engendered sedentary futures.

Chapter 5 probes how Suðuroy's position in the wider Faroese transformation and external synchronisation accentuate the present relational emptying, creating a desynchronisation that locates the future elsewhere. I then examine how localised initiatives in the village of Vágur aim to synchronise with what is happening in the Faroes more generally. Chapter 6 examines how Suðuroy's inhabitants relate to technologies of the imagination, using the prospect of replacing Smyríl with a sub-sea tunnel as a case in point. I propose four ways in which promised futures manifest in people's imaginations, arguing that imaginative effects are always refracted through people's unique experiences and positions. Chapter 7 follows five trajectories and traces the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility as it unfolds over time and space. I identify five possible modes of interaction and suggest that imagined futures are important to many forms of im/mobility and are often expressed in the oscillation between staying and being stuck. Chapter 8 concludes by offering several theoretical and methodological openings for studying imagination on the move and contains a final return to Einar to explore the connection between his youth and the present circumstances.

1. Imagination and Im/mobility

No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simply escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labour and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 3)

Appadurai argued that imagination is becoming more central with globalisation due to the increasing circulation of people and media images. This echoes Vygotsky's line: "Every act of imagination starts with this accumulation of experience. All else being equal, the richer the experience, the richer the act of imagination" (1931, p. 15). However, from a sociocultural standpoint, the imagination has always been important and does not categorically proliferate—it depends on people's circumstances and unique trajectories. What might have changed is that, for those with the means to do so, faster and cheaper mobility is progressively becoming an instrument to actualise imagined futures elsewhere in order to locate or bring an elsewhere closer (Ringel, n.d.).

In this chapter, I describe the sociocultural psychological axioms and theoretical propositions that have guided me over the previous three years. I first elaborate on the ontological and epistemological lens shared by most sociocultural psychologies before presenting a discussion of and justification for researching the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility. I have chosen to write this chapter in meta-theoretical terms. Instead of providing an exhaustive theoretical expose, I define the core concepts and highlight their complementarities. Later, when relevant, I introduce additional literature that helps me explore specific aspects. This decision was taken because most of the chapters focus on different elements of the interaction and compiling all the ideas and arguments in just one chapter would disrupt the flow of the analysis.

1.1. Sociocultural Psychology

I situate this work within the field loosely labelled sociocultural psychologies, also drawing on anthropology, geography, sociology, and im/mobility studies. As with any

social categorisation (Gillespie et al., 2012), sociocultural psychology encompasses a wide array of approaches and scrutinises a broad range of phenomena (Rosa & Valsiner, 2018b), each with complex genealogies (Farr, 1996). Most are, however, unified by the axiom that people and their sociocultural environments are irrevocably intertwined and co-constitutive (Cole, 1996; Jovchelovitch, 2007; Marková, 2016; Marková et al., 2020; Rosa & Valsiner, 2018a; Valsiner, 2007). This fundamental interdependence creates a bi-directional relation. Cultures provide people with resources supporting and facilitating psychological development while people simultaneously maintain and generate these cultures through enactment (Bruner, 1990; Valsiner, 2014). Simply put, cultures cannot exist without people, and people cannot exist or develop without cultures. Conceptualisations of cultures have been notoriously murky (Jahoda, 2012) and static (Ferguson & Gupta, 1997). However, as Valsiner (2014b) emphasises, a sociocultural psychological perspective does not characterise cultures as static entities subtly guiding people’s conduct through manipulating invisible strings. Instead, cultures are viewed as processes maintained and transformed by people. While I am not concerned with cultures as such, this argument more generally means that people do not develop in a vacuum but in dialogue with social others and specific contexts.

The sociocultural nature of human development is abundantly clear in the work of Vygotsky and Mead—two scholars whose concepts (imagination and perspective taking respectively) feature later in the thesis. Vygotsky’s (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994; 1978) first law of development states that all higher mental functions are “first culturally acquired through interaction with others and then internalised as thought” (Thompson, 2020, p. 3). Mead’s (1934b) quest to understand the emergence of consciousness and self-reflection provides another example. He assumed that all people have divergent perspectives and proposed that “becoming other to oneself” is central to self-reflection. The key to unravelling this process is found in the social act (Gillespie, 2005). This insight led neo-Meadian scholars to develop the notion of position exchange, which differentiates between perspectives and positions (Gillespie, 2006a). They claim that, through changing social positions, as epitomised by play (Gillespie, 2006b), people learn to take the perspective of the Other on the Self, which is the genesis of self-reflection (Gillespie, 2005; Martin & Gillespie, 2010). In short,

psychological and developmental processes, including imagination, are rooted in the sociocultural world—a point I return to.

This dynamic interdependence between people and the sociocultural context simultaneously enables and constrains developmental processes. Norms or cultural guidance represent cases in point (Cabra, 2021; Valsiner, 2018). Some actions are encouraged while others are sanctioned. The objective of sociocultural psychological studies is therefore: “To understand how people develop and act within their sociocultural environment, the dynamics by which the social and cultural becomes psychological, and the dynamics by which people transform their social and cultural world” (Zittoun, 2016, p. 7).

1.2. Four Pragmatic Assumptions

Moving on from the more general assumptions that define most sociocultural psychologies, I want to specify four additional axioms that have pragmatically informed my epistemological and analytical approach: People’s lives are unique, exist in different temporalities, are always oriented towards the future, and continuously develop. These elements were not chosen to establish an unassailable philosophical system but to make sense of what I heard and observed during my time on Suđuroy. These four assumptions did not precede the analysis but emerged in the research process and are therefore important to clarify for the sake of later propositions.

First, I ascribe to the notion that there is a degree of uniqueness to people’s lives and experiences (e.g. Zittoun, 2016; Zittoun et al., 2013). Admittedly, I still struggle to accept this idea because it has a somewhat humanistic ring, and I want to avoid equating uniqueness with related concepts such as freedom or individualism. Nevertheless, this assumption was necessary to capture the instances when the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility varied considerably according to people’s unique experiences and circumstances. I utilise the notion of uniqueness to emphasise that everyone goes through life having different experiences, social networks, socioeconomic opportunities, and im/mobility trajectories. As a result, people make sense of their experiences or imagine their futures idiosyncratically, which the analysis must inevitably account for. The assumption of uniqueness does not simply mean that people always can or will imagine their futures in unique ways—

this would indeed be a rather rose-coloured perspective. Instead, the symbolic resources used in the imagination are embedded in normative streams, cultural guidance, materialities, socioeconomic systems, and power relations that impinge on which are used and how. Symbolic resources are defined as: “are cultural elements (i.e., created by people and loaded with meaning) that become resources in the process of being used by people to act upon the world, another person or themselves” (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2013, p. 1). For example, through exerting strict control over cultural elements and severely punishing any form of dissidence, totalitarian regimes have been demonstrated to actively promote some imaginations while demoting or even outright forbidding others (Marková, 2017).

Second, I redirect attention away from the idea presupposed in certain sociocultural models that development materialises in irreversible time (Valsiner, 1994) because it tends to ignore temporalities as an analytical category. Borrowing from related disciplines, I argue that people experience time according to different temporalities (Adam, 1995, 2022) that are relational (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017), operate at distinct scales and tempos (Sharma, 2014), and are subject to chronopolitics (Cwerner, 2004; Jacobsen & Karlsen, 2020; Mills, 2020). Temporalities are sociocultural constructs that are shaped by seasons (Robins, 2009), infrastructure (Harvey, 2018), border technologies (Sontowski, 2018), neoliberal restructuring (Ringel, 2018), detention officers (Lindberg & Edwards, 2021), immigration regimes (Griffiths, 2014), ferries (Vannini, 2012), and bureaucracies (Eule et al., 2019). I therefore propose to distinguish time from temporality—see section [1.3.1.1](#). This requires asking how temporalities are constructed, what their relation is to other temporalities, what they do, how they are experienced, and for whom (Pedersen, n.d.). The succession and content can be altered (Ringel, 2016b). This distinction between time and temporality expands the sociocultural model of the imagination by highlighting the experiences and constructions of time in specific contexts. Temporalities are important organising forces of people’s imaginations and im/mobilities, and people live, maintain, and navigate distinct and occasionally contested temporalities that not everyone is equally a part of.

Third, people live oriented toward the future (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). Therefore, imagined futures are essential to how people make sense of the present, guide their

actions, understand their pasts (Brescó de Luna, 2017; de Saint-Laurent, 2018), and decide on im/mobility (Zittoun, 2020). If people simply existed in the immediate “present”, their experience could be compared to a lost and drifting boat at sea with little concept of where it came from or where it was heading. Hence, echoing others, I argue that imagined futures are crucial to understanding what drives people and societies (Hawlina et al., 2020), including under what circumstances they transform. Imagination is a generative and productive force. When the imagined future is impeded, people might experience their lives as being disrupted or stuck (Cangià, 2020), which can accelerate people’s mobility (Dzenovska, 2018; Hage, 2009b). Orientations toward the future are therefore ubiquitous and range from when people plan their next holiday to imagining what will happen if politicians do not listen to Greta Thunberg’s pleas.

Fourth, people develop throughout their lives (Zittoun, 2016; Zittoun et al., 2013). The above contention is opposed by several psychologists’ and sociologists’ tendencies to conceptualize development as following either certain stages (e.g. Erikson, 1980; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) or normative and non-normative transitions (e.g. Elder et al., 2003; Elder & Giele, 2009), which I return to in Chapter 7. The developmental perspective emanating from sociocultural psychology departs from preconceived or fixed stages or transitions (see Zittoun, 2012, 2016). Rather, this approach seeks to study development as it happens across the life course. Development is considered a qualitative and dynamic transformation happening within the sociocultural and material contexts (Josephs & Valsiner, 2007; Valsiner, 2014). This can be triggered when people move through time and space (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013), when they encounter alterity (Gillespie et al., 2012), or experience ruptures (Hawlina & Zittoun, n.d.; Zittoun, 2006). I follow others who propose that the imagination is a dynamic developmental process (Zittoun, 2013; Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015). I use imagined futures as an indication—however imperfect—of development based on the assumption that a changed relation to the future represents a qualitative change in people’s relation to the world, others, and im/mobility practices. This suggestion also corroborates the more processual epistemology outlined, as people’s imaginations evolve in time and space in relation to their unique and changing circumstances.

These assumptions naturally have epistemological implications for how I study the relationship between imagination and im/mobility—both sociogenetically as well as ontogenetically. The development of the person and their sociocultural context are described as interdependent and dynamic, making it impossible to study and theorise without accounting for the interaction between both perspectives; that is, combining the first- and third-person perspectives (Zittoun et al., n.d.-b). Furthermore, because development is assumed to occur continually, it is vital to incorporate a longitudinal dimension to capture the qualitative transformations. Psychological phenomena are dynamic and must be studied as such (Valsiner, 2017), and I follow an idiographic logic that focuses on the local and unique meanings in contrast to the universals (Molenaar, 2004; Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010). Development is therefore viewed as a change that are not additive.

Altogether, I conceive people as co-constituting the sociocultural world, which, in turn, is the precondition for all forms of development. People develop throughout their life courses, and I conceive imagination as a meta-theoretical and analytical tool to explore and theorise how developmental processes transpire over time and space, in specific contexts with multiple temporalities, and always oriented towards the future.

1.3. Defining the Imagination

A person who imagines some future event is not doing something useless. Just the contrary—imagining potential future events makes it possible to strive towards them, or—in the case of adverse imaginary events—to try to avoid them. When imagination is orientated towards the future it becomes a project or an intention. (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 3)

On the one hand, imagination may function to preserve an order. In this case the function of the imagination is to stage a process of identification that mirrors the order. Imagination has the appearance here of a picture. On the other hand, though, imagination may have a disruptive function; it may work as a breakthrough. Its image in this case is productive, an imagining of something else, the elsewhere. (Ricoeur, 2015, pp. 265–266)

Imagination is the germination of individual and collective futures and maintains or disrupts what “exists”. The concept’s genealogy stretches all the way back to the ancient Greek philosophers and remains highly polyphonic even today (Abraham, 2020; Stevenson, 2003). Providing an exhaustive philosophical or theoretical account

is beyond the scope of this thesis, although I position myself in opposition to those conceptualisations that sharply dissociate the imagination from “reality”. Others have provided an overview of the many perspectives on the imagination in philosophy (Furlong, 1961/2002; Jørgensen, 2018; Kind, 2016; Liao & Szabó Gendler, 2011) and psychology (Abraham, 2020; Pelaprat & Cole, 2011; Singer & Singer, 2005; Taylor, 2013; Wagoner et al., 2017). To be pragmatic, I only present some of the major debates concerning the definition of imagination and instead focus on the sociocultural psychology model (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). Consequently, I propose several aspects that allow the current sociocultural psychological model to be advanced further. I then elaborate on what constitutes im/mobility and discuss how it relates to the imagination.

As both quotes indicate, imagination can be understood as a fundamental generative process that serves to both maintain or transform people’s lives and societies. Philosophically, one of the principal debates *vis-à-vis* the definition of the imagination pertains to whether it is reproductive or productive (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). The reproductive interpretation gained legitimisation from Descartes, who suggested that the imagination is a mental capacity for reproducing images in the mind (Sepper, 2016). Descartes further argued that the faculty of reason trumps the imagination. Zittoun and Gillespie (2016) propose that Descartes’ claim shaped how several figures within psychology came to perceive and define the imagination. This perspective characterises the imagination as a means of reproducing images of that which exists “out there” but which is currently absent. This perspective gave primacy to reason, foreshadowing several of more cognitive interpretations that see imagination as a precursor to reason (e.g., Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). The productive interpretation gained momentum in recent times and is associated with Vico (Tateo, 2015; Zittoun, 2015), who proposed that the imagination is central to making sense of the world, granting it an epistemic function. Vico is at times attributed with “unleashing” the imagination from being simply a reproductive faculty, meaning that it also transforms the sociocultural and material world. Sartre (1936/2012.) also shared this perspective and proposed that the imagination is what enables people to escape the immediacy of the “present”, thus linking the process to freedom and agency. This does not mean that the imagination is a wholly positive force and cannot be exploited to oppress; for example, through Othering (Glăveanu & de Saint-Laurent, 2018) or manufacturing a

cruel optimism in which blind hope for a better future prevents any meaningful actions towards transforming the present conditions (Berlant, 2012). This brief overview highlights three continuums regarding the imagination: Productive to reproductive, positive to negative, and free to imposed.

Cartesian dualisms still exert a hold over psychological definitions of the imagination, often conceptualising it “as an individual cognitive phenomena” (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b, p. 18). For example, neuroscientists have proposed that the brain combines previous experiences to project forward in time, knotting together imagination and memory (Schacter et al., 2017). Among cognitive approaches, there seems to be a consensus that the imagination represents a means through which “we transcend time, place, and/or circumstance to think about what might have been, plan and anticipate the future, create fictional worlds, and consider alternatives to the actual experiences of our lives” (Taylor, 2013, p. 3). This is exemplified in Byrne’s (2018) idea of the rational imagination and Bogdan’s (2013) mind vaulting. Byrne has proposed that the imagination and reason are not as distinct as often assumed. Instead, the former must be viewed as an integral part of the latter. She claims that the imagination is an essential mechanism for creating counterfactuals (“what-if” scenarios), which represent alternatives to the present that inform “rational” decision-making. Bogdan has suggested that the imagination is the paradigmatic example of mind vaulting, which is defined as equivalent to an escape from current circumstances. Bogdan further proposed that the imagination is also important for the development of other faculties. He argued that the imagination emerges as the child begins to face sociopolitical pressures in kindergarten and later in school, which both offers and necessitates a space for rehearsals. Although both models share the assumption that the imagination is potentially productive and expansive (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013), neither theorise in relation to the process itself and tend to lose sight of the specificities of the sociocultural environment (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b).

Moreover, scholars have also provided different accounts of the developmental function of the imagination. Piaget (1952) has proposed that the imagination represents a maladjustment to “reality” that occurs before the child masters other forms of thinking—what Zittoun and Gillespie (2016b) have called a “deficit model”. Singer and Singer have explored the link between the sociocultural environment and

the development of the imagination primarily in children and through focusing on play (1990, 2005). According to them, the imagination develops in early childhood and is first embodied in pretence before subsequently manifesting in more complex forms of symbolic play (Singer & Singer, 1990). They conceived the imagination as being nourished by cultural objects (e.g., books, films, TV series, computer games), as a productive force participating in the development and construction of the future, and guided by adults through recognition (Singer & Singer, 2005). While their approach is indeed compatible with the sociocultural psychological model, Singer and Singer primarily focused on children (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b) and espoused a hint of normativity in terms of the symbolic resources they studied. The seminal work of Vygotsky (1931) also primarily focused on children and adolescence; however, he added that the imagination is continuously differentiated throughout life.

While imagination therefore occurs in a sociocultural context and in relation to others, it can simultaneously transform these contexts and relations. This leads to the question: What is it that develops? While I explore this question throughout the analysis, I chose to focus on changes to imagined futures because such changes are indicators of development if one accepts that people are guided by the future and use it to make sense of their present and steer their im/mobility. Vygotsky's model forms the basis of the sociocultural psychological model that I elaborate on in the subsequent section, which Zittoun and Gillespie has called the "recursive approach" because "the outcomes of imagination feed forward into the individuals' relations with other people and things, which in turn feeds forward into future imagining" (2016b, p. 95).

1.3.1. The Sociocultural Psychological Model

Sociocultural psychology offers a dynamic model of the imagination, and I use this model as a meta-theoretical frame throughout the thesis to understand how people construe and engage with the future. In doing so, I build on the idea that it is paramount to combine the first- and third-person perspectives. Imagination is defined as a psychological process that cannot be studied without reference to the context in which it occurs and how it unfolds over time. This model builds on Vygotsky's (1931) proposition that the imagination is a developmental, productive, and generative process that expands people's experiences (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013). Through the imagination, people can enlarge their immediate experience and potentially trigger

developmental processes. For example, cultural elements such as books, films, and the experiences of others are transformed into symbolic resources when used to imagine bygone times, distant places, or alternative lives—times or places that have not necessarily been directly experienced (Vygotsky, 2004). Vygotsky also recognised that the outputs of the imagination can be instrumental in generating additional imaginings. The imagination is a creative and combinatorial activity in which people synthesise past experiences into new ones. Vygotsky outlines four aspects of imagination: it always draws on “reality”, it contributes to the construction of complex phenomena, it has a bi-directional relation to emotion, and its outputs can take material form and transform “reality” (Vygotsky, 1931). In their book, *Imagination in Human and Cultural Development*, Zittoun and Gillespie (2016b) further systematise Vygotsky’s ideas and characterise the imagination as a recursive process through which people can travel “back and forth in time”:

Imagination, we propose, is the process of creating experiences that escape the immediate setting, which allows exploring the past or future, present possibilities or even impossibilities. Imagination feeds on a wide range of experiences people have of, or through the cultural world, through diverse senses, now combined, organized and integrated into new forms. Imagination can either be more or less deliberate; it can be enjoyed in itself (such as in a daydream) or be part of a more deliberative process of creation. Imagination is a process, in the sense that it only exists in the making, which we call a looping dynamic. In other words, we are not interested in an abstract capability for imagination that exists independently of the real-time process of imagining, or in the stable outputs of imagination sometimes called “the imaginary”. Imagination, we maintain, is a social and cultural process, because, although it is always individuals who imagine, the process of imagination is made possible by social and cultural artefacts, it can be socially allowed or constrained, and because the consequences of imagination can be significant changes in the social world. (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016, p. 2)

Zittoun and Gillespie dissociate the imagination from people’s capabilities to imagine and the more stable (social) imaginaries that nonetheless inform what and how people imagine (Salazar, 2020). Using the “loop” as a metaphor (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b), they argue that the imagination enables people (or collectives) to temporarily disengage from the present or “proximal sphere of experience” to a “distal sphere of experience” before looping back into the immediacy and constraints of the present. I prefer to consider the imagination an expansion of experience because a “loop” implies a break with the “present”. I also wish to explore the imagination’s sociocultural and material grounding. Further, Zittoun and Gillespie (2016b) propose that the process of

the imagination is a temporal sequence instigated by a trigger, nourished by various resources (cultural artefacts, social representations, social others, etc.), and characterised by different outcomes. They propose three dimensions to discern the content of the imagination: Temporal, abstraction, and plausibility. First, the temporal dimension reflects the idea that people can “travel in time”, such as when they revisit childhood memories, explore possible futures, or simply conjure up alternatives to the present. Second, the abstraction dimension refers to how concrete a given imagination is. For example, imagining taking a swim in the lake outside my office is almost palpable, whereas imagining the scope of and possible solutions to the climate crisis is highly abstract and relies on resources dislodged from my personal experience. Third, the plausibility dimension denotes how credible an imagination is in not only material or technological terms (e.g., imagining whether interstellar space travel was plausible) but also according to sociocultural, moral, economic, and political conditions. Some imaginations are deemed plausible while others are considered implausible. Imagination is also contingent upon social recognition (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015).

On the level of the person (the ontogenetical level), sociocultural psychological research on life course has explored the role of the imagination (e.g., Hviid & Villadsen, 2015; Märtsin, 2019; Zittoun et al., 2013). This strand of research proposes that imagination is a developmental process that guides people (Zittoun, 2016), allows them to creatively imagine alternatives to what exists (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016a), offers potential new life paths (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015), and provides a degree of freedom from situational constraints (Zittoun, 2012). However, the imagination is simultaneously anchored in the sociocultural and material world, so any potential developments are inevitably grounded. The role of imagination has also been studied in relation to ruptures and transitions (Zittoun, 2006; Zittoun et al., 2003); for instance, when longitudinally following the diarist, June, and her experiences during the Second World War (Gillespie et al., 2008; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018b). The power of the imagination along people’s life courses is also exemplified in the studies of migration (Salazar, 2014) or decisions to stay (Mata-Codesal, 2018; Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). On the level of societies (the sociogenetic level), the imagination is a key mechanism producing, maintaining, and ultimately transforming the very fabric of societies (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018; Hawlina et al., 2020; Zittoun & Gillespie,

2016b, 2018a). Scholars across several disciplines have underscored this point: Vygotsky (1931) and Castoriadis (1987) have proposed that societies are imaginatively instituted (see also Adams, 2011), Anderson (2006) has suggested a concept of imagined communities, and Taylor (2002; see also Gaonkar, 2002) has advanced a notion of social imaginaries. While others have mapped the differences and similarities between several of these notions in considerable detail (e.g. Adams et al., 2015; Strauss, 2006), it suffices to state that imagination can make and break societies—a useful example is utopias (Jovchelovitch & Hawlina, 2018; Levitas, 2013). Ricoeur (2015) has similarly pointed to the fact that the imagination can be reproductive and productive for societies. Glăveanu (2018) has further proposed that collective futures are perspectival and imagined in relation to other futures and differentiates between futures imagined for others, futures imagined with others, and futures imagined towards others. This point hints at something I explore later, namely that futures are embroiled in power relations and can act as invisibilising and exclusionary forces. Another paradigmatic example is social movements (Hawlina et al., 2020), which can be motivated by imagining more prosperous and fairer futures (Power, 2018, 2020) or the avoidance of dystopian and catastrophic futures (Milkoreit, 2017). According to de Saint-Laurent et al. (2018), collective imaginations are directly related to collective action, the construction of identities, collective memory, and what is possible and impossible. Imagination is a psychological process that guides life courses and defines the realm of possibility (Glăveanu, 2018b; Zittoun et al., 2020). However, it is also a process that cannot be understood or separated from the more stable and resilient products of the imagination, such as imagined communities or social imaginaries, which establish a frame for what people can and should imagine.

Although I still find the sociocultural psychological model of the imagination both theoretically convincing and practically useful, I nonetheless encountered several “translation” issues when I conducted the analysis. Perhaps the most important of such issues is what I have decided to call the black box of the imagination. That is, the question concerning why some imaginations lead to action (e.g., decisions related to im/mobility) while others do not. Focusing just on the processes and their “inputs” (symbolic resources) makes the analysis overly abstract and directs analytical attention away from the more stable elements of the imagination, power relations in terms of the construction and selection of “inputs”, tangible barriers to its actualisation, and social

and affective components. In the following sections, I propose three tentative extensions to the sociocultural psychological model—temporalities, sociomaterial reality, and affectivity—to better account for people’s imaginative capacities, including how these develop and how people tend towards different futures. The time I spent on Suðuroy triggered these proposed extensions and represents an aim to theorise changing power relations and uneven imaginative possibilities.

1.3.1.1. *Beyond Time*

Imagination is defined as unfolding in the flow of irreversible time from the position of the present or what is sometimes referred to as the “here-and-now”. The process of the imagination is described as that which enables people to transcend immediacy and engage in a form of psychological time travel (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013); however, with the emphasis on the process and its capacity for escaping the irreversible flow of time, the sociocultural nature of temporalities is often backgrounded. I propose to include temporalities as an analytically important dimension instead of taking time for granted, which can produce a dichotomisation of “physical” and “psychological” time and therefore neglect questions concerning the experience, construction, and maintenance of temporalities. Along with much scientific literature and what can arguably be termed the dominant temporal regime at present, I view time as following a succession from the past into the future (Ringel, 2016b)—as Munn writes, “we and our productions are in some sense always “in” time”” (1992, p. 94). Time is commonly assumed to flow in one direction. However, I argue for the necessity of an analytical vocabulary sufficient to exploring how this succession is experienced and potentially manipulated—I therefore distinguish time from temporalities. Temporalities are plentiful, socioculturally and materially constructed, and relational. Moreover, the content and experience of their succession can be manipulated (Ringel, 2016b). Adding temporalities to the analytical lens situates the process of the imagination more firmly in the context and opens a new avenue for exploring how multiple temporalities impinge on the imagination. I decided to add this dimension after realising I needed to account for how societal transformation and dynamic relations between places impinged unevenly on the imagination. Temporalities enhance contextual sensitivity and the prospect of accounting for both chronopolitics and negotiations, elements which are crucial to understanding the Faroese context.

Zittoun and Gillespie write that imagination entails “disengaging from the here-and-now of a proximal experience, which is submitted to causality and temporal linearity, to explore, or engage with alternative, distal experiences, which are not submitted to linear or causal temporality” (2016b, p. 40). With reference to Sartre (1940), they proceed to argue that disengagement represents a form of freedom and agency, defined by “acting based on what does not, or does not yet, exist” (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b, p. 53). I conceive agency as people’s attempts and abilities to actualise an imagined future (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b, p. 53). Imagination can beget possibility, and the future can thereby conspicuously become the site of people’s “hopes and fears” (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b, p. 113). For example, deciding to leave an island, commuting to find work, taking “recharging” vacations, or staying all reflect an act of agency in relation to the future manifesting in people’s im/mobility. Moreover, Zittoun and Gillespie (2016b) distinguish the type of agency related to steering the actual process of imagination from the agency related to pursuing a certain course of action based on the outcomes of the imagination. In addition to simply directing their actions in trying to actualise an imagined future, people can also act in an agentic manner towards temporalities; that is, “modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down or structure the times they are living in” (Moroşanu & Ringel, 2016, p. 17). Ringel (2016b) calls this manipulation of temporal succession “temporal agency”. As I later demonstrate, the effect of technologies of the imagination can be to transform the relations between temporalities and reflect the constant tension between structure and agency.

While I agree that the “not yet” plays an important developmental role and that people can act upon something that does not yet exist, I want to go beyond ideas of the natural (and causal) flow of physical time. I explore how temporalities are relationally formed, contested, and maintained in specific contexts with reference to the imagination. This focus does not directly contest the idea of irreversibility. Rather, it reverts the analytical approach to more accurately explain the sociocultural construction of temporalities—in the plural—because not everyone shares the same experience of time’s flow, and this difference impacts their imagination. Does time always pass at the same speed for everyone? Can time be divorced from space? Einstein famously relativised time, proposing that its flow cannot be divorced from space, which, in sociocultural psychological terms, would mean that temporality and temporal experiences must also be situated. The “translation” issue arises from superimposing a philosophically and

theoretically coherent system that arbitrarily ignores temporalities, sacrificing certain contextual nuances and divergent experiences that sociocultural psychology otherwise praises itself for including. Linearity is perhaps the most dominant of the “third-person” temporalities; however, it is not the only one. Naturalising assumptions leave little room for exploring the sociocultural construction and embeddedness of temporalities, which Munn argues against, since: “spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be disentangled” (1992, p. 94).

The central pillar of sociocultural psychology is the exploration of unique experiences. Is it then feasible to ignore temporalities based on a philosophical system that does not consider how temporalities are constructed and experienced? I want to reanimate time and further explore how temporalities are situated (Sharma, 2014) and relational (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017). I also intend to demonstrate how such temporalities are filtered through people’s experiences. Several sociocultural psychologists have advocated for a different conceptualisation of time and temporality. For instance, Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of chronotopes has been employed as an analytical tool to situate experiences and psychological phenomena firmly within specific time-space constellations (Marková & Novaes, 2019). However, temporality remains a relatively unexplored dimension.

In related fields, it is no notable innovation to investigate the production, maintenance, contestation, and entanglement of temporalities, including how these shape (and are shaped by) people’s experiences (Adam, 1995; Bear, 2016b, 2016a; Gell, 1992; Munn, 1992). When focusing on time, there is a risk of disregarding the power inequalities that are present in temporalities as forms of governmentality or in terms of chronopolitics (Ahmann, 2018; Jacobsen & Karlsen, 2020; Sharma, 2014). Studies have mapped how temporalities can act as instruments of control (Eule et al., 2019); for instance, through accelerating and deaccelerating bureaucratic procedures (Cwerner, 2004). This question of power and inequalities is embodied in Hage’s question of “Who waits for whom?” (2009a, p. 2) and Griffith’s studies of rejected asylum-seekers whose temporal experience is purposefully contorted due to “the lack of control that [they] (and immigration detainees in particular) have over their own time” (2014, p. 2002). Such experiences create a myriad of temporal manifestations that include time being frenzied, sticky, out of sync, and wasted (Eule et al., 2019;

Griffiths, 2014). States actively govern temporalities through bordering and procedures (Bhatia & Canning, 2021; Khosravi, 2018; Lindberg & Edwards, 2021) or their allocation of capital and resources (Dzenovska, 2020; Ringel, 2018). Drawing inspiration from other fields, I propose that different temporalities produce distinct modalities of and capabilities for the imagination. How temporalities are constructed, lived, controlled, or, in some cases, stolen eventually impacts how and what people can imagine—or whether they can imagine at all. Therefore, moving beyond a fixed time to insert the imagination into multiple and contested temporalities arguably increases analytical sensitivity to the sociocultural and material world and connects with people’s capacity to imagine. Furthermore, defining temporalities as sociocultural constructs also enables an exploration of what role im/mobilities play in the process of (de)synchronisation.

1.3.1.2. Situating the Imagination

Another aspect of the model I address is the imagination’s relation to the sociocultural and material context, specifically the application of the loop metaphor. The semiotic-oriented approach tends to be rather abstract, and I therefore attempt to situate the process in the concrete—from ferries, swimming pools, fish processing plants, material deterioration to tourists in the streets and new sidewalks. If the imagination is defined as a somewhat momentary escape and is simultaneously nourished, guided, and constrained by resources partially originating in the very present it leaves behind, then can it be dissociated from what “exists” and people’s capacities for imagining? For example, access to cultural elements is contingent upon unique experiences and people’s position in the world. Zittoun and Gillespie write that imagination:

[...] can be enabled and constrained by the uses of cultural resources that variously awaken, channel and enrich a person’s imagination. Second, some specific imaginations might be seen as socially or morally inadequate; certain political, scientific or erotic imaginations might thus be condemned in a given social group. (2016b, p. 201)

This centres the relationship between people and their contexts and raises questions about what Liao and Gendler (2011) have called “imaginative resistance”; that is, when an individual faces difficulties engaging “in some sort of prompted imaginative activity” (2011, p. 84), which can be produced by the layers of the imaginative horizon (Crapanzano, 2004; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). Crapanzano captures this innate

tension when he poetically writes, “the paradoxical ways in which the irreality of the imaginary impresses the real on reality and the real of reality compels the irreality of the imaginary” (2004, p. 15). This also resonates with Vygotsky’s claim that the relation between imagination and cultural reality is bi-directional, further adding that the richer people’s experiences are, the more material for imagining they have (1931, p. 15). However, it is crucial to capture how constraints on the imagination operate and recognise that inequalities that exist, particularly in terms of who can bring imaginations “back to reality”, but also in terms of what are used as symbolic resources. Most research on the imagination focus on the use and not the construction and “intended” imaginative effect. Vygotsky (1931) suggests that the process of imagination occurs according to twin mechanisms: Dissociation and association. First, resources from the sociocultural world are deconstructed and, second, re-associated or re-combined in novel ways. This is also where Vygotsky’s model and Zittoun and Gillespie’s differ because the former describes the process of imagination as an “expansion” and the latter as a “detachment”. Here detachment “implies that the imagination is not causally dependent upon the immediate situation or reality” (2016b, p. 20). I presume that the distancing is layered and always maintains fragments of the immediate situation. I therefore view the imagination more as an “expansion” than a “detachment” because it always seemed firmly grounded in my analyses. Indeed, as Glăveanu (2020a) also observes, relying on a stark distinction between the “proximal” and “distal” sphere of experience can potentially dislodge the study of imagination from the context in which it occurs. I wonder whether this separation at least partially reflects the emphasis on studying semiotic processes within sociocultural psychological studies of the imagination (Koukouti & Malafouris, 2020), which often focus on symbolic resources (social representations, movies, books, etc.) rather than the sociomaterial world. To provide a foreshadowing example, constructing a sub-sea tunnel has immense repercussions for how the future is imagined, including who is doing the imagining and for whom. Such concerns have been extensively documented in anthropological studies on infrastructure (Appel et al., 2019; Harvey & Knox, 2012; Larkin, 2013) and can (de)synchronise relations between temporalities (Ferguson, 1999; Gupta, 2018; Harvey, 2018; Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017).

Central to the sociocultural psychological model of the imagination is its embeddedness in “the world” (Zittoun et al., 2020; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b) and embodied experiences (Gfeller & Zittoun, 2021). However, I argue that there is space for further theorisation regarding this relation. Zittoun and Gillespie (2016b) have integrated and expanded on Crapanzano’s (2004) notion of the imaginative horizon to account for what people can and should imagine and actualise in a given historical epoch or society, using the moon landings as an example (2018a). Recently they expanded the notion of imaginative horizon (Zittoun et al., 2020) by proposing a four-layer structure to the horizon, each with comparatively permeable boundaries: The actual (what already exists), the possible (non-existent but actualisable imaginations), the impossible (non-existent and unactualisable imaginations), and the unimaginable (what lies beyond the imagination at a given point in time). Zittoun et al. (2020) argue that these boundaries are pushed by the imagination, often resulting in a tension between Self-Other or Semiotic-World. In their words: “imagination breaks free from the logic of the material world; the possible and impossible are no longer subordinated to the actual but expand and transform it” (Zittoun et al., 2020, p. 1). While the model is analytically useful, it focuses primarily on the collective and broader horizons of societies—equivalent to the third-person perspective—and the development over time, not temporalities. It does not, however, explore whether multiple relational imaginative horizons exist nor whether everyone shares the same horizon.

In analysing the imagination in and around Suđuroy with this model in mind, two questions emerged. First, does there just exist one imaginative horizon in each historical period or are multiple horizons constituted through their relation? Second, does everyone share or have access to the same imaginative horizon, and are they aware of potential horizons elsewhere? On a collective level and inspired by a relational conceptualisation of places (Amin, 2004) and temporalities (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017), I propose that different sociocultural, material, political, and geographical contexts afford different imaginative horizons that establish what imaginations are possible for whom (Glăveanu, 2020c). These horizons are defined by their synchronic and diachronic relations and hierarchies. On the more individual level or first-person perspective, I argue that it is not feasible to assume that people necessarily share or have access to the same imaginative horizon merely because they live in the same period or context; this would violate the idea of uniqueness and neglect

questions related to power and inequalities. This does not imply that the two levels are separate, however. While the first- and third-person perspectives must be combined, they represent different analytical angles. Moreover, imaginative horizons can be comparatively centralised or expansive (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). For example, people with limited social and professional opportunities living on an island might experience their imaginative horizons as being contracted in relation to the people in metropolitan centres. Understanding this relationship is important for exploring “where” the future is located and whether people decide to become mobile or opt to stay—a relation that is not fixed but changes dynamically.

With the advent of global media platforms and transportation technologies easing the friction of mobility, several scholars have argued that the collective imaginative horizon has expanded, as for example is the case for Appadurai’s (1996) proposition that imagination has become a social practice and that people have access to more possible lives to be lived. However, I argue that imagination has always been part of life and, echoing others, this proposition ignores the inequalities and asymmetries that determine what people imagine and whether they are in a position to actualise certain futures (Ellis, 2018) or in terms of their temporal experiences (Crapanzano, 2007). Thus, I do not assume a universal expansion of the imaginative horizon. Instead, I intend to explore how the technologies of the imagination that either promote or obstruct imaginations (Sneath et al., 2009), consider what they do and to what purpose, examine who is excluded and included, determine how technologies manifest in individual imaginations, and possibly warrant different temporal experiences. Technologies of the imagination can both expand or contract the imaginative horizon and are connected to the concept of imaginative resistance (Liao & Szabó Gendler, 2011), questions of power, and manipulate temporalities. Unlike symbolic resources, which are used as developmental resources (Zittoun, 2018; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2013), technologies of the imagination are instruments of power that contain specific temporalities and are aimed at engendering certain imaginations, though they can become symbolic resources. Thus, I aim to explore the “construction” side of symbolic resources, that is, the power that permeates them and therefore include a stronger attention to the third-person perspective.

I operationalise the notion of imaginative horizons to account for the context in which imagination unfolds and use the technologies of the imagination to focus on the contraction and expansion of imaginative boundaries. This suggestion represents an attempt to blur the borders between proximal and distal spheres of experience by directing analytical focus onto the social and material technologies of the imagination and their imaginative effects. This approach is an attempt to overcome “semiotic bias” and return to Vygotsky’s conceptualisation of the imagination as an expansion of experience (1931; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013). As Ingold writes: “Indeed the problem [of imagination] is the very opposite of what we take it to be: Not of how to reconcile the dreams of our imagination with patterns in the world, but of how to separate them in the first place” (2013, p. 735).

1.3.1.3. *Introducing Affect*

The final aspect I want to introduce is the role of affect. I consider affect a feasible means of approaching why certain futures become developmental and not others, as affect can impinge on the imagination. Indeed, as Crapanzano wrote regarding the highly selective mobilisation of doomsday scenarios, “fear has always been a political weapon” (2007, p. 425), and few forms of affect can shape the imagination to the extent fear and its attendant anxieties can. Introducing affect might therefore provide an answer as to why some futures are imagined and pursued while others are not. Studying the various inputs (symbolic resources) does not directly address the question of why some resources in different situations. Affect arguably plays a role in this regard. This link is not necessarily new and was perhaps forgotten. Vygotsky (1931) previously proposed that the imagination is both shaped by and shapes emotions, yet this proposition has remained largely absent from the sociocultural psychological research on the imagination. I suggest that integrating affective dynamics in the theorisation and study of the imagination can explain the difference in the transformative potential of various imaginations, including when waiting becomes a viable strategy (Berlant, 2012). A crucial step in that direction is provided by Zittoun and Gillespie's introduction of “valences”, which they defined as:

[...] relational and motivational; they designate how people will tend towards these imaginations, and therefore organize their conduct to maintain and cultivate certain imaginations and even turn them into projects. Imaginations with positive valences for

certain persons are utopian; imaginations of the future with negative valences are dystopian—that is, futures to be avoided. (2018a, p. 22)

I agree that valences impact how people are inclined towards certain imaginations—utopian as well as dystopian. However, it is unclear how valences emerge, what gives them weight in determining which imaginations people tend towards, and whether, as Vygotsky indicated, they also drive the process of imagination. I propose to examine “affective valences” to account for the relationality regarding how people tend towards the products of the imagination. In Chapter 7, I argue that the articulation between imagination and people’s im/mobility is partially governed by affective valences that emerge at the intersection of specific sociocultural and material contexts and according to people’s unique experiences and trajectories.

Several attempts have been made to integrate affect into sociocultural psychology. Valsiner theorised the role of affect in his semiotic approach (Valsiner, 2008, 2018) that proposed the notion of affective fields, which encompass both feelings and emotions. These fields are progressively differentiated, beginning from the physiological and pre-mediated level, moving towards the articulation and differentiation of emotions, and ending in a nebulous and undifferentiated state of “hyper-generalised affect” (Branco & Valsiner, 2010). Valsiner’s model proposes a dynamic and multi-level model of affect, but it is less sensitive to context and other relationalities. I chose to adopt a more relational understanding of affect (Robinson & Kutner, 2019; Stenner & Greco, 2013) that does not situate affects solely *in* people but rather in relation to the past, the future, and the sociomaterial world (Robinson & Kutner, 2019). Affects are not clearly defined (Stenner, 2018) and are, as Massumi (1995) claims, not necessarily distinct from emotion. Stenner (2018) asserts that a neat separation creates an artificial divide in relation to what emotions become individual, articulable, and socially defined. Affective valences are then emergent and dynamic qualities that steer and are steered by the process of imagination. Such affective valences inherently spring from people’s relation to the “world”. I later introduce hope as one such affective valence.

In short, integrating a relational perspective on affect into the sociocultural psychological model of the imagination affords a means of exploring the question of

why people pursue some imaginations and not others in a contextually and epistemologically compatible manner.

1.4. Defining Im/Mobility

The concept of mobilities encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital, and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life. Issues of movement, of too little movement or too much or the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are central to many lives, organisations and governments. (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 1)

Demagogues and national security experts now look askance at many of those who move, defining mobility as dangerous and threatening, while immobility is seen as normal and necessary for political and personal security (Isotalo 2009; Turner 2007). (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 184)

The second core concept I use is im/mobility. Questions regarding im/mobility largely linger outside the gaze of sociocultural psychologists (Glăveanu, 2020; Glăveanu, 2020b), though several exceptions exist (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020; Zittoun & Levitan, 2019). Insights from the “mobility paradigm” (Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) contain the potential to enrich sociocultural psychological theorisations. While I admit that mobility studies expand beyond the “mobility paradigm” (Kaufmann, 2021), this perspective forms the basis for my understanding of mobility and immobility.

People have always moved, but scholars contend that the circulation of people, goods, and ideas is currently happening at an unprecedented pace (Cresswell, 2006). This is commonly exemplified by the fact that the number of people living outside their countries of birth has reached unmatched heights (e.g., Adey, 2017). Moreover, such mobility is often positively valued (Salazar, 2016, 2021b) and linked to notions such as “liberty” and “progress” (Cresswell, 2010), social mobility (Faist, 2013), and the promise of transformation (Salazar & Smart, 2011). As Cresswell writes, “We are always trying to get somewhere. No one wants to be stuck or bogged down” (2010, p. 21). During the COVID-19 pandemic, these representations and meanings of mobility were, at least momentarily, reversed to the extent that the ability to remain immobile was positively valued (Piccoli & Moret, 2021). The pandemic also made the substantial disparities in who can move and who cannot blatantly visible (Salazar, 2021a).

In tandem with the surge in the mobility of people, goods, and ideas, societies also developed increasingly discriminatory structures or regimes to govern who moves and how fast. Enforcing national and supra-national borders has been highly politicised, and the externalisation of Europe's outer borders is one example of the detrimental human costs border policies can incur (Andersson, 2014; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2016). Borders rarely constitute anything other than an arbitrary line that is easily crossed by the privileged. However, the same lines materialise for others in Kafkaesque ways and can provoke othering (van Houtum, 2021), stealing time (Bhatia & Canning, 2021), following people (Khosravi, 2010a), and ultimately determining who is illegalised (de Genova, 2002) and who is deemed "expendable" (Mbembe, 2019). The latter is evident in the direct and indirect rise of deaths on Europe's southern border (Last et al., 2017) and hauntingly present in de León's (2015) ethnography concerning undocumented migrants' perilous journey across the desert after the introduction of the United States' 'Prevention through Deterrence' policies. States tend to pathologise mobility (Amelina & Vasilache, 2014) and therefore instrumentalise the dromology (Virilio 1977) of people; that is: "[T]he power to stop and put into motion, to incarcerate and accelerate objects and people" (Cresswell, 2010, p. 28). Border studies have also abandoned the idea of fixed lines in favour of a more dynamic and "always-in-the-making" conceptualisation (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018), defining borders as unfolding in everyday settings (Rumford, 2006, 2014), in accord with moral and social boundaries (Charmillot, 2021), and with highly uneven effects (Paasi, 2018). While this thesis only addresses borders and bordering practices indirectly—in terms of social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002)—it is abundantly clear that these practices have a monumental impact on people's lives and im/mobility. States, municipalities, tourist agencies, and other institutions all seek to shape people's mobility and immobility and, as I later explore, through the imagination.

Furthermore, nation states and the rootedness produced by borders have also infiltrated the assumptions that social science builds its knowledge around. This assumption is referred to as a "sedentary metaphysics" (Cresswell, 2006; Malkki, 1992), which ontologically assumes that stasis and immobility are the normal state of being. Sedentary metaphysics consequently portrays mobility as an abnormality and a temporary state of exception between sedentary points. Wimmer and Glick Schiller

(2002) have argued that this assumption produces a “methodological nationalism” in which the nation state is taken as the natural starting point and container of social processes. This proposition has led critical migration scholars to propose a de-migrantisation (Dahinden, 2016), a de-exceptionalisation (Hui, 2016), and a de-nationalisation (Anderson, 2019) of migration research to avoid reproducing state-centric categorisations.

Cresswell (2006) and Urry (2007) have also questioned the prevalence of sedentarism and instead argued in favour of a “nomadic metaphysics” that views the world as being intrinsically on the move. This reverse approach came to be known as the “mobility paradigm” (Sheller & Urry, 2006) or “mobility turn” (Faist, 2013). Adopting this perspective allows me to circumvent the epistemological pitfalls of migration studies, and such an approach integrates effectively with sociocultural psychology. An im/mobility approach accounts for both human and non-human forms of im/mobility, including the meanings attributed to them (Cresswell, 2006; Frello, 2008). The mobilities paradigms’ ontological perspective also entails not viewing places as entities that exist but instead as always in the making (Cresswell, 2004; Massey, 2005) and in relation to other places (Amin, 2004). The approach also aids in investigating the governance of im/mobility (Bærenholdt, 2013; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) and immobile moorings (Hannam et al., 2006). Mobility and immobility are not dichotomous but entangled (Adey, 2017; Kleist, 2020). Thus, it is imperative to understand what factors and power relations engender some forms of movement while curbing others (Söderström et al., 2013). As Salazar suggests:

[...] to assess the extent or nature of movement, or, indeed, even ‘observe’ it sometimes, you have to spend time studying things that stand still: the borders, institutions and territories of nation-states, and the (imagined) sedentary ‘home’ cultures of those that do not move. In other words, motion is always framed within a material and institutional infrastructure, and the circulation of people is constantly limited or promoted by economic coercions, political guarantees and sociocultural imaginaries. (2020, p. 5)

Im/mobility is always situated or emplaced (Salazar, n.d.), simultaneously shaping and being shaped by places that are themselves mobile (Massey, 2005). Im/mobilities therefore cannot be studied in isolation. Cresswell (2010) has proposed that mobility is constituted by geographical movements, attached meanings, and embodied experiences—all interrelated elements that must be situated in histories and

geographies that form “constellations of mobility” (2010, p. 26). Further theorising the role of power asymmetries and the constituents of mobility, Cresswell then proposes a “politics of mobility” and identifies six aspects: “[M]otive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction” (2010, p. 17). Adey further adds that “mobility and immobility are profoundly relational and experiential” (2006, p. 83), arguing that it is the difference in speed that determines the relation and adds emphasis to experiences (Adey 2010). This point highlights that nothing is really static and that mobility and immobility are not dichotomous or oppositional (Salazar, 2021b); rather, the two are defined in relation to each other and take many forms. Although the use of “im/mobility” implies a dichotomy, the two elements of the term are intermeshed, and I maintain a focus on this entanglement and its transformation across time, between places, and from different perspectives. Using either mobility or immobility simplifies and fixates the phenomenon. However, maintaining a temporal dimension and being sensitive to contradictions and multiple perspectives provides a counterbalance to such simplification. For example, the construct of “gender” generates inequalities through its relations to how people are mobile (Cresswell & Uteng, 2008) or remain still (Straughan et al., 2020), motility levels (Hayfield, 2018), and representations of “migrants” (Fischer & Dahinden, 2017) through its relation. In other words, the use of “im/mobilities” represents a means of emphasising entanglement (Wyss & Dahinden, 2022) that stresses the continuous changes to the many entanglements and to the elements that affect it.

Power relations and inequitable capacities to be im/mobile are captured by Glick Schiller and Salazar’s (2013) concept of “regimes of mobility”, which comprise: “The relationship between the privileged movements of some and the co-dependent but stigmatised and forbidden movement, migration and interconnection of the poor, powerless and exploited” (2013, p. 188). Each regime of mobilities transforms longitudinally, operates according to different rationalities, is produced and reproduced by various factors and across different scales, and manifest in distinct modes of control (Fradejas-García & Mülli, 2019; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Regimes are analytically useful in discerning the processes that facilitate or hinder im/mobilities. However, the current conceptualisation raises questions concerning where one regime ends and another begins. Regimes are often studied at the supra-national level (Dahinden et al., n.d.), but im/mobilities are also determined from

below (Jensen & Urry, 2013). For example, Dahinden et al. (n.d.) and Charmillot (2021) have respectively explored and demonstrated the more mundane and local regimes of mobilities through case studies examining market places and a Swiss valley bordering France. Further, through following people's im/mobility trajectories, Schapendonk (2020) and colleagues (e.g., Lipphardt & Schwarz, 2018; Schapendonk et al., 2020) have demonstrated that people navigate them differently. However, questions regarding the future have remained largely absent. I therefore propose to incorporate sensitivity towards the role of the future but also shift from regimes of mobilities to regimes of im/mobilities in recognition that immobilities and staying—as mobilities—are equally differentiated, stigmatised, and moralised as “good” or “bad” (Charmillot, 2021). Changing the location, temporality, or affective valence of imagined futures impact the ways regimes hierarchise and entangle im/mobilities.

As a reaction to the burgeoning literature on mobility, scholars began investigating and theorising the many facets of immobility through the lens of stillness (Cresswell, 2012; Fuller, 2010) and staying (Hjälml, 2014; Jónsson, 2011; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018; Ye, 2018) because: “In a world assumed to be perpetually on the move (Adey, 2009; Cresswell, 2006), those who stay put are often perceived as left behind (Jónsson, 2011) or as having failed to leave (Looker & Naylor, 2009)” (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021, p. 3). Immobility has occasionally been approached as the polar opposite of mobility and been negatively connotated (Salazar, 2021b) with stillness, conceived of as “an aberration”, and defined as signifying a lack of agency instead of an active decision (Bissell, 2007; Bissell & Fuller, 2010). Even those deemed immobile are rarely static; in fact, there is no absolute immobility (Adey, 2006; Salazar, 2021b). Sheller states: “[the mobility paradigm] is crucially concerned with friction, turbulence, immobility, dwelling, pauses, and stillness, as much as speed or flow (Cresswell, 2006, 2010, 2014), and examines how these textured rhythms are co-produced, practiced, and represented in relation to the gendered, raced, classed mobilities and forms of dwelling and ‘grounding’ of particular others (Ahmed et al., 2003; Tolia-Kelly, 2010; Tsing, 2005)” (2014, p. 7). It is therefore important to distinguish between various modalities of immobility and interrogate the role of agency, lived experiences, politicised immobilisations, and changes over time. Otherwise, the absence of mobility might be equated with wasted time. As Bissell and Fuller warn:

Stillness is not just a gesture of refusal. Stillness punctuates the flow of all things: a queue in line at the bank; a moment of focus; a passenger in the departure lounge; a suspension before a sneeze; a stability of material forms that assemble; a passport photo. Each of these stillnesses pulse through multiple ecologies with multiple effects. Yet, curiously, stillness is so often anticipated, more or less, as an aberration and thus a problem to be dealt with. A moment of emptiness or missed productivity, producing a hobbled subjectivity without active agency. In an epoch that privileges the mobilization of mobility, still has been stilled; turned into a stop that is just waiting to go again. Waiting to be re-moved. (Bissell & Fuller, 2010, p. 3)

Immobility can be neither taken for granted nor assumed to be the polar opposite of mobility. The two are entangled, not exclusive, and can both be active or passive as well as infused with different meanings (Jónsson, 2011) to represent “two dynamic sides of the same coin” (Salazar, 2021b, p. 15). I do not wish to discount that people’s mobility can be forcibly hindered, but it is important to emphasise that it “is much more than a simple absence of geographical mobility” (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021, p. 3). For example, simply changing the semantics from “immobility” to “staying” acknowledges the active role of people and abstains from reproducing the phantom of immobility (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). Jónsson (2011) have proposed that normatively a sedentary perspective deems staying desirable and a mobility perspective deems it a lack of mobility. Staying can be engendered by technologies and the mobility of others (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021) or be used to facilitate additional mobility (Dahinden, 2010). Here, it is noteworthy to recognise when stillness morphs into stuckness (e.g. Cangia, 2020; Cresswell, 2012; Straughan et al., 2020; Wyss, 2019) and waiting (Bissell, 2007; Hage, 2009a; Jacobsen & Karlsen, 2020; Khosravi, 2017). Stuckness emerges in relation to constraints (Salazar, 2021b), such as forces that physically entrap people (Blondin, 2020), the absence or breakdown of infrastructure (Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012; Harvey, 2018), too much mobility (Wyss, 2019), uncertainty (Cangia, 2020), or simply being held up in a traffic jam. The diverse forms of immobility once again demonstrate the need to account for lived experiences, people’s changing relation to mobility, and acknowledge that staying (as a form of immobility) is a dynamic process that “is not a decision that is made once and never renegotiated, and it does not occur in isolation but is connected to other life projects and people” (Hjälml, 2014, p. 579). In other words, if staying can be both voluntary or forced (Carling, 2002; Carling & Schewel, 2018; Schewel & Fransen, 2020; Ye, 2018) and happens in specific regimes, it is also important to ask “who has the right not to

move, to deliberately avoid mobility, to choose stillness over mobility” (Adey, 2017, p. 13).

The concept of im/mobility is therefore a useful analytical tool to explore the ways in which people move or remain still. However, it is critical to underscore that these ways are not oppositional but relational and can both entail agency and be positively valued, depending on the circumstances and experiences. Avoiding dichotomisation necessitates a focus on the changing relation between immobility and mobility and the introduction of various perspectives that demonstrate it is impossible to have one without the other.

1.4.1. Synthesising the Imagination and Im/mobility

In the end, why should psychologists pay more attention to new mobilities research and try to develop mobility-based accounts of their own topics? As I tried to argue here, the latter would radically transform the way we consider minds, bodies, and societies and how we recognise their richness, complexity, and ontological basis in movement. This would challenge static, universalistic theories on the one hand, and open up a new vocabulary for thinking about the psychic on the other, including trajectories and transitions, re-positioning and position exchange, flows, scapes, and networks. (Glăveanu, 2020, p. 189)

As Glăveanu writes, the field of psychology and, equally, the sub-field of sociocultural psychology exhibit a tardiness in harnessing the insights of mobility studies. The temporal or developmental dimensions are sociocultural psychologists’ primary preoccupations, but the field has a blind spot concerning the spatial dimension. Integrating an im/mobility perspective allows me to, first, focus on the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility and, second, benefit from mobility studies’ long tradition of studying power relations, inequalities, and the political and socioeconomic circumstances that shape them.

The bulk of the research within sociocultural psychology that has addressed im/mobility tends to inquire into “migrant experiences” and “integration processes”, thus remaining within the container model. For example, Andreouli and Kadianaki (2018, p. 3) grouped sociocultural psychological research into three categories: Ideological resources shaping perceptions towards immigration, dialogical engagement with the Other, and migrant experiences. Combining case studies

conducted in Greece and Ireland, Gillespie, Kadianaki, and O’Sullivan-Lago (2012) investigated the non-linear relation between geographical and semantic movement that manifested in the encounter with alterity. They revealed how potentially transformative perspective-taking processes are regulated and can be deflected through deploying semantic barriers (see also Gillespie, 2008, 2020). Other scholars have studied migration through the rupture and transition framework proposed by Zittoun (2006), suggesting that food can be used as a symbolic resource to support the adjustment assumed to follow a relocation (Zittoun & Morasso, 2014). More generally, others have argued that symbolic resources play a crucial role in the identity transformations that occasionally follow migration (Hale & de Abreu, 2010; Kadianaki, 2014a) and have redirected attention to lived experiences (Märtsin, 2010). Märtsin and Mahmoud (2012) studied the experience of Estonians moving to England, revealing that migration can produce multiple ruptures and lead to a dialectic experience of “home” and “not-home”. This somewhat dichotomous portrayal is exactly what studies on transnationalism sought to overcome (Dahinden, 2017). Focusing on social representations and the construction of common-sense knowledge, Kadianaki (2014b) proposed several strategies related to poetry and dance that Celia—a Columbian immigrant living in Greece—developed to manage stigma and sustain identity. Andreouli (2013) approached the question of acculturation from a dialogical perspective. Drawing on qualitative interviews with recently naturalised British citizens, she proposed that acculturation is an ongoing negotiation between social representations and identities, which can be experienced as both a threat to and an enrichment of identity. In their research on perspective-taking and the construction of otherness during the “refugee crisis”, Glăveanu and de Saint-Laurent (2018) analysed memes and Reddit commentaries, arguing that the process pivots on whether people are committed to difference or similarity. They identified a tendency to construe refugees from the “outside” using existing social representations and stereotypes when there is little overlap in experiences (Glăveanu et al., 2018). Based on fieldwork conducted in Chicago and Toronto, Ellis (2021; 2015) developed a sociocultural psychological theory of migrant illegality and deportability (De Genova, 2013; 2002), proposing that the experience of deportability undergoes cycles at the psychosocial level. The cycle begins with people experiencing a stressor related to their legal status, which produces acute and chronic fears and calls for creative coping strategies. She

stressed that illegalised migrants' experiences are not only defined by deportation regimes (Ellis, 2015).

As this brief overview indicates, a considerable amount of sociocultural psychological research has explored questions related to migrants, migration, or processes (e.g., acculturation or integration) commonly associated with it. However, these studies do not contest the category of migration itself, question the underlying assumptions of sedentariness, or explore which forms of im/mobility are most significant for people and places. The journey is reduced to a state of exception between two sedentary points and a dichotomisation between migrants and non-migrants. I turn the lens towards the various forms of im/mobilities that are and become significant to people, which includes considering how these forms are entangled, experienced, impeded, facilitated, or imagined.

Several direct and indirect attempts to connect sociocultural psychology with the mobility turn exist. Gillespie's (2006a) study on perspective-taking between tourists and locals in Ladakh is an example of an indirect connection. Though he did not explicitly adopt a mobility lens, Gillespie explained how different forms of mobilities (not exclusively human) impact perspective-taking processes. In doing so, he distinguished between the mobile foreigner and the immobile local. Another example of this kind of research is Gillespie and Zittoun's (2013) article on "minds" moving in and through various semiotic structures. They, too, did not explicitly refer to im/mobility. The article nevertheless represents an attempt to pair movement with psychological development and illustrates movement's importance in facilitating distancing and agency regarding the contexts people traverse. I am, however, wary of linking mobility to agency because, as Wyss (2019) demonstrated, an increase in mobility does not necessarily equal an increase in people's agency. People can feel stuck in mobility as well. Recently, several studies have adopted an im/mobility perspective to disentangle sociocultural and psychological phenomena. Based on interviews conducted in Switzerland with families who had undergone repeated international relocations, Levitan (2018) found that they developed strategies to maintain a sense of continuity throughout the upheavals. For instance, they bought the same furniture or slept in the same bed the first night in a new place (see also Zittoun et al., 2018). On a more conceptual plane, Glăveanu (2018b, 2020b) argued

that mobility can expand and contract the possible on both an individual and societal level. Cangia (2018, 2020) reported how “trailing spouses” can develop and experience bouts of stuckness and existential immobility, arguing that such conditions can both trigger and inhibit imaginations of other professional paths or subsequent relocations. After long-term fieldwork in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Jovchelovitch and colleagues (2020) proposed that grassroots organisations contribute to making the borders within a city more porous, facilitating the development of people and communities. Glăveanu and Womersley (2021) developed a sociocultural psychological approach to “affective mobilities”. Based on Womersley’s fieldwork in Athens, they argued that asylum-seekers’ experiences exhibit a simultaneity between mobility and immobility as well as possibility and impossibility. They also identified affects that can be possibility-enhancing or possibility-reducing.

Altogether, increasing yet sporadic attention to im/mobilities within sociocultural psychology—often starting from a container model or not explicitly drawing on the wealth of im/mobility research—suggests it is a pertinent area of study. Echoing others (Cangia & Zittoun, 2020; Glăveanu, 2020), I argue that combining the two perspectives allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis that emphasises not only space or time but the interaction between the two. Before providing the final synthesis, I first present the literature that discusses the intersection between imaginaries or imagination and movement.

1.4.2. The Power of Imagined Futures

That a viable life presupposes a form of imaginary mobility, a sense that one is ‘going somewhere’—what I have called existential mobility—is something that has strongly emerged in both my research on transnational Lebanese migration as well as my work on white racists in the West. In a sense, both the migrants and the racists seek existential mobility and aim to avoid its opposite, a sense of existential immobility or what I will be referring to here as ‘stuckedness’. (Hage, 2009b, p. 97)

The migrant worker sacrifices the present for the future under circumstances which continually confound his sense of continuity. Scarcely anything he experiences, or witnesses confirms the value of his sacrifice. Only when he returns to redeem his exchange-units of time will he gain acknowledgement for what he has done, or to be more precise, for the way he has done what he was forced to do. Meanwhile he lives in a situation of almost total unacknowledgement. (Berger & Mohr, 1975/2010, p. 191)

Hage proposes that the fulcrum of a “viable life” rests on what he calls “existential mobility”—a sense of “going somewhere” (Hage, 2009b, p. 98). Similarly, Salazar argues that “virtually all forms of migration are related to aspirations of a ‘better life’” (2014, p. 119). It is widely acknowledged that people’s im/mobilities and migrations are future-oriented (Pine, 2014) and can serve to expand the possibilities of both imagining and acting (Glăveanu, 2020a) in search of a better elsewhere (Jovchelovitch et al., 2018; Ringel, 2018). Mobility metaphorically functions as a form of time travel in which a person jumps closer to an imagined future—even if doing so temporarily necessitates living in precarious circumstances (Schielke, 2020). My principal concern is developing, maintaining, and transforming imagined futures throughout various temporalities and places. The idea of opening up future possibilities through mobility and migration is arguably indirectly present in traditional push-pull models (De Haas, 2014), which rather mechanically focus on people’s rational selection of destinations. Carling’s (2002) work is another excellent example of placing the future at the heart of migratory decisions. He advocated studying migration aspirations in relation to the contexts in which they form in order to determine how they are formed and whether they can be actualised (Carling, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018). Scholars have applied this framework abundantly, linking aspirations to imaginaries of “the good life” (Mata-Codesal, 2015; Schewel, 2020), developmental initiatives, and improvements to educational infrastructure (Czaika & De Haas, 2014; Schewel & Fransen, 2018; van Heelsum, 2016). Others have suggested that staying can be aspired to as much as migration (Mata-Codesal, 2018; Schewel, 2019). This highly operationalisable model offers a contextual approach to migration aspirations; however, it does not sufficiently address the temporal development of aspirations and ignores the im/mobilities that also impress themselves on people’s imagination of the future. Carling’s model is ultimately concerned with identifying whether people aspire to migrate or not. It is thus insufficient for theorising the imaginative process that produces aspirations, which (according to the sociocultural psychological model) are outputs, or for capturing the nuances of people’s im/mobilities. Studying Indian workers migrating to the Gulf states, Chambers (2018) provided one of the most dynamic descriptions of how imagination relates to migration. They claimed that the relation is indeed bi-directional, contextual, and develops over time—and that what can be imagined is therefore subject to change.

Others have explored the link between social imaginaries and migration, emphasising how and for whom imaginaries are set in motion based on the premise that imaginaries mobilise some people at the expense of immobilising or invisibilising others. For example, Schielke (2020) ethnographically revealed how Egyptian workers temporarily migrate to the Gulf states to work and consistently endure precarious conditions to build a better future at home. Vigh (2009) demonstrated how young men in Bissau experience a form of entrapment due to imaginaries of elsewhere that contrast the paucity of local possibilities. These imaginaries are embodied in the presence of technologies that open a window onto a “progress” that recurrently fails to manifest in Bissau. Moreover, several imaginaries generate certain expectations that might be socially impossible for young men to meet. Grill (2012) explored how, after Slovakia entered the EU in 2004 and new regimes of im/mobilities emerged, migrating to England became linked to notions of “going upwards” among some Roma. The move was considered equivalent to obtaining a promised future that seemed lost in Slovakia—see also Manolova (2018) for a similar account of potential Bulgarian migrants. Focusing on the everyday lives of the younger generation in Bangladesh, Rairapuro and Bal (2016) studied how global imaginaries crystalise and examined the concrete consequences of such imaginaries. They depicted how the valorisation of mobility, urban lives, and education creates a discrepancy in smaller villages between aspirations and that which is possible. Pelican (2013) demonstrated how global power inequalities impinge on and are filtered through local imaginaries, using international migration from two Cameroonian cities as examples. She highlighted how varying socioeconomic and political conditions shape whether the future is located at “home” or “elsewhere” and for whom. Salazar extensively documented and theorised how tourist imaginaries are meticulously imagineered (Salazar, 2013). In doing so, they revealed how such imaginaries often reproduce colonial tropes (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Isfeldt, 2020; Loftsdóttir, 2015; Salazar, 2010) and underscored that imaginaries simultaneously mobilise and immobilise people (Salazar, 2011a, 2018). Identifying imaginaries, their constituents, and who is included and excluded in relation to them are effective means of analysing the sociocultural ideas underlying why, how, and when people migrate, choose to become mobile, or simply remain in place due to the mobility of others. However, as Cangià and Zittoun (2020) argued, the concept of imaginaries is relatively static and chiefly concerned with the output of the imagination rather than its actual process. Salazar

notes: “Once imaginaries are formed, it becomes very hard to change them, precisely because they are culturally shared and socially transmitted (Salazar & Graburn, 2014)” (2020, p. 4). Imaginaries are useful for capturing the regimes of the imagination because they offer people socially recognised resources for imagining and can also pinpoint inequalities (Salazar, 2020). However, they are rather abstract and static, therefore I decided to focus on the dynamic process of imagination, its changes across times and spaces, what and how people imagine, but also unravel the specific initiatives impinge on the process.

The concept of hope is often linked to imaginaries and examined in terms of its emergence, unequal distribution, and temporal and spatial locations (Kleist, 2016a; Kleist & Jansen, 2016; Ringel, 2021). Hope epitomises positive affective valences and orientations towards a specific future (Mar, 2005). Hage (2003) differentiates between societal and social hope. The former denotes the imaginaries of what constitutes a “good life” and the latter focuses “on how the state generates and distributes visions of the good life and possible achievement within society” (Kleist, 2016b, p. 174). Societal hope manifests in politicised promises of better futures—which do not include everyone—and social hope is specific to places or groups of people (Kleist, 2016a). Potentiality and uncertainty regarding the “not-yet” characterise hope (Bloch, 1996).

Kleist illustrated how societal hope in Ghana, diffused by the state, excludes a large part of the population and propels people to take precarious migration routes in pursuit of social hope (Kleist, 2016b, 2018). Hernández-Carretero (2016) elucidated how Senegalese migrants are more inclined to become mobile when hope is located elsewhere in space rather than elsewhere in time. Vammen (2016) described how specific people occupy the role of “brokers of hope” controlling the location of a hopeful future. Khosravi (2017) explored the “right to hope” in his ethnography of younger Iranians, arguing that simultaneous hope and hopelessness force them into a downward spiral of seemingly endless waiting. This point neatly highlights that not moving well enough (Jansen, 2014), or not at all, can create feelings of being stuck (Cangià, 2020; Hage, 2009a) and make people lose hope in the future. Ringel (2021) warned that hope can also be an obstacle to change by keeping people locked in the present.

Following in the footsteps of Cangià and Zittoun, I focus on the continuous interaction between the imagination and people's im/mobility:

Imagination can trigger mobility (Baas, 2010), yet also slow down, accelerate, or even immobilize the rhythm and possibilities of mobility. [...] At the same time, the actual movement can trigger the capacity of imagining oneself in the past and the future or transform the ability of a person to travel with the mind, while being in fact highly mobile. (2020, p. 5)

Imagination can accompany and possibly transform (and be transformed) in and through people's im/mobility or that of others (Zittoun, 2020). It can also speed or slow people's mobility or keep them still (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020; Salazar, 2020). Imagined futures can also transform the very meaning of im/mobility, and it is necessary to move beyond "linear causality", which can both open or close people's possibilities (Glăveanu, 2020a). Research has suggested that, depending on sociocultural context and people's experiences and capabilities, stuckness can both trigger and impede the process of imagination (Cangià, 2020; Womersley, 2020). While imagination can be a means of visiting distant places without moving in space, it can also be nourished through the mobility of people, goods, and ideas (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021).

In short, as mentioned in the introduction, I aim to explore the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility over time and space while examining affective valences, entanglements, and unique experiences as well as meanings, temporalities, and changing conditions. In this regard, people's imagined futures become indicators of developmental processes. In other words, such futures change people's relation to the world and perhaps prompt new practices or meanings of im/mobility.

1.5. Synthesising

In this chapter, I outlined a meta-theoretical framework that permeates the analysis and raised several open questions. I proposed that fusing a sociocultural psychological model of the imagination with an im/mobility lens is both epistemologically justifiable and conceptually pertinent. Theorising the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility entails examining the relations and how they are maintained or transformed over time and space. As detailed, this approach demands studying

experiences and the conditions that surround them; that is, combining the first- and third-person perspectives. Changes in imagined futures can represent a developmentally significant event, and this emphasis provides a useful bridge because the future is present in both concepts. While acknowledging that the imagination is refracted through unique experiences, I hope to explore how it is shaped and situated in power relations, concrete initiatives, and the relation between places and temporalities. Doing so can provide insight into how the imagination guides people's im/mobilities.

On the one hand, sociocultural psychological research on the imagination has primarily approached its ontogenetic and sociogenetic role semiotically. However, the field has not extensively discussed the imagination's concrete manifestations (such as a ferry) or accounted for the effect of changing im/mobility practices and meanings. On the other hand, research on im/mobilities has largely examined the outcomes of the imagination and, consequently, not studied the process as it unfolds. I intend to theorise the interactions between the imagination and im/mobility. Furthermore, in the second section of this thesis (Chapters 4 to 6), I emphasise the sociomaterial initiatives that condition and impact on how people imagine the future. To this end, technologies of the imagination (see Chapter 4) provide a means of addressing issues that are largely absent from related theorisation; such issues include temporalities (e.g., synchronisation versus desynchronisation), the embeddedness of the process, and affectivities (e.g., whether the future is hopeful or not). I define the context as emptying and reveal how various technologies of the imagination (targeting different registers) make the future appear hopeful and open, effectively sedentarising some while mobilising others. In the third section (Chapter 7), I address how these changes manifest in people's imagination and im/mobility—if at all—and explore how specific imagined futures transform and are transformed by various forms of im/mobility and according to people's unique experiences. In sum, I address three theoretical shortcomings in the sociocultural model of the imagination and fuse two strands of research. I proceed to argue that technologies of the imagination condition not only the content of the future but also its (de)synchronisations and affectivities—which in turn shape im/mobilities. The second section places the third-person perspective at the forefront while maintaining a secondary focus on how technologies of the imagination are refracted. The third section principally focuses on the first-person

perspective while still highlighting how imagination is a situated process. I aim to capture both the conditioning of the imagination in addition to how people use symbolic resources, which grounds the analysis more firmly in the context and relations of power.

2. Methodology and the Ethnographic Process

This chapter is dedicated to rendering visible—without superimposing excessive order on—the research process. Research is often a messy (Law, 2007) and improvisational (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007) endeavour—something that I suspect characterises more qualitative projects than methodology sections indicate. Therefore, I detail the dialogical (Cornish, 2020b; Marková et al., 2020) and abductive (Zittoun, 2017) techniques that shaped this open-ended process, which was guided by the principles and epistemology of sociocultural psychology. I used different methods to both integrate and warrant an analysis that combined the first-person and third-person perspectives (Zittoun et al., n.d.-a). Such an approach is demanded when attempting to conduct a holistic and multi-modal exploration of the interaction between imagination and im/mobility in and around Suðuroy. More specifically, this methodological design involved conducting participant observation, qualitative interviews, and analyses of various forms of reports, history books, and statistics.

I visited the Faroe Islands five times between 2019 and January 2020². These visits varied greatly in length, ranging from a little over a week to a month. In total, I spent a little more than three months in the Faroes. I arrived without clearly articulated research questions or a well-defined “field”. All I had was a theoretical interest in how people imagine their future and a project description that introduced im/mobility. Through an abductive process and stepping in and out of the field (Rinehart, 2021), I gradually formulated the research questions that guided the process. Emmanuel and I did not define the “where” or the “who” *a priori* (Charmillot & Pedersen, n.d.)—establishing these were an integral part of the research. Moreover, I decided to write for multiple audiences early in the process (Cornish, 2020a), including the people who live on the island and to whom I spoke. During my visits, I participated in the daily life of Suðuroy, which involved attending social events and activities, hiking, having beers at the local pub, rescuing a sheep stuck on a cliffside, hitchhiking, crossing the sea within Smyríl, celebrating a retiring hospital director, driving around, playing football, visiting museums, attending Faroese lessons, trying fermented whale meat with blubber, and much more. After returning to Switzerland, I decompressed and reflected

² In January, May, July–August, and November in 2019, and January 2020.

on my experiences, aided by reading through fieldnotes, discussed emerging ideas with friends and colleagues, and explored new strands of literature to widen the scope, all of which fed into the planning of successive visits. I also regularly watched documentaries, read Faroese novels, and followed Faroese news. What I present in the thesis naturally represents only the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, I attempt to be transparent concerning the “selection” and messiness that constituted the design of this research instead of streamlining the process and pretending all unfolded fluidly.

In this chapter, I first present and discuss the project’s pre-established objectives and the choice of Suðuroy as the subject of my research. I explain and justify the more static principles of each method in relation to the concepts of imagination and im/mobility. I then proceed to share slivers of the research process to exhibit how different events or encounters impacted what questions were asked and how they were answered. Finally, I discuss several ethical conundrums I struggled with, particularly those that relate to conducting research in smaller villages with high levels of familiarity and visibility. I start where it all began: in Neuchâtel in October 2018.

2.1. Hitting the Ground Running...

I started from already formulated research objectives and a tentative question, although without anything written in stone. Together with Emmanuel Charmillot, Janine Dahinden, Anna Wyss, and Tania Zittoun, we formed one (IP34) of 17 NCCR—on the move³ projects, all addressing different subject matters regarding migration and mobility. Our team’s overarching research question was: “What can we learn about the Migration-Mobility Nexus and multi-scalar place-making under conditions of diversification, studying small localities at the outskirts of Europe?”.

The project originated in two emerging yet complementary epistemological and methodological approaches—one addressing migration scholars and another focusing on sociocultural psychologists. The first approach follows Dahinden’s (2016) and others’ (e.g. Anderson, 2019; Hui, 2016; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) calls to de-nationalise, de-migrantise, and de-exceptionalise migration studies. To avoid

³ NCCR is a National Centre of Competence in Research focusing on migration and mobility studies.

reproducing a state-centric sedentary bias, we did not predefine a group of im/mobile people or political categories (the “who” or “what”). Instead, we focused on “segments of the overall populations” (Dahinden, 2016, p. 2213). This was determined as we began to visit the Faroe Islands. Over time, we gradually identified which forms of human and non-human im/mobilities have been, and still are, significant for the place, its relation to other places, and to the people living there (though this is, of course, a matter of perspective). The second approach followed a recent proposition in sociocultural psychology calling for single dialogical case studies (Marková et al., 2020). The approach represents a shift towards idiographical approaches (Molenaar, 2004), as “the mind of the Self and the minds of Others are interdependent in and through the sense-making and sense-creating of social realities, in interpretations of the past, experiencing the present and imagining the future” (Marková et al., 2020, p. 2). Single dialogical case studies adopt a dialogical epistemology and emphasise the polyphonic and multi-level nature of any case.

As further discussed in section [2.5.3](#), Emmanuel Charmillot and I worked closely together and conducted part of the fieldwork in the Faroe Islands simultaneously. I therefore decided to represent this dialogical collaboration by alternating between “we” and “I”. We started at the same time and, within a week or thereabouts, went to Val-de-Travers—a Swiss valley bordering France, which became Emmanuel’s case. Three months later, we flew to the Faroes. The initial research plan was for us to create four case studies, at least two of them together, which impacted the methodological strategy. For example, having to create four cases within four years worked against extended fieldwork because it meant losing sight of the other sites. Emmanuel returned twice to the Faroe Islands after the exploratory trip. We stayed a month together in May 2019 and then he joined me for a two weeks in August (I was already there). I initially visited Val-de-Travers extensively, but language barriers restricted my participation. In the first six months, we were in the field together and met and talked to people, discussed surprises, how to proceed, and any concerns that arose in concert. However, we slowly realised it was overly demanding to be mentally and physically present in two places at once and that such an approach would fail to deliver the depth we desired, which eventually led us to split the cases between us. Emmanuel focused on Val-de-Travers, and I focused on Suðuroy. We maintained a close collaboration despite the split, often discussing ideas and struggles because we had intimate

knowledge of both cases. Furthermore, we also decided to omit comparisons between the places and suspend plans to conduct the two last cases. Overall, in the first period we formulated questions, attended events in the field, conducted interviews, discussed methodological strategy, and discussed analytical ideas together. Afterwards, I travelled to the Faroes alone and began focusing more on my theoretical interest (imagination and im/mobility). The analysis presented later is therefore mine (although it inevitably bears traces of Emmanuel and others). The benefits of close collaborations are both personal and professional. First, having someone around when staying for months made it easier to detach and attend activities together—being in the field can be a lonely experience otherwise. Second, the professional benefits are abundant because being two entails more “eyes” and having the ability to discuss experiences and interpretations ongoingly. Being two can also open more access points and create an expanded social network, although we did most things together. Emmanuel was, in that sense, part of creating the field (Gupta, 2014). Of course, there can be a downside in terms of theoretical angles and the width of the inquiry because we actively tried to be sensitive to each of our interests, which occasionally made the inquiry more general (which was also reinforced by the notion that we needed to conduct more cases); however, we were later both freer to delve deeper into several of the emerging issues. This form of dialogical collaboration was immensely useful for me and made the research process more pleasant and open than if I had conducted it entirely alone.

Both approaches presented assume the social construction of categories. They are sensitive to what categories do and seek to incorporate the complexity, voices, and tensions that might be missed if we had defined the “where” and the “who” beforehand. We therefore aimed to listen to as many voices as possible while being responsive to emerging phenomena and various social and psychological processes.

2.2. Knowledge Production in Case Studies

Psychology is a fragmented discipline (Toomela, 2008). A point of particular contestation concerns whether research should produce nomothetic or idiographic knowledge; that is, whether psychology should primarily relate to the general and universal or the unique and contextual (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010). I adopted an open-ended and idiographic approach while still maintaining that theoretical

generalisations are possible through abduction. Scholars increasingly argue in favour of more idiographic studies in psychology (e.g. Bennett, 2015; De Luca Picione, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2014; Morgan, 2012; Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010; Yin, 2009). In that spirit, I reflect on what constructing and conducting a case study means for the research process and the knowledge produced.

Philosophically, the debate concerns the question of whether knowledge is universal or particular (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010). The basic premise of the debate involves whether the processes psychologists study exist in the “world” or are “constructed”. Experimental- and cognitive-oriented branches of psychology tend to adopt positivistic ideals and seek to “discover” universals. When researchers operationalise cases studies, even when considering the idiographic knowledge, it is often as vessels in the explorative or design phase. Salvatore and Valsiner (2010) call this nomothetic psychology because it intends to generalise laws across populations. However, when approached through a dialogical and relational epistemology, the nomothetic approach is incapable of providing the open-endedness and multi-voicedness required for studying human development as an intrinsically social process. Others have criticised the nomothetic approach for its reliance on “populations” and “samples” because these concepts tend to conflate similarity for sameness (Sato et al., 2018) and have a naturalising connotation. To quantify and homogenise groups of individuals contradicts the assumption that humans and their sociocultural environments are ontologically and epistemologically co-constituted (Valsiner et al., 2009; Valsiner & Brinkmann, 2015) in a dynamic manner. In contrast, I follow Picione, who writes:

Uniqueness and variability of psychological phenomena must be understood not as disturbing elements to be eliminated but as a real opportunity for modelling, studying and understanding the psychological processes that are always situated, contextual, dynamic and systemic. (2015, p. 368)

This thesis emphasises both the sociocultural circumstances and individual experiences as well as the interactions between levels (Cornish & Gillespie, 2010; Duveen & Lloyd, 1990; Zittoun, 2019b) or scales (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018). While constructing this case involved scrutinising the sociocultural and political guidance of both the imagination (Valsiner, 2008; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016) and im/mobility (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), I equally focused on how these refract through

people's unique experiences. This approach helped me explore what people can imagine in specific situations, why imaginative possibilities and mobility might be restricted at one point but plentiful at another, and how this relates to social others. Alternatively, as Zittoun et al. phrase it:

Considering meaning from a sociocultural psychology perspective requires neither an exclusive attention to social meanings, nor to individual psychical life: it requires considering both. Concretely, it implies that case studies should ideally be built so as to give access to both socially shared meaning as well as personal sense making, so as to capture the dynamics of their circulation. (n.d.-b)

Dialogical case studies call for an open-ended research process that follows phenomena in the “wholeness” of their complexities, polyphonies, and ambiguities (Cornish, 2020b; Demuth, 2018). I now elaborate on the principle of abduction.

2.2.1.1. Abductive Reasoning

Qualitative research often operates on an iterative logic but rarely mentions its philosophical underpinnings. Abduction is more than a simple oscillation between deductive (from general laws) and inductive (from empirical observations) methods; it is a form of reasoning rooted in pragmatism that extends beyond “the relationship between data and theory” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 722). It continuously aims to generate the most optimal theoretical explanation possible (Valsiner, 2019; Zittoun, 2017). Brinkman describes the process as:

a form of reasoning that we employ in situations of uncertainty; when we need an understanding or explanation of something that happens or some effect. It can be formalized as follows: (1) We observe X; (2) X is unexpected and breaks with our normal understanding; (3) but if Y is the case, then X makes sense; (4) therefore we are allowed to claim Y, at least provisionally. (2013, p. 56)

Alternatively, in the words of Peirce:

abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis. (Peirce, 1905/1994, as cited in Zittoun, 2017, p. 174)

Abduction follows an iterative process through which the researcher commits to finding optimal explanations by identifying patterns based on existing knowledge and experiences (Evers & Wu, 2006) while remaining open to surprises (Zittoun, 2017; Zittoun et al., 2013) and possible breakdowns (Brinkmann, 2014). I chose a methodological design in part to facilitate surprises by creating frictions. My knowledge-production process was therefore situated between deduction and induction (Sato et al., 2018). The abductive principles align with the overall frame of this project because they fit the idea of starting from neither a complete *tabula rasa* nor from a pre-established and theoretically deduced hypothesis. Instead, I began from a general theoretical orientation (the sociocultural model of the imagination and im/mobilities studies) but allowed the phenomena, research questions, and theoretical ideas to constantly evolve in dialogue (Valsiner, 2017)—with surprise as the driving force. While the abductive inferences are neither generalisable nor transferable to another “population” in the nomothetic sense, the process still provides a form of analytical generalisation by crafting theories (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Yin, 2009; Zittoun, 2017, 2019a). Any theories developed through abduction retain a link to specific cases and the thick descriptions that give them shape. In other words, I do not generate “predictive” knowledge but present an in-depth account and provide “good enough” theories related to the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility in and around Suðuroy. The researcher acts as a *bricoleur* (Brinkmann, 2014), or a “tool-user”, crafting theories to patch breakdowns in understanding and more accurately explain the phenomena.

Presenting all the abductive instances is beyond the scope of this thesis; instead, I provide two illustrative examples. First, employing emptying as an analytical concept unlocked extensive explanations and provided a means of addressing both the importance of the material conditions and my surprise concerning how people described the island(s). I consistently heard people describe Suðuroy as “dying” due to disappearing, deteriorating, or absent infrastructure. However, I needed a conceptual vocabulary that could not only situate these descriptions within the wider Faroese societal transformations and neoliberal restructurings but also capture their impact on people’s imaginations. Stumbling upon Dzenovska’s (2011) and Ringel’s (2018) work helped me solve this issue. Emptying (see Chapter 4) provided a way of describing the Faroese context in a dynamic and inherently relational fashion that

involved explicit links to ideas of progress and capitalism and anchored the imagination and im/mobility in material, economic, and political transformations. This framework allowed me to connect imaginations and im/mobilities against the background of varying conditions that could signal hope or despair; that is, to ground the process of imagination and address what I earlier proposed as less frequently explored avenues. Second, the significance of Smyríl surprised me in terms of how people talked about the ferry, how I started to attune to its movements (watching it from the window of the house we rented in Tvøroyri as it docked and departed on the opposite side of the fjord), and how the boat was central to the process of emptying. In the process of finding approaches useful to theorising this puzzle, I searched through the literature on infrastructure and realised that Smyríl and the discussion of whether to replace the ferry with a tunnel (see Chapter 6) not only related to the emptying but also contained many, often divergent, imaginations of what the future should be. Through the literature on infrastructure, I moved away from a more abstract semiotic approach and instead began considering the imagination as being embodied in and transformed by concrete initiatives, such as a sub-sea tunnel or a new sports centre. Furthermore, infrastructure is linked to emptying and ideas of progress (Larkin, 2013) and (de)synchronisation while also representing sites of contestation, providing an ideal outlet for exploring the interaction between the levels of analysis.

While these two examples are brief, they identify how the abductive reasoning worked in practice. Throughout the thesis, I also attempt to highlight when moments of surprise produced new insights. Before justifying the adequacy of the methods chosen to address the research questions, I must first elaborate on how Suðuroy came to be under examination.

2.2.1.2. Case Selection

The case was not established beforehand but happened progressively. However, the initial IP34 project description already mentioned four localities (Val-de-Travers, the Faroe Islands, Greece, and the Czech Republic) based on the following criteria:

The case studies are chosen to contrast according to three sets of criteria: (i) their geopolitical location in Europe (i.e., North, East, or South of Europe), (ii) their maximal variations along a series of migration-mobility dimensions (a) types of mobility (commuters, seasonal movers, touristic, circulatory migration, etc., b) local history of

migration, and c) mobility regimes (Glick & Salazar 2013); (iii) their degrees and types of diversity and forms of social stratification (e.g., linguistic, economic, racial, religious, national, gender, lifestyle, generational, social, etc.).

These three criteria were theory-driven (Flyvbjerg, 2011) and aimed to facilitate comparisons between localities. These “fields” are not only geographical localities but extend in time (Gupta, 2014) and exist through their relations (Feldman, 2011; Hannerz, 2003). Any demarcations are inevitably fluid along the synchronic and diachronic axes. We first searched for a place we could stay for a time, starting from the idea that a village would be ideal. However, the scope gradually expanded due to theoretical interests and specific features—geographies, relationalities, and imaginations.

We divided the research process into two interrelated mutually constitutive phases that defined the “where” and the “who”. We sought to identify the different forms of entangled im/mobilities that were emplaced (Salazar, n.d.) and constitutive of the localities’ (Cresswell, 2004; Massey, 2005) past, present, and future. We also traced the socioeconomic, institutional, political, and demographic development of the places through historical accounts, official statistics, and local news outlets. We visited the various villages, talked to people, considered points of access, noted what infrastructure was present (and absent), and conducted initial expert interviews. When combined, these elements provided a comprehensive picture of the villages that helped us identify “matters of concern” (Latour, 2004) in these localities. As Salazar et al. write: “The task is neither to deconstruct nor to essentialise ‘site’, but to investigate empirically what ‘sitedness’ means to different actors, and how it becomes privileged in different contexts” (2017, p. 12).

We visited the Faroe Islands for the first time in January 2019 and had planned a seven-day road trip in advance. We identified several “candidate” villages by searching the internet for information regarding a predefined goldilocks zone of sites that contained 600 to 1,500 inhabitants, minimal basic infrastructure, and a degree of im/mobility⁴. We arranged several interviews and conversations with people we had

⁴ This point clearly illustrates that we were also prone to the common trope of smaller places being less immobile during the first stages of the research.

identified through Facebook, Couchsurfing, and various other platforms. Through these, we learned of several salient issues on the island concerning imagination (e.g., a future with or without a sub-sea tunnel), boundaries (e.g., the long-standing rivalry between Vágur and Tvøroyri), and im/mobilities (e.g., the flight of younger people). These topics were present throughout the entire research process. We had a base in Tórshavn and drove to villages all over the islands while trying to maintain meticulous records of what we observed and our impressions. We were concerned that the compact nature of the villages might render the strategy of recurrent visits (as opposed to extended stays) unfeasible, which made us particularly attentive to public spaces such as cafés, bars, and sports clubs. A Faroese anthropologist, Gaïni (2013a), has also proposed that much of the social life on the Faroe Islands unfolds in private homes.

After returning to Switzerland, we prepared a shortlist of three potential villages (Sørvágur, Fuglafjørður, and Tvøroyri) that resulted in Tvøroyri being recommended:

- i. The village had a mid-sized population and a long history of diverse im/mobilities.
- ii. The island seemed somewhat out-of-sync with the broader Faroese socioeconomic transformation, which was also evident in reports, people's narratives, and imaginations.
- iii. The island was geographically distant due to the two-hour ferry ride, which people often talked about, and Smyríl arrived and departed from Tvøroyri.
- iv. Tvøroyri had several "access points" and basic infrastructure that included its own hospital, a newly established fish processing plant, a museum, a library, different sports clubs, and two cafés.

Moreover, our decision was reinforced by the fact that Suðuroy seemed to be subject to an emptying process related to both its "glorious" past and its desynchronised present. Several people described Suðuroy as marginalised and empty, which impacted the research question and also led me to the concept of emptiness (Dzenovska & Knight., 2020). We eventually rented a house in Tvøroyri to focus on the village. However, after a time, we agreed to expand the inquiry to encompass the entire island. This choice would allow us to more effectively capture the distinct voices present, the local points of contestation, the imaginations linked to the Suðuroy's relative position, and the cumbersome nature of travel to and from the island.

That Suðuroy is an island also warrants brief reflection, as its natural borders can reinforce “common-sense” presumptions of boundedness, immobility, and homogeneity (Baldacchino, 2018; Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020; Nimführ & Otto, 2020). I strive to avoid these stereotypes by highlighting how Suðuroy—as with any other place—has always been in flux and defined by changing constellations of im/mobilities. Such an approach echoes how anthropologists began to rethink the field in the context of globalisation, challenging the field’s rigid and perhaps even mythological boundaries (Ferguson & Gupta, 1997; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995; Tsing, 2005). Therefore, I aim to balance the fact that localities are mutually constitutive with im/mobilities and the need to stabilise certain elements for the analysis. This equilibrium is hopefully achieved through emphasising and analysing transformations and people’s experiences of them over time. Suðuroy is not a locality that exists as such. It is a construction or category that is historically contingent, perspectival (Gillespie et al., 2012), and the outcome of a dialogical process (Gupta, 2014). Furthermore, in comparison to other case studies exploring emptiness (Dzenovska, 2011) or shrinkage (Ringel, 2016a), the Faroe Islands and Suðuroy are arguably on a different trajectory. While these studies have focused on how life is maintained and the present stretched into the future, studying a place (the Faroes) filling up allows me to explore the channels through which emptiness is actively transformed and move from a state to a process.

2.3. Studying the Imagination across Time and Space

I now turn to the question of how to study the elusive process of the imagination (Zittoun, 2015c). If, as Zittoun and Gillespie claim, “imagination [...] is rarely visible” (2016b, p. 11), how can I render an invisible process visible? This is accomplished by identifying the externalisations of imagination in a specific context, reconstructing the process, accounting for the different perspectives, and longitudinally following the transformations of imaginations (Zittoun, 2015c). The ideographical and dialogical approaches favoured contextual depth, while recurrent visits added a temporal dimension that provided a sensitivity to changes over time. Methodologically, the imagination was inferred through the integration of several methods; that is, the phenomena were investigated from multiple angles across times and places to facilitate holistic theorisation (Flick, 2014). Flick calls triangulation “a strategy for improving the quality of qualitative research” (2009, p. 405) that is achieved by mixing

methods, data, and theoretical perspectives in addition to inviting the involvement of more researchers—all of which we technically accomplished. Epistemologically, triangulation was previously associated with enhancing validity. However, as Denzin (2012) also acknowledged, triangulation is increasingly concerned with facilitating deeper understandings. Moreover, as Moran-Ellis et al. (2006) argued, triangulation tends to be outcome-oriented whereas “integration” focuses on the process. Instead of an epistemological focus, they argue in favour of a theoretical one. Integration is premised on researchers using cross-level methods while preserving what is unique to each method and, ideally, employing an integration approach that runs from the beginning to the end of the research process. Integration, as a methodological strategy, focuses on how different methods are related “in pursuit of the goal of ‘knowing more’”(Moran-Ellis et al., 2006, p. 11). In the spirit of “knowing more”, I integrated several methods from the start (interviewing, participant observations, and desk research) because each captured different facets of the same phenomena theoretically. For example, interviewing is effective for understanding perspectives and experiences, whereas participant observation is more appropriate for capturing the broader material and sociocultural contexts. This difference in emphasis is essential to unravelling the tensions between structure and agency that permeates this thesis. The integration of methods is suitable for nourishing what I call “frictions”. These frictions entail being surprised at what people say and do in relation to experiences and societal transformations and allowing insights from one method to recurrently permeate others. The specific methods are elaborated and justified below.

Furthermore, Glick Shiller and Çağlar’s (2018) proposition to study multi-sightedness resonates with this approach. They propose that studying a phenomenon does not only concern its recurrence in multiple settings but also involves studying how phenomena manifest from different perspectives. Thus, I aim to identify the externalisation of the imagination by using several methodologies to strengthen inferences, as the imagination does not exist exclusively in the “world” or the “mind”. Indeed, its products are never truly fixed. This research design therefore included exploring people’s unique and embodied imaginations (Gfeller & Zittoun, 2021) and discerning the contexts in which they unfolded (Hawlina et al., 2020; Salazar, 2011b). I therefore conducted participant observations and qualitative interviews while analysing information that ranged from news clippings to statistical reports, all of which fed into

the theory-crafting processes (Zittoun, 2015c). This research design was also sensitive to (synchronic and diachronic) transformations in the symbolic, socioeconomic, material, and geographical contexts of Suðuroy, which facilitated a conducive approach to a holistic study of the imagination (Zittoun, 2015c; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b).

As with any other theoretical entry, studying the imagination of the future risks producing what it seeks and possibly making it appear more prevalent. I do not believe having a theoretical entry point is negative in itself; however, the goal is instead to focus on the instances in which that entry point was salient while acknowledging the randomness that ultimately occurs. While this thesis is inevitably oriented towards how people imagine the future, this does not indicate that the future is an overwhelmingly present subject all the time.

Methods are presented as fixed and procedural in textbooks, but they are considerably more dynamic in practice. To capture this dualism and to place myself within the process (Ghodsee, 2015), I decided to split the chapter in half, elaborating first on the methods in more general terms and, second, presenting examples of the twist and turns in the research process.

2.3.1. Participant Observation and Ethnography

“Ethnographies, to me, are fundamentally stories and the people that they are about, in my mind, are the storytellers, in part. Writing ethnographically, as a social scientist, involves positioning these individuals’ stories such that a larger narrative becomes apparent, which illuminates the interplay of various social forces and people’s own agency” (Weiner, 2014 cited in Ghodsee, 2015, p. 32)

Participant observation was vital to placing people within larger transformational contexts and highlighting the tensions between people and structures, as Weiner proposes above. What commonly falls under the label “ethnographic fieldwork” arguably remains under-utilised in psychology (Bartholomew & Brown, 2019), though it is not a completely alien method within sociocultural psychology. Several classic studies have relied on participant observation, such as Jodelet’s (1991) study of the social representations of madness in the Family Colony in Ainay-le-Chateau or Duveen and Lloyd’s (1992) studies of the social representations of gender in children. More recent examples include Gillespie’s (2006a) study of tourism in Ladakh, Zittoun’s

(2019b) regional case study of life in and around a hill in the Czech Republic, Cabra's (2021b) research on gender differentiation in children's play (2021b), Ellis' (2015) study of the experience of deportability amongst illegal migrants in Canada (2015), and Power's (2016) exploration of the social movements emerging in response to the privatisation of water in Ireland.

Participant observation is epistemologically compatible with sociocultural psychological axioms and appropriate for constructing dialogical case studies; however, the nature of the method and the ethnographic process are rarely discussed in detail. While I am not an anthropologist or expert of any kind, I still want to discuss what participant observation means based on my eclectic reading of the abundant anthropological literature. As a case in point, the term "ethnographical fieldwork" is often neither elaborated nor reflected upon, and Ingold questions this tendency: "Every time I hear the phrase 'ethnographic case study', innocently rehearsed as though it were entirely unproblematic, I wince in protest" (Ingold, 2017, p. 22). What makes Ingold wince is the unreflective use of the term and the idea that ethnography is a method according to which researchers enter a field and collect "data"—which has positivistic connotations. Without presenting excessive details, I articulate what constitutes "ethnography" and "participant observation" from my perspective.

I suspect that two interrelated forces might be hampering a widespread introduction of and reflection on ethnography and participant observation in psychological research. On the one hand, psychology has given primacy to the verbal modality (Aagaard & Matthiesen, 2016), which explains why interviewing has become the quintessential qualitative method. On the other hand, positivistic ideals (Packer, 2011; Tanggaard, 2014) produce scepticism concerning "biased" research that does not follow the gold standard of experimental designs. However, in resonance with the sociocultural psychological ethos, the ethnographic process and participant observation are geared towards different realms of experience (Pink, 2015) and situating people's experiences and practices in specific contexts through interpretation. In addition, spending extended periods in and around Suđuroy foregrounded ethical concerns and ensured that the knowledge was never produced in a vacuum. Sociocultural psychology has been described as being concerned with how people develop under certain conditions and in relation to social others over time. One

might therefore assume that this implies spending time with people, experiencing a study's setting and geography, attending events, and meeting people regularly (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Packer, 2011). In addition to interpretative prowess, these elements are what participant observation provides (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Ghodsee, 2015).

Despite often focusing on third-person rather than first-person perspectives, anthropologists' movement toward "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1991) or "partial truths" (Clifford, 1986) fits the sociocultural psychological epistemology. Clifford's (1986) text on "Writing Culture" firmly linked ethnography with writing "about people"—a definition still debated (Hammersley, 2018)—and argued that researchers "represent" what they observe through providing thick descriptions. Clifford's claim precipitated a crisis of representation because "on what basis, then, can one claim any authority to represent others ethnographically?" (Flaherty, 2002, p. 481). Later Abu-Lughod (1991) challenged Clifford's idea by insisting that even writing about "partial cultures" creates and reinforces the difference between Self and Other. She proposed that researchers "write against culture" and recognise that partial truths "are also positioned truths" (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 53). Abu-Lughod suggested that writing "ethnographies of the particular" can be an alternative because "one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenise them" (1991, p. 58). This discussion echoes an earlier one regarding "samples", and, while sociocultural psychologists also questioned the totalising gaze of studying "cultures", they largely bypassed the question concerning who possesses the "right" to represent who. An excellent example of Abu-Lughod's approach is Biehl's (2013) ethnography, which follows one person's life during Brazil's neoliberalisation. To remain vigilant concerning the perils of objectivism and homogenisation, I worked to maintain multiple perspectives and a temporal dimension to demonstrate that no category is fixed. Pink adds that ethnographic approaches "aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced" (2013, p. 35). If ethnography is the act of writing a contextualised and nuanced account of people's experiences, participant observation is the act of being with people (Ingold, 2008, 2017), described by DeWalt and DeWalt as:

Every one of us has had the experience of being a stranger in the midst of a new crowd. We walk into a room or join a large cluster of people all of whom seem to know and understand one another. As we nervously approach some part of the chattering crowd, we look for individuals to make eye contact or to shift their position to allow us to join the group. Our senses are on full alert. We observe the people present, how they are dressed, their relative age, who seems to be doing the most talking, and how each individual responds to what others are saying. We listen to conversations taking place to try to gauge the pace of the conversation, the degree of formality or informality of the language being used, and what it is that is being discussed. We look for ways in which we might begin to contribute to the dialogue. (2011, p. 1)

Participant observation entails being with people, and Ingold calls the practice an ontological commitment building on “correspondence ” and “living attentively to others” (2014). As such, these practices “are contingent on the circumstances, and advance towards no end” (Ingold, 2014, p. 390). In practicality, participant observation generally involves a prolonged and/or recurrent presence in one or more localities (Marcus, 1995), admittedly with a scientific objective in mind. My approach resonates with what Günel, Varma, and Watanabe label “patchwork ethnography”⁵, which often involves shorter stays and “fragmented data” yet maintains “long-term commitment”. Such an approach is a result of forces that include the neoliberalisation of academia and private commitments rendering traditional long-term field work increasingly difficult. Participant observation generally entails partaking in social activities and daily life, collecting relevant information, and observing and experiencing what happens and what it means to live in a specific environment (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Of course, ethnography and participant observation are not easily separable; however, subsuming one under the other removes sensitivity to the distinct dilemmas and struggles associated with each. For example, observing and indirectly participating in a whale killing poses different dilemmas than writing about the experience more than 1,500 kilometres away. The experience of being with people is therefore more constrained than narrating and analysing it from afar (Scheper-Hughes, 2000). Moreover, participant observation is often portrayed as a continuum ranging from full participation to full observation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). I ultimately situated myself somewhere in the middle of this spectrum due to the methodological design rather than from concerns regarding the loss of objectivity (because epistemologically this was never a goal). On the one hand, not speaking the language and my pre-established

⁵ <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>

theoretical interest in people's elusive imaginations made full observation impossible. On the other hand, my short, recurrent stays prevented me from extensively participating in daily life. That said, I always engaged with people and attended various events of both a regular and exceptional nature, which made me a familiar figure after the first couple of stays.

Participant observation is a feature of the ethnographic process. However, ethnography is often associated with interpretation and writing, which raise questions concerning what the researcher focuses on, how they write about places and people, and whose voices are amplified and whose silenced. Ingold writes: "The objective of ethnography is to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience" (2008, p. 69). Separating participant observation from ethnography highlights the power differentials and when they are most pronounced. The act of being with people, listening to their stories, sharing a beer or a meal, or driving around on Suduroy blur the asymmetry between me (as a researcher) and the people I spoke to. For instance, when I talked to mayors, Einar, or university professors, I maintain that it is too simplistic to describe these talks as extravist (Burman, 2018) because all were open-ended and subjected to people's interests and agendas. These are instances of "being with people". However, the power differentials change significantly when engaging in the act "describing the lives of people" because this part of the research process relied mostly on my interpretations and authorial decisions, which is loaded with academic expectations and viewed from *somewhere*. I attempted to counteract this imbalance by retaining tensions in the writing, by organising a focus groups to discuss different ideas, and by focusing on people's concerns. I also shared the first version of this thesis with a couple of people from the Faroes. Thus, participant observation and ethnography are intimately related; however, discussing them separately reveals the changing role of the researcher. Writing is often more detached (Scheper-Hughes, 2000), and I was therefore acutely aware of a responsibility to not merely portray all the "bad" elements and incorporate different perspectives.

While shorter but recurrent visits facilitated sensibility towards surprises (Earl Rinehart, 2021) and allowed a degree of disengagement and reflection between visits (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), we never worked or lived for extended periods in the village.

At one point, we considered working at a fish processing plant in Tvøroyri; however, the management expressed that the time scale (a few weeks) was too short for safety reasons—and understandably so. Instead, we participated primarily in leisure activities. For example, we (mostly Emmanuel) attended soccer training, and I later participated in a language course as a student—a bi-weekly evening class hosted at the local school in a room with sturdy and functional furniture that had elementary school books and coursework scattered over the tables. The course was designed locally, and the attendees talked about life in the village between lessons. The group usually consisted of four to six people, excluding me, and most were women who had recently moved to the island (Ísfeld, 2019).

In addition to the more regular activities, we also attended events (a local dance festival, retirement parties, diversity nights) and helped rescue a sheep stuck on the cliff—supposedly one that belonged to the Mayor of Tvøroyri. Emmanuel and I were invited on a boat trip to transport sheep to grazing spots inaccessible by foot. A young man dressed in a durable fleece and trousers with many pockets picked us up in Tvøroyri and smilingly greeted us in English. On the 10-minute car ride to Hvalba, we introduced ourselves and explained what we were doing on the island. He told me, in Danish, that he knew the region where I grew up because his sister lived close by. Arriving at the harbour, we were introduced to two middle-aged Faroese men in the process of preparing to put a rather large rowing boat into the ocean, and we immediately offered to help. The men asked us to row the boat further into the harbour, and four of us jumped in. We rowed to a larger motor boat that was normally used for fishing and still smelled of the catch. A group of men was erecting a makeshift barrier made of wooden pallets at the rear of the boat. Once complete, they transported around ten sheep into their compact and temporary confinement by hand, always with a hand on the horns. I moved to the side of the ship, standing on the patch next to the covered cockpit. Then, 12 to 15 people filled the boat. The ocean was calm and the sky cloudless. Several people asked who we were, primarily in Danish. We sailed southwest from Hvalba and, after 20–30 minutes, a patch of grass 30 metres above sea level appeared. However, I saw no docking area or path leading to the patch. Five men jumped into the rowing boat we had towed and rowed towards the cliffs. The swell was one or two metres high. Therefore, the group of men could not exit normally and instead had to jump at the high point while one person manoeuvred the boat. At least one person

slipped on the wet rocks but regained a foothold before taking an unwanted dip in the dark blue Atlantic Ocean. Once all were on land, the group climbed the cliffs without any rope and hiked to a small plateau with a wooden hoisting system. We sailed closer. The men who remained in the motor boat began to transfer a couple of sheep to the rowing boat. The sheep were rowed underneath the hoisting system and hoisted up, one by one, in a large white cloth. Once all the sheep had found their new home for the next three to four months, Emmanuel and I were rowed to an empty seal cave with the children. Somebody spotted a sheep stranded on a cliff. Suddenly invited on a rescue mission, we jumped into the rowing boat alongside four other men. We then leapt onto the shore's slippery rocks amidst the waves and hiked to a spot above the stranded sheep. The cliff was too steep to see the sheep below. Without much instruction, we grabbed the rope while the oldest man in the group, wearing a faded red down jacket and with thinning hair, casually tied the robe around his waist while walking down and disappeared over the edge. While waiting, I was mesmerised by the islands protruding from a calm ocean and the light's slow fade into a more orange tint. At some point, a fast speed boat loaded with tourists wearing matching wetsuits and life jackets arrived and stopped below. They started photographing the spectacle. Suddenly, we were told to pull the rope and, after a long and quite strenuous effort, the old man appeared, carrying the sheep. We climbed down and, soon after, sailed back towards Hvalba, though with one last surprise, as the captain decided to sail through a narrow path between two rocks at high speed. Events like these were, of course, somewhat rare; however, despite not staying for extended periods, we still managed to participate in a diverse set of activities.

Conducting participant observation recurrently over a longer period creates sensibilities to the natural and material setting (Aagaard & Matthiesen, 2016), the social and political life, and the everyday practices and activities. This method adds further layers to the verbal dimensions; for example, the affective (Stodulka et al., 2018), embodied (Schlieve, 2020), and sensory experiences (Pink, 2015). These registers also fostered surprises, facilitating better theorisations concerning imagination and im/mobility. The design warranted a multi-modal (Crapanzano, 2004) and situated (Zittoun et al., 2020) account of the imagination that partially relied on my experiences as a compass. Attuning to Smyríl's comings and goings, having varied embodied experiences of crossing, or responding to being fixed in place

due to storms were all experiences that shaped this research. Furthermore, participant observation are also suited for exploring how the global manifests in the local (Gille & Riain, 2002; Tsing, 2005) and the relation between places (Amin, 2004), which can be difficult to attain when relying only on qualitative interviews.

The discussion of participant observation and ethnography also raises questions regarding the “site”. While global processes manifest locally, conceiving Suðuroy as a totality would be a misapprehension. Several scholars have suggested that, in studying an epistemologically mobile world, researchers must also become mobile themselves to analyse the relations between “sites” (Clifford, 1997; Marcus, 1995; see Salazar et al., 2017 for an overview). As Hannerz argues, “sites are connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units” (2003, p. 206). This approach involves heeding the relations between Suðuroy and other places in both the Faroes and more globally because these relations or connections are constitutive of life in Suðuroy. Wider geopolitical transformations and neoliberal restructurings also materialise, create frictions, and are made sense of in the locality (Gille & Riain, 2002; Tsing, 2005). I cannot claim to have conducted a multi-sited ethnography. I leaned instead towards a “multi-sighted” approach (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018), meaning that I explored these connections from a “single site” through their recurrence and saliency. The island(s) is not protected by an impermeable boundary. I focused on those imaginations and modes of im/mobility that appeared frequently and were contested.

The open-ended nature of participant observation provided a more extensive grasp of the many facets that impact the interaction between the key concepts. As Pink notes:

Indeed, taking the question of how such everyday imagining emerges as part of the way in which people go about living in the world—as part of the way we do ethnography—opens the sensory ethnographer to the possibility that the temporality of everyday actions is often referential to possible futures and memories of the past—both of which might be thought of as ways of imagining. (2015, p. 46)

Imagination is a multi-faceted process that has predominantly been studied semiotically in sociocultural psychology. Through conducting participant observation, I was able to ground the theorisation more firmly in tangible initiatives and

infrastructural projects, thereby identifying the more mundane externalisations of the imagination and capturing its relation to various features (e.g., the embodied experience of changing weather). This approach facilitated a contextual and nuanced analysis, allowing for the expansion of current theorisations by accounting for the “constructions” and rationalities embedded in the symbolic resources people use when imagining. Im/mobilities have been extensively studied through participant observation, particularly in terms of the more experiential dimension (Salazar et al., 2017) and, arguably, their entanglements in a specific context (Kleist, 2020) and over time (Schapendonk, 2020). Interacting daily with people on the move, capturing perspectives on the same im/mobilities, and experiencing the settings and modes of im/mobility first-hand supported the theorisation of the interactions between the imagination and im/mobility around Suðuroy. These “thick descriptions” were then integrated with the verbal accounts I now turn to.

2.3.2. Qualitative Interviewing

Debates concerning the role of qualitative interviews (Hammersley, 2006) are particularly germane to shorter-term research projects such as mine and warn against an overreliance on verbal accounts. Research focusing primarily on verbal accounts is limited in its ability to account for practices and contexts (Tanggaard, 2014). However, verbal accounts are nonetheless crucial to gaining insights into people’s experiences and how they make sense of different events (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2020; Turner, 2010). Such accounts also add a first-person perspective to integration. Qualitative interviews excel at allowing people to describe their experiences (Brinkmann, 2013), which is corroborated by Pink:

It is commonly recognised that interviews cannot bring researchers into direct contact with life as it is lived and experienced or with the routine and other practices that people engage in on a day-to-day basis. However, one of the advantages of interviews is that they allow people to discuss their lives, beliefs, values, opinions, experiences, practices and more in a focused way in collaboration with a researcher within a circumscribed time. (2015, p. 80)

I conceived and used qualitative interviews as a dialogical method to enhance my understanding of sociocultural and political issues, significant im/mobilities, and of how people narrate lived experiences and imagine their individual and collective futures. We conducted several types of interviews, most of which were semi-

structured. This choice hinged on the semi-structured format's appropriateness for exploring specific themes and emerging ideas while allowing responses to any unplanned subjects that might surface during the interviews (Kvale & Svend Brinkmann, 2015). Brinkmann (2016) claims that qualitative interviews are among the most common methods within social sciences and have consequently sparked the development of many different approaches and protocols (Flick, 2009). This abundance can be both an advantage and a disadvantage when researchers must identify the "right" format for a specific purpose. On the one hand, the texts on interview techniques, designs, and protocols are plentiful and provide considerable material for inspiration. On the other hand, fixating on only one protocol can represent a substantial hazard—methodologically as well as epistemologically—because doing so might erase the dynamism of the research process.

We did not strictly adhere to one format but tailored the interview structure and questions according to the situation and who we were interviewing, which entailed adjusting the openness and predefined topics. Therefore, we never developed a one-size-fits-all interview guide but had a document with "prototypical" questions. These questions were not static but were continuously modified. Therefore, no interviews were identical but all were similar. The structure and the questions were adopted in response to what we heard, theoretical ideas, the situation in which the interview was conducted, and in relation to whom we spoke and what we knew about the person beforehand. Though not as neatly separated in practice, three key forms of qualitative interview informed the process: expert, problem-centred, and biographical. Interviewing offered a means of understanding how people made sense of and experienced different forms of im/mobilities—the first-person perspective—and proved useful in eliciting imagination and deconstructing the elements that went into the imaginative process.

2.3.2.1. Expert Interviews

We conducted six interviews with eight people using a format inspired by so-called expert interviews. Most of these interviews were conducted at an early stage of the research process. Bogner et al. (2009) defined expert interviews as following a semi-structured guide and suggested that they can be particularly useful in the exploratory phases. Indeed, we conducted three of the six interviews during our first visit in

January 2019. We sought a general insight into the place, finding people with specific forms of expertise (e.g., social scientists or immigration officers). We asked a variety of questions concerning contested voices and imaginations, politicised issues related to the island(s), who moved and how, and other “matters of concern” (Latour, 2004). These questions constituted infant steps towards establishing a “where” and “who”. For example, towards the end of these interviews, we discussed possible localities, using a large map as a prompt. The map evoked reflections on the “candidate” localities and helped to situate the discussion. These interviews also functioned as an impetus for further inquiries and oriented me towards several salient issues regarding both the imagination and im/mobilities. In these interviews, I first learned about the initiatives intended to encourage the younger population to stay, the rivalry between Tvøroyri and Vágur, and the rapid expansion of sub-sea tunnels—all phenomena I began to explore and which were included in this thesis. We contacted people we assumed could concretise several of the abstract theoretical orientations. Echoing Meuser and Nagel (2009), we did not select the experts based on only their professions and educational levels but also in terms of their familiarity with and knowledge of the Faroes. Therefore, we also asked more general questions. These interviews revealed several public debates regarding the future. The interviews also intimated which im/mobilities were visible, the role of infrastructure, and the specificities of the Faroese context. The expert interviews focused primarily on exploring the third-person perspective.

2.3.2.2. *Problem-Centred Interviews*

We also conducted 27 semi-structured interviews loosely based on a problem-centred approach. Some of these I conducted alone, others alongside Emmanuel. These interviews were initially built around the conceptual skeleton provided by the project’s description (boundary-work, im/mobility, and the imagination). However, we revised the questions as our knowledge of Suðuroy and the Faroe Islands grew, as we explored new strands of literature, and as additional voices and concerns emerged. Witzel and Reiter explain: “The main purpose of problem centring is the facilitation of a conversation structure that helps to uncover the actual perspectives of individuals on a particular problem in a systematic and dialogical way” (Witzel & Reiter, 2013, p. 24). Although the term “problem-centred” has monological connotations, the idea does not simply involve people responding to a series of issues defined *a priori*. These

interviews were conducted in the spirit of dialogism, acknowledging the co-creation of knowledge that involved myself (as a researcher with certain agendas) and others (with concerns and experiences). We purposefully kept these interviews open-ended to make space for people to digress on tangents. Epistemologically, this approach compliments the axiom of sociocultural psychology because the field is also concerned with the Self and Other and attempts to elucidate multiple voices—mine included. Recognising that my voice is also present calls for transparency regarding how the “problems” were constructed. Witzel and Reither compare the position of researchers to that of a “well-informed traveller” (2010), adding a third alternative to Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2015) miner (uncovering the phenomena) and traveller (exploring the phenomena together) dichotomy. They write that:

[well-informed travellers] have specific priorities and expectations and start the journey on the basis of background information obtained beforehand. Yet the trip they will finally make, and the story they will tell about it afterwards, depend on the people they meet on the road and on their insider knowledge. (2010, p. 3)

We adjusted the questions from interview to interview. Therefore, each of the “problems” had a complex genealogy that included a growing background knowledge of the island(s) in addition to traces of theoretical ideas, dialogues with real and imagined people, and institutional requirements (being part of the NCCR – on the move). The overall objective of the IP34 prompted us to ask questions related to people’s im/mobilities that later also explicitly focused on entanglements with non-human aspects (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). The project’s description listed three levels of analysis (im/mobilities, social and symbolic boundaries, and people’s interrelated lives) and posed several general research questions. I was initially interested in the imagination’s connection to mobility along people’s life courses but then questions concerning immobility and stillness emerged when I met Einar. The same applied to questions regarding how the political system and other factors prohibited and invisibilised some imaginations while promoting and visibilising others. Below is a condensed overview of the overarching “problems” Emmanuel and I developed for the interview guide. Note that this is a retrospective compilation.

- i. **Biographical information:** We asked people to briefly describe themselves, focusing on significant life events, im/mobility trajectories, where they are from,

where they have lived, what they have done, and how long they have lived or stayed on Suðuroy, and so on.

- ii. **Social transformations:** We asked people about the various changes—potentially material, political, sociocultural, imaginative, economic, and demographic—they have observed on Suðuroy or the Faroes more generally. We asked people to indicate which changes they experienced as being most significant or contested and explain why.
- iii. **Social and symbolic boundaries:** We asked people about any tension between villages and/or people, who engaged in this process and with what aim, and the possible consequences for people’s lives and the islands (due to its relatively peripheralised position).
- iv. **Im/mobilities:** We asked people about their (and others’) mobility and immobility practices and the meanings associated with them, including which forms of movement or stillness were valued and which were contested. We also inquired about any possible friction.
- v. **Imagined futures:** We asked people what their own and the island’s future might resemble, how it might relate to im/mobility, and which affective valences they attached to the future.

We deliberately framed all questions in an open-ended manner and had a list of possible questions and probes for each theme, which was then modified according to the person we spoke to and the direction the interviews took. This approach resonates with the idea of a “guided conversation” proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015). While several researchers have argued that it is useful to ask the same questions throughout the research (Turner, 2010), such an approach clashes with a dialogical epistemology. For example, during the later visits, the interviews increasingly focused on specific elements (e.g., questions regarding the processes of staying and the possible construction of a sub-sea tunnel) that had featured little initially but had risen in saliency as we continued. Later, I also explored people’s biographies and im/mobility trajectories to understand why some became mobile while others stayed and where the imaginative process played a role. This emphasis permitted me to trace certain temporal and spatial connections to elsewhere and elsewhere (Ringel, n.d.). The problem-centred interviews also allowed me to prompt and discuss people’s imagination in relation to specific topics and other perspectives. They also facilitated discussing various forms of im/mobilities, the infrastructure that facilitates or hinders them, and their relation to the future.

2.3.2.3. *Biographical Interviews*

We conducted five additional biographically oriented interviews with three different people, aiming to reconstruct entire life courses and im/mobility trajectories. Abu-Lughod's "ethnographies of the particular" inspired the biographical angle, together with sociocultural psychological studies following the life of June, a British woman writing a diary throughout the Second World War (e.g., Gillespie et al., 2008). I wanted to explore and theorise changes in people's imaginations of the future in relation to fluctuating im/mobilities. Moreover, I aimed to situate people's lives in the sociocultural and material world to explore the interface between sociogenesis and ontogenesis. While I do not present any ethnographies of the particular (Abu-Lughod, 1991) in this thesis, the analysis of Einar's trajectory was a cautious steps in that direction (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). Instead, I present five condensed stories in Chapter 7. Biographical interviews capture people's experiences over time and with reference to certain events, such as how societal transformations materialised in their everyday lives or imagined future and whether that produced a change in their im/mobility. Rosenthal proposes that biographical research needs to "reconstruct their [phenomena] genesis" (2018, p. 159); that is, elucidate experiences and meanings people construct and situate these in a wider context. She describes the crux of this interview format as:

In all of these interviews, the autobiographical narrators—so-called biographers—were asked, employing an initial opening question, to give a full extempore narration (as opposed to an argument or a theoretical exposition) of events and experiences from their own lives. The ensuing story, or 'main narrative', is not interrupted by further questions but is encouraged by means of nonverbal and paralinguistic expressions of interest and attention, such as 'mhm'. (1993, p. 1)

We asked people to describe their lives and explained that they could take as much time as needed, highlighting that we would not interrupt and presenting a statement (taken from an interview guide) akin to:

In this interview, we are interested in hearing your life story all the way from your birth until today (and possibly also going into the future) in your own words. We will not interrupt you and you can take as much time as you want. While you speak, we will take some notes in order to remember some of the follow-up questions we might want to ask afterwards.

We listened and only answered with affirming words or noises. When people's narration faltered or they fell out of the story, we either prompted them with different cues (for example, by repeating the last sentence) or asked open follow-up questions. Such questions often related to certain omissions, such as when people skipped specific periods in their lives, significant events, social relationships, or silences that triggered our curiosities. In contrast to problem-centred interviews, the biographical interviews do not start from pre-existing ideas or observations; rather, people are offered a platform to freely narrate their lives as they wish with as little interruption as possible (Brinkmann, 2013; Rosenthal, 2009). These interviews naturally also lasted longer than the problem-centred ones. On this basis, I was able to reconstruct elements of the interaction between people's imaginations and im/mobilities. However, the past-oriented emphasis of this type of interview often requires a degree of inference to identify imagined futures; for example, by establishing contexts through additional secondary sources. I usually also invited people to contemplate the future at the end of the interview—as was the case when I tried to understand why Einar decided to stay on Suðuroy through three different crises (Pedersen, n.d.).

2.3.2.4. *Focus Groups*

I also designed and conducted one focus group (a second was cancelled due to bad weather) and held one lecture for students at the local high school using a PowerPoint derived from the one intended for the focus groups. Both took place during my last stay in January 2020. I sought to foster a dialogue around several salient topics and theoretical ideas to elicit different perspectives. I had already conducted a variety of preliminary analyses and gathered a substantial amount of information on the island, a fraction of which I presented. While researchers tend to focus on sharing the final product (Mosse, 2015), I hoped to create a more dialogical process. Arranging focus groups appeared to be a rudimentary step in that direction because they facilitate discussion. This dialogue helped enhance the analysis by including additional voices. Marková and colleagues characterise focus groups as:

[...] a research method based on open-ended group discussions that examine a particular set of socially relevant issues. In some respects, focus groups are expected to have characteristics that are similar to spontaneous and informal discussions taking place in cafés, in streets and in pubs. (Marková et al., 2007, p. 32)

I prepared a PowerPoint and relevant content in ongoing dialogue with Emmanuel, who had conducted a similar focus group in Val-de-Travers. While the structure was similar, the content differed. Jógvan invited a group of eight and organised a place where we could all meet. To ensure shared understanding, I began with a 15-minute presentation that described the project's overall objectives. I then presented statistical information to emphasise the Faroese socioeconomic transformation, focusing on the growing disparities or lack of synchronisation between Suðuroy and the rest of the Faroe Islands. After the initial presentation, I offered various themes for discussion based on their saliency and emerging theoretical ideas. These were exemplified with one or two quotes to initiate the debate. I also formulated a small number of general questions regarding social transformation, living on Suðuroy, and whether the attendees imagined staying. Before starting the session and the recording, I informed the group that the discussion would be recorded and could feature in further analysis. I underscored that everyone was free to speak off the record or simply listen.

The lecture at the high school happened somewhat spontaneously, and I was unsure of who and how many would be present. I decided to modify the format to accommodate an unknown number of attending students (I suspect between 25 to 35 attended). Therefore, I moved away from a more dialogue-based format, leaving just three open questions, because I feared that facilitating an open exchange would be difficult in this atmosphere. I also discussed this format with a friend who grew up on the island, and she also warned that I should not expect too much discussion. To create a semblance of interaction, I used Mentimeter, which is an online platform that allows students to anonymously type answers to questions. The answers are then displayed on a screen and can be used as prompts—though the effect was admittedly rather limited. However, I did obtain certain indications regarding whether the younger generation imagined a future on the island. Altogether, by facilitating a space in which people could discuss germane aspects and imagine together, the focus group added a more dialogical layer to the analysis and theorisation concerning the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility.

2.3.2.5. *Whom Did We Talk To?*

Who we eventually talked to or interviewed depended on a combination of chance (it is impossible to control who we met and who wanted to speak to us) and the

snowballing element (Patton, 2002). Fortuitously, most people were extremely helpful and went out of their way to connect us with others. Early in the process, we realised the importance of how we described the project and its aims to people, as this impacted how they interpreted who we wanted to talk to. For example, we initially used “mobility” and the highly politicised word “migration” when explaining the project, but people were perplexed and responded that “nobody is moving here” and “I don’t know any migrants”. After presenting the project, we also received a considerable number of responses regarding why we picked Suðuroy. People would sometimes say “nothing is happening” on the island. These responses were revealing in terms of invisibilised mobilities (e.g., people returning, the increasing number of foreign nationals, stayers, and commuters), visibilised mobilities (e.g., ships and people leaving), and those mobilities that were deemed comparatively absent (e.g., tourism). Such replies also exemplify experiences of emptying and what others described as a “dying island”. We adjusted the description in response and decided to provide concrete examples of a wide range of im/mobilities (e.g., those who are visiting, those who have returned, and those who are staying), although people naturally focused on what was most significant to them.

Simultaneously, I do not want to downplay our role. We actively endeavoured to capture as many different voices, perspectives, and forms of im/mobilities as possible, which sometimes involved contacting specific people or chatting to people in the streets. After a number of visits and once theoretical ideas had started to form, we deliberately contacted people who could provide an alternative perspective or who we felt were missing. The “selection” had theoretical underpinnings from the beginning (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Valsiner, 2014b) and evolved throughout. I was not concerned with establishing a representative sample but with incorporating as many voices and experiences as possible (Cornish, 2020b; Flyvbjerg, 2011).

2.3.3. Desk Research

I conducted extensive desk research, adding an additional layer to the other methods detailed. Hannerz (2003) argued that desk research is an indispensable element of ethnographic writing, and it proved useful in detecting the debates prevalent on Suðuroy and in the Faroe Islands more generally. Desk research was also vital for emplacing the imagination and im/mobilities in history and accounting for changing

socioeconomic and demographic circumstances over time. This so-called “corpus collection” (Bauer & Aarts, 2000) involved gathering information from academic articles, ethnographies, historical accounts, novels, newspaper articles, reports, and statistical data. This information contributed to formulating an in-depth contextualisation and creating thick descriptions, further substantiating the analysis by placing specific details in a wider setting. I integrated this method with the others and, in doing so, strengthened my ability to capture the third-person perspective. In short, the desk research was essential to situating the interactions of the imagination and im/mobility within wider transformations and providing more accurate descriptions and more effectively relevant theorisations *in situ*.

2.4. Analytical Inspirations

Although the analysis did not follow a strict analytical procedure, I was inspired by three different perspectives: Foucault’s elaboration of the genealogical method (Foucault, 1978; Hook, 2007) and the micro-physics of power (Foucault, 1990), more classical thematic analyses (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006), and multi-voiced analyses (Aveling et al., 2015; Cornish & Gillespie, 2010). These inspirations guided the analysis and directed my gaze towards complex power vectors, recurrent themes, and the distinct voices present.

2.4.1. Killing Chimaeras

Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (Foucault, 1978, p. 146)

Foucault proposed an alternative approach to broad and linear historical accounts (2007), arguing against the search for origins and historical determinism, which is not overly distant from sociocultural psychology’s quest for moving beyond universals. This is exemplified in his book “Discipline and Punish” (Foucault, 1977), which demonstrates how the penal system cannot be reduced to neatly successive developments but emerged from various contradictions and multiplicities. Such a viewpoint corresponds with a dialogical epistemology because its goal is to capture the

polyphonic nature of human existence and social life—and add a dimension of power. Gillespie adopted a similar approach in his studies of tourism in Ladakh (2006a). I rely on Foucauldian insights as an analytical lens and not a step-by-step procedure, as he proposed the need to closely scrutinise contingencies and constraints when exploring sociogenetic transformation to avoid creating a singular origin story.

2.4.2. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a staple procedure in psychology and aims to identify and construct patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Since researchers with both positivist and constructivist philosophical viewpoints use thematic analysis, it is debated what this procedure can accomplish (Braun et al., 2019). This analytical approach does not necessarily impose strict linearity but intends to foster reflexive thematic development. Themes (as a form of categorisation) are not “found” but “created”. I used thematic analysis to form a general overview, form preliminary theoretical ideas, and as an instrument of abduction.

I developed the themes by reading the transcribed interviews and my field notes with several theoretically inspired themes in mind (e.g., symbolic resources, various forms of mobility, and features of the imaginative horizon) but maintained an openness to when these did not apply or emerging patterns or sub-themes. I repeated this process several times at different stages of the research. Doing so allowed me to funnel the complexity into thematic hierarchies, aiding theorisation while maintaining a focus on the data. Themes are always incomplete and potentially homogenising; however, they offer a degree of analytical clarity. To avoid naturalising, I did not quantify the occurrence of themes or network their relations (Brinkmann, 2014). Moreover, in accordance with Brinkmann’s cautionary tale, I was concerned to sustain internal tension in order to expose the themes’ dynamism. Thematic analysis served as a preliminary instrument in establishing patterns and nourishing theoretical ideas. It must be mentioned that the coding was occasionally far from the neat fit and that this resistance spearheaded several of the abductive movements. For example, I initially coded time according to the sociocultural model; that is, into three distinct categories (pasts, alternative presents, and futures). However, these classifications did not fully represent people’s imaginations of the future, their relations to other places, and how time was experienced. Here abduction came into play. First, I added a theme coded as

“bright future” to capture affective valences—somewhat misleadingly, as this category also contained dystopian imaginings. Second, I added a theme on the perceived possibilities implied by imagined futures, coded as “opening/closing” to indicate the expansion or contraction of what futures were imaginable. Third, I added a theme to reflect the relation between places, coded initially as “peripheralisation” and then as “emptying” because I found the latter framework more convincingly captured the relational process and matched people’s descriptions. All of these were important to unravelling the (de)synchronisation discussed later.

Often this process manifested in the creation of sub-themes, Im/mobility provides an excellent example in this regard. I first broadly distinguished mobilities and immobilities (being aware that they are entangled) because I did not want to superimpose certain types of im/mobility. I then added differentiation between the forms of im/mobility based on key terms I encountered (e.g., “commuting”, “return”, “imaginative”, “non-human”). I subsequently proceeded to repeat the process in relation to barriers (e.g., “regimes”) and infrastructure (e.g., “Smyríl”). However, these sub-themes did not capture people’s experiences and the meaning they attributed to their im/mobility (Cresswell, 2006), I therefore also coded for “stuckness” and “staying”. I am aware that this approach can create an artificial binary—as discussed in section [2.5.5](#)—because coding elements according to whether people are mobile or immobile is responsive to neither entanglements nor changes over time, which is why I proceeded with a deeper qualitative analysis. To overcome this potential weakness, I focused on making the entanglement apparent, illustrating different experiences of the “same” form of im/mobility and demonstrating how the entanglement changes in time. I also developed a series of theoretically inspired themes that were primarily utilised through their relation to emptying, such as social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) and possibilities (Glăveanu, 2018b).

Altogether, coding provided a means of fostering dialogue between the data and theories in the early stages of the analysis; however, the codes are not explicitly used in the analysis because doing so would frustrate my intention to nuance the case study.

2.4.3. Multi-Voiced Analysis

I was also inspired by multi-voiced analysis (Aveling et al., 2015), which also permeates dialogical case studies (Cornish, 2020b, 2020a). This approach is applied to analyse “the interactions between Self and Other as they appear within the utterances of the multivoiced Self” (Aveling et al., 2015, p. 684). Multi-voiced analysis directed me towards moments when people act as ventriloquists, issues concerning who is talking and who is addressed, and the asymmetrical relation between various voices. For example, this mode of analysis raised questions regarding the relational aspect of the imagination and whose voice is amplified and whose silenced (Glăveanu, 2018). The approach functioned as a springboard for acquiring and analysing different voices, points of negotiation and contestation, and the addressivity ingrained in utterances. The multi-voicedness was notably present when I analysed the regimes of the imagination and who imagined what in relation to whom. The multi-voiced approach also highlights the links between voices both “horizontally” and “vertically” and therefore situates them firmly within relations (Linell, 2009).

2.5. Research Progress

I now present the more eclectic aspect of the research process. I first explain and reflect on several of the significant events and decisions that shaped the research process and relate these to questions concerning “access” and the “field”. Whereas the first half of the chapter discusses the procedural aspects, this second section aims to illustrate elements of the process. Cerwonka states:

[...] it is characterized by rushes of and lulls in activity and understanding, and it requires constant revision of insights gained earlier. We see the anxiety and euphoria that accompany the uneven tempo of analytical understanding and systematic research. (2007, p. 5)

The above passage is from a dialogue between Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) during the former’s PhD research, underlining the improvisational nature of participant observation. The messiness of the research process is often subsequently neatened (Law, 2007), conceivably in the guise of scientism. I was never interested in defining and diagnosing “Faroese culture” or “Faroese society” through coalescing all the islanders under a homogenising category; rather, as mentioned, I was interested in

ambivalences (Kierans & Bell, 2017), frictions (Tsing, 2000), and polyphony (Marková et al., 2020) that could aid in developing more “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1991).

2.5.1. Returning to Suðuroy

After the initial visit to the Faroe Islands and deciding to initially centre on Tvøroyri, I assisted Emmanuel in Val-de-Travers (although in a limited fashion due to my meagre French). We planned the next visit to Suðuroy in parallel. Throughout spring 2019, we regularly visited Val-de-Travers and, realising the inadequacy of centring on a single village, decided to enlarge the inquiry to encompass an entire valley. This naturally made the notion of taking “segments of the entire population” into account a practical impossibility.

These two case studies materialised in dialogue, and the reflections emerging in Switzerland infiltrated the preparations for returning to the Faroe Islands. We wondered if the entire island would be a more suitable “where” and, if so, contemplated whether we should live in different villages. However, we decided to use Tvøroyri as a base because Smyríl docked there and, from our rudimentary impressions, the village appeared to have more places where we could meet people spontaneously. As previously mentioned, we opted for shorter but recurrent visits to add a longitudinal dimension, to experience the island over different seasons, and for practical reasons (e.g., also having a case in Val-de-Travers and partners in Switzerland). Oscillating between presence and absence had several advantages for the abductive process (Rinehart, 2021). One such benefit is that leaving the Faroes created space in which to digest the many stories, experiences, and observations I had encountered. Returning to Switzerland also permitted me to further discuss emerging ideas with colleagues, read relevant literature, and explore various related documentation. Periods of absence therefore assisted the unfamiliarisation process that rekindles sensitivity to new surprises (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007; Shweder, 1997; Zittoun & Morasso, 2018). Another advantage of intermittent absence was that our returns to the Faroes ensured that we could experience the islands at different times and tempos and, before we decided to abandon the other cases, conduct multiple studies in parallel. Most noticeably, my embodied experience of staying on Suðuroy differed significantly from summer to winter.

After staying a month in May 2019, I returned in August, November, and finally in January 2020. We rented a small house in the heart of Tvøroyri, which smelled like my grandfather's summerhouse and was without Wi-Fi. We initially considered renting vacant rooms in somebody's home because it offered straightforward access to a social network; however, we eventually prioritised having a safe space to talk to people and a private area for recuperation. Even otherwise immersive and brilliant ethnographies have occasionally failed to include more mundane aspects of fieldwork, such as uncertainty, fatigue after long days, and the need for privacy. In January 2019, we had already repeatedly heard people say "everyone knows everyone" and, from ethnographies written on the "islanders" (Gaffin, 1996; Gaini, 2013a), we were aware of the social control this implied. The house's four walls formed a protective cocoon that allowed the discussion of sensitive topics with others (which several applauded) or amongst ourselves. However, we still experienced how the boundary between the public and the private was not always delineated by the front door (Wylie, 2011). Taking a nap one afternoon after two long days, a woman standing in the middle of the living room abruptly woke us by calling loudly to see if anyone was home. Getting up, eyes puffy, we learned that she sought donations for the Blue Cross. We locked the door after that incident.

We also failed to anticipate how mobility functioned in and around Suðuroy. Being completely unacquainted with the public transportation system in the Faroes, we did not consider the infrequent scheduling nor the impact of the weather. For example, the fact that we first sought to rent bicycles to get around demonstrates just how little we knew about the ways of being mobile there and highlights the difficulties of knowing this from afar. The rapidly fluctuating weather, constant wind, and steep mountain passes makes biking unreliable and physically demanding. When thinking back, I do not recall seeing anyone biking on Suðuroy, a lack that now seems somewhat obvious after seeing the Faroese infrastructural attempts to nullify the natural limitations placed on mobility. We eventually relied on public transportation and were therefore occasionally obliged to leave the house hours before a meeting despite, by car, most destinations on the island being no more than 35 minutes away from Tvøroyri. Buses were largely synchronised with Smyril and almost superimposed a particular rhythm (Vannini, 2012). The concrete ferry terminal also functioned as the main hub for the buses. A long line of cars was usually waiting at the parking lot to

pick people up when Smyríl docked, and we tended to be among the few taking the bus. We never experienced any problems finding a seat on the buses, even the smaller ones. We therefore spent considerable time waiting, walking around villages, or drinking coffee in local cafés or restaurants. A potential side-effect of our relative immobility is a degree of Tvøroyri-centrism, but we made a point of visiting and talking to people from other villages as often as possible. We occasionally increased our motility by renting a car for several days or hitchhiking (I had never hitchhiked before), although the former required foresight because the island had only one official rental car. However, through friends, we learned of more information channels. We were returning from a meeting in another village and asked the bus driver if he could drive us to Froðba, a village further down the fjord than Tvøroyri. We walked towards a garage (because the mechanic might have a car to rent). Outside the garage a lot of cars were parked, and it was quiet. I opened the front door and noticed a little office on the right-hand side with stacks of paper all over a desk at the centre of the room. A man emerged from a kitchen in the back, and I asked him if they had any rental cars. “Yes, you can just take that one”, he said while gesturing at a grey family wagon parked outside. He told us where to find the keys without asking for any identification. Various sized dents covered the body of the car. The interior was not precisely spotless, smelling a little like sheep, and we noticed that it had driven nearly 300,000 kilometres. Nonetheless, the car allowed us to explore several lost places and only got (temporarily) stuck once, when trying to descend a steep road consisting of dark rocks.

Furthermore, as a novice researcher and arguably still naïve, I falsely anticipated that planning would be frictionless. Before arriving in the Faroes, I encountered challenges in terms of scheduling formal interviews or meetings that did not involve large companies or public institutions. Appointments often hinged on a somewhat *laissez-faire* attitude to planning, which triggered occasional bouts of frustration. To superimpose an academic concept, the temporality on the Faroes differed from what one might have expected. Fixing dates and times therefore required spontaneity and flexibility, and arrangements regularly changed. Every time I arrived in the Faroes, I immediately contacted people to ask if they had time to meet or talk. Waiting, while integral to the research process, occasionally created a sense of racing against the clock, and I learned to expect a hectic final two weeks. When I shared this frustration regarding planning with people from the Faroes, most jokingly called this “Faroese

time”. One person explained that being 10 to 15 minutes late to work was acceptable because randomly meeting someone in the streets took time. This “Faroese time” hinges on the unexpected and the contingent—because it is the land of maybe (Norgate, 1943). Another person facetiously stated that Danes always arrived early while the Faroese always arrived late after I (a Dane) appeared five minutes in advance.

Language also impacted the research process, particularly since I am a native Danish speaker. Faroese is the first and institutional language of the Faroe Islands. However, due to the country’s post-colonial/neo-colonial relationship to Denmark (until 1938, Danish remained the official language) (Isfeldt, 2020; Mitchinson, 2010), Danish is still taught in school, and many books used for educational purposes are still in Danish. This relation created a significant flow of people between the two countries, and everyone I met spoke perfect Danish. During the first two stays, almost all the interviews were conducted in English because Emmanuel does not speak Danish. However, once people realised I spoke Danish, they often switched to it when addressing me. While most Faroese are also highly proficient in English, speaking Danish proved a valuable skill because people tended to be more fluent and comfortable in Danish compared to English. This also meant I had access to history books, various documents, and could follow some of the news. I primarily spoke Danish when visiting alone and found the conversations more organic. Understanding Faroese would have been ideal, but the research design, moving between countries, and the initial concept of conducting additional case studies slowed the process of learning Faroese (and French, for that matter). Nonetheless, I gradually learned to decipher casual conversations because Faroese and Danish share the same root insofar as conversations between Faroese and Danish people (those who have lived there for some time) often proceed in both languages. I therefore could not generally sit and “observe” people—even if the epistemological and ethnical conundrums connected with such a practice are disregarded. Moreover, I was perhaps inclined to notice whenever people spoke Danish and, indeed, contacted two people because I noticed their Danish accents.

I wrote field notes throughout the entire process, which I admittedly found to be a rather strange and demanding endeavour at first. The attention and recall skills

necessary for such work took time to train and grow accustomed to. The notation process included learning to attune and be aware of what or who is present or absent, what people are wearing and doing, who speaks and who does not, the general atmosphere, and what I am thinking and doing (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). We briefly discussed note-taking practices in the team and read a couple of texts to form a sense of what to be aware of and the different ways of structuring notes, yet the practice was still new to me. One of the issues that I faced concerned how to write unintrusive notes without acting secretively. I was not trying to document a world but to recognise that knowledge is produced socially. I therefore I did not immediately aim to transform the process into a product (Fabian, 1995) but wrote keywords throughout the day. I would jot down several prompts on my phone (because most people are used to smartphones) before writing the field notes once I was back at the house. While I always strove to be transparent with everyone I met, it can be difficult to continuously inform everyone because and keep them aware of my purpose, as familiarity grows and scenes change, contacts are likely to forget that I am a researcher when casually having a beer or hiking in the mountains. The boundaries blur.

With the benefit of hindsight, I would have acted differently regarding certain aspects. First, I would have kept meticulous track of the abductive reasoning as it unfolded throughout the entire research process, perhaps by keeping a research log—a standard approach in many natural sciences. Second, I would have emphasised my affective responses and embodied experiences earlier because they produced surprises. Once again, this demonstrates that undertaking research is a constant learning process. Unfamiliar aspects of im/mobility were part of the process; for example, experiencing heavy turbulence when landing, being unable to walk outside due to extreme winds, and even questioning the durability of the house. Experiencing these displays of nature and the corresponding changes heightened my attentiveness to how people discussed the weather and, in response, occasionally reported feeling stuck or depressed. I noticed how well-informed people were about the weather forecast, how the weather permeated almost every conversation during the winter months, and I was frequently asked how I was faring; that is, coping with the darkness and harsh weather that limited most social life.

2.5.2. Construction of the Field

For several general points on the research process, I turn to the construction of the field, which emerges in dialogue with people (Gupta, 2014) and is always partly imaginary (Stellmach, 2020). Discussing the field is important because we did not define the “where” beforehand. All studies with a constructivist ontology would perhaps concede that those whom the researchers speak to and the social networks researchers create can undoubtedly inform what comes to constitute the field. However, I want to stress the improvisational dimension and illustrate how random encounters became important. In this regard, I introduce two events and several people that played a central role in shaping the field before discussing the possible shortcomings and what this process reveals about my positionality and the “place”.

2.5.2.1. A (Symbolic) Funeral Emblematic of Emptying

One event in May 2019 stood out when reflecting on the research process. Ghodsee (2015) wrote that specific events reveal many elements concerning the past, the future, wider transformations, temporalities, and social relations—and this is arguably one such event. It proved important due to the people we met there, the type of question we asked, and the theoretical ideas that later emerged.

We walked back towards the small centre of Tvøroyri on a sunny but cold Friday afternoon, just a few days after arriving in the start of May 2019. We wanted to have a beer at Puppín, a local pub situated in the first building ever constructed in the village (as a trading outpost). We read on Facebook that the pub would soon close permanently, yet we could not determine when and why. This pub was a factor in our decision to stay in Tvøroyri because it seemed a lively public space on our first visit. Therefore, we were naturally somewhat disappointed to learn of its imminent closure and curious to learn more. When we arrived at 4pm, there were only a handful of people present. I felt as though I had stepped into a dimly lit time capsule due to the pub’s low yellowish ceiling, crooked wooden floors, old weights and cans, fixed drawers, and walls decorated with photographs from a bygone era. I suspect this was a purposeful attempt to provoke nostalgia and a homage to the building’s historical significance.

We ordered two Faroese beers, and Emmanuel asked the waitress when the pub was closing. “Today”, she said. Her answer confused us and, after some clarification, we realised that the pub was closing permanently at 7pm that evening (although it later reopened under a new owner). We sat down at a table near the door with an overview of the room. We had little idea of what to expect but still wanted to see what happened. After 20 minutes, a steady influx of people aged from late adolescence to post-retirement age began to enter. Most spoke Faroese except for a couple of Danish speakers—we were ostentatiously the only ones speaking in English. Everyone who arrived greeted an elderly woman who was walking merrily around the crowd offering lollipops from a wooden basket. There seemed to be a high degree of familiarity between people, and I remember feeling somewhat out of place.

We went outside to smoke cigarettes on the small wooden terrace with a view of the newly built processing plant and got talking with two younger men. This moment destroyed the veneer that separated us from the crowd. More people joined the conversation, all curious as to what we were doing on Suðuroy. People expressed sadness regarding the closure of the pub and mentioned that this event was just a symptom of a longer process. After the last round was served and the key turned for the final time, a group lingered on the gravel below the elevated pub with an almost defiant disregard for the extraordinary chill factor. We were shaking and had trouble holding our beers. A woman directly asked us who we were, explaining that she had immediately recognised that Emmanuel and I were “not from here”. After learning we were conducting a study, she repeatedly stressed that we had just witnessed a historical event and suggested centring the research on the building. The three of us walked to a local pizzeria 50 metres uphill from the pub, taking a slight detour because she wanted to show us the local elementary school. She introduced us to a middle-aged man on the way and encouraged us to meet him during the following week, which we did. Indeed, I continued to meet him during all subsequent visits, and he helped introduce us to more people and identify historical literature useful for learning about the Faroe Islands. We arrived at the pizzeria, all intoxicated, and ordered a pizza and beers. She made a point of telling us that, because commercialised tourism was yet to reach the shores of Suðuroy, people would not treat us as commodities. though she still encouraged us to “give back”. I was not under the impression that this “giving back” implied monetary compensation. She proceeded to ask us more personal

questions. Unlike scholars who equate lack of distance with a breach of objectivity, I maintain that a view from nowhere does not epistemologically exist (Haraway, 1991; Jovchelovitch, 2007). Indeed, social relations such as the one forming that hazy night at the local pizzeria represent the minimal condition for conducting any kind of in-depth qualitative research. This conversation was also one of the first times I encountered the question “Why here?” followed by the exclamation “Nobody moves here”. We did not immediately understand the significance, but her exclamation indicated a sense of emptying to me, that people moved away, and that leaving or staying was a pertinent topic.

2.5.2.2. *Further Points of Access*

We slowly formed a social network after attending the closing of the pub, and the woman from the pizzeria brought us to social events, cooked dinner for us, and introduced us to several people. The snowball rolled after that first meeting, albeit in a direction contingent upon the manner of people she thought we would be “interested in”. Several links that emerged from the event can further demonstrate the dialogical process.

We met the woman from the pizzeria the following week, and she introduced us to a soccer player through whom we received permission to train with the local team in Tvøroyri. In truth, I was never more than a casual soccer player, but luckily Emmanuel is an exceptional player. This led to a range of (male) acquaintances, several interviews, and some incredible experiences. For example, one of the players informed us of a grind (whaling) happening in Hvalba and offered to drive us there. The sheep rescue detailed earlier also happened through the soccer team. We were also served Faroese specialities (such as fermented sheep and whale), had snaps, and were shown around the island on foot and by car. The fact that we are two (relatively) young, heterosexual, white men eased the entry into that social circle. At the same time, other parts of the community remained invisible to us. We had little contact with other sections of the population, such as visiting workers, docking anglers, and women who had moved from afar.

We also had numerous chance encounters in which we or others would instigate conversations. For example, during a visit to a local cafe in Tvøroyri, we overheard a

person having a conversation in Danish over the telephone. When the call ended, we asked what he was doing in the village and spoke for 20 minutes. We agreed to meet again, and I eventually spent considerable time with him in both the Faroe Islands and elsewhere. Through him, I was invited into another circle of friends and family. The fact that I am a native Danish speaker and grew up in Denmark likely served as the impetus for establishing relations with other Danish nationals.

Naturally, we also contacted several people through formal channels, several of whom were also helpful in placing us in contact with others. A noticeable example is Jógvan, who connected us to several others, offered us a place to work (though we never actually went there), and organised the focus group. As an anthropologist advised us at the beginning of the research: we should be willing to be carried away by different forces but reflect on why it happened and consider the possible implications. Most of the people Jógvan introduced us to had lived elsewhere and returned, meaning “returnees” constituted a large segment of the people I spoke to. However, I received the impression that having lived in Denmark and elsewhere was normal. Those who had lived elsewhere often vocally advocated for change. I tried not to focus blindly on their perspectives through incorporating tension, but it still raises questions regarding the potential politicisation of this research; that is, who can mobilise this research to promote particular agendas. I therefore hope that people engage with and discuss the entirety of the descriptions and ideas presented, particularly those concerning the future. Moreover, the optimal means of addressing this possible use of my research is to include as many voices as possible.

2.5.2.3. Positionality, The Field, and Potential Blind Spots

While I consciously tried not to reduce Suðuroy and its inhabitants to a homogenous and hermetically closed “field” (Ferguson & Gupta, 1997), the voices included reveal several aspects of the context of knowledge production.

Most of the people that I spoke with had lived elsewhere for longer or shorter periods, tended to belong to the younger segment of the population, and often expressed varying degrees of excitement regarding the tremendous socioeconomic transformations this thesis later explores. Concerns over a “brain drain” and discussions on how to halt the exodus had been prominent for decades. Recent

investments in tourism and education had been made in the hope of convincing people to stay or, at least, return. Given the shifting tectonics of power, the people I spoke to also seemed to be those with louder voices concerning the collective future. The older segments of the population, or those more ambivalent about or hesitant towards the transformation, are unfortunately less present in this thesis; however, I actively worked to neither silence nor invisibilise them. Despite my efforts, an asymmetry nevertheless remains in terms of who contributed to knowledge production and who might consequently use and benefit from it.

Certain people remain almost invisible in this thesis. For example, an increasing number of women moved to the Faroe Islands to marry over the last 20 years (Ísfeld, 2019), but meeting and talking to them and/or their husbands proved difficult for several reasons. From what we heard, many worked long hours in the fish processing plants and were not overtly visible in public spaces. We spoke to many people who knew of, but not necessarily knew, several of the women. If they did know the women, most were hesitant to place us in contact, possibly to protect the women or because of existing stigmatisation (Ísfeld, 2019). Further, being young, white men likely produced scepticism towards us and our motives. Ísfeld (2019), who wrote a PhD dissertation on the women, writes at length about the difficulties in gaining “access” to this group. I even talked people suggest that arranging two birthdays common in families with a partner coming from abroad. Hayfield and Schug claimed (2019) that the tight-knit Faroese networks have firm boundaries, and I suspect they are firmer for those who appear or speak differently. During my last stay, I began attending language classes in which I met several of the women and began to hear their perspectives. However, because of COVID-19, I was unable to return and therefore could not provide them with a stronger voice.

Inevitably, my social position, beliefs, and experiences shaped the contours of the field and what I chose to emphasise, which I have tried to make apparent throughout the thesis.

2.5.3. Writing in Dialogue

Shifting between “we” and “I” in the writing reflects that the entire process was dialogical and did not represent only my collaboration with Emmanuel. Somewhat

paradoxically, social scientists often ignore this point—despite claiming an ontological stance that assumes the interdependence of Self and Other. The individualisation of authorship is further encouraged by the neoliberalisation of academia. Therefore, as Foucault (1969) suggested, we should focus on the construction and role of the author-function instead of the author themselves. This resonates with Glăveanu’s (2012) proposition that society tends to romanticise the lone genius. I firmly maintain that the theoretical ideas presented later are products of an ongoing dialogue with real and imagined colleagues, texts, and the wider sociopolitical landscape. In this spirit, I want to acknowledge the dialogical authorship that permeates this thesis and echo Cornish’s call that research should also address different audiences with different “interests and perspectives” (2020a, p. 8). The notion of audience is not intended as a monological or unidirectional communication but refers more to a dialogue partner. Numerous people and various audiences contributed to the formulation and structure of this thesis, and the dialogues with and translations between these diverse audiences were not frictionless due to contradictory interests. I want to discuss three central audiences.

First, I was in close dialogue with the IP34 team and the NCCR—on the move community. While I unfortunately cannot represent all the voices and must pragmatically essentialise them under one banner, I still believe it is crucial to acknowledge these voices. A dialogue with this audience offers both benefits and challenges due to its composition, which encompasses many (occasionally contradictory) disciplines and approaches. However, such an audience forced me to significantly widen my knowledge of the research on migration and im/mobility, since the sociocultural psychological literature is limited on these topics. On the one hand, this melting pot encouraged and facilitated interdisciplinarity, and I learned to engage with different perspectives, methodologies, and concerns. On the other hand, the IP34 team and the NCCR—on the move community placed extra pressure on me to “translate” and navigate more divergent demands, particularly regarding those beyond the assumptions and scope of the sociocultural psychological perspective. Although initially a source of (productive) intellectual confusion, many studies—particularly from the geographical and anthropological fields—inspired me immensely. Indeed, anthropological reflections on the ethics and modalities of writing informed the way I wrote this thesis and what I decided to include. For example, reflections on what

constitutes a “field” are rare in sociocultural psychology. Through entering a dialogue with other fields, I learned to reflect on the construction of “fields”, who (or what) contributed to their shapes, and which voices were visible or otherwise. Moreover, in the IP34 team, we continuously discussed aspects ranging from methodology and epistemology to preliminary analysis and writing style. These discussions were crucial in challenging my thinking and enhancing the abductive process further.

Second, I was trained as a sociocultural psychologist and affiliated with the Institute of Psychology and Education at the University of Neuchâtel. Most of my colleagues were not migration or im/mobility scholars and were therefore unfamiliar with the debates in these fields. However, they were all well-versed in the sociocultural psychological canon. This affiliation kept me grounded in the discipline, fostered explorations of new ideas, and provided ample space for discussing how to relate my work to sociocultural psychology and the extant literature. Moreover, I regularly organised and attended meetings of CUPSYNET, a European doctoral network frequented by other like-minded sociocultural psychologists, during which I also worked on translating. These two affiliations constituted a single audience with whom I could discuss sociocultural psychological perspectives.

The third audience consists of the many people I met and spoke to on my trips to Suðuroy, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark, who kindly welcomed me into their homes, shared their stories, answered my obscure questions, and made my stays wholly pleasurable. Early in my research, I felt the need to ensure that their voices guided how I constructed the case, what areas I chose to analyse, what literature I leaned on, and how I chose to write. I devoted considerable thought to how to include different interests and make this research somewhat relevant to them, which was fortuitously enabled by an open-ended design. For example, I doubt that I would have written about Smyril or Einar’s decision to stay on the island had we defined the research’s parameters beforehand. Though I am obliged to produce knowledge with a scientific community in mind, I ensured this was not my sole objective. Rather, I also wanted to write this thesis for the people living on Suðuroy and in the Faroe Islands, which is one of the primary reasons I opted for a narrative style of writing and, at least in the analysis, avoided verbose language.

2.5.4. COVID-19 and Abandoned Plans

COVID-19 transformed people's lives overnight and destroyed several plans I had of returning to the Faroe Islands and Suðuroy again. Admittedly, I realise how privileged it is to write about COVID-19 in terms of a delayed, suspended, or modified research project. I had the ability to remain comfortably still while others did not. Nonetheless, the pandemic still impacted this thesis. I had planned to visit the islands twice more when the borders began to close in March 2020. I attempted to arrange another stay when the travel restrictions in Europe began to ease over the summer—I even managed to get as far as Denmark. I planned to arrive a week after the Faroese national celebration; however, the cases spiked drastically just days after the celebrations ended. I therefore concluded that it would be practically and ethically impossible to visit. Almost 2% of the Faroese population was in quarantine at that point. I was fortunate to have spent a little more than three months in and around Suðuroy and conducted more than 30 interviews. I then decided to proceed with what I had for the time being, hoping that I would be able to visit later. However, when I considered organising another stay at the beginning of Autumn 2021, I still did not feel travelling there was responsible. Therefore, while other factors naturally played a role, this thesis does not necessarily contain the nuances, longitudinal dimension, and divergent voices I would have wished for. To overcome the physical limitations of being unable to visit Suðuroy, I therefore relied more on secondary sources, including integrating quotations from newspaper articles, novels, and reports.

2.5.5. Categorisation and Binaries

“We are not arguing against the use of social categories. Thinking is a process of making distinctions, and it can be useful to distinguish one social group or culture from another. Rather, we argue that an unreflective use of social categories by social scientists results in the same risks as those evidenced in lay thinking.” (Gillespie, Howarth, et al., 2012, p. 399)

The creation of social (and analytical) categorisation is unavoidable in both daily life and the research process. I must therefore inevitably concede that some nuances and difference are flattened for the sake of analytical clarity. Since categorisations are always situated and positioned (Dahinden et al., 2020, p. 5), the choices I made are important. Gillespie et al. (2012) argue that trading complexity and heterogeneity for simplicity and homogenisation is a natural part of the research process; however, they

caution against using the parsimonious blade of categorisation unreflexively because the impact extends beyond esoteric scientific debates (Gergen, 2015). Salazar writes: “a concept also (re)produces a particular social order” (2021b, p. 15). I view concepts as abstract forms of categorisation. As discussed earlier with reference to the “container model” of migration studies, reproducing categories such as “migrant” can have direct consequences for those people seeking protection (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018) and can therefore “simultaneously create and limit [the social world]” (Dahinden et al., 2020, p. 5). It is therefore important to remain sensitive to when categories emerge and are salient instead of taking them for granted. Similarly, theoretical concepts—im/mobility being an excellent example (Salazar, 2021b)—create categorisation and influence the phenomena studied. Furthermore, categorisation almost always operates against that which it is not; for example, migrant versus non-migrant or immobility versus mobility. These opposites are, of course, arbitrary. Indeed, as Markova highlights: “thinking is by nature antinomic” (2003, p. 181). I therefore briefly interrogate the key concepts permeating this thesis in relation to their (fictional) opposites. That said, not all binaries operate in the same order. For instance, the question concerning people’s leaving or staying is relatively straightforward because the body cannot be in two places simultaneously, whereas questions concerning im/mobility or emptying are more nebulous. I agree with Gillespie et al.’s (2012) claim that categorisations are perspectival, historical, mobile, and constitutive of the phenomena they seek to describe. With this in mind, I proceed to discuss the use of emptying, im/mobility, and the future.

First, the concept of emptiness or emptying stands in imagined opposition to fullness. Therefore, when I define a place as emptying, I run the risk of removing contradictions in the field, creating an ordering, and streamlining divergent perspectives that are themselves subject to continuous change. In other words, I accentuate the characteristics that align with such a claim and take “emptying” as the frame of reference, though reality is never either/or. I attempt to overcome this apparent shortcoming by focusing on processes (emptying), revealing that the condition transforms over time and according to people’s perspectives. I move beyond static binaries by highlighting the relationalities and fluidity. Places can be full and empty at the same time. What matters is the perspective and the reference point—historically and relationally. Gillespie’s (2006a) research in Ladakh offers a parallel because the

tourist workers simultaneously embodied ideas of the modern and the traditional depending on perspective and situation (Gillespie et al., 2012; see also Salazar, 2010). On one hand, the concept of emptiness (and its partner, fullness) enabled me to situate people's imaginations and im/mobilities within wider societal (and capitalist) transformations and explore the relations. On the other hand, the concept of emptiness can reduce difference and create a unified understanding of the circumstances that always operates with reference to other "full" places. Instead of generating a homogenising ordering of places and discounting people's agency (Gillespie et al., 2012), I never viewed either end of the emptiness spectrum as an absolute. In fact, I sought to demonstrate the dynamism of emptying and unveil different understandings and responses, meaning that I never used emptiness as a uniform concept. I maintain that shifting the emphasis to processes justifies the potential negative trade-off. For example, I left space for tension and argued that emptying depended on geographical location (see Chapter 5), people's unique experiences and positions (Chapter 6), and im/mobility trajectories (Chapter 7).

Second, the concept of im/mobility is built around a fictional antinomy; however, I assume that people or things are not simply moving or still. Salazar (2021b) argued that immobility is often conceived as the "residue" of mobility" (p. 15) but should be considered in its own right. The dichotomous nature of the concept demands careful attention because it is tempting to "freeze" people as either mobile or immobile, though this is hardly ever the case. While I work within the im/mobility framework, in part due to the project's objectives, I do not want to simply explore whether people are moving or not; rather, in line with Adey's (2006) argument, the primary concern is the dynamic relation between mobility and immobility—the entanglement (Kleist, 2020). On the one hand, "freezing" people's mobilities or immobilities can reduce the complexity of how they and others move in space. On the other hand, "freezing" mobilities or immobilities enables a closer exploration of specific forms of im/mobilities, their meanings, experiences, and consequences. Without applying categorisation, it would be immensely difficult to say anything useful regarding these processes. It is also important to remember that mobility and immobility are themselves highly heterogenous categories. Furthermore, as with emptying, I tried to illustrate how such a binary is analytical and is not fixed. Rather, such a binary depends on what I, as a researcher, choose to focus on. I attempted to add nuance to

the discussion by focusing on the entanglement of im/mobilities over time and introducing different experiences.

Third, the emphasis on imagined futures juxtaposes the past. Memory and the imagination are neurologically similar (Schacter et al., 2017), and studies on collective memory and the future claim that the two are indeed intertwined, meaning that imagining the future can transform the collective past and vice versa (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018a). Collective futures are often instrumentalised in service of specific (future) aims (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018a). I am aware that, by focusing on imaginations of the future, I exclude other imaginations, backgrounding questions regarding the past or alternative presents. Though it is practically impossible not to discuss the past when studying the future, histories and relations change, including how people use them to promote their own agendas. I therefore incorporate this tension. Moreover, I maintained a link to the past, although the goal is not to trace the interrelation but to investigate what role the future plays in the present.

In short, categorisations and their oppositional nature are essential for making sense of the world; however, they always come with a cost and not being aware of this cost can have detrimental consequences. This holds true for both the categorisations I encountered and for the analytical concepts I decided to use. I therefore try to be transparent concerning where certain categorisations emerged from and actively reserve space for tensions and nuances to illustrate the perspectival nature of such categorisations. Without categorisations and binaries, little remains. However, as a researcher, I must be vigilant regarding how they impact the thinking of the people on Suðuroy and myself and what their potential ramifications might involve. While using binaries can create an either/or picture, I argue this can be avoided by using and studying them as fluid, perspectival, and relational concepts that generate more effective theorisations.

2.6. Reflections on Ethics

There is something deeply troubling, as we all know, about joining with people, apparently in good faith, only later to turn your back on them so that yours becomes a study of them, and they become a case. (Ingold, 2017, p. 23)

I learned a considerable amount regarding knowledge production in the process of conducting and writing about this research project, and I encountered the occasional impasse in struggling to solve an ethical conundrum. Something intangible changed between my first and second visit that prompted me to view the purpose and audience in a different light, and I started exploring the literature on ethics. One colleague proposed that the change had happened after I began being “with people”. While there is possibly some truth to that, I have long been sceptical of institutionalised ethics on the grounds that standardisation resolves what should be dynamic and contextual considerations (Atkinson, 2009). I somewhat naïvely failed to anticipate the difficulties associated with *doing* ethics. I had mostly conducted interviews before, and discussions regarding processual ethics are often abstract or not pertinent to psychology. After hearing of my experience, a friend who had studied anthropology recommended Scheper-Hughes’ article, “Ire in Ireland”, and it indeed epitomised several of the concerns that led me to rethink what and how I write about and engage with people:

“Sure, nobody’s perfect, nobody’s a saint. We all have our weaknesses. But you never wrote about our strengths. You never said what a beautiful and safe place our village is. You never wrote about the vast sweep of the eye that the village offers over the sea and up to Conor Pass. You said nothing about our fine musicians and poets, and our step dancers who move through the air with the grace of a silk thread. And we are not such a backwater today. There are many educated people among us. You wrote about our troubles, all right, but not about our strength” [...] When I protested that I could not have written about those radical activities for fear of reprisals from outside against the village, Martin replied: “Ah, you were protecting yourself.” “Is there anything I can do?” I asked. “You should have thought about that before. Look, girl, the fact is that ya just didn’t give us credit.” (2000, p. 119)

Here a person accosted Scheper-Hughes upon returning to her field site (a village) and ultimately people asked her to leave again because they felt offended by the book she wrote on the place. Her article eloquently discusses the challenges related to what researchers write from afar and the institutionalised tendency to hide behind anonymity. Anonymisation does not provide sufficient credit to people, particularly those living in smaller communities, because heightened familiarity makes it easy to identify the person behind the mask. Anonymisation also deprives people of their potential authorship, reflecting the pitfalls of pursuing an academic end with little concern for the people portrayed.

Part of my scepticism towards institutionalised and universalised ethics-review procedures, inspired by biomedical models (Atkinson, 2009), stems from the sense of false safety they produce. That is, such procedures assure researchers that the research process is ethically sound insofar as they check a variety of arbitrary and predefined boxes. This procedure is often completed before meeting people and, if the ethical committee evaluates the considerations as acceptable (Hammersley, 2009), the research is greenlit. Such an ethical regime has been called predatory ethics (Cannella & Lincoln, 2007; Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). This portrayal of standardised ethics is naturally a simplification but serves to highlight the importance of viewing ethical research as a processual and dialogical endeavour (Marková et al., 2020; Mattingly & Throop, 2018). Indeed, ethical considerations that are directly oriented towards the people who feature in the writing must be present not only in the initial stages but throughout the entire process. Brinkmann (2005) distinguishes between micro ethics and macro ethics. The former concerns whether those who have consented to participate are well-informed regarding the aims and objectives of the research project and aware of their rights. In contrast, the latter denotes reflections on what sociocultural and political consequences the process might have (see also Mosse, 2015). Brinkmann suggests that thick ethical descriptions and allowing the “object to object” can address a variety of possible pitfalls. Burman (2018) further reminds researchers that anthropological practices can be extractivist, exemplifying this by comparing researchers to monsters in that they can be strange, powerful, exploitative, and use the “resources” they extract in mysterious and distant contexts. The same aspects can apply to psychology. However, I attempted to overcome this and below are several of my thick ethical descriptions regarding how I addressed emerging issues and in which I discuss questions related to consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.

First, it is germane to question what it means to ask people for consent and preserve their confidentiality. In the team, we quickly realised that attaining written consent, the gold standard in most psychological research (but not necessarily in related fields), would be largely unfeasible during this type of fieldwork. Instead, we decided to continuously explain to and remind people of why we were spending time on Suđuroy, clarify to them our research project’s purpose, and discuss what we had heard and any preliminary ideas we had developed, with them. We aimed to be as transparent as possible; however, I am convinced that consent is challenging (although not

impossible) to maintain in longitudinal studies during the course of which researchers spend extended periods of time with people, in and between different settings, and develop close relationships. The clear boundaries and expectations that, for instance, exist in a classic interview setting blurs and I suspect people occasionally “forgot” that I wore two hats, I therefore made sure to continuously discuss the process with people. The fact that people do not know what they consent to represents another difficulty. Consent is often given at the start and before it is clear what “analytical insights” their participation might produce (Atkinson, 2009). However, if people saw the “end-product” they would have a clearer understanding of what they consented to and how the information they provided was used. Having everyone sign a written formula would provide me with legal protection. However, not only would this be difficult in practice but could also be considered extractivist because my ethical engagement might technically cease as soon as the forms were signed. Transparency and honesty are crucial, but it is challenging to ensure that people are continually aware of my motives in all situations. One measure I adopted was to, whenever possible, share what I had written with people who would feature prominently in my writing. This practice provided people with clarity as to what they had consented to and the opportunity to raise objections, although time constraints impeded this idea somewhat. Furthermore, I also decided to omit sensitive topics, which could cause ethical problems for people. As others have noted (e.g., Giordano et al., 2007; Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011), confidentiality extends beyond mere consent. It does not only entail storing data or sensitive information on secure university servers (a description challenged by a recent hack of the University of Neuchatel). Confidentiality also involves a commitment to respecting people whose voices are present and being attentive to what can be shared in specific contexts. Consent and confidentiality were dynamic concepts for me and required ongoing reflections on the potential implications for both individuals and, more broadly, Faroese society. These considerations demanded close attention to what material is used and how.

Second, questions regarding whether anonymity can truly ensure confidentiality and whether it should be a default practice are also important. Various ethics committees and journals have formalised anonymisation as criteria for conducting research and publishing. This practice tends to be unquestioned, and people are therefore not asked whether this is desirable for them. For example, people might feel alienated and

deprived of authorship when hidden behind a pseudonym and situated in a fictional world (Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). Scheper-Hughes' (2000) return to the village led her to conclude that the practices of using conventional pseudonyms and scrambling details to mask people and places are naïve and easily decoded. She proposes that this practice relates more to protecting researchers and that pseudonyms actually create a distance from people and render the writing detached. Nesor (2000) expands this last point and argues that anonymising places, and the people living within them, decouples them both spatially and temporally from the contexts that provide meaning. This also resonates with Hammersley's (2006) warnings that shorter-term fieldwork—such as that which I conducted—can be ahistorical, which is also one of the reasons we decided not to anonymise the places. For Nesor, the creation of a semantic barrier in terms of anonymised places gives credence to the academic endeavour but moves away from a dialogical ethics in which researchers acknowledge and write for a wider audience (e.g. Levinas, 1998; Marková et al., 2020). There is an answerability to the people whose voices are analysed and discussed. Furthermore, much can be discovered by anyone with a passing familiarity with Google's algorithms, challenging the feasibility of anonymity (Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). Thus, I do not perceive anonymity as a desirable or *de facto* feature of research that guarantees confidentiality. Instead, confidentiality can only be maintained through ongoing reflection, negotiation, and dialogue at the micro and macro level; that is, paying attention to the possible implications for people and the collective alike. The familiarity that exists on Suđuroy necessitates a delicate balancing act between recognising that pseudonyms here represent a thin veneer and not diluting so much detail that the study loses its meaning. Again, the emphasis is not strictly on masking but on how and what to write.

We often discussed what to include and exclude, particularly once we began presenting at conferences and writing preliminary analyses. We were initially unsure whether it was possible and desirable to anonymise localities and change details. We considered creating fictitious names for the localities themselves, inventing new industries and im/mobilities, or speaking in abstract terms. We settled on following Nesor's argument that abstraction or hiding names alienates the analysis from localities' specifics and people's voices. In other words, the research would lose its relevance beyond the academic sphere. Within a week or two after our visit in May 2019, news

of our presence had travelled throughout the island. People said they had heard about us, illustrating that, even if we only mentioned the Faroe Islands, most people would have little trouble identifying any potentially anonymised locations. People from the Faroes could simply couple our names with anything published and make the connection from that alone. Omitting too many details would therefore be incongruent with conducting an in-depth, contextual, and dialogical case study with thick descriptions that aimed to capture a nuanced and multi-voiced landscape.

Take the example of Einar. Writing a paper on the life of one person who had lived his entire life on the island and is well-known in the community meant that it would be virtually impossible to anonymise him to his peers and therefore prompts questions on the micro-ethical level. One option could have been to write abstractly or fictitiously, inventing a whole new microcosmos. However, I found that solution unappealing because it would no longer be Einar's story. There was also no guarantee that people would not see through that because they already knew that I had spoken to him. Based on Scheper-Hughes' suggestions, I instead attempted to anticipate the issues that could emerge in the writing process. I decided to omit details I assumed might be sensitive or socially damaging regardless of whether they were theoretically interesting. Inevitably, this lent the writings a somewhat positive ring, but Einar also tended to narrate his life this way. I also sent Einar a draft of an article before submitting it. While I attempted to find various ways of conducting ethics dialogically, I often felt a pressure to anonymise, which is reflected in a pseudonym concealing Einar's name in the draft he received. I talked to Einar twice over the phone, explaining that I had written something about his life that, if he had no objections, I would like to publish in an academic journal. I conveyed that I would be thrilled if he read the article, explaining several possible pitfalls. He read the article and discussed it with his daughter. Einar's main comment related to the pseudonym, and he expressed a clear desire to have his name feature in the article. He reasoned that it would be difficult to anonymise him even if I removed various primary and secondary means of identification. He wanted the article to be his story. He similarly hoped that the article could help politicians portray the island more positively, connecting the micro- and macro-ethical dimensions. Einar asked me to translate the article into Danish (a task I promptly completed), which would allow him to share it with his friends, who might not read English as proficiently as he did. In Chapter 7, I also follow five people's trajectories, although in less depth than with Einar, all of whom initially gave consent.

However, due to time constraints and the pressure to finish, I decided to anonymise their names and other easily identifiable information, although ideally, I would have followed an approach similar to when I wrote about Einar. To an extent, this removes the person from the analysis and wished to have had more time to discuss elements of the analysis with them, such as what to include and whether they wished to remain anonymous. I did send each person what I had written about their trajectories as well as the introductory and concluding sections, and Chapter 7 will not be part of the public version of this dissertation if they decide to retract their consent. I still maintain that the analysis is useful because it is primarily a theoretical exploration of the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility along trajectories, but I would have liked to centre the people involved more consistently.

In sum, I therefore decided not to anonymise the place because the people living there would not be fooled by a semantic veneer (knowing I had been there), and I would lose the nuances of the case. I also decided to anonymise people who either did not feature significantly in the analysis or those I have been unable to reach, which then entailed not only removing their names but also any potential means of identification, calling for a degree of abstraction in the writing. Whenever possible, I sent the analysis to people to ensure they reaffirmed their consent. I also shared several examples and reflections concerning what it means to conduct dialogical and dynamic ethics in a manner that extends beyond institutionalised committees and journal review boards. I did not assume that specific procedures would inevitably bestow the research with an ethically unimpeachable frame but instead sought to continually assess what the micro and macro implications could be. I additionally attempted to foreground people's "matters of concern" in the field, the analysis, the theorisation, and the writing.

3. An Eclectic Introduction to the Faroe Islands

Far out into the mercury-illuminating world ocean lies a lonely, small lead-coloured country. This tiny rocky land relates to the big ocean as does a grain of sand to the floor of a ballroom. But under a magnifying glass this grain of sand is nevertheless a world with mountains and valleys, straits and inlets and houses with small people. (Heinesen, 1950, p. 9, my translation)

Emmanuel and I first travelled to the Faroe Islands in January 2019. We met in Copenhagen for a walk around a cloud-covered and windy city before departure. SAS pilots striking for higher salaries delayed the plane. We entered an Airbus 319 operated by Atlantic Airways (a Faroese airline) after a five-hour wait. Most seats were free. I was simultaneously excited and anxious because we were on our way to the Faroe Islands three months into this PhD journey. The plane started to descend through the clouds after about one hour and 30 minutes of flight, mostly over endless blue ocean, and the aircraft shook violently. With time, I learned that flying to the Faroe Islands is often a turbulent experience. Once the aircraft broke through the clouds, 18 islands rose from the ocean. The atmosphere turned from one of palpable discomfort, with people holding tightly to their seats while questioning the plane's robustness, to one of silent amazement and faces glued to windows. The trip ended with a rather abrupt landing prompted by the airport's short landing strip. Walking down the stairs and onto an artificial hill's tarmac, we were surrounded by mountains furnished with a brownish seasonal tint. People took photographs and posed on the short walk from the plane to the terminal.

I consumed a lot of information to nourish my imagination before arriving. I read history books and travel accounts, watched documentaries and YouTube videos, and revisited vague recollections of visiting the islands back in elementary school. None did justice to my first impression. I write this with the awareness that "entry stories" are criticised for potentially reinforcing an artificial divide between "home" and "field". As Gupta and Fergusson remark: "[W]hat needs to be emphasised is that all tropes of entry and exit, however playful, parodic, or self-conscious, may still function to construct the difference between 'the field' and 'home'" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 13). However, I am willing to run this risk because my intention is not to exoticise the Faroe Islands but rather to demonstrate how my imagination failed. I also believe it is important to be transparent about my experiences.

This chapter provides a condensed version of my sociological imagination and the information I used to reconstruct the societal transformation in the Faroes over time. The account that follows are paramount for contextualising and theorising the interactions between the imagination and im/mobility. I highlight Suðuroy—an island yet to be connected to elaborate road networks and tunnels. The island is only accessible by a ferry, Smyríl, that makes two or three round trips each day (if we discount the helicopter flying two to three times a week⁶). I do not provide an exhaustive account of Faroese history. More qualified people have already achieved that (e.g., Debes, 2001; Joensen, 1987; Madsen, 1999; Sølvará, 2020; West, 1972). I instead establish the necessary background in terms of the changing sociocultural, economic, political, and material conditions. All imaginations and im/mobilities must be studied with reference to the context in which they occur. I therefore focus on three specific periods, which were selected with the analysis in mind and due to the periods' significance to certain people I spoke to. I begin with a general overview of Faroese history until the beginning of the first period, emphasising demographic changes, socioeconomic developments, constellations of im/mobility, and infrastructural projects. The information utilised to describe each period varies due to the material available and my insufficient command of Faroese, but this review is also envisioned as a rather eclectic account. However, because of the Faroe Islands' post-colonial relation to Denmark (e.g. Isfeldt, 2020; Mitchinson, 2010), books were published in Danish. This chapter hopefully makes my sociological imagination apparent.

3.1. Introducing the Faroe Islands

A few words on the islands' geography and climate are apposite because these were a recurrent topic of conversations and, as I later demonstrate, both play a role in subsequent theorisations. The Faroe Islands, or *Føroyar*, is a small archipelago at 62° latitude demarcated by natural oceanic barriers and periodically exposed to violent storms and prolonged periods of darkness. Often sheltered in a thick layer of fog, the islands are tucked away in the North Atlantic Ocean between Iceland, Norway, and the Shetland Islands, approximately 300 kilometres from the nearest harbour.

⁶ <https://www.atlanticairways.com/en/helicopter/timetable>



Figure 1. Map of Europe with a focus on the Faroe Islands produced by Andreas Perret using Eurostat, NextGis, and ArticDem.

The importance of geography and climate did not spring from a pensive moment in Switzerland but from hearing people speak about the weather, experiencing the changing seasons first hand, and being physically trapped during winter storms. Several people suggested that growing up on an island instils a wanderlust and guides people's imagination towards what is beyond the horizons (see also Gaini, 2013). I therefore began to reflect on how the imagination and im/mobility might relate to geographies and the climate. Faroese scholars (e.g., Gaini, 2013; Hayfield, 2017) have suggested that a possible consequence of geography and climate is a form of fatalism originating from living in geographically enclosed communities in which weather limits mobility. Such attitudes are said to persist despite people now having access to the world through the internet and infrastructure's partial conquest of the natural environment. Younger people tended to describe such boundedness as the cause of

parochialism amongst the older segment of the population, consolidating and maintaining social control (Gaffin, 1995). We experienced this first hand. During our initial walks around the villages, it was not unusual for passing cars to slow down to (presumably) see who we were. This quickly declined once people became familiar with our presence and satisfied their curiosity concerning why two strange young men were walking around when it is customary to drive. People occasionally initiated a conversation because they had heard of us and were generally well-informed regarding what was happening on the island. For example, cancellations of the bus were not announced but known. “Everyone knows everyone” people explained. I heard many anecdotes of how the circulation of gossip could hold serious social and economic implications for a person that ranged from them being someone children should avoid to them not obtaining a certain job. Geographical enclosure and the size of the community also seemed to produce a sense that friendships were not always a product of choice or shared interests but were based on a membership of the same community of fate (Kristiansen, 2005). Indeed, geographical and climatic factors seemed to impact people’s imaginations and im/mobilities in multiple ways.

3.1.1. On Geography and Climate

The archipelago consists of 18 islands, 17 of which are inhabited, with a total surface area of 1,399 square kilometres (Guttesen, 1996). The distance from the northernmost point, Kap Enniberg on Viðoy, to the southernmost point, Sumbiarsteinur on Suðuroy, is 180 kilometres, and the archipelago stretches 79 kilometres from east to west (Numminen, 2010, p. 35). The landscape is characterised by its rugged contours and the omnipresence of the grass that paints the islands bright green during the summer months. Steep cliffs break the waves, and the highest peak rises 880 metres over sea level. Most villages are situated in narrow valleys along the banks of a fjord, and the islands’ elongated geographies ensure that people rarely lose sight of the ocean. The villages are surrounded by rocks or water, enforcing a sense of enclosure and smallness. People used to live in relatively insular communities dispersed around the islands because the journey between villages or islands could be perilous due to ever-changing weather (West, 1972). While the geographical and climatic circumstances place restrictions on people’s mobility, roads and tunnels connecting villages eased these constraints significantly. The first tunnel was built in 1963 between Hvalba and Trongisvágur on Suðuroy. The islands are also home to more than 70,000 sheep that

roam freely during the summer months. Below is a map of the islands that includes the points of connectivity:

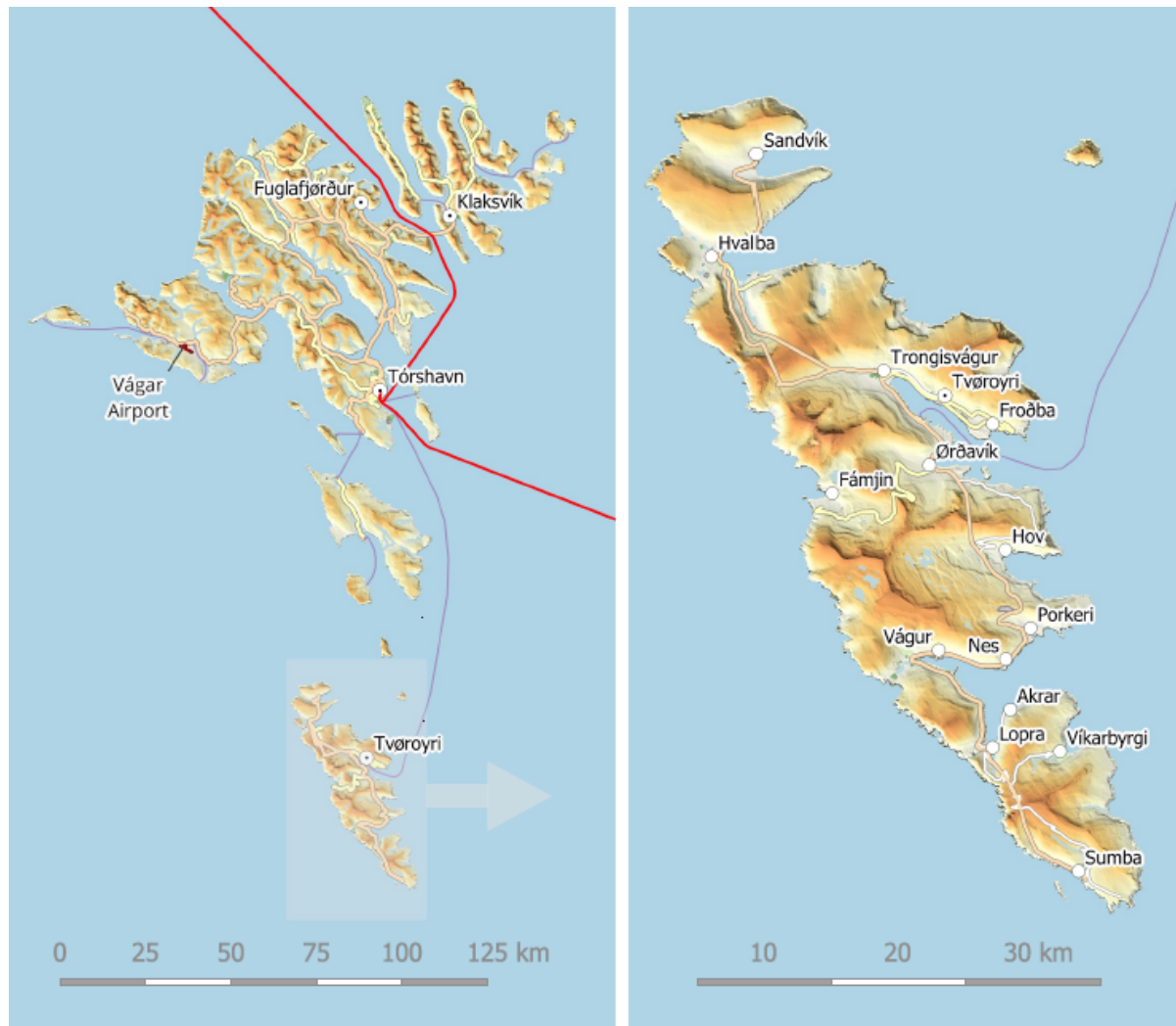


Figure 2. Map of the Faroe Islands and Suðuroy produced by Andreas Perret using Eurostat, NextGis, and ArticDem.

Suðuroy has a surface area of 164 square kilometres and is approximately 32 kilometres long. It is generally flatter than the northern islands, and its highest peak rises 610 metres above sea level. The island has 14 villages divided between seven municipalities. While the Faroese parliament passed provisions urging the voluntary merging of municipalities (Kleis, 2003), the municipalities on Suðuroy have yet to do so. The islanders speak a dialect of Faroese known as Suðuroyarmál (Mitchinson, 2010), which is closer to Danish than northern dialects.

The climate in the Faroes is simultaneously mild and harsh. The variation in temperature is slight due to the islands' location at the tail-end of the Gulf Stream,

where the mesh of hot and cold waters create favourable yet precarious circumstances for marine life (Debes, 2001) Temperatures vary between 3.5 degrees in the winter months to 10.5 degrees in the summer, a difference that would likely be double at an equivalent latitude on continental Europe (Guttesen, 1996). The wind, however, is ever-present. Calm weather is the exception, whereas windy weather is the normality (Guttesen, 1996, p. 26) and storms are usual during winter. The weather also changes abruptly, and people facetiously declare that one can experience all seasons within a single day. This changeability was responsible for the Faroe Islands' sobriquet of "the land of maybe" (Norgate, 1943) because the weather makes planning ahead challenging. We experienced this sudden shift in weather on a hiking trip to Hvannahagi, a lake hidden on the northeast coast of Suðuroy. The sun had emerged from the clouds after a grey and windy day, but we expected that the weather would hold long enough for a hike. Snowflakes began to fall after about 500 metres, yet we pressed on. We met a farmer dressed in overalls and boots in front of a small wooden shelter for sheep, who pointed at our shoes and suggested we change. People were acutely aware of the weather. The weather's unpredictability and the harsh storms are due to the islands' location close to a low-pressure channel that runs east across the North Atlantic and causes frequent fluctuations in air pressure (Debes, 2001). Climate change is expected to make the storms worse⁷. Furthermore, Atlantic mist and rain are also part of everyday life. Unlike the temperature, however, the length of the days varies significantly from 3.5 hours in the winter months to 19.5 hours in the summer. To compare, Tórshavn averages about 1,000 hours of bright sunlight annually⁸.

⁷ <https://www.clicnord.org/8-faroe-islands-storms>

⁸ <https://hagstova.fo/en/environment/climate/climate>

3.1.2. Vignette I: Walking on Suðuroy

The geography and climate of Suðuroy gave new meaning to a familiar form of mobility—walking. Walking is now primarily a leisure activity on the islands, but taking old paths provides a glimpse into what moving between villages involved before roads and tunnels were constructed. Geographical features, such as long and narrow valleys surrounded by steep mountains, have elongated the shapes of many Faroese settlements. Walking from one end of a large village to the other can easily take 20 to 30 minutes, while walking to a neighbouring village on the other side of a mountain can be physically challenging.



I took this photograph on the ridge that separates Hvalba from Sandvík. The photograph displays Suðuroy's north-facing tip, with Sandvík being vaguely visible on the right of the fjord. The islands of Skúvoy, Lítla Dímun, Stóra Dímun, and Sandoy rise from the ocean on the horizon. We wanted to experience walking between the villages because many people from the older generation frequently talked about these journeys. Built in 1969, a 1,500 metre, one-laned tunnel connects Sandvík with the rest of the island. I chose this image because it illustrates the ruggedness of terrain, with the eternal presence of the mountains and the ocean reminding its inhabitants of the natural barriers to their mobility. The image also indicates that mobility was previously demanding and possibly dangerous. The constellation of im/mobility largely followed the rhythm of the natural environment (Cresswell, n.d.). There used to be approximately 1,100 kilometres of cairn paths across the islands, and 7,500 cairns guided people safely over passes such as this one (Gaini & Jacobsen, 2008). The alternative to walking was boats. However, the temper of the ocean changed like the weather. When visiting a local history museum inside a two-storey dark wooden house with a grass roof in Tvøroyri, the curator showed us a restored shelter near the harbour

outside. It had a base of white stones, a wooden roof construction with grass on top, and was dug slightly into the ground. Only a small window provided limited natural light. The inside of the shelter was dark and moist. It had a long wooden table in the middle with bunk beds on each side. There was little space to move around, and we had to dodge the beams. We learned that several villages used to have shelters designated for travellers or tradespeople who were unexpectedly caught by a sudden turn of the weather. While these shelters were free, people had to bring their own blubber to keep the light running.

To reach the ridge, we first took a bus to Sandvik and walked to the other side of the island—1.2 kilometres to the west—to enjoy the view of the coast. However, we did not stay long because the wind was too strong. We tried to find the old path over the ridge but failed. Instead, we started to climb the mountain at a random point, zig zagging upwards. I had not anticipated how straining climbing the rocky terrain would be. My calves were burning and maintaining the appropriate balance was a challenge despite being used to hiking in Switzerland. When we reached the ridge, which rose 370 metres above sea level, I was exhausted. The ridge stretched from the eastern to the western side of the island. After taking the obligatory photographs and a short recuperation, we descended toward Hvalba. However, because we did not follow a path, there were a couple of fences to be scaled, and we ended up in somebody's garden. The entire trip over the ridge must have taken between one hour and 30 minutes to two hours and required considerable energy.

This brief vignette illustrates how geography must have constrained people's mobility and emphasises how transformative infrastructure can be regarding changing the constellations of im/mobility by removing friction and increasing speed. However, the weather still immobilises people and must be considered when exploring its relation to people's imaginations. Moving away from the geography and climate, the following section provides an eclectic overview of Faroese history, emphasising the socioeconomic and demographic development necessary to understanding present day circumstances on Suðuroy.

3.1.3. Suðuroy in the Faroese Until the Mid-19th Century

There is a broad consensus that the Faroe Islands' first major and permanent settlement occurred during the Vikings' *landnám*⁹ in the ninth century (Arge, 1991; Arge et al., 2005). Literary analysis suggests that Irish monks arrived even earlier than the first Norse settlers (Wylie & Margolin, 1981). Pollen analysis indicates the existence of minor-scale settlements as early as the fourth century (Church et al., 2013). The islanders are said to have been Christianised around 1000 and began paying taxes to the Norwegian Crown in 1035 (West, 1972), effectively marking the beginning of the Faroe Islands' colonial history. In 1298, the population had grown to the point that a codified system of rule was considered necessary, and the Sheep Letter, or *Seyðabrævið*, was introduced (West, 1972). This document established guidelines for processing disputes over sheep, outfields, driftwood (which was of great value because the islands are almost devoid of trees), and land ownership. While the document secured rights for the poorest members of the islands' population, it also placed restrictions on their mobility and entitlement to establish households (West, 1972). Several scholars have suggested that these restrictions possibly reflect farm-labour shortages and that the population had neared its upper sustainable limit at that period (Madsen, 1999; Numminen, 2010; Sølvará, 2020).

In 1397, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden formed the Kalmar Union—three realms under the same king. The incremental weakening of Norway effectively shifted power towards Copenhagen (Sølvará, 2020), and fuelled the Faroe Islands' peripheralisation (Nauerby, 1996; Wylie, 1987). Climatic changes deepened this process, the Black Death killed up to a third of the population, and socioeconomic and political developments on the European continent created strong dependencies on the outside world (Høgnesen, 1968; Numminen, 2010). Since the Faroese did not have their own ships—until Nólsoyar Páll (a Faroese folk hero) bought a shipwreck and used the material to build *Royndin Fríða*¹⁰ in the early 19th century—the islanders' contact and trade with the broader world were funnelled through Danish trade channels. Over time, various merchants had been licensed to supply the Faroes, limiting Faroese mobility in and around the islands, although that is not to say there was none (Joensen, 1987). For example, Danish governors and merchants travelled to and from

⁹ Landnám translates into “taking land”.

¹⁰ Boat named “The Free Attempt”.

the Faroe Islands, some Faroese studied abroad, people moved between the villages, pirates attacked Suðuroy in the 17th century, and its inhabitants are jokingly said not to have known the prices of the trade monopoly because the geographical distance to Tórshavn made it safer to trade with visiting foreign merchants (Sølvará, 2020). Another example is the Danish merchant Niels Ryberg, who established a smuggling hub in the 18th-century, which enhanced the circulation of goods and ideas said to have allowed Faroese people to learn various skills (West, 1972; Wylie, 1987). After the trading stewardship of the Gabel family and decades of hardship due to neglect, a Royal Trading Monopoly was established in 1709 (Debes, 2001; Madsen, 1999). The crown directly oversaw all trading. West (1972) argues that the monopolisation of trade stabilised Faroese society, shielding prices from global market fluctuations. However, the monopolisation also contributed to further peripheralisation and the deceleration of socioeconomic development (Joensen, 1987; Nauerby, 1996). This change somewhat desynchronised the Faroese from the growing capitalist system and the increasing circulation of people and goods (Brandt, 1983b; Joensen, 1987). However, the islands remained indirectly embedded in global trade, and villages were transforming, in part because peasants had begun to make money through specialising in wool products (Brandt, 1983b). The supposed stabilisation that took place in the 18th century gave people “more trust in the future” (Numminen, 2010, p. 54; see also Høgnesen, 1968; West, 1972), and the population level slowly rose. Though the Faroese were largely self-sufficient (Joensen, 1987), mobilities and immobilities were still both ubiquitous and entangled (Lapp, 2011; Thorsteinsson, 1991); for instance, the relative immobility of the Faroese hinged on the mobility of foreign merchants and goods, which, in turn necessitated internal mobility to reach the trading outpost. People moved a great deal within the confines of the villages, fields, and shores but mobility between villages or islands was rarer and more of an event.

War between Denmark and Britain erupted in 1807 and again added to Faroese isolation because the British fleet blocked trade shipments (West, 1972). Continuous war efforts culminated in the Danish government going bankrupt in 1812–13. Denmark had taken Napoleon’s side during his eponymous war and, with little bargaining power during the Versailles negotiations, Denmark was forced to concede Norway, *de facto* Danish territory at the time, to the Swedish King. However, for unknown reasons, the North Atlantic territories (the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and

Greenland) remained under Danish jurisdiction (Sølvará, 2020). In 1816, the Danish government changed the Faroe Islands' status to that of a Danish county and dismantled the *Lagtinget*, the Faroese parliament (Sølvará, 2020). The population was 5,000 people in 1801, and farming remained the primary livelihood (Gaffin, 1996). Scholars have suggested that geographical isolation and colonisation produced a sense of being “outside world history” (e.g. Nauerby, 1996; Pons, 2011) and, although I cannot speak on people's sense of isolation or desynchronisation centuries ago, many geopolitical events and technologies seemed to have limited Faroese mobility in this period.

3.1.4. The Faroese Fishing Adventure

No single historical event vitalised the Faroese fishery trade, but it is often compared to an industrial revolution due to its widespread socioeconomic impact (Joensen, 1975, 1987; West, 1972) and presented as the advent of capitalism on the islands (Brandt, 1983b). The trade monopoly might have delayed the emergence of the fishing industry (Joensen, 1987). I elaborate on fishing because it remains the primary industry and is therefore crucial to exploring the complex intermeshing of the islands' past, present, and future. Indeed, fishery-related goods currently account for more than 97% of combined exports.

In the early 18th century, most Faroese still worked in agriculture, and fishing remained a form of additional subsistence (Joensen, 1987). High prices on wool products, a “boat-tie” system (requiring the landless to man farmers' boats while limiting their mobility and reproduction), and the trade monopoly halted the transition toward a fishing-based society. Villages were largely self-sufficient and the centre of most social relations (Brandt, 1983a). The transition from a feudal and agricultural system to a fishing-based society can be divided into two phases (Joensen, 1987). Near-shore fishing increased from around the 1840s before a gradual shift towards smack fishing began when three brothers bought the first smack, *Fox*, in 1872. Several factors supported this transition. First, the Royal Trade Monopoly introduced more lenient regulations on trade, partially due to mounting internal pressure and the rising price of fish on the global market (Brandt, 1983b; Joensen, 1987). Second, the Royal Trade Monopoly decentralised and opened trading posts outside Tórshavn in 1836 (Madsen, 1999). Third, increasingly regular visits from foreign anglers and study

trips to the Shetland Islands in 1839 improved Faroese fishing technologies (Joensen, 1987; Wylie, 1987).

Near-shore fishing experienced a slow start due to the Royal Trade Monopoly's control over trading. While resistance from those whom the system benefitted through the boat-tie system remained active, the Royal Trade Monopoly was finally abolished in 1856. Foreign merchants acquired many of the first trading licences because they had the capital (West, 1972). However, Johan Mortensen, a farmer's son from Ørðavík on Suðuroy, established what would become one of the largest businesses in the Faroe Islands in 1856 (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). These developments strained existing feudal structures, and fishing gradually emerged as a profession that promised geographical and social mobility by providing a means of earning enough to establish a household (Joensen, 1987). In 1865, the boat tie was repealed, and people could move and seek a livelihood on the ocean (Brandt, 1983; Joensen, 1987; West, 1972). Near-shore fishing intensified, and internal mobility increased, which began to connect the previously disparate islands and villages socially, economically, and symbolically.

While the first smack was acquired in 1872, smack fishing did not develop into a significant industry before the 1890s (Joensen, 1987). Apart from internal pressures, this development also coincided with British anglers replacing their smacks with steam-powered steel trawlers towards the end of the 19th century, which enabled the Faroese to acquire more smacks relatively cheaply. Merchants became the primary actors buying the smacks because they had accumulated an adequate amount of capital since the abolition of the Royal Trade Monopoly. This capital accumulation was partly due to salaries not being paid in cash but kept in accounts managed by the merchant (also known as *kontrabøger*) from which all goods purchased by a household were deducted. This system created a closed economic loop that provided merchants with liquidity to invest (Joensen, 1987; West, 1972). This financing scheme facilitated a rapid rise in smack fishing, and the number of ships soared from 14 to 125 between 1895 and 1910, which created approximately 1,500 new jobs on the ocean in the space of only 15 years (Joensen, 1987).

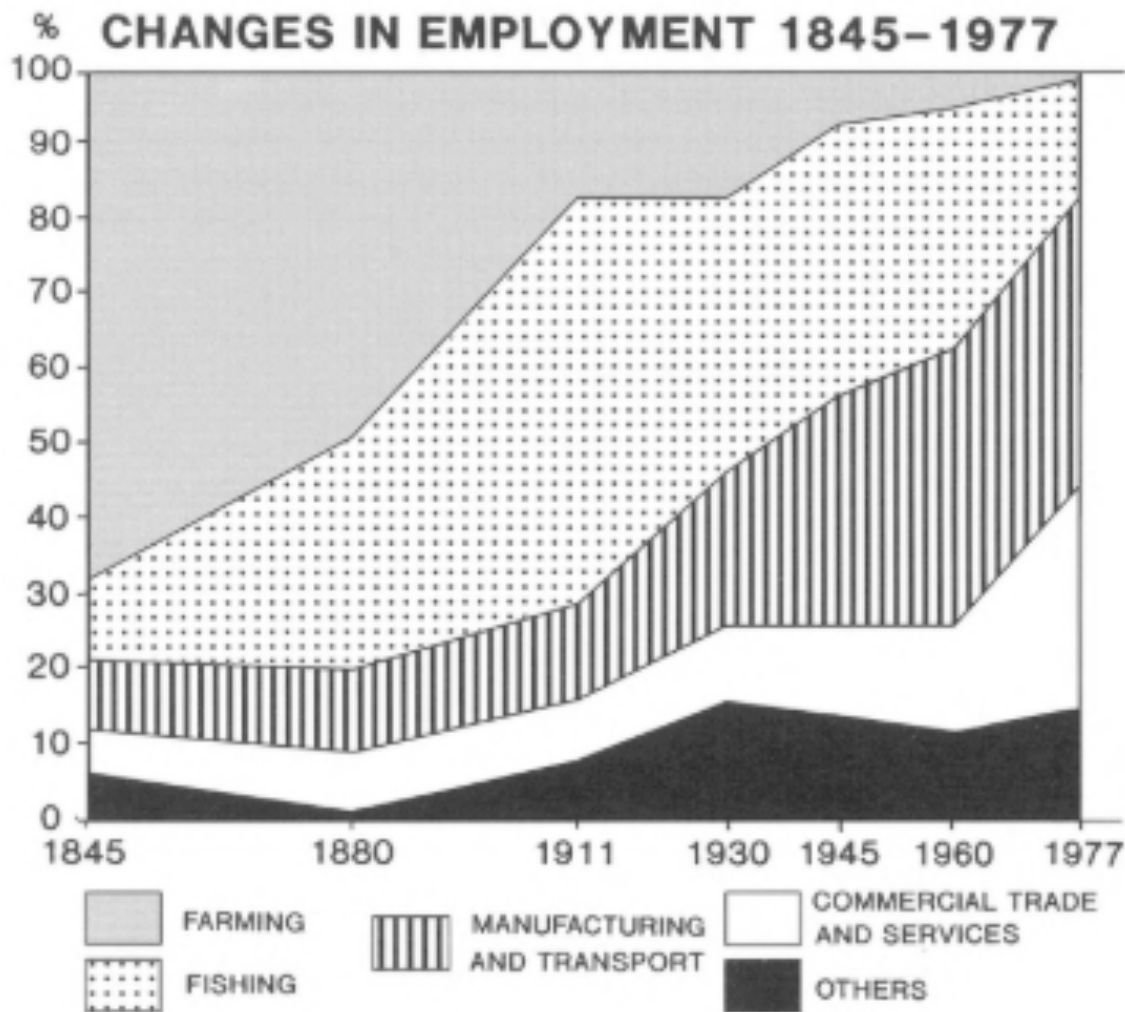


Figure 3. Proportional change in occupations over time (Guttesen, 1996)

This graph displays how the number of people employed in fishing increased dramatically after the Royal Trade Monopoly was abolished and smacks became more common. As fishery developed and became increasingly commercialised, the population continuously increased and new professions emerged. Schooling was institutionalised in the 19th century after much contestation (Debes, 2001; Volckmar, 2019). Nationalism surged in the late 19th century (Sølvará, 2015), the first political parties were established in 1906 (Madsen, 1999), and the first power plant was constructed in 1921 in Vágur (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). From 1801 to 1901, the population also tripled, increasing from 5,262 to 15,230 (Wylie, 1987, p. 113), and rose further to 21,352 in 1921. The number of people supported by agriculture remained relatively constant, whereas fishery sustained the growing population (Joensen, 1987). Wylie and Margolin write:

Fishing offered an alternative to the traditional system of acquiring economic control over one's life and so establishing one's identity as a full, married adult. The old system had guarded by law against uneconomical marriage, but it was threatened once a satisfactory living could be made from the sea. Even landless men might make enough money as commercial fishermen to set up their own houses. Young woman might do the same, as they often worked, processing the catch in their home villages in the new centres of commercial export fishery. (1981, p. 63)

The fishing industry facilitated an unprecedented degree of increased mobility and further synchronised the Faroese with the global economy while reducing several of the legal and economic obstacles that had previously prevented people from pursuing livelihoods such as working as an angler. The turn of the 20th century was characterised by unprecedented technological advancements and economic prosperity—both contributing factors to the formation of a coherent political entity (Bærenholdt, 2007; Joensen, 1987). Emigration remained low and primarily served as an option for wealthy merchants and their families (Guttesen, 1984; Wylie, 1987). In tandem with the intensification and proliferation of smack fishing, a number of people left smaller villages in search of employment in larger settlements. Technologies rendered the geographical distance to fishing banks less important since the smacks rapidly crossed greater distances. Enhanced transportation technologies therefore engendered new forms of relative immobility as well (settling elsewhere within the Faroes). Villages with calm landing conditions and a fjord offering shelter from the storms grew (Joensen, 1987). This shift partially explains why villages such as Tvøroyri and Vágur grew from being smaller, relatively peripheral settlements to centres of socioeconomic development (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). The constellations of im/mobility were also highly gendered. Men were expected to be versatile fishermen (Wylie, 1987) who also fowled, participated in the grind (Faroese whaling), kept a herd of sheep, and cultivated a plot of land (Gaini, 2013; Joensen, 1987). This is epitomised by the term '*raskur*' men, which generally encapsulates traits such as being hardworking, resourceful, able-bodied, and strong (Gaffin, 1996; Gaini, 2013a). Women were responsible for everything related to the household, processing the catch, and maintaining the fields when the men were on the ocean (Joensen, 1987).

Industrialisation also challenged traditional norms and expectations, creating a younger generation more oriented toward the future than the past. As Bruun describes:

There is no longer quiet and peace in the Faroese homes. The young folk journey to Iceland in bulk, yes, even to Greenland, in the summer to fish, and when they return the conversation naturally revolves around what they have experienced and seen and plans for the future are made. But previously, one thought more on the past. (Bruun, 1929, p. 140)

The above account illustrates how various technological improvements, combined with socioeconomic and political changes, gave rise to a societal transformation that ultimately placed Suðuroy at the heart of development in the Faroe Islands. These processes guided people's imaginations and im/mobility through, for example, increasing motility (Kaufmann et al., 2017). Suðuroy therefore emerged as a place with a hopeful and industrialised future.

The gradual embeddedness of the Faroe Islands into the global economic system was a dynamic process, and downswings and upticks have disproportionately impacted Suðuroy since the heydays of fishery. Fluctuations have reversed the centralisation detailed and produced a decades-long depopulation, negative representations of the island, and reduced capital investments. Inspired by studies on decline (Ferguson, 1999), emptying (Dzenovska, 2020), and shrinkage (Ringel, 2018), I am interested in exploring these societal processes. In the next section, I identify several of the processes that led to the emptying of Suðuroy. I have selected three periods that altered life on the island, focusing on the socioeconomic, political, material, and symbolic conditions later included in the analysis.

3.1.5. 1930 to 1950: First Signs of Suðuroy's Emptying

The Faroese population had risen to 24,200 in 1930 (Wylie, 1987). The majority was still directly or indirectly employed through fishery, with estimates of "3,000 ship-fishermen during the 1930s" (Wylie, 2013, p. 23). The 1930s were difficult. Still recovering from the reverberations of the 1929 Wall Street crash, Faroese businesses did not escape foreclosures (Holm & Mortensen, 2002; Madsen, 1999). In partial response to British trawlers' over-exploitation of local Faroese fishing banks, Faroese vessels began to fish around Greenland in the mid-1920s, continuously increasing this

practice in the 1930s (West, 1972). Despite gaining new and distant fishing territories, geopolitical developments on the European continent amputated the most important Faroese salt-fish markets, as prices plummeted for reasons that included the League of Nations imposing a trade embargo on Italy in 1935 and civil war in Spain (West, 1972). Economically, the 1930s were particularly challenging compared to previous decades characterised by tremendous growth.

The Second World War became an unlikely impetus for economic prosperity and an improbable basis for surging nationalism (Sølvará, 2015; West, 1972). The Danish government conceded to the invading German forces only hours after being attacked from the south on April 9th, 1940. All official ties and lines of communication between Denmark and the Faroe Islands were effectively cut. The *Amtmand*, the highest-ranking Danish official on the Faroe Islands, and the *Lagtinget* (the Faroese parliament) decided to split the task of governance (Sølvará, 2020). Just three days after the German occupation of Denmark (on April 12th) a British destroyer arrived to secure the Faroes—considered a vital strategic geographical position in the North Atlantic Ocean. This marked the beginning of approximately five years of isolation from Denmark under a peaceful British protectorate (Sølvará, 2015). Most fishing in the North Atlantic, Faroese included, was halted due to the British war effort necessitating the mobilisation of all available resources. Therefore, the British military seized British trawlers and converted them into armoured vessels (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). This created a supply problem for the British Isles. In response, Faroese anglers began to transport fish from Iceland to sell in British harbours, which was a highly lucrative albeit hazardous venture—131 Faroese anglers lost their lives during the war. From 1940 to 1945, Faroese anglers supplied an estimated 50% of the total consumption of fresh fish in Britain (Wylie, 1987). Except for a reduced number of anglers shipping out, most people were stuck on the islands for five years.

Two events boosted existing nationalist sentiments and cemented the Faroe Islands as an independent nation. First, the British Government acknowledged the Faroese flag, named *Merkið*, in 1941 because Faroese ships would *de facto* represent the enemy if they sailed under the Danish flag. Second, five years of self-governance without interference from Copenhagen demonstrated to the Faroese that they indeed possessed the capacity to both administer and govern the country. Talks between the

Lagtinget and the Danish Parliament began after the war but never reached a consensus. Therefore, the former decided to hold a national election in which a slender majority voted for separation. However, the Danish government rejected the results and temporarily dissolved the *Lagtinget*. A second referendum was organised that ultimately led to the Home Rule Act¹¹ of 1948, which recognised the Faroe Islands as a self-governing nation within the Danish realm. The domains of governance were divided into common and special areas, the latter of which the Faroese Government could assume (Ackrén, 2006; Hovgaard & Ackrén, 2017; Østergård, 2008; Sølvará, 2016, 2020).

Faroese infrastructure was also developed further in this period (Gaini & Jacobsen, 2008). Men unable to leave the islands aided the British forces in constructing roads for motorised vehicles, and the British also built the first runway on the Faroe Islands from 1942 to 1944 (West, 1972), which became the current Vagár airport. While the road network had expanded in the 1930s and 1940s, it was not until the 1960s that the northern and southern parts of Suðuroy were connected by road (Gaini & Jacobsen, 2008). Towards the end of the 1940s, the Faroese fishing fleet was in dire need of modernisation. Many of the ships were still made of wood. Moreover, according to West (1972), more than half the fleet was 50 years old. The wealth amassed during the war enabled the Faroese to purchase old steamers, but they proved to be considerably less capable than advertised.

¹¹ <https://www.government.fo/en/the-government/the-home-rule-act/>

MIGRATION BALANCE 1841/50 TO 1986/89

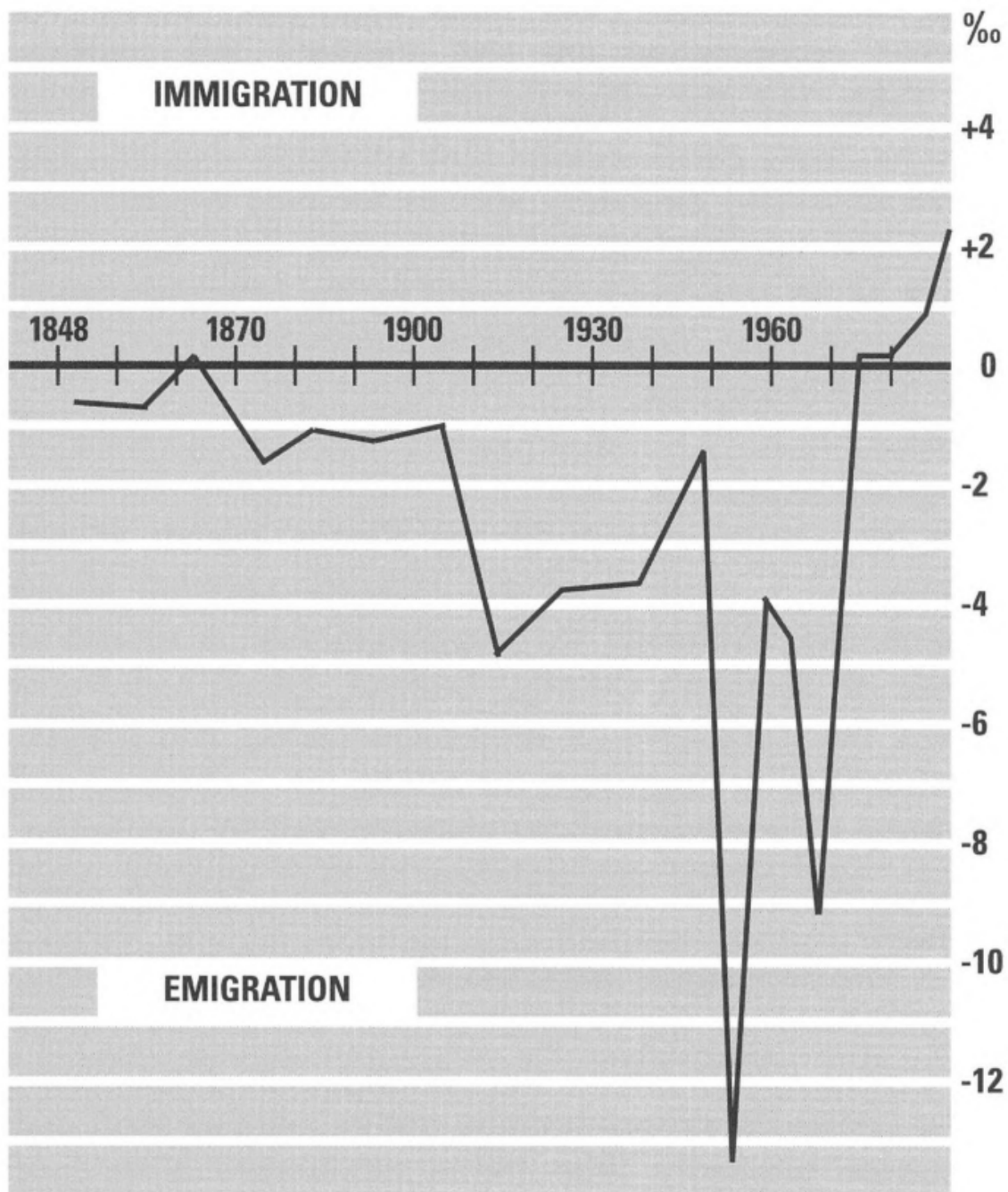


Figure 4. Net migration based on decadal averages (Guttesen, 1996)

Towards the end of the 1940s, the old steamers the Faroese had acquired needed extensive maintenance, and the increasing cost of fuel led to a crisis around 1950 that prompted a wave of emigration, primarily to Denmark, at the beginning of the 1950s. While information is scarce, it is possible to draw tentative conclusions regarding people's im/mobility practices. Internal movement increased, particularly in and

around villages with an attractive landing ground and a fishery industry in which people could find paid work (Joensen, 1987). A significant quantity of Faroese men spent months on the ocean, sailing to fishing grounds in the north of the islands. While they likely had limited contact with foreigners there, this sparked an awareness and intermeshing of people from different villages (Joensen, 1975). Some anglers also ventured out with foreign vessels. Increasing numbers of people also travelled to Denmark and occasionally elsewhere in Europe. Faroese docks were also increasingly visited by foreign ships. However, the villages seemed to remain the gravitational points, and moving between villages or islands for leisure was still rare. People moved primarily within the village-sphere, since travelling elsewhere entailed climbing a mountain or braving the ocean. The population peaked on Suðuroy in 1950, reaching 6,200 people (Holm, 2007), though Tórshavn and Klaksvik were slowly taking over as the socioeconomic powerhouses.

3.1.6. 1990 to mid-2000: Surviving the Fishing Crisis

This can be said to be the biggest demographic change since the 'Black Death' in the mid-1300s. The only difference is that back then it was a disease that ravaged the country. Now it's more or less self-created societal problems that are causing people to flee the country in their thousands. (Bygnaárnevndin 1993, p. 4 cited in Justinussen, 1997, p. 3)

The Faroese population had climbed to 47,773 at the start of 1990 while dropping to 5,835¹² on Suðuroy. In total numbers, this does not represent a significant drop from its peak in 1950. Nonetheless, it does correspond to a substantial drop in proportion to the entire Faroese population (Holm, 2007). The 1980s were characterised by the steady increases in both population and economic prosperity gradually centring themselves around Tórshavn (Klinte, 1994). Outer areas, such as Suðuroy, experienced a gradual emptying because resources amassed around Tórshavn and Klaksvik, the population began to age, and people faced geographical obstacles regarding access to the central labour market (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020). Concurrently, local development policies—known as *bygdamenning* (Hovgaard & Kristiansen, 2008; Klinte, 1994)—began supporting decentralisation, making it possible for small villages to operate a fish processing plant and thereby prevent

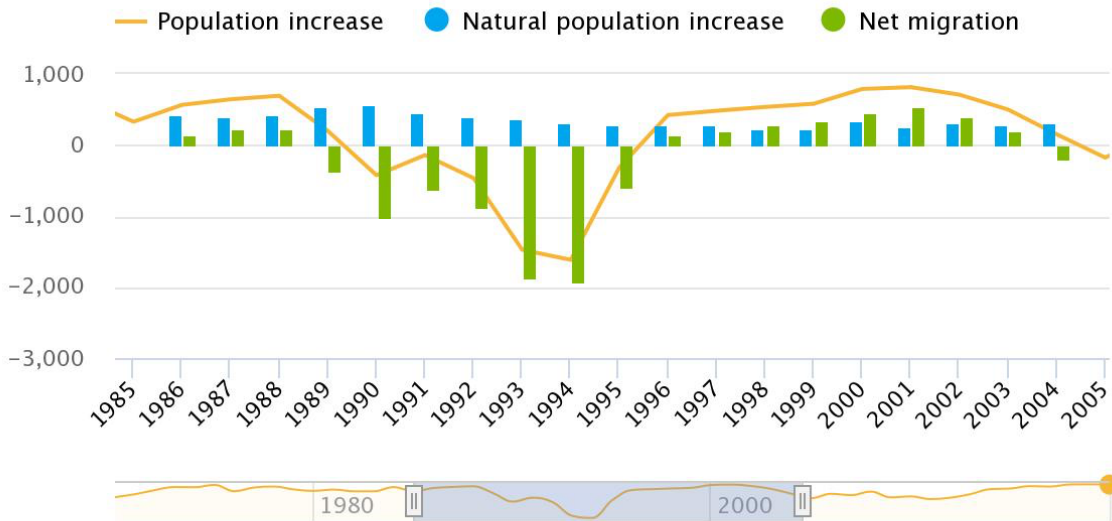
¹² <https://hagstova.fo/fo/folk/folkatal/folkatal>

people from moving away (Justinussen, 1997). Indeed, until the depths of the 1990s crisis, there were 21 fish processing plants across the Faroes (Klinte, 1994)

In the mid-to-late 1980s, the economy began to exhibit signs of overheating and, in 1989, it came to a standstill (Justinussen, 1997). From 1989 to 1995, around 7,200 people emigrated (Klinte, 1994)—in 1994 alone, as many as 1,953 people left the islands (Larsen, 1999). The Gross National Product dropped 40%, and unemployment reached 20% (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). A wide range of factors generated this collapse. For example, the expansion of nautical borders to 200 miles (Joensen, 2003; Justinussen, 1997) excluded the Faroese fleet from its customary fishing grounds and forced the fleet to reconfigure and adjust for home waters. This process further exacerbated the rising number of people employed in the tertiary sector (Larsen, 1999). Additional elements also contributed to the crisis: a combination of failed localisation policies, depleted fish stocks due to overfishing throughout the 1980s (Larsen, 2000), new competition entering the global market, declining prices of fish, and the inability to maintain the enormous investments the industry required (Guttesen, 1996; Holm & Mortensen, 2002; Justinussen, 1997). The crisis also possibly indicated the Faroese economy's structural weakness of overreliance on a single industry. For example, the establishment of a fund to offer loans on favourable terms and stabilise prices in the context of market fluctuations resulted in keeping the sector artificially alive. According to a report published in 1988, all filleting plants ran at a loss in 1988 (Larsen, 2000), triggering the implosion of the Faroese economy and obliging the two largest banks to merge in order to survive (Sølvará, 2020). The Faroese parliament was forced to borrow money from the Danish government to prevent a complete economic collapse. The above losses significantly reduced the number of people employed in fishing and processing, which decreased from 7,989 just before the implosion to 4,438 in 1992 (Larsen, 1999). Salaries dropped substantially, unemployment surpassed 20% (Justinussen, 1997), and almost 10% of the population consequently emigrated over the subsequent five-to-six years (Guttesen, 1984, 1996), which is visible in the statistics:

Changes in population (annually)

persons



Note: By 1. January

Source: Statistics Faroe Islands

Figure 5. Annual changes in population (Hagstova Føroya, n.d.-a)

This exodus had a highly uneven geographical impact and struck hardest in those peripheral places with a higher reliance on fishing—in part facilitated by the localisation policies—and related industries:

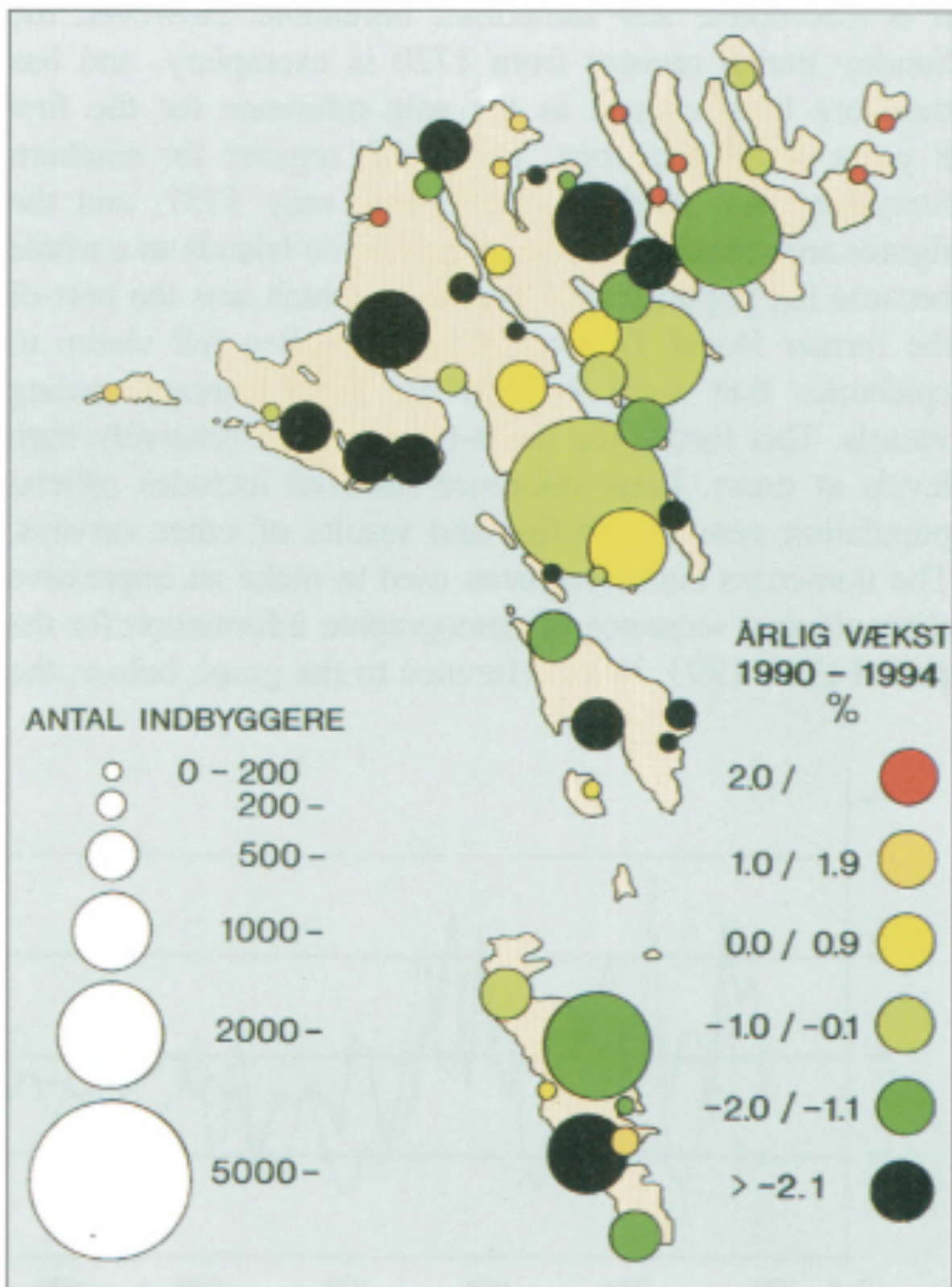
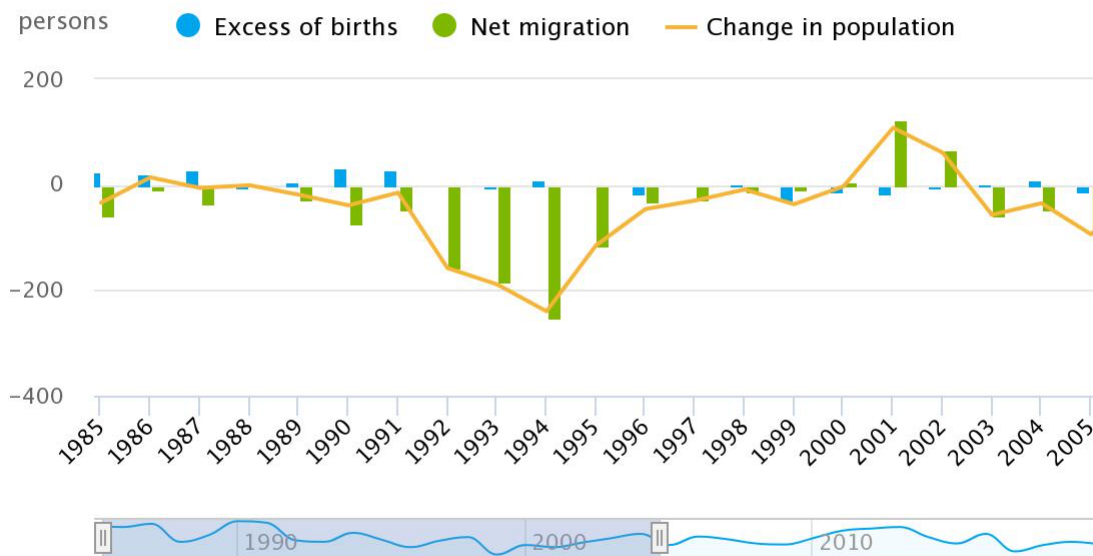


Figure 6. Annual population growth (Guttesen, 1996)

The graph looks similar when focusing on Suðuroy:

Changes in population in Suðuroyar region (annually)



Note: By 1. January
Source: Statistics Faroe Islands

Figure 7. Annual changes in population on Suðuroy (Hagstova Føroya, n.d.-e)

Due to a strong dependency on fishing and limited access to the central labour market, the crisis had a ruinous impact on Suðuroy. In Tvøroyri alone, approximately 14% of the inhabitants left, the majority of whom belonged to the younger generation. According to Holm and Mortensen, 48% of the people between 20–24 years of age left (2002, p. 52). Despite the dire situation, unemployment stayed lower in Tvøroyri than in several of the other villages on the island because the main processing plant remained open, and people in the village collectively financed two trawlers (Holm & Mortensen, 2002). The crisis produced a natural reduction in spending power, and a halt to most building projects that left the construction sector exposed and workers without jobs. The situation in Vágur was more difficult, and it was the only village on Suðuroy with a negative population growth of -2.1% or more. The main processing plant closed and did not reopen at its pre-crisis capacity. It went from employing more than 140 people in 1993 to 15 in 1995 (Holm & Mortensen, 2002, p. 54). Unemployment rose to approximately 16%, and the average annual earnings dropped as low as 68,000 DKK per person (Holm & Mortensen, 2002).

The crisis sparked political changes, such as the first unemployment scheme in 1992 (Klinte, 1994) and recommendations to reduce municipalities to a maximum of nine

across the Faroes (Larsen, 1999). Policies had hitherto promoted decentralisation to accommodate a nation built from villages, but municipalities were subsequently urged to merge, though on a strictly voluntary basis (Larsen, 1999). Awareness also grew concerning the dangers of relying on a single industry, and the government therefore began to invest in tourist promotion to diversify (Larsen, 1999). The Faroese economy was back on its feet in the late 1990s due to substantial catches and rising global prices (Larsen, 1999). By October 1995, the population had slowly begun to climb again. On Suðuroy, the picture was different, however. The crisis left a considerable reduction in the total and relative population—one that has yet to be successfully addressed.

The Faroese Government continued investing in infrastructure that connected the islands internally and externally to combat the rising inequalities between the outer areas and Tórshavn. In 1979, the government expanded the runway at Vagár airport and installed new navigational equipment (Dam & Groth, 1979). They also bought helicopters to connect the outer areas (Dam & Bentsen, 1984). In the 1960s, two tunnels were constructed to connect Sandvik to Hvalba and Hvalba to Tvøroyri on Suðuroy. Moreover, Sumba was connected to Lopra by tunnel in 1997. Television was introduced in the early 1980s and had a relatively rapid diffusion throughout Faroese society (Andreassen, 1992). The internet was also introduced in 1996 and was, towards the end of the 1990s, present in 30% of households (Larsen, 2000). In 2002, a subsea tunnel connected the islands of Vágur, where the airport is located, and Streymoy, which accommodates Tórshavn, making travel much simpler and less dependent on weather.

Internal mobility increased significantly during this period due to infrastructural projects that included expanding the road network, thereby making mobility less contingent on the weather. Cars became the primary mode of mobility. Moreover, air traffic steadily increased throughout the 1980s and, while the numbers of passengers dipped briefly during the crisis, rates of travel soon increased again. In 1998, over 40% of the guests sleeping in hotels were Danish, 25% were Faroese, 16% were from other Nordic countries, 5% were from Germany and Britain, and 7% were from elsewhere (Larsen, 1999). Many Faroese between 15 and 40 left in search of educational and professional opportunities during the crisis. Some returned, but many opted to stay away. According to the Faroese statistical agency, 99.2% of the Faroese population had

Danish citizenship in 1995, 93.4% was born on the islands, and 4.8% originated in Denmark. Further, 0.6% of the population was born in countries outside Europe, while the residual 1.4% were from Europe and primarily originated from Scandinavian countries. While the 1990s and early 2000s saw a substantial exodus, the expansion of infrastructure increased internal mobility, making it relatively easy to travel between villages and even islands. At the same time, tourists were arriving in higher numbers, and travelling elsewhere became easier; however, people recalled that the high costs of air travel had restricted their mobility growing up.

3.1.7. Vignette II: Being Mobile on Suðuroy

Suðuroy's main artery, the ferry Smyríl, was often described as a form of temporal decompression chamber, echoing sentiments that Vannini (2011a, 2012) heard in remote communities on Canada's west coast. The rhythms of social life and im/mobility were connected to the comings and goings of Smyríl. The two-hour crossing was emblematic of my trips to the island. After buying my obligatory snack or coffee from the onboard cafeteria, I would often linger spellbound by the window if the weather was calm and clear. On one side of Smyríl, the rugged coastline rose imposingly from the ocean while, on the other, the North Atlantic stretched into infinity. The crossing also symbolised the "task" ahead for me as both a researcher and an individual. Once Smyríl docked, people exited through a small terminal on the opposite side of the fjord from Tvøroyri; most people on foot are picked up by friends or relatives waiting in cars. Various sized buses also waited, though I always had trouble determining which bus drove where, so the bus drivers often became my first point of contact. Several of the buses were not much larger than a sizeable van and probably fitted a maximum of 15 people. To my knowledge, there are few designated stops along the route. Instead, it seemed common practise to simply ask the driver to stop in front of a house.

We realised that most people drove around and that our mobility would be somewhat restricted without a car. As discussed in the first vignette, walking was feasible within the villages, but inter-village mobility was troublesome and time-consuming. It was uncommon to see people walking around and only the village centre area had sidewalks. Most people strolling about the village were tourists. People seemed to drive everywhere. We tried to familiarise ourselves with the bus timetable. However, it took

a week to properly learn how to decode it; even then, we still misinterpreted the schedule once in a while. Indeed, I called the central bus station more than once to inquire about a delay only to realise that we had misread the timetable. Buses also did not automatically drive to the smaller villages unless people specifically asked them to, and bus schedules are primarily coordinated with the arrivals and departures of Smyríl. Whenever we had a meeting or engagement in other villages, we often left hours beforehand, walking around the village or having lunch at Hotel Bakkin (if it was open) to pass time. The few cafes were rarely open. The absence of public transportation also meant that people appeared somewhat familiar with picking up hitchhikers. I spoke to one young man who had taken his driver's license test in another village; however, the classes ended after the last bus left. He therefore hitchhiked back a couple times a week for several months, only failing once to find a lift, which necessitated having to call a friend's mother for help (he was not from the island). I also had my first hitchhiking experience(s) on Suðuroy. Emmanuel and I were stranded at the ferry terminal one evening and, after some discussion, he convinced me to hitchhike. Hitchhiking was not practiced where I grew up but was reasonably common where Emmanuel was raised. After putting out our thumbs, a few cars passed until a camper wagon in faded white colours stopped. An elderly man offered to drive us to Tvøroyri and, in notably accented Danish, invited us to sit at a table in the back. There was a harpoon and diving equipment lying around. He had worked as a diver in the aquacultures (large circular nets, each holding thousands of fish, in which salmon are farmed), with the objective of removing dead salmon. He was unable to eat salmon after that. We got back to the village without further event and thanked the driver. Mobility on Suðuroy is therefore primarily dependent on access to cars due to the geography, weather, and existing infrastructure.

3.1.8. 2010–2020: Towards a Hopeful Future

While the Great Recession impacted the Faroese economy and society, the consequences were less severe compared to other places. While the population of Suðuroy had declined to 4,743¹³ at the start of the 2010s¹⁴, the total Faroese population had reached 48,494. Moreover, there had been a drastic rise in GDP, and unemployment in the archipelago had fallen to a mere 1.2% before the crisis (Knudsen,

¹³ <https://hagstova.fo/en/region/su%C3%Bouroyar-region/population>

¹⁴ <https://hagstova.fo/en/population/population/population>

2009). Just as the future started to appear more hopeful, two of the largest companies in the country, Eik Banki and Faroe Seafood, were declared bankrupt in late 2010 (Knudsen, 2014). Unemployment peaked at 8.1% in 2011 but swiftly began to decline in 2012¹⁵. Suðuroy was again struck proportionally harder by the crisis compared to the national average, and unemployment rose to 12.5%¹⁶. This contributed to further decreases in the island's population in terms of both total numbers and proportion. There was also a reduction of the jobs available in both the fishing and fish processing industries, which decreased from 4,800 in the 2000s to just 2,700 in 2011 and 2012 (Johansen, 2020). The modernisation of the fishing fleet and processing plants combined with increasing exports of unprocessed fish reduced the hands required (Johansen, 2020). Aquaculture, which had been slow to flourish since the mid-2000s, became a lucrative business and softened the blow by consuming some of the surplus labour that traditional fishing could no longer employ. Slightly more than 3,900 people are currently employed in fish-related industries (Johansen, 2020) and, on Suðuroy, the percentage of the workforce employed in “fishery and other natural resource industries” is almost 10% higher than the national average¹⁷.

The wind began to refill the economic sails again from late-2013 (Malthe-Thagaard, 2018) as a result of increasing prices, pelagic fish catches, the continuing success of aquaculture, low oil prices, and EU trade embargoes targeting Russia that the Faroe Islands could bypass due to not being a member state (Johansen, 2020; Sølvará, 2020). Salaries rose, and unemployment fell below 1% at the end of 2020¹⁸. Centralisation around Tórshavn continued, and the proportion of the population living in the capital area increased from 38.8% to 40.2% over a 10-year period. However, the population decreased from 9.8% to 8.8% on Suðuroy over the same period. The *Lagtinget* launched several initiatives to halt the exodus and further diversify the economy. These included the expansion and diversification of educational opportunities (because many young people were leaving to study in Denmark), life-long counselling to enhance people's awareness of available possibilities, improvements to the social welfare system, and developments regarding tourism. One example of the latter was the “We chose the Faroe Islands” campaign, which

¹⁵ <https://hagstova.fo/en/region/su%C3%Bouroyar-region/unemployment>

¹⁶ <https://hagstova.fo/en/region/su%C3%Bouroyar-region/unemployment>

¹⁷ <https://hagstova.fo/en/regions/suduroyar-region/employees-suduroyar-region>

¹⁸ <https://hagstova.fo/en/society/labour/unemployment>

propagated positive stories concerning the Faroe Islands to counter what people tended to describe as a heavy and negative atmosphere. The national tourist agency was re-branded, and its budget doubled, leading to a campaign marketing “authenticity” and natural splendour. As I explore in the following chapters, these initiatives are intended to sedentarise people’s imaginings through symbolic, social, and material transformations.

The population continued to rise throughout the 2010s and reached 52,914 people in December 2020. On Suðuroy, the population declined through the 2000s but stabilised in the first years of the decade and sat at 4,660 at the end of 2020. However, the characteristics of the population on Suðuroy are often used to question the future. While nationally there are still more people below 40 than above, the opposite is the case on Suðuroy, where the average age is increasing. Working-age people have dropped to perhaps 60% of the island’s population (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020). A larger portion of Suðuroy’s workforce is still employed in fishing-related industries than the national average, and the island has a large public sector due to the logic of using decentralisation to maintain livelihoods (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020). Educational attainment is also lower than the national average, with deficiencies in all pre-established levels except “one year or less from elementary school”. The scarcity of women is similarly more pronounced on Suðuroy, and unemployment was 2.3% as of December 2020 compared to 1.4% nationally¹⁹. In 2018, the share of Suðuroy’s population with an income 60% below the median was 14.1%, whereas the number was 10.1% nationally. All municipalities on Suðuroy were below the national gross median income, which was 184,296 DKK in 2018. Most Faroese municipalities are below that; however, four of the municipalities on Suðuroy (Hovs, Sumbiar, Famjins, and Vags) were among the five with the lowest median income²⁰. Tvøroyri is the municipality with the highest median income on Suðuroy. Few jobs on the islands require people with a tertiary education (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020).

Connectivity and infrastructure were also improved in order to strengthen internal and transnational mobility. Vágur airport expanded its runway from 1,250 to 1,799 metres in 2011 to accommodate larger planes and thus extend travel distances to

¹⁹ <https://hagstova.fo/en/region/su%C3%Bouroyar-region/unemployment>

²⁰ <https://hagstova.fo/en/economy/wages-and-income-distribution/net-income>

destinations necessitating 6–7 hours of flight time (Knudsen, 2014). Furthermore, the airport installed new navigation technologies to accommodate more airlines and improve frequency of flights in 2012²¹. Since the start of the decade, broadband coverage has been at 99.8% (Knudsen, 2014), and Føroya Tele estimates that they have covered the entire population with 4G, which extends outwards almost 100 kilometres from land. Moreover, the number of beds in the capital almost doubled in 2020 due to the construction of two new hotels, and the number of bars and restaurants is also steadily rising. Suðuroy also witnessed development in parallel, though at a different pace, as Smyríl functioned as a buffer. All villages are connected by road, most by a tunnel through the mountains, though Famjin is still only accessible by a windy road through a mountain pass. Several cafes have opened since the mid-2010s, a new and highly technological processing plant was built in Tvøroyri in 2018–2019 (after the former plant burned down in 2017), a remote learning centre was established in Vágur in 2013, and a new high school opened in Hov in 2007. In addition, an Olympic-sized swimming pool opened in Vágur in 2015 along with a sports school in 2016, an “after school” (one year of voluntary and paid schooling after elementary school) in Tvøroyri in 2020, and a large indoor soccer and sports centre in Vágur in 2018. More cafes and restaurants have opened since my last visit. However, despite these recent developments and initiatives, there is still a tendency to represent Suðuroy negatively (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020) in both the national media and everyday conversations. I have heard it being referred to as more rural and as “50 years behind”. Moreover, I have been presented with a caricature of a milking calf that a person (from the north) explained represents Suðuroy—with the cow being the Faroe Islands. Almost as if an internal ordering exist (Isfeldt, 2020), people from the rest of the Faroe Islands and tourists do not visit the island to a substantial extent, which is again often attributed to Smyríl.

As evidenced in the number of passages (until COVID-19 immobilised the world²²), mobility to and from the Faroe Islands has increased annually. The islands have become a major international tourist destination, and the success of the re-branding campaign has reached far and wide, won several international awards, and attracted a younger demographic of visitors. Suðuroy, however, received a fraction of the

²¹ <https://www.fae.fo/en/about-vagar-airport/history/>

²² <https://www.fae.fo/en/about-vagar-airport/statistic/>

incoming tourists and their attendant capital due to selective marketing and geographical distance, although this seem to be slowly changing. Outgoing mobility also increased due to airlines opening more routes and rising salaries. However, people living on Suðuroy wishing to benefit from the cheaper flights and economic prosperity have an extra hurdle to overcome due to Smyríl: they must often travel a day before their flight in case there is a sudden change in the weather. Moreover, while 0.4% of the population held a non-Nordic passport in the mid-1990s, that number has increased from 1.2% in 2004 to 3.2% in 2020²³. For example, the foreign-born segment of the population amounted to 1% in the mid-1990s and sat at 4.2% in 2020. More specific statistical information is not available on the Faroese statistical agency's website. However, according to a newly developed website, Integration.fo²⁴, approximately 180 people of varying nationalities live on Suðuroy. The people moving to the Faroe Islands from elsewhere also tend to cluster in and around Tórshavn. In terms of employment, there is an overrepresentation of migrants in service jobs and fish processing, which is also reflected in Ísfeld's work (2019). An increase in the mobilities present and the distance they cover, both within the country and beyond, is therefore clearly evident. For example, going on vacation or visiting friends or family in Denmark are quite accessible now. Increasing mobilities and decreasing friction contributes to engendering the relative immobilities implied by a rising population. As was the case when Einar was young, the world is coming to the Faroes, bringing tourists, increasing migration, and offering new technologies and goods. However, within the Faroes, clear differences or inequalities exist in terms of what forms of im/mobilities are plausible for whom and, consequently, not all places are on the same trajectory or promise the same future.

3.2. Discussion

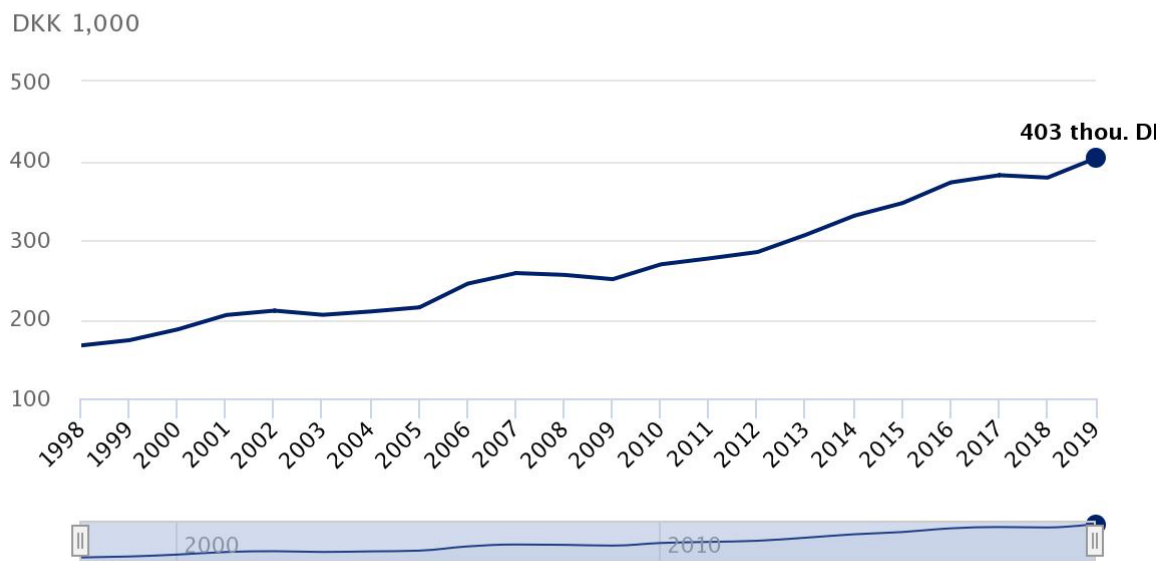
I have sought to describe Suðuroy's changing position within Faroese socioeconomic and demographic developments over time, with reference to changing im/mobilities. This account forms the background for the discussions around emptying presented later and illustrates that this analytical category is not fixed. Im/mobilities and places change in tandem (Salazar, n.d.), impacting the emptying relative to other places.

²³ <https://hagstova.fo/en/population/population/citizenship>

²⁴ <https://integration.fo/lyklatol>

While I am aware that people experience these circumstances differently, I became interested in the initiatives that were launched to reverse the exodus. I therefore want to end this chapter with a discussion of the desynchronisation (in relation to Tórshavn and “progress”) and emptying of Suðuroy relative to the wider societal transformation. The Faroese economy grew steadily since the banking crises:

GDP per capita

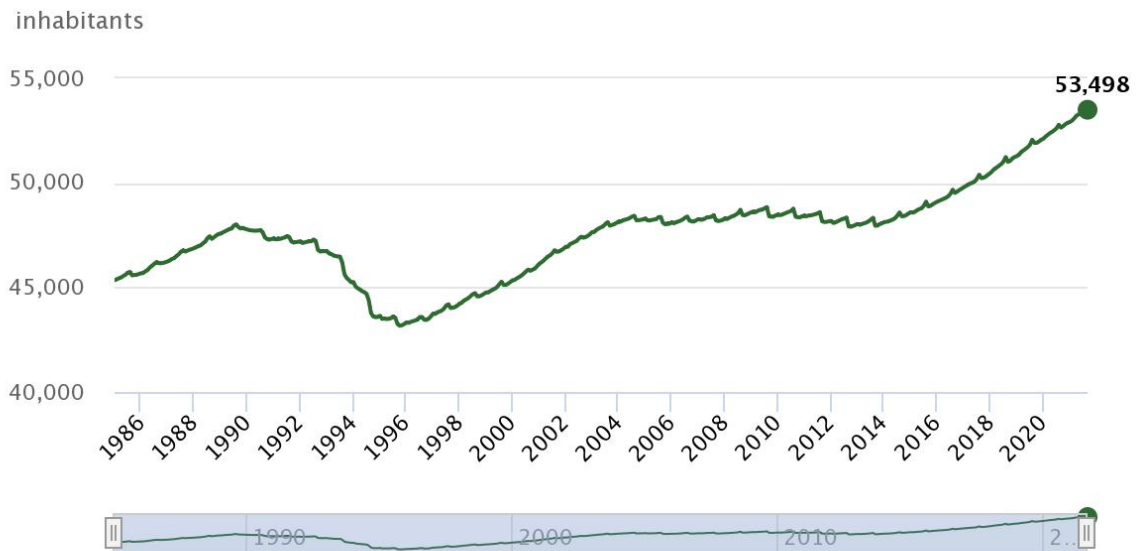


Note: Current prices
Source: Statistics Faroe Islands

Figure 8. Annual GDP per capita growth (Hagstova Føroya, n.d.-b)

Population growth did not initially follow suit but subsequently demonstrated a considerably steeper increase:

Population



Note: Primo

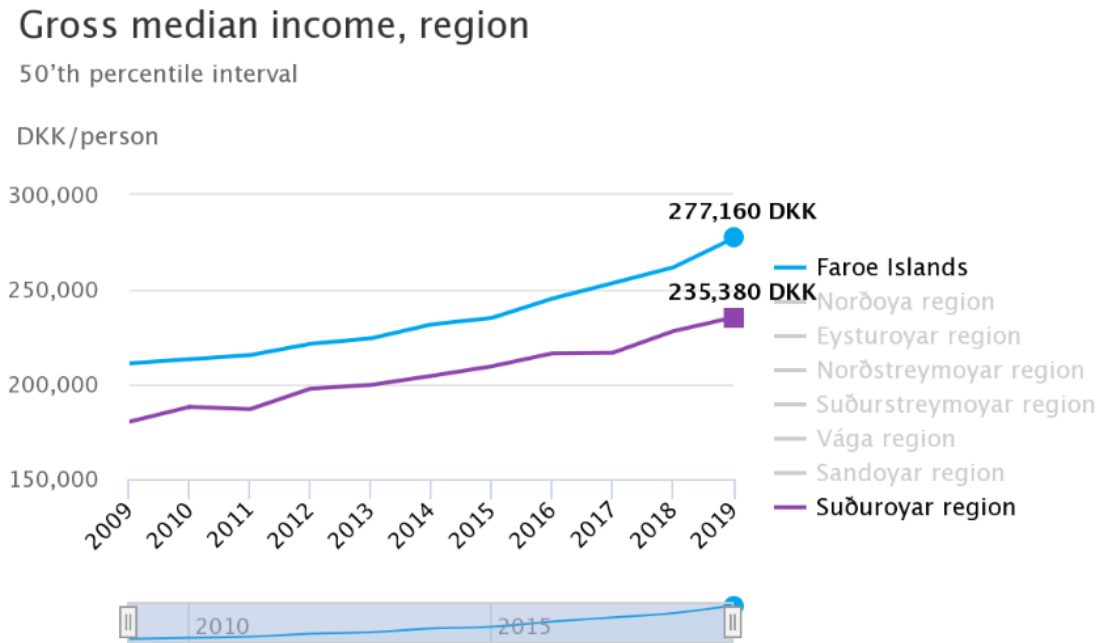
Source: Statistics Faroe Islands

Figure 9. Annual population growth in the Faroe Islands (Hagstova Føroya, n.d.-a)

While I admit that GNP is a crude measure, the apparent mismatch between the graphs indicates that increasing economic activity might not be what prompted the substantial increase in overall population. Instead, this increase in residents could have been caused by a more intangible dimension. Faroese GNP rose steadily, unemployment declined, and the labour market diversified. However, the Faroese population stagnated from the early 2000s to the early 2010s before drastically increasing from 2013 to 2014 onwards. Economic prosperity undoubtedly represents part of the answer, but I want to propose and explore a more elusive factor: the way in which alterations in imagined futures sedentarised people. I heard several people indicate that the change was not merely economic but related equally to how people engaged with the future; namely, that it was becoming hopeful. I decided to explore what might underpin this changing affective valence beyond the usual economic rationale.

As previously mentioned, the societal development was never evenly distributed around the Faroes. Suðuroy arguably represents one of the more desynchronised places in terms of keeping pace with the promise of “progress” and the wider transformations occurring across the Faroes. However, I suspect that the geographical

disparity possibly accentuated the emptying and therefore provides an interesting place to study how people managed population loss. Gross median incomes offer a useful illustration of these disparities:



Source: Statistics Faroe Islands

Figure 10. Annual increase in gross median income based on region (Hagstova Føroya, n.d.-c)

Additionally, while the population is rapidly increasing on a national scale, it has declined or, at best, stagnated on Suðuroy:

Fólkatalið í Suðuroyar økinum



Viðm.: Uppgjørt fyrst í mánaðinum
Kelda: Hagstova Føroya

Figure 11. Annual population change on Suðuroy (Hagstova Føroya, n.d.-d)

I am not seeking to portray Suðuroy in a negative light. Rather, my intention is to share the circumstances I define as the contexts of (relative) emptying to explore people's responses to this process. These conditions and the relation to Tórshavn (and elsewhere) are significant in determining whether a future, and therefore im/mobility practices, can be located on the island. People are often described as leaving or living emptiness (Dzenovska, 2018), but I want to demonstrate that they also transform it and that it is not a fixed state. This eclectic historical overview was written with two purposes in mind. First, I needed to share my sociological imagination to frame the analysis and justify interpretations or theorisations that combine the first and third-person perspectives. Moreover, the history of fishery seemed particularly important because it still impacts many of the decisions taken, the desynchronisation of Suðuroy, and how people imagined the future and decided to become mobile or remain in place. Second, I also felt compelled to write this account in perhaps more detail than was strictly necessary for the analysis because those living on Suðuroy (and other places) might also be interested in an account of the island's history—little exists so far. Based on this, I now proceed to analyse the technologies of the imagination that, I argue, instilled hope in the Faroes Islands' future and constituted part of their societal change. In subsequent chapters, I add nuance to the account by addressing

contestations, geographical and social differences, and how individual experiences and trajectories refract the imagination.

4. Regimes of the Imagination and Im/mobilities

Towards the end of our stay in May 2019, we left Suðuroy to embark on a tourist trip to Mykines—one of the most advertised places at the time. Mykines is the westernmost of the islands and home to a little village of perhaps 12 people, more than a thousand sheep, a large puffin colony, and a much-photographed lighthouse built at the cusp of the endless Atlantic Ocean. In 2019 alone, the number of visitors rose to almost 30,000²⁵, with the bulk of visitors arriving in the summer months. We caught a bus from Tórshavn at 9am to the port of Sørvígur, from which a 13-meter ferry with a capacity for 88 passengers sails twice a day²⁶. When we arrived at the docks, a group of tourists dressed in bright-coloured hiking gear amassed, and a person checked everyone's tickets (due to high demand, everyone had to book their tickets in advance) and directed people towards the boat. At the front of the boat was a small steering house and, at the back, an entrance to the seating area below deck—partly under the sealine. The seating area was divided by a bright wooden table and consisted of rows of 2 by 2 seating booths, one on each side of the boat, under a low ceiling. The booths were covered in a black fabric that appeared easy to clean. The windows, which were frequently covered with water during crossings, allowed people to appreciate the view. The ceiling was higher in the aisle dividing the two rows of seating booths, and two metal pipes were bolted to the sides of this ceiling, presumably to provide something to hold onto. The seating area quickly filled, and Emmanuel and I decided to stay on deck with a small group of other tourists. Outside, the weather was windy and greyish. Once we left the fjord, waves started to toss the small boat around, and I had to hold onto the railing to remain standing. The people on the deck spoke a mixture of languages and were trying to take photographs while maintaining their grip. We sailed along the island's coastline, enjoying an extensive view of a large bird colony nesting on the steep cliffs, until suddenly the captain steered towards a small gorge. We docked at a concrete pier barely long enough to take the boat, and people jumped off when the swell allowed. The line of people walked up a long concrete staircase next to an old mechanical hoisting system for supplies (which were picked up by a person on an ATV). Soon after, we arrived at a village with perhaps a dozen houses, most with a concrete ground floor painted white and a wooden first floor painted in different

²⁵ <http://local.fo/numbers-of-travelers-visiting-mykines-and-kalsoy-more-than-doubled-in-last-five-years/>

²⁶ <https://www.mykines.fo/company/?lang=EN>

colours (mostly black, red, or yellow). The houses closest to the harbour also had grass on their roofs. The crowd dispersed, and we took a brief stroll around before heading to the trail starting above the village. As with the majority of visitors, we were going to visit an islet connected to the island called Mykineshólmur. A path had recently been established and a hiking fee introduced to manage the high demand and discourage tourists from trampling the puffins' nesting grounds. We paid our fees to a person casually lounging in a plastic chair and began to walk.

The trail was a narrow barren line. The sun began to shine through the clouds, and the trail did not feel too crowded because most people frequently stopped to take photographs. We first walked towards the northern side of the island, where seagulls were effortlessly gliding in the strong wind. On our way to the bridge, we found both the first puffins, who were making sketchy landings after having caught fish, and the first congestion. Further down, the path steered us directly through the nests the puffins had dug into the ground. We continued to the light house, where another blockage had formed because people were taking photographs, as did we:



We slowly hiked back to the village and entered its sole café, which appeared to be reasonably new and contained an impromptu wooden bar and offered a limited selection of foods. They sold sodas and beers, hot beverages, and typical fast foods such as hotdogs and burgers. It resembled a house converted into a café. Upstairs, there was a small seating area of outdoor furniture that had been placed close to the bar. Downstairs were benches and a couple of tables. As far as we could tell, this was the only café in town, and the place gradually filled up with tourists returning from the hike to wait for the ferry's departure at around 4pm. We then followed the mass of people heading to the small concrete dock to return to the mainland.

This vignette from a trip to Mykines reveals more than simply a remarkable surge in tourists and the push to create the infrastructure necessary to service them. It also exemplifies a rapid societal transformation and relates to the increasing Faroese population that the previous chapter ended on. In this chapter, I wish to explore the sociocultural and material drivers of these changes in the Faroes more broadly—tourism being one. I propose to theorise imagination as a form of governmentality or the “Conduct of Conducts” (Walters, 2012, p. 11). Eule et al. (2019) argue that power also operates through temporalities, but I want to explore how power works through the imagination. I therefore analyse various initiatives and adopt the concept of the technologies of the imagination, which denote material and social initiatives engendering indeterminate imaginative outcomes (Sneath et al., 2009). Hook describes technologies as representing a “category of analysis” that “is strongly focused on the minutia of the concrete instrumentation and mechanisation of procedural application of power” (2007, p. 215). That is, technologies function as an analytical concept that captures a relational and incomplete power at work (Foucault, 1990). In other words, I use this concept to analyse and unravel the impacts of the various initiatives people frequently mentioned. Governmentality denotes rationalities of governance (Foucault, 2007; Rose et al., 2006). Technologies (of the imagination) represent concrete manifestations of such governmentalities. I emphasise how specific technologies have contributed to widening imaginative possibilities (Glăveanu, 2020b), instilled hope in the future (Hage, 2009b), and situated the future in the Faroes as opposed to elsewhere (Dzenovska, 2018; Jovchelovitch et al., 2018; Ringel, n.d.). Building on Glick Shiller and Salazar's (2013) work on regimes of im/mobilities,

I propose that the imagination is also an important dimension to consider when exploring the shape of these regimes.

Although the Foucauldian canon is occasionally accused of neglecting the individual and is therefore not viewed as being compatible with psychological research, integrating his ideas on power adds to an under-theorised dimension. This combination highlights the tension between structures and individuals that is a central feature of this thesis. Whereas Foucault focused on the rationalities or governmentalities conducive to human conduct, these were never conceptualised as deterministic. If anything, possibilities are expanding (Foucault, 1990); however, the point is to investigate the multiple manifestations of power instead of who possesses it, which I aim to accomplish using the technologies of the imagination. Technologies are dialogical because they also bear traces of other people and institutions, yet how they become symbolic resources depends on a person's individual refraction process. In other words, exploring the technologies contributes to capturing power relations and their operation. However, when combined with the sociocultural psychological approach, such an exploration also accounts for how these technologies are used and refracted through people's experiences and trajectories.

Issues concerning power relations, perspectives, and which imaginations are politicized (visibilised) or depoliticised (invisibilised) are foregrounded when identifying the imaginative aspect of regimes of im/mobilities. I therefore aim to disentangle how distinct technologies—several of which align with state interest—guide people's imagination while acknowledging that imaginative effects will always remain indeterminate. Sneath et al. write that technologies “count as being ‘of the imagination’ insofar as they serve to precipitate outcomes that they do not fully condition. This definition does not involve demarcating a particular set of objects, but rather a particular relationship between objects (but also, potentially, narratives, events and so on) and the outcome they precipitate” (2009, p. 25). Technologies of the imagination are therefore productive, hold the potential to redraw the boundaries of the imaginable in specific contexts (Zittoun et al., 2020), modify affective valences, and manipulate temporalities (Ringel, 2016b). Thus, they encapsulate the three shortcomings of the sociocultural model identified in section [1.3.1](#). The goal is not to determine who created such technologies but to interrogate their genealogies and what

they do (Hook, 2007). Specifically, in this chapter, I travel back to the years (early 2010s) in which the population increase began and identify the technologies of the imagination. These technologies range from investment in education and changing counselling practices to tourist campaigns and encouraging sedentariness. I assume that one of the main rationalities of the state is to sedentarise people. The analysis in this chapter is primarily oriented towards the third-person perspective and determining the elements that made imagining a future plausible.

4.1. Emptying

When people spoke of the early 2010s, they often described the Faroe Islands as an “empty” and “boring” place and referred to the period as one in which “nothing was happening” due to “a lack of initiative”. It was also a period in which a lot of young Faroese moved away, as discussed earlier, and not necessarily with intentions of returning. I initially lacked a means of defining the context that united first and third-person perspectives until I discovered Dzenovska’s (2011) concept of emptiness. I decided to use this concept to describe the changing circumstances situated in a broader (capitalist) world. Emptiness simultaneously refers to an observable reality, ways of living, and lived experiences (Dzenovska & Knight., 2020) that relate to material degradation and the flight of people and capital in relation to capitalism and ideas of societal progress. To avoid creating a strong binary between “empty” and “full”, I use *emptying* to shift the emphasis from a static state towards a process unfolding in time that reaches between places. I find *emptying* to be useful in analysing the material, social, and experiential ramifications of geopolitical shifts that impact places disproportionately (Dzenovska & De Genova, 2018), creating what I call (de)synchronisations. These (de)synchronisations represent a relation between emplaced temporalities related to ideas of progress. The condition of emptying also signals certain futures and incentivises particular actions. Forms of emptiness can serve as “harbingers of the dystopian futures inherent in the present” (Dzenovska, 2018, p. 19); however, similar circumstances are experienced differently. For example, people who express a sense of emptying and view the future as shrinking or infused with negative affective valence might seek to move in space (Dzenovska, 2018), whereas others might attempt to extend the present into the future by maintaining what already exists (Dzenovska & Aistara, 2014; Ringel, 2014a). Alternatively, as I propose, people could consider emptiness an invitation to imagine radically different

futures. It is within this context of emptying that the technologies of the imagination have to be understood and analysed—both as a result of and a reaction to growing emptiness (Dzenovska, 2018, 2020) and shrinking futures (Ringel, 2016a, 2018). Emptying can be a characteristic of a contracted imaginative horizon, introducing a relational angle on diachronic (e.g., nostalgia for futures in the past) and synchronic (e.g., imagining the future to be brighter elsewhere) terms. Hage (2005) argues that, when imagined futures are regarded as beyond people’s reach, staying can be equated with a lack of personal “progress” in people’s expected life-course and they might search for their future elsewhere:

Those who stay and those who leave generally share the sentiment that “nothing changes” and “nothing will change.” They exhibit a pervasive sense—pervasive beyond wanting to remove concrete politicians in office—that time in the place they come from no longer flows in a recognizable manner. Those who stay seem to want to slow down time by extending the present, whereas those who leave seek a recognizable flow of time by moving in space. (Dzenovska, 2018, p. 26)

Here, technologies of the imagination can transform and enlarge the imaginable and reverse the emptying to signal a hopeful future, which can have a sedentarising effect. Furthermore, these technologies can also manipulate temporalities. Ringel proposes the concept of “time tricking” to capture the “different ways in which people individually and collectively attempt to modify, mangle, bend, distort, speed up or slow down or structure the times they are living in” (2016b, p. 17). Such a concept occurs specifically in terms of changing the relation between temporalities (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017) through (de)synchronisation with neoliberal ideas of progress. Emptying can produce a sense of desynchronisation related to the “discursive frame of modernity” (Dzenovska, 2020, p. 2); in other words, of being “out of sync” or somewhat outside the promise of linear progress. If infrastructure represents one instrument for summoning progress (Appel, 2018; Larkin, 2013), it necessarily follows that its absence or deterioration can spell decline. As I demonstrate in Chapter 7, im/mobility also represents a form of tricking time, bringing the future closer to the present. In short, I use emptying analytically approach the Faroese context, capturing both first and third-person processes, then explore how technologies of the imagination have transformed the context through changing temporalities, affective valences, and possibilities.

Not everyone agrees that the Faroes are emptying—it is obviously a matter of perspective and a choice made by myself. I nonetheless approach the socioeconomic conditions and people’s experiences throughout the 2000s and early-2010s through the prism of emptying because there was an observable flight of people, and a sentiment of emptying was common. This approach allowed me to analyse how different initiatives impacted the emptying process. While I aimed to present nuances and different perspectives on the process, describing the context as emptying nevertheless ignores other processes or interpretations. Nevertheless, this decision is justifiable because it resonates with what I heard and provides a holistic entry point but with certain reservations already discussed. Emptying is not simply a limited range of possibilities but also encompasses existing possibilities on the Faroes and the general atmosphere (when described as “boring” compared to elsewhere). Several initiatives were launched in the early-2010s to manage or outright counter the emptying in the Faroe Islands. In the next section, I analyse initiatives from the educational sector and tourism as technologies of the imagination because these were frequently said to sedentarise people’s imagined futures through addressing different features of the emptying. The educational policies aimed at materially expanding the possibilities and enhancing awareness, whereas the tourism initiatives intended to repaint the islands as “cool” by cultivating the positive gaze of others. I begin by elaborating on why the period after the 1990s crisis can be characterised as emptying and propose four constituents of this process before identifying three reactions to it.

4.2. Living, Leaving, or Transforming Emptiness

Nobody is promising better futures to those living in the emptying villages—at least not if they stay put—because the people and places do not have a future together. Those who cannot start successful businesses—the only form of employment imagined by development planners and national elites—must leave. (Dzenovska, 2020, p. 13)

In these future imaginings, the young Faroese were constructing their life paths abroad. This was similar to the argument of Gaïni (2013: 25) who has pointed out that young people have a ‘longing for contact to the world beyond the village community’, a feature of Faroese culture he argued is rooted in a long history of being geographically isolated. (Hayfield, 2017, p. 6)

When I talked to people who grew up in the aftermath of the 1990s crisis, many classified the atmosphere as “heavy”, and expressed that villages were “empty”, and

that “nothing happened”. These descriptions epitomise an experience of emptying, and the imaginable seemed only more contracted relative to what appeared to be the plentiful opportunities available in Denmark. This led many young people to leave in search of the future elsewhere. Gæini writes that the decision “to stay or to leave” (2013a, p. 9) is pertinent for young Faroese (see also Hayfield, 2017). People cannot be in two places at once, at least physically, and I propose the saliency of this decision justifies the dichotomy. However, I add nuance to the picture by exploring the different ways of staying (and its entanglement with mobility). People specifically mentioned the absence of educational possibilities, the lack of social and cultural events, and a general sense that there was no initiative. The streets were depicted as deserted, houses were standing empty, and people left—all signalling the opposite of a hopeful future. Even when the economy began to recover in the 2000s, younger people kept moving away and did not return. Faroese sociologist, Hans Pauli Strøm, eloquently captured this phenomenon in an article written for a city renewal company from Greenland, Siorarsiorfik²⁷:

There were no possibilities for the youth to develop in the Faroes during those years, whether in terms of education or work. We were in a negative spiral in which one bad thing reinforced another. The youth did not just leave because they had to but also because their friends did so as well. Nobody wanted to study at an uninteresting Faroese university or live in a place with fewer friends because they moved away—primarily to Denmark. (My translation)

Hans ventriloquised what I had heard others say: one of the principal reasons causing this flight of young people was inadequate possibilities in the Faroes for actualising imagined futures that were considered plausible elsewhere (e.g. Farrugia, 2016; Kuhmonen et al., 2016; Meyer, 2018). Even the possibilities present were often designated as “undesirable”, a description further aggravated by witnessing friends constantly moving away. Based on people’s accounts, I propose four intertwined material, social, temporal, and symbolic dimensions constitutive of Faroese emptying in the early 2010s:

²⁷ <https://ncd.gl/da/2017/12/fra-exit-faeroerne-til-vaelger-faeroerne/>

	Material	Social	Symbolic	Temporal
Manifestations of Emptying	Absent infrastructure and material degradation	Friends and family moving away and limited social recognition	Existing possibilities considered “boring”	Desynchronised with the promise of modernity

Im/mobility is a transversal category that, through its outgoing directionality, underscored and maintained the continuous emptying across dimensions. These four constituents are relational and indicate further decline and ruination. First, the material dimension depicts that the infrastructure, which ranged broadly from educational and cultural institutions to roads, was considered limited in relation to other places. Absent infrastructure directly reduced the material foundations of the imaginable. Second, the social dimension refers to the flight of friends and family and the concomitant disruption of social activities. For example, we were told that sports clubs experienced difficulties recruiting the bare minimum of members. This reduces social activities and makes villages noticeably emptier. Moreover, robust (religious) norms also made several futures unimaginable. Third, the symbolic aspect reflects that the possibilities were often deemed “boring” and the landscape barren. Fourth, the temporal dimension captures that the Faroe Islands was described as being “out of sync” in terms of progress on social (e.g., LGBTQ+) or material (e.g., diverse education) grounds. In other words, this multi-layered experience of emptying removed the basis for imagining and actualising sedentary futures because staying created fertile grounds for existential immobility to flourish (Hage, 2009b). That is, emptying produced a sense of “not going anywhere”. Altogether, these dimensions combined and instigated a self-perpetuating circle in which emptying triggered additional flights of people and capital, thereby reinforcing the emptying cycle.

Existing possibilities and the imagined futures they afforded were frequently disregarded as “uninteresting” or “boring”. It was also common to hear people associate mobility with development (Kaufmann, 2021) or as a way to broaden the field of the possible (Glăveanu, 2020a). Mobility seemed to be one solution to the emptying (Dzenovska, 2018), both for the individual (leaving) and the places (attracting mobilities). These experiences of emptying indicate the co-existence and relationality between multiple imaginative horizons because moving in space was assumed to shift the imaginative horizon. Hence, the four constituents of emptying

must be understood in their relations to other places and temporalities but also as elements that do not always transform at the same pace. When combined, the constituents and perceived possibilities elsewhere acted as a barrier against imagining sedentary futures. Waiting for the future to arrive was not considered a feasible strategy.

Appadurai (1996) suggested that media technologies combined with cheaper and increasingly frictionless mobility enhance people's capacity to aspire by expanding awareness of how life might be different elsewhere, which, to an extent, resonates with what I heard. However, as others have also argued (Crapanzano, 2007; Ellis, 2018; Schielke, 2020), the ability to imagine and aspire is not evenly distributed, and neither is the capability to actualise particular imaginations. Gender plays a role in who can imagine what if staying in Faroes due to strong norms, as for example Hayfield (2018) shows how women's motility is reduced because of structural adjustments and gendered expectations (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Paulgaard, 2017; Skaptadóttir, 2000). While people share certain common frames of reference, I try to be sensitive to the fact that not everyone experiences the situation as emptying and, even if they do, often highlight different aspect and rely on different means of coping. A number of people saw a hopeful future in Denmark (or elsewhere) and chose mobility as an escape, while others sought to maintain life at "home". Studies have revealed that some people attempt to retain the future by maintaining the present a little longer in what Ringel calls the "temporality of endurance" (Ringel, 2014a). It is tempting to describe this period as characterised by a "culture of migration" (Hayfield, 2017), which Horváth defines as: "From a possible, optional or desirable practice, migration can turn into a crucial and necessary social act, that is quasi-compulsory for certain social categories" (2008, p. 774). However, doing so neglects the other forms of im/mobilities, and I swiftly realised that not everyone shared this experience of emptiness and never seriously contemplated leaving the islands.

In addition to the people who lived in or left emptiness, which is a commonly used dichotomy in studies of emptiness, I also identified people who actively sought to transform it. The initiatives that follow are considered as technologies of the imagination that almost uniformly aimed to expand the imaginable and nourish an open and hopeful future. In the same article mentioned above, Eyðun Christiansen,

the director of Kommunufelagið²⁸, added nuance to the narrative by mentioning those who remained but did not identify with the bleak portrayal:

I think that too much and too many focused on the problems. We who lived in the Faroes could not recognise the descriptions of the Faroe Islands. It painted an irritating image of the Faroe Islands. We believed there was a rhetoric that only focused on the impossible, which could be a negative spiral that was one of the reasons that people did not want to move back to the Faroes. We wished to make the rhetoric positive rather than negative. (My translation)

Eyðun believed the overly negative descriptions were harmful. He was aware of the pervasive narrative that often painted the situation as rather bleak but believed that people stressed the impossibilities over the possibilities. He thought that, if nothing changed, the emptying would continue to worsen, and attempts were made to counter these descriptions. For example, the “*vit vejlja Føroyar*”²⁹ (“we chose the Faroe Islands”) campaign intended to showcase the possibilities by circulating positive stories on various social media platforms. People working in local municipalities also mentioned the importance of social media in sustaining the connection to people who had already left. Social media functioned as a channel through which to share updates and initiatives intended to actively debunk the notions of “temporal standstill” that prevailed. Tourism is another example, and one I return to. Increasing mobility in and around the Faroe Islands is the antithesis of emptying and a well-documented means of stimulating material and social transformations (Sampaio et al., 2014). One tourism official acknowledged its impressive impact when asked about how life was before the industry grew successful 10–15 years ago:

I remember how it was before. Of course, I remember. It was really dead. It was really boring, especially in the winter. You could walk through the city [Tórshavn] and see nobody. I like it now. You see people. It’s much livelier. You get restaurants and bars and all these things that come with the tourists. I think it’s better. [...] I think so because ten years ago, people were very pessimistic about the future of the Faroe Islands. Especially the small places. Nobody talks about that anymore. The small places, they’re going to die and nobody’s going to stay there. All this.

²⁸ An organization representing the Faroese municipalities.

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=Vit%20vejlja%20F%C3%B8royar>

With the islands being depicted as “really dead” and “really boring”, people were “pessimistic about the future”, particularly in the “small places”. However, the advent of tourism was said to have changed that, implying that the recent directionality of im/mobility signalled a brighter future ahead. In tandem with the increasing mobility of tourists and the emergence of new leisure infrastructure, the islands became visibly “fuller” as opposed to emptier. In concrete terms, this transformation entailed more people walking in the streets and mountains, notably during the summer months, and additional social and cultural activities. If the flight of people and capital spell demise or suspend the future, the increasing presence of people and gatherings indicate a brighter future.

From the beginning of the 2010s, the Faroese government also backed a range of initiatives that further bolstered societal hope in the future (Hage, 2003). These initiatives intended to curtail the flight of people and capital, or ensure they were not permanent mobilities while encouraging other people to stay, particularly those who imagined a future elsewhere. For example, The University of the Faroe Islands expanded its number of bachelor programmes based on the premise that, if younger people spent more time on the islands, they would be inclined to either stay or return. Surveys indicated that younger Faroese about to finish high school and decide on a path would consider staying *if* more possibilities existed (Rógvi & Reistrup, 2012). Counselling services were reorganised to focus explicitly on providing information concerning what was possible in the Faroe Islands rather than, as some felt was the case previously, just shipping the young to Denmark. Indirectly promising a diversification of the economy, labour market, and local infrastructure, the Faroese tourist agency (now Visit Faroe Islands or VFI) was re-established and launched a new branding campaign in 2013 with the immediate objective of boosting tourism.

As I detail in the subsequent section, these technologies of the imagination were instrumental in countering the emptying process. I group these technologies under two overarching themes (education and tourism) and detail how each targeted different aspects related to the four constituents of emptying. These technologies are temporally and economically highly distinct and operate differently. Education is generally a long-term and cost-intensive investment with limited immediate socioeconomic reward. In contrast, tourism offers more immediate results, has a

directly visible impact, and demands less direct economic investment. Education is largely a state-driven initiative, whereas tourism relies more on private actors. The technologies I identified are somewhat at odds with the fishery industry, which remains powerful given its historical role and the fact that it still accounts for 95–98% of all exports (Johansen, 2020; Malthe-Thagaard, 2018; Nagy & Schmidt, 2020). This is currently producing tensions between continuity and discontinuity. As one person stated:

I do not think that the educational sector is particularly prioritised because it is still those fishery-oriented thoughts that dominate the debate. There are many in the public and political space—a lot of men—who are elected and who have done exceptionally well without much education: “why spend so much time and money on [education], and they [the educated] just sit in Kontórshavn”³⁰, as it is called, “and produce paperwork that just impedes fishers”. (My translation)

Alternatively, as Justinussen remarks:

Fishing has become the key to prosperity. For over a hundred years, fishermen have therefore been seen as national heroes, ensuring the economic prosperity and progress of society. (1997, p. 2, my translation)

Undoubtedly, the Faroese fishing industry has deeply influenced society and is responsible for a considerable portion of socioeconomic prosperity. However, systemic overreliance on the industry also generated a structural (and gendered) Achilles heel, and the ongoing societal transformations suggest its grip might be waning. Many associate further investment in education with increasing obstacles for an industry facing ever-tightening regulation, depleting fish stocks, declining interest from the young (Gaini, 2013b), and the looming threat of automatisisation. The number of people employed in fishery and processing industries respectively declined from 3,109 and 2,748 in December 1985 to 1,514 and 1,325 in December 2020³¹. While the thriving aquaculture industry absorbed some jobs—the people employed rose from 181 to 1,242 over the same period—it certainly cannot compensate for all those that were lost. It is worth observing that the proportion of workers in fishery-related industries with non-

³⁰ The centralisation of administration has made Kontórshavn a sobriquet for Tórshavn. It fuses the word “kontór”, which means an office, and the word “havn”, which means harbour.

³¹ <https://hagstova.fo/en/business/primary-sector/employees>

Faroese passports also increased significantly, which possibly indicates declining interest.

4.2.1. Education, Counselling, and Job Match

The exodus of young adults, many of whom moved to Denmark because of familiarity (Gaini, 2013a), is an extensively debated issue in the Faroe Islands. According to the Faroese Student Grant Fund³², only 30% to 40% of those who left to study in the period between 2004 to 2018 returned, and a higher proportion of women studies abroad compared to men. In the same period, the numbers of Faroese studying in Denmark exceeded the number studying in the Faroe Islands. However, in 2019, an important threshold was crossed in that more Faroese students were registered in the Faroe Islands than in Denmark, and the trend has continued since. The estimated return rate increased to 56% in 2020. I identified three complementary technologies of the imagination related to education: the expansion of the educational system, the restructuring of counselling services, and the launch of the Job Match event. These technologies all contributed to expanding the imaginative horizon and facilitated imagination of sedentary futures. Concretely, these materialised as increasing educational infrastructure, consciously improved the awareness of educational and professional prospects, and actively diffused symbolic resources related to imagining (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). Such technologies thus reduced the discrepancies between what people could imagine in the Faroe Islands compared to elsewhere. Enlarging the educational system is a cost-intensive endeavour, and any tangible benefits often take time to materialise. In contrast to Fransen and Schewel (2020), who demonstrated that formal education is associated with growing aspirations to migrate internally and transnationally, the reverse seems the case in the Faroes: widening the scope of education facilitates staying. The number of bachelor's and master's programmes increased tremendously over the previous ten years. Moreover, the University of The Faroe Island's budget grew from 68.2 million DKK in 2010 to 77 million DKK in 2015 and 105.8 million DKK in 2020: almost doubling over a 10-year period. From 2013 to 2019, the number of students enrolled almost doubled, rising from 618 to 1,126.

³² <https://www.studni.fo/hagtoel>

During an interview with a person employed at the university, it was clear that education functioned as an important technology of the imagination—one overlapping with other societal transformations:

[A report] suggested that one of the key priorities should be to invest in the university, as they [the government] did. The university had already, at the time, started to grow, and there was this discourse that to become something—to widen your perspective—you had to leave the Faroe Islands; to go abroad. [...] That discourse has completely changed. Yes, it is related to the fact that the economy is going well, but there is also something else in that change. It is a more open society; the LGBT movement has become more established and accepted. The recent change in the law of marriage for gay couples. All these things have made the Faroe Islands quite cool, and the population growth is also continuing, but that is also due to immigrants from outside the Nordic countries. [...] They [the government] invested more in the university [...] and the point is, to answer your question, whereas before we had an international office at the university. That international office was assigned to help students—young Faroese people—go abroad. We said: “Why do you just help them go abroad? Why don’t you also give them a career or educational guidance on getting a degree here”, which has very much changed. They have started to do that as well. It is not seen as *the* option to go abroad; it is seen as one of the options to go abroad; and another one, if you like some of the degrees that are here, you can also do it here—that has changed as well.

The proliferation of bachelor programmes was proposed as a solution to “keep” younger people longer in the Faroe Islands because staying longer might cement their social network while incorporating them into the societal transformations occurring. It therefore follows from the person above that witnessing material and social changes abolishes, to an extent, the notion that development equals mobility. Einar even acknowledged that a similar imperative to live elsewhere in order to develop existed when he was younger. Witnessing such changes was said to have instilled hope in the future and, as others expressed, made staying desirable because the future was “exciting” even if it had not yet fully materialised. The widening of possibilities therefore challenges the notion that mobility is necessary for personal “progress” because socioeconomic “progress” had a similar effect for some people. Thus, people can increasingly retain a sense of “going somewhere” while staying in the same place. Moreover, even if people must leave the islands for a number of years (e.g., when enrolling in a master’s programme), staying longer on the islands during their early adult years is expected to kindle imagination of returning and eventually entice people to do so—an expectation that both the statistics and people’s narratives suggest is far from groundless.

The effects of expanding educational possibilities are said to be entangled with other societal transformations. In addition to economic prosperity, a well-documented factor in push-pull models (de Haas, 2014), shifting normativity was often said to be a further key factor (Valsiner, 2008). The reference to LGBTQ+ is noticeable given the strong religious undercurrents in Faroese society (Hansen, 2014). The LGBTQ+ community has been marginalised and I heard several stories regarding people who felt forced to move because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. For instance, I heard of a gay couple living in a smaller village who had moved away after being ostracised but had recently returned. I also had several conversations with different people about the apparent lack of openly LGBTQ+ people. That said, I also witnessed Faroese Pride—which is held a day before Ólavsøka (the national day)—and watched a large crowd of people walked through Tórshavn with huge banners and children in rainbow face paint, their parade culminating in front of the parliament building. I propose that increasing mobility in and around the Faroe Islands also pushed the normative boundaries of the imaginable (Zittoun et al., 2020), eliminating several of the social barriers to imagining by increasing people’s encounters with alterity (Gillespie et al., 2012). Simultaneously, the sheer presence of people and goods can amplify the sense of synchronisation and stimulate experiences of the “world” coming to the Faroe Islands (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). Mobility and staying are always entangled (Kleist, 2020). Altogether, the imaginable was enlarged by materially expanding the bachelor programmes in combination with other factors that “opened” Faroese society. However, simply having the possibility does not mean that it is “desirable”, which is where the other technologies gain further relevance.

Furthermore, restructuring the counselling practices also functioned as a technology of the imagination that aimed to expand the imaginative horizon by enhancing people’s awareness of existing possibilities. While investments in education mended the perceived material lack, counselling operated more intangibly. Student counsellors represent “brokers of hope” (Vammen, 2016) and were occasionally accused of complicity in guiding young adults’ imagination towards Denmark; though, to be fair, the university offered fewer educational options in the early 2013s. First, the counselling service was relocated to the Faroe Islands from Denmark. Moreover, as educational opportunities emerged, counsellors advised prospective students that moving to Denmark was “just one of the possibilities” and not the only option. As a

technology of the imagination, new counselling practices socially guided and legitimised the imagination of a sedentary future by illuminating alternative options. What began as student counselling recently converted into “life-long” counselling. Therefore, services not only targeted young adults but also those who wish to make a professional transition later in life. Given the changing Faroese economy and labour market, some might fear their jobs becoming obsolete while others might find the new possibilities intriguing.

However, another person working in the educational sector indicated that geographical challenges persisted, particularly regarding the uneven awareness and social recognition of certain imagined futures:

We had students from all over the Faroes, and there I could see the difference [...]. We did a “name all the job opportunities you can think of” exercise and, based on what people mentioned, we could almost tell where they came from. [...] If you were from up north, then they know a lot about fishing and seafaring. If they came from Tórshavn, it was more academic education and perhaps also some crafts. This is the crude sorting, and then there is a finer sorting. The difference is evening out, luckily. (My translation)

The question of staying or leaving seemed pertinent for many young people on Suðuroy. People who decided to remain on the island were more restricted in terms of professional variability and did not have the same access to centralised counselling services. According to the person above, this distance produced a reduced awareness of job opportunities compared to those growing up in Tórshavn, likely relating to questions of class. However, the forces that impinge on people’s imagination of the future are not monopolar. Regions such as Suðuroy depend more directly on fishery than Tórshavn. Other factors, such as demographic and socioeconomic circumstances, also play a role. People living on Suðuroy are outside the central labour market (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020) and tend to work more in the primary and secondary sectors, whereas people living in Tórshavn are often employed in the growing tertiary sector. Enrolling in educational programmes is inevitably linked to mobility for people from Suðuroy and demands living off-island for shorter or longer periods. Moreover, I heard stories concerning parents who feared their children leaving (and not returning). Some parents even asked counsellors to guide children towards a future that allowed them to stay, whereas others criticised education and social delegitimation. Some parents supported their children’s decision to leave and considered leaving too if the children

did not return. Peers also play a significant role. Watching friends leave does not encourage staying. Imaginations of the future are negotiated within complex power relations, extending from the technologies of the imagination to conversations with friends and family. In response to imaginative inequalities, the counsellors began to travel regularly to the outer areas of the Faroes, including Suðuroy. Uneven counselling possibilities and socioeconomic conditions can make the imaginative horizon on Suðuroy appear constrained in relation to Tórshavn, as imagined futures are delegitimised for different purposes and from different angles. Indeed, technologies of the imagination represent one among many forces shaping futures, such people's socioeconomic circumstances or gender.

The Job Match³³ event was launched in 2008 to concretise post-educational futures by diffusing symbolic resources and establishing connections that could support people's imagination. The person from the previous quotation explained the reasoning behind this event:

We convinced the companies to sacrifice one day to present themselves and the possibilities [they offered] for students. It was a little anxiety-provoking at first because those who studied in England were competed for during their last years of studies. The big companies said: "See us and work for us in the holiday. Come and let us get to know you, and you get to know us", and then [the students] were swayed by those offers. And here, on the Faroe Islands, we just sat on our hands, I almost dare say, and what happened? [The students] were taken, they became interested [...], and then we said: "We have to do something in order to get people to come here", and we had something to offer, which they might not be completely aware of. Some mid-sized companies had arrived, which offered exciting jobs—not too many naturally—but it is nevertheless more than some [expected]. Some [of those who left], who ten years ago said: "Goodbye, we will never be back because there is no chance here", they realised that now their children were born and it [the Faroe Islands] is a good place for children to grow up, and more opportunities have surfaced in the meantime. (My translation)

As an effect of emptying, people left without imagining a return. The person suggested that insufficient access to symbolic resources constituted another barrier for imagining a sedentary future. In the example, British companies poached Faroese students in England during their final years, creating a competition in which soon-to-be graduates encountered an array of exciting possibilities in Britain. These young people would

³³ <https://www.jobmatch.fo/um-okkum/>

then establish contact with British companies while remaining ignorant of the possibilities in the Faroes because the Faroese “sat on their hands”. The relation therefore highlights asymmetries between two imaginative horizons. A future in the UK was viewed as hopeful, open, and relatively easy to actualise, whereas a future in the Faroes seemed less hopeful, constrained, and hard to actualise because of limited connections or awareness. People partially blamed the lack of initiatives in the Faroes for the discrepancy. Unless people were willing to be pragmatic with their future, those who had already left experienced difficulties imagining a return. Job Match was launched to address the social aspect of emptying. The format was adopted from Norway (a country with many students studying abroad), where a similar annual event happens over Christmas. Those living abroad often return for Christmas, making it an ideal time to arrange a forum in which potential employers and employees meet. For the first two years, the Faroese Job Match took place in Copenhagen before relocating to Tórshavn in 2010. In 2019, more than 400 people attended the event, and 60 public institutions and private companies were present. Mirroring the shift in counselling practices, Job Match ceased to exclusively target people finishing higher education. Everyone interested in learning of the possibilities on the Faroes were welcomed. An interesting aspect of Job Match is that the “successful” returnees are invited to share their story, which counterbalances the narrative that everyone moves away by providing social recognition and proof that a sedentary future is plausible.

Altogether, these technologies of the imagination operated according to three mechanisms: Enlarging actual possibilities (expansion of educational programmes), providing symbolic resources for imagining (increasing awareness of possibilities), and providing social guidance and legitimacy for sedentary futures (presenting people who “successfully” returned). The table below illustrates how these technologies directly address the material and social constituents of emptying previously proposed:

	Material	Social	Symbolic	Temporal
Educational programmes	Expand and adapt actual possibilities	-	-	-
Counselling services	Generate awareness of new possibilities	Social guidance towards opportunities in the Faroes	-	-
Job Match event	Generate awareness of new possibilities	Social legitimation of sedentary futures through “success” stories	-	-

New educational infrastructure and active efforts to display the widening range of professional possibilities, combined with hearing positive stories, signalled a different future ahead. Possibilities were expanding rather than contracting, reducing the imperative to be mobile, to “go somewhere” in existential terms. Staying without falling prone to existential immobility made a future in the Faroes more viable. The technologies are not fostering a monolithic imagination of the future but leaving its content open and reducing temporal desynchronisation.

Sociocultural psychological research on the imagination tends to focus on how people use symbolic resources to nourish and/or inhabit the imagination. However, I situate the process in concrete initiatives and do not believe that these technologies can be reduced to symbolic resources, although they might be used as such. If symbolic resources are cultural elements used by people (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2013), technologies reorient analytical scope to the sociocultural and material initiatives intended to produce imaginative effects. Technologies also address the rationalities behind such effects, the manipulation of temporalities, and changing relations between imaginative horizons. Further, focusing on technologies accentuates the power relations shaping the imagination and embeds these relations in wider societal transformations. Technologies carry traces of others and can become symbolic resources, but it is not a given and will always be refracted through personal experiences. Technologies of the imagination are, in this case, aligned with the state (but cannot be reduced to it) and target people differently.

I proposed that emptying characterised the early 2010s but increases in both population and the numbers of students studying in the Faroe Islands indicate a shift. I explored this transformation and Faroese nation-building by identifying three technologies of the imagination regarding education, arguing they expanded imaginative possibilities, enhanced symbolic resources through counselling and networking, and provided social recognition through success stories. In turn, these initiatives made remaining in the Faroes more plausible because they reduced relative differences regarding both possibilities and the potential for existential immobility. In contrast to the more repressive modes of guiding people's imagination identified by others (e.g. Marková, 2017; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018), these technologies of the imagination did not constrain but expanded the imaginable. The content of the imagined futures matters less insofar as they unfolded in the Faroe Islands or, at the very least, led people back. The technologies of the imagination related to education focused primarily on countering the material and social aspects of emptying. However, as previously mentioned, some considered the possibilities in the Faroes to be “boring”, requiring the symbolic and temporal aspects of emptying to be addressed by further technologies: those associated with tourism.

4.2.2. Visit Faroe Islands and Tourism

The technologies of the imagination related to tourism are arguably producing visible results faster and involving a wider range of actors. The industry is currently spearheaded by the public marketing agency Visit Faroe Islands (VFI). In 2011, the Faroese government increased investments in the tourist industry to create “another [economic] leg to stand on”, as one person phrased it. Emmanuel and I identified several narratives concerning the tourist industry: it diversified the economy, produced various spillover effects, and had an ambivalent reception (Villa, 2019). However, my focus is on the imaginative effects the industry produced. Studies have demonstrated that tourism can stimulate localised socioeconomic development (e.g. Binns & Nel, 2002; Goodwin, 2008; Monterrubio et al., 2012). In other words, tourism can be the antithesis of emptying, although not as categorically as in Chapter 5. Tourism also potentially engenders staying by increasing the mobility of people, capital, and ideas and triggering societal transformations. Tourist imaginaries have been extensively researched (Salazar, 2009, 2011b, 2018) and have been linked to colonial tropes (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Salazar, 2009, 2010), selling

“ethnic encounters” (van den Berghe, 1995; Yang, 2011), and promises of personal transformation (Andrews, 2017; Sampaio et al., 2014). In a brilliant master’s thesis, Isfeld (2020) details how Faroese marketing campaigns reproduce colonial tropes (e.g., a land unexplored and untouched by time), arguing that VFI interpellates “the Faroese as particular national subjects that should support VFI’s work” (2020, p. 45). However, she also reveals how others use tourism to negotiate the nation’s colonial past. We encountered a similar sentiment when a marketing official told us that they try to “educate” people to “become ready for tourism”. Furthermore, Isfeld explores how people living at the “periphery” do not necessarily “feel the financial gains from tourism” (2020, p. 64) but certainly do experience the toll on local infrastructure. Although the tourists do not visit Suðuroy as much as other outer areas, I still propose that the discrepancy actuates the emptying, which I explore in the next chapter.

Rather than deconstructing the imaginary elements that attract tourists or their colonial roots, I argue that the mobility of tourists facilitates sedentary futures and staying. Franklin summarises tourism’s relation to places and people:

[T]he tourism ordering (re)orders places, spaces, cities, and cultures, leaving them changed in specific ways. In some instances, tourism has become a place-maker by creating an entirely different way of configuring, knowing, desiring, visiting, and living in places previously untouched by tourism. The simple act of mapping a set of streets and producing a narrative history to enable visitors to grasp what it is they see as they roam them alters a place, both for outsiders who might now feel comfortable there and its inhabitants who may feel that their place has wider significance and is part of a broader sweep of history. (2008, p. 33)

Tourism equally transforms the lives of people who live in highly marketed destinations. When marketers produce and reproduce imaginaries to lure the tourists’ gaze towards specific places (Salazar, 2011b), it simultaneously alters the place and people’s relation to and experience of it (Bruner, 2005). When VFI launched its “Unspoiled, Unexplored, Unbelievable—The Faroe Islands”³⁴ campaign in 2013, the objectives were to generate 1 billion DKK in tourism-related revenue, reach 200,000 overnight stays annually, and employ 1,000 people in tourism-related sectors—all by 2020 (VFI, 2019). VFI first commissioned a survey to determine tourists’

³⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AC61mXWqM88&ab_channel=VisitFaroeIslands

"psychographics" to unravel why they travelled to the Faroe Islands³⁵. Based on the results, VFI purposefully branded the Faroes as an “un-destination”, meaning that the campaign was designed around everything that the islands are *not* in comparison to fast-paced metropolitan cities. This resonates with what Loftsdóttir calls an “explorer experience” (2015, p. 12), inviting people to be “explorers of the past”, evident in the agency’s Instagram account habitually posting pictures portraying a lone hiker against the backdrop of the rugged Faroese landscape³⁶. For example, Isfeld (2020) proposed that the idea of “unexplored” cannot be dissociated from its colonial and “timeless” logic. However, the campaign triggers a “coolification” of the islands that enhances synchronicity by addressing emptying’s (uneven) material and socioeconomic spillovers, facilitating perspective taking due to the presence of the tourist other (Gillespie, 2006a; Ísfeld, 2019).

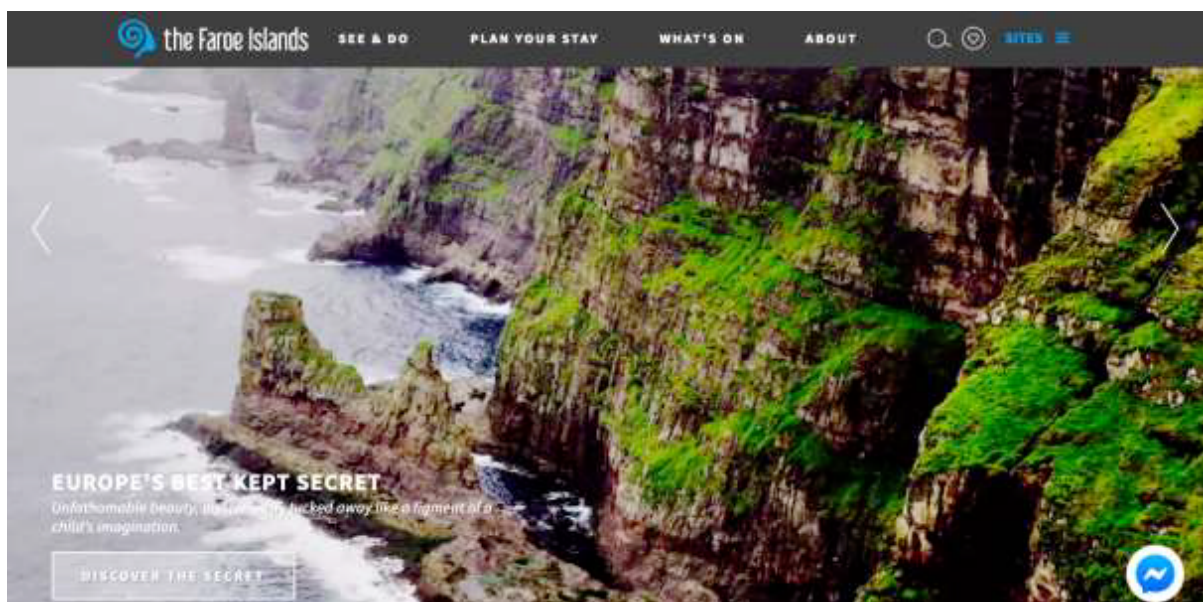


Figure 12. Former front page on Visit Faroe Islands' website

This former frontpage of VFI’s website embodies the campaign. One person working in the tourist industry described how the mobility of tourists entangles with processes of staying and returning:

The Faroe Islands were perceived as a very boring place. The young people did not want to stay here. They had plans to move away and not come back. I wanted this position because I knew that I could contribute to something when it comes to tourism, and

³⁵ https://issuu.com/visitfaroeislands/docs/vfi_summer_2014_-_2015_-_web_-_17

³⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/visitfaroeislands/?hl=da>

tourism generates a lot of extra effects. It can give a lot of work in creative industries and other things, increasing the income in money, but it also makes the destination or the place more interesting for the locals to stay in.

Attracting tourists by the meticulous branding of the Faroe Islands and the societal transformations represent two side of the same coin. The campaign also intended to make the islands attractive to people living there by creating more jobs in emerging industries and potentially satisfying the growing demand for a labour market catering to a wider selection of educational qualifications. Increasing tourism likewise brings about material transformations in the form of new infrastructure (e.g., hotels, restaurants, cafes, cultural events, museums) attractive to both tourists and people living on the islands. These changes extend the boundaries of the imaginable in the Faroes both socially and materially (Glăveanu, 2018b). Tourism is instrumental in shifting the directionality of mobilities towards the island and, quite literally, filling the islands rather than emptying them. I therefore identified three technologies of the imagination related to tourism that particularly (although not exclusively) addressed the symbolic and temporal aspects of emptying.

VFI described the Faroese landscape as being “out of a Lord of the Rings movie” or “best captured by the figment of a child’s imagination”. Picturesque photographs of the Faroese coastline (such as the one above) often accompanied the slogans. Using The Lord of the Rings as a symbolic resource is significant because it connects the locality with a global phenomenon. It evokes a tale of an epic adventure (a further reference the “explorer experience”) that invites tourists to imagine a visit to the Faroes as embarking on a fantastic quest. In its familiarity, this branding targets a global audience in order to enlarge the tourist base. Although I am not representative, I often start to hymn the theme song of The Lord of the Rings when hiking. We discussed the campaign’s construction of nature in the focus group. Hilmar stated that the campaign had transformed people’s relation to the islands’ harsh geography and position in the global system:

Eight to ten years ago, we had that study “Exit Føroyar” [...] The economy was not that bad, but people did not want to move back. This changed due to the campaigns and the social construction of nature [...]. Suddenly, one was not from a miniature country, but it is now a cool place. (My translation)

Jóhan reaffirmed this statement and expanded:

I also think that the marketing campaign that Visit Faroe Islands has had has actually been positive for Faroese. It gets tourists to come, but I also believe it gets Faroese back to the Faroe Islands. It has suddenly become cool to live in the Faroe Islands. (My translation)

Both emphasise the VFI campaign's importance to promoting staying and transforming people's relations with the islands, making sedentarism desirable. While the economy recovered throughout the 2000s and 2010s, people who had already left to escape the emptying were not necessarily returning, often because of the perception that little was "happening" or that the "right" jobs were difficult to acquire. Moreover, the landscape was experienced as claustrophobic and the climate too harsh—unlike the grandiose and epic portrayal evoked by *The Lord of the Rings*. Furthermore, people reported feeling globally minuscule because few knew about the country (even amongst Danes, who are part of the same realm) and many felt out-of-sync with the "progress" observed elsewhere. Even when people did know of the Faroes, their questions reproduced stereotypical tropes of limited mobility and temporal standstill. One day Emmanuel and I wanted to visit Hvalba and decided to try hitchhiking because the bus was not running anytime soon. We quickly managed to attract the attention of a passing driver, who offered to drive us to Hvalba despite living near the pickup place. We squeezed together on one seat. The driver was born on the island and still lived there. He wore trousers meant for construction work and mentioned that work was sometimes scarce on the island. When learning how long we already spent on the island, he asked what we were doing on it. After discussing our studies, the conversation shifted to whaling. He did not have the "license to kill" (as many people jokingly dub the license required to actively kill pilot whales) but would instead help drag the whales closer to the shore. He liked the meat but most friends from abroad did not. When recounting his travels, he explained that many were not aware of the Faroes or asked, "Do you even have cars there". We made it to Hvalba in about 10 minutes and thanked the driver. This little vignette echoes Heinesen's description presented earlier: "This tiny rocky land relates to the big ocean about as a grain of sand to the floor of a ballroom" (Heinesen, 1950). In addition to VFI's rebranding of the Faroese landscape, the media campaign also exploited this global invisibility to portray the islands as unspoiled, unexplored, and unbelievable. According to marketing officials, the

campaign attracted a wave of younger tourists (the demographic that is otherwise moving away).

Through the campaign and its side-effects, people living on the islands gradually began to change their descriptions of the Faroes from “boring” to “cool”. Moreover, their sense of desynchronisation declined because people from all over the world began to visit. I propose to split VFI’s campaign into three interrelated technologies of the imagination. First, in their portrayals of the Faroe Islands, VFI provided new symbolic resources with a global reach. Second, the campaign increased the mobility of people, capital, and ideas around the islands and, consequently, the construction of new infrastructure that materially expanded the imaginable. This transformation resulted in a “coolification” of the Faroe Islands that was further perpetuated and consolidated by people taking the perspectives of tourists and international media outlets. Increasing global attention and the real or imagined gaze of tourists offered social recognition of the “coolness” that VFI marketed, while enhancing the sense of global synchronicity. The Faroe Islands were no longer considered marginal or emptying but increasingly at the centre of global attention. The rising number of visits, Instagram posts, and news articles concerning the islands showcased the trend. Such transformations challenged previous sentiments that the islands were globally desynchronised and comparatively “boring”. For example, the Crown Prince of Dubai flew to the Faroes to take photographs for the 13.9 million followers of his Instagram account³⁷. A part of the newest James Bond film was also filmed on the island of Kalsoy³⁸, and becoming a part of this global franchise made the Faroes globally visible. In fact, the island of Kalsoy is now the final resting place for Daniel Craig’s James Bond, and a gravestone has been erected in his memory³⁹. The islands were also singled out as a top travel destination by Lonely Planet and other large media institutions⁴⁰. The world is coming to the Faroe Islands (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021), and it speaks positively about the place. To understand this, I propose that VFI’s campaign indirectly created a feedback mechanism in which the Faroese adopted the perspective of tourists or the more generalised “global community”, allowing them to view the islands in a

³⁷ <https://local.fo/crown-prince-dubai-visits-faroe-islands/>

³⁸ <https://local.fo/blink-and-youll-miss-it-catch-a-glimpse-of-kalsoy-in-the-new-james-bond-trailer/>

³⁹ <https://nerdist.com/article/james-bond-gravestone-james-bond-no-time-to-die-faroe-islands/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.faroeislands.fo/the-big-picture/news/faroe-islands-named-top-travel-destination-in-2019-by-international-media/>

positive light, which compounds other technologies. Isfeld also discusses the proverb “wise is the eye of the guest” (2020, p. 41) and proposes that tourism sparked reflection and kindled a national pride—one that is paradoxically built on colonial tropes. In short, “perspective-taking” is defined as the process whereby people become other to themselves through metaphorically changing social position (Gillespie, 2006a, 2006b; Gillespie & Martin, 2014; Martin & Gillespie, 2010; Mead, 1934a). Here, people living on the Faroes become other to themselves through the tourists.

A person working in the tourist industry explained:

I moved back when everyone else was moving away. And we see that now, a lot of times that the young people, many young people, or people [...] say that [Visit Faroe Islands] was one of the reasons why they wanted to come back. Because [VFI] made the Faroe Islands cool and made the international press aware of us and write nice articles about us.

Moreover, a person who moved to the Faroe Islands from Denmark many years ago captured the change from the “outside”:

When people said to me back then: “The Faroe Islands? What will you do there? What can you do there at all?” It is precisely that: “Oh, it is so beautiful. Perhaps I should try to move to the Faroe Islands for a while”.

Seeing and hearing tourists’ wonder can be experienced both directly when talking to them but also by reading how the islands are represented in articles. This parallels Gillespie’s (2006a) study of tourism in Ladakh, in which perspective-taking between tourists and Ladakhis triggers self-reflection that can be transformative for both parties (see also Salazar, 2010). Before VFI’s campaign, tourists came predominantly from Scandinavian countries and were markedly older. Taking the tourists’ perspective before VFI’s rebranding did not generate the same transformative effect. This older demographic (at least anecdotally) occasionally viewed the Faroe Islands as being “outside modernity”, which again raises the issue of Danish colonialism. This changed as tourism almost exponentially scaled up and diversified. Thus, this technology of the imagination countered the symbolic and temporal constituents of emptying by creating excitement around the Faroes that formed the basis for perspective-taking and synchronised the islands with global “progress”. Through generating more tourist

mobilities, people living on the islands also started to imagine sedentary futures. The notion that the future is made elsewhere lessened because the discrepancy between imaginative horizons shrank and the future became imbued with hope. The tourists, media stories were arguably significant in slowing the mobility of those living on the island to the point at which stillness and staying began to be valued (Straughan et al., 2020). This is not to say that people do not move. The point is that they increasingly wanted to live in the Faroes. One person described the transformation:

[...] and the next is, there are exciting people coming to the Faroe Islands and not just during the summer holidays but all year round. This both creates employment and a varied milieu in terms of restaurants, nightlife, and those things, which means that it is not just an empty and abandoned place.

The mere presence of people in the street all year round contributed to transforming the perception of the Faroe Islands from an “empty” to a “cool” place. However, based on my experiences, the streets are noticeably emptier in the winter months. The multifaceted nature of these societal transformations is reduceable to centralised decision-making processes. However, the case of tourism also indicates that some voices are louder than others (Isfeldt, 2020), which manifest in geographical disparities concerning the places tourists visit and how long they stay there. The degree of socioeconomic spillover reflects this disparity—as does the “coolification” and its resultant synchronisation. Chapter 5 explores how these initiatives conceivably accentuated the relative emptying of islands such as Suðuroy by making internal desynchronisation and material deprivation more apparent. A report published by VFI (2019) indicates that only 11% of the tourists visit Suðuroy and only a fraction stay overnight. Statistics also reveals that the majority of tourists sleep in Tórshavn⁴¹. People living on Suðuroy stated that tourists tended to arrive with Smyril in the morning and leave again in the evening. The island remained off the beaten tourist path because of lower visibility in VFI’s promotional material, geographical distance, and the absence of infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and museums. That said, new infrastructure emerged on Suðuroy after I stopped visiting, and VFI’s marketing seems to be advertising Suðuroy more systematically as part of their new mission statement, which stresses decentralising tourism.

⁴¹ <https://hagstova.fo/en/business/tertiary-sector/tourism>

A trip Emmanuel and I took to a coal mine, which now serves largely as a tourist attraction, illustrates the impromptu nature of most tourists' activities on Suðuroy. As we drove through the tunnel from Tvøroyri to Hvalba in a rented car, we had trouble finding a sign indicating where to turn. We eventually noticed a dirt road with a sign in Faroese and supposed this might lead to the mine. Our rental car was ill-suited for the drive to the mine because of the dirt road's many large holes and the worryingly sized rocks everywhere. At the end of the road, we arrived at a small plateau. A pickup truck was parked outside a container that had been converted into a break or locker room. A man in overalls was working alongside who I assumed was his son. Scrap metal lay strewn all over, along with a couple of coal bags. A car arrived and a man exited and immediately introduced himself as our guide. He opened the trunk of his car, which was filled with books, posters, different rocks, and other gear. He then took out a folder that contained home-printed pages, newspaper clippings, and a schoolbook, all sheathed in plastic, and started to present the history of the mine and villages without much small talk. He then retrieved several rocks from his trunk for us to examine while he described their qualities. His demeanour and manner of speaking reminded me of a teacher who had presented the same material so frequently that it had become second nature. The coal mine opened at the end of the 18th century and, at its peak, approximately 100 people worked there, including a number of foreigners, primarily from Scandinavian countries. After the presentation, he handed small handheld flashlights with faded paint to both of us, which we realised barely worked once we entered the darkness. He led us along the tracks into the mine:



Just in front of the entrance, we noticed a small stream of water next to the rusty metal tracks. We entered. The tunnel smelled mouldy and tired, and the wooden pillars looked ancient and worn. I replaced the flashlight with my phone because the batteries were failing. The wooden pillars got increasingly further apart and, halfway in, the

small stream completely submerged the pathway, so we balanced on the thin track to keep our feet dry. Neither of us had brought practical shoes. Probably 20–30 meters into the mine, the guide led us right into a small square opening, where a coal cart stood, and which was illuminated by a weak and yellowish light. He took a pickaxe and asked if we wanted to try. I gave it a few swings without committing. I asked if the wooden logs rotted in this humid environment, but he replied, “No”. Digging coal was the climax of the tour and we walked out, again balancing on the tracks. We paid him in cash afterwards and I spoke with him for a few minutes in Danish while standing in front of the converted container. He had started doing tourist tours a few years ago but mentioned that there had been no demand before that point. He told me that prospects had changed recently. We said goodbye and drove slowly down the bumpy road.

The coal mine illustrates the rapidity of the transformation as well as the geographical disparities. In sum, the three technologies of the imagination related to tourism primarily function on the symbolic and temporal planes, as presented in the table:

	Material	Social	Symbolic	Temporal
VFI’s campaign	-	-	Portraying the Faroes in a positive light	Inserting the Faroes into global awareness
Mobility and perspective-taking	-	Social recognition and expanding normativities	Viewing the Faroes through the perspectives of tourists	Synchronisation through incoming mobilities from near and far
Socioeconomic and material spillovers	Expanding material and social possibilities	-	-	Synchronisation through reducing discrepancies with elsewhere

When combined, these technologies of the imagination foster a (re)imagining of the Faroes (e.g., a harsh geography now begets adventure) and stimulate a diversification of im/mobilities in and around the islands. People living there began to view their surroundings in a different light through taking the perspectives of tourists and global media outlets. Altogether, these technologies counter the emptying and negate narratives that depicts the Faroes as “boring” and “out of sync” because people are increasingly visiting or staying as opposed to leaving. These transformations produced a new regime of im/mobilities, encouraging tourists lured by the “explorer experience”

and stayers who perform as VFI's representatives (Isfeldt, 2020) and imagine an altered future. Moreover, the spillovers that expand local possibilities reduce the temporal discrepancy between the Faroes and different elsewhere. These transformations signal an "exciting" future in which development is not solely contingent on being mobile but entangled with the mobility of others, and this makes imagining a sedentary future plausible. This increasing external synchronisation also produced internal desynchronisations.

The technologies of the imagination related to tourism addressed the symbolic and temporal aspects of emptying. These technologies necessarily compound with those of education (and presumably others) to challenge the mobility imperative and engender staying without being "existentially immobile". While a wider selection of educational offers undoubtedly helped, the tourist gaze played a significant role in making the Faroes "cool". Perspective-taking reinforced this sense of "coolness" and enhanced synchronicity. Through the mobility of others, the lack of "progress" and possibilities that previously induced people to leave in search of a more prosperous elsewhere were increasingly present in the Faroes. Further, even if the future was still in the making, it was now imbued with hope and accomplishment equivalent to other places. In the next section, I explore how these technologies and population growth afforded a form of agency that contributed to people's decision to stay or return.

4.2.3. From "Empty" and "Boring" to "Full" and "Cool"

I have argued that the overall emptying waned due to technologies of the imagination directly targeting its constituents. All the proposed technologies of the imagination functioned to "open" the future up to engender staying, a rationality that partly aligns with state interest. People's need to become mobile to escape a perceived futureless place diminished. I want to further suggest that the technologies and the smallness of the country generated a sense that the future can be changed, which represents a form of temporal agency. This topic arose during the focus group:

Hilmar: If you have an idea, something you want to try or something you want to start—there is a very short distance from idea to reality. You do not face as many obstacles as you do in Denmark, also on bigger projects. I read a funny article about this phenomenon in the Faroes. They [the writers] called it agile when there is a short distance, and you do not have that many meetings—meetings about having meetings [...]. It becomes complex.

There is a very short distance from the foreman to the workers. The workers participate in the meetings—the same page, let's begin. This is a big advantage if one wants to start something or wants to have a project with others. (My translation)

Hilmar implied that the size of the Faroes reduces the obstacles to agency with reference to Denmark. Jógvan supported this proposition and added that lower levels of bureaucratisation and higher familiarity make it easier to exercise agency and this “excites” people:

I go to [village on Suðuroy], [number of] people, I will go downtown and say, I want to change things, I really can change things. I think this feeling that your effort or your dreams really can be reached, and your action really can make a difference; I think that excites people. (My translation)

The population of Denmark is around 5.8 million, and Jógvan claims that this size obscures most voices. By contrast, the Faroese population is a little more than 53,000. Both Hilmar and Jógvan therefore maintain that agency, in the sense of acting towards the not-yet, appears more straightforward in the Faroes and that this attracts people. People know the appropriate person to contact or, at least, know a person who does. Of course, agency also hinges on people's social network and political clout. I spoke to many people who expressed that a critical element of their decision to either stay or return was the sense of having a degree of agency in shaping an “exciting” future. Beyond merely expanding the imaginable, the technologies create a future that seemed malleable.

In the smaller communities or villages, the impression that one has agency over the future was also described as a challenging endeavour. Although high levels of familiarity could be an advantage, the pervasive social control and limited local socioeconomic means fostered an ambivalence in which smallness both facilitated and hindered the pursuit of new futures. Take the example of Suðuroy, which the legacy of decentralisation divided into seven municipalities, each with separate agendas and budgets, and therefore created the likelihood of rifts forming over scarce resources. Moreover, while most people knew the mayor or people working in the municipalities, which accelerates initiatives (if ideas align), such familiarity also came with downsides. People said that the strong social controls discouraged agency. I was told that, if someone “swims against the current”, it might have real consequences for their social

and economic life and thus deter them from claiming agency over the future. Some said that challenging the status quo demanded being willing to “take a beating”. Smaller villages also do not have the level of capital available in bigger towns to invest or, in certain instances, the necessary workforce and still struggled with a dependence on fishery. Geographical distance and the absence of transportation caused further complications, particularly regarding tourism. Jógvan explained:

In a small community, being a male dancer who announces he will be a dancer in this small society—as small as this one. It requires some strength. It requires that you really want to become a dancer, and you must be ready to stand up and take a beating. It is what happens, and everyone here, we have all been subjected to a beating. Every time someone comes up with a new idea about what one should do about his or her business, then there will be a lot of people saying: “No”. It is the same when I toss one of my balls up into the air; it happens sometimes that people say: “No, that is simply too stupid” [...]. Unfortunately, in a small society, you must be ready to take a beating. It is the same if [person’s] child wants to become a dancer, then he or she must really want it and must have support in the school. We are heading there, I hope. FabLab is a part of it, and the music school is also a part of it. One should not only be able to do what has always been done. (My translation)

In comparison to Tórshavn, people in smaller villages felt it required more strength to claim agency over the future. This strength was occasionally conflated with having lived elsewhere, particularly when new imaginations of the future jeopardised continuity with the past.

4.3. Discussion

In this chapter, I have identified several compounding technologies of the imagination, demonstrating how they expanded the imaginable, enhanced synchronisation, and instilled hope in the future. I argued that they signify both a reaction to and a transformation of a period of emptying and descriptions of the Faroes as “empty” and “boring”. People expressed a sense of desynchronisation from the promise of “progress” (temporal), stated that the islands lacked possibilities relative to other places (material), and conveyed a perception of feeling miniscule on a global scale (social). I proposed various technologies of the imagination related to education and tourism and showcased how these contributed to transforming the Faroe Islands into a “full” and “cool” place. The increasing mobilities of others, combined with growing possibilities, engendered processes of staying, particularly amongst the younger

segment of the population. The technologies of the imagination also contributed to producing a localised regime of im/mobilities (Charmillot, 2021) differentiating stayers according to their imagination of the future. The imperative to be mobile progressively diminished as the future become increasingly hopeful. In the Faroese case, technologies of the imagination therefore addressed certain material, social, symbolic, and temporal constituents of emptying.

The expansion of educational offers and the construction of tourist infrastructure operated on a longer temporal scale, whereas the restructuring of counselling services, the launch of Job Match, tourist-promotion material, and the presence of tourists provided swifter and more visible effects. The immediate consequence of expanding the number of bachelor programmes, for instance, was less visible and primarily aimed at expanding the material foundations for imagination. Furthermore, new counselling practices and events such as Job Match were intended to increase awareness and provide social legitimisation. However, the technologies related to education were not sufficient in isolation. VFI's campaign further aided this shift by attracting tourists that filled the streets, facilitated new forms of direct and indirect perspective-taking, and prompted the construction of new infrastructure. Deliberately latching onto global franchises (e.g., Lord of the Rings and James Bond) and being embedded in the international tourist circuit counteracted the sense of desynchronisation. While the technologies related to education primarily operated to expand possibilities and provide social legitimacy, those related to tourism functioned on a more symbolic and temporal level. I argue that the compounding effects of these technologies of the imagination drove, at least partially, societal transformation and rapid increases in population. These technologies addressed the emptying that had led people to search for more attractive elsewhere (Ringel, n.d.). The increasing mobility towards the Faroes (directionality) instilled hope in the future, counteracting the previous flight of people and capital. These transformations might constitute a reason the youth in Gæini's (2018) study, often extrapolating from current trends, imagined altered futures.

By shifting analytical attention from symbolic resources to technologies of the imagination, I addressed three shortcomings in the sociocultural model. I was able to demonstrate the imaginative effects of concrete initiatives specific to the Faroese

context, including the way they shaped im/mobilities, arguing that they can modify the imagination's temporality and affective valence. Technologies of the imagination modify the relation between places and temporalities, with reference to ideas of "progress" embedded in the global neoliberal order and (de)synchronisations of the future. They create external synchronisation but also internal desynchronisation, as I will explore in later chapters. This point also opens question related to power and the many forces that impinge on the process of imagination. I argue that this approach introduces a stronger focus on the sociocultural and material aspects of the imagination, one that emphasises the tension between the structures' weight and the individuals' agency. For example, while I acknowledge that people can use the technologies as symbolic resources, this is not a given and must be refracted through their experiences—as detailed later. I therefore describe the imagination as a productive instrument of governmentality that operates not only in conjunction with state rationalities but also in a field of multiple force vectors (Hook, 2007). Sociocultural psychological models of the imagination leave the question of power implicit. However, as I have demonstrated, power is important for identifying and theorising what can (and indeed should) be imagined if the focus remains on what it does rather than who possesses it. Power relations arguably determine the weight of various symbolic resources and prompt discussion concerning inequalities in people's agency (towards the not-yet). However, such aspects can be lost when overemphasising the use of symbolic resources or when mapping an imaginative horizon at a given point in time. The shared imaginative horizon and the person's experience of it are inseparable; however, analytically separating them allows for a more substantial degree of sensitivity to the tensions.

Power is theorised in concepts such as constellations of im/mobilities (Cresswell, 2006) and regimes of im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), to which I add by revealing how power operates through the imagination. I argue that, by focusing on the imaginative effects and rationalities of specific initiatives, it is possible to capture both the broader and mundane aspect of these regimes (Dahinden et al., n.d.). Regimes of im/mobilities are naturally not simply constituted by the imagination, but it is an element crucial to understanding changes in im/mobilities and determining how these changes can be modified in the future. Moreover, studies on these regimes have tended to focus differentiating mobilities (e.g., Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Dahinden et al.,

n.d.; Schwarz, 2018) but, as shown above, immobilities and staying are equally differentiated. In that sense, I believe the imagination offers a new means of understanding which im/mobilities are *imaginatively* encouraged and which are discouraged. This also embeds the analysis in a dynamic context, where temporalities and affective valences impinge on people's im/mobility. Here, it is interesting to remark how emptying is partly a function of the direction of mobility and relations. Whereas studies on the future tend to have fixed contexts—for example, emptiness in the Latvian country side (Dzenovska & Aistara, 2014)—I propose to shift attention towards the process of emptying and the ongoing (de)synchronisation. This approach emphasises the relationality and agency of people in shaping the context rather than merely maintaining what exists.

I have identified different yet compounding technologies of the imagination that—crudely put—countered the Faroese emptying that prevailed in the early 2010s. I argued that this concept addressed three shortcomings in the sociocultural model and can be used to explore the imaginative aspect of regimes of im/mobilities. However, to exhibit the uneven impact of and tension between technologies of the imagination, I continue the analysis at the scale of an island and a village because the societal transformations are not experienced evenly. As Isfeld (2020) also suggests, for places such as Suðuroy, what is happening elsewhere in the Faroes might accentuate emptying and produce internal desynchronisation. Therefore, I concentrate on Vágur, the second biggest village on the island.

5. Countering Relative Emptying on Suðuroy

Nobody, not even planners in municipal offices, offered visions of reversed fortunes for people if they stayed in eastern Latvia's towns and villages; nor did they offer any such visions for the towns and villages themselves. Many imagined the future as an entirely different world in which they would play no part. (Dzenovska, 2020, p. 12)

Particular infrastructures signal the desires, hopes, and aspirations of a society, or of its leaders. Nation-states often build infrastructures not to meet felt needs, but because those infrastructures signify that the nation-state is advanced and modern (Ferguson 1999; Apter 2005; Appel 2012b; Harvey and Knox 2015; Gupta, this volume). (Appel et al., 2019, p. 19)

Emmanuel and I were visiting Vágur and decided to view the new sports facilities—the Olympic-sized swimming pool and the indoor soccer pitch—and therefore walked towards the other side of the fjord where the two are located. From the centre of the village, it took 20 to 25 minutes by foot. The sun was out but we still needed a jacket. We walked on the road due to the absence of sidewalks most of the way; only a couple of cars and a few sheep disturbed the walk. The south side of the fjord is less inhabited, with a small industrial area. The exit leading to the sports facilities appeared new. Its asphalt was fresh compared to the road's coarser and patched coating. The indoor soccer pitch rose at least 10 meters and looked like a massive, white tent. As we walked through the door, a two-storey wooden construction appeared. Two symmetrical blocks stood on its left and right and were connected by a wooden terrace on the first floor: the locker rooms and common area. Speakers blasted The Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way". We climbed the staircase to a viewing area overlooking the entire centre. About 50 children and teenagers chaotically played around, and a handful adults stood in a group. At the centre's far end, there was a wall for bouldering and several large advertisements next to it—mostly local firms who presumably helped finance the centre. At each side of the soccer pitch, there were several athletics tracks. Underneath the viewing deck, two girls served drinks and pizza slices from a foldable table. The music changed to Michael Jackson's "Beat It". After five minutes, we walked next door to see the swimming centre, Páls Høll. I had expected it to be larger. The ceiling was low and it had no diving point. This discrepancy probably derived from people's tendency to describe the centre with adjectives such as "big". We could not enter because the reception desk was abandoned, and a group of children were finishing their swimming lessons. A bus was waiting outside, and we asked the driver if he was going to Vágur, but it was a school bus returning to Sumba. The bus driver

pointed at a middle-aged man and told us that he was driving to Vágur and asked him if he could take us along. He agreed without hesitation and saved us another 25 minutes' walk back. We managed to visit the swimming pool on another trip to Vágur but noticed some wear was already evident. When we jumped into the hot tub on a terrace at the back of the swimming centre, the view was tarnished by a flattened area strewn with seemingly discarded building materials that ranged from concrete blocks to large pipes.

The societal transformation observed elsewhere in the Faroes in the late 2010s, particularly those around Tórshavn, tended to be described as accentuating the relative emptying and internal desynchronisation of Suðuroy (Isfeldt, 2020). However, the case of Vágur epitomises these technologies' uneven imaginative effects while revealing the manner in which new ones attempt to balance the scale. The difference in pace and temporality, in many ways, diminished people's ability to imagine a future on the island because, as one person said, Tórshavn increasingly felt like the "land of abundance". Stories regarding empty houses⁴² and the island's declining population⁴³ circulated in the local and national media. Educational and professional possibilities were limited compared to Tórshavn, and the central labour market was beyond commuting distance (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020). The mobility of tourists and capital was also lower than elsewhere in the Faroes, and the regional development these promised to stimulate was therefore delayed. Desynchronisation and proximity to faster temporality did indeed expand the imaginative horizon—just elsewhere. Media stories and personal experiences of emptying prompted unwelcoming imaginations of Suðuroy slowly but surely becoming depopulated. If nothing changed soon, the island's disadvantageous geographical location, ageing population, limited possibilities, and lower income levels would, it was imagined, worsen and accelerate this emptying. Admittedly, this process had long historical roots (Guttesen, 1996; Holm, 2007), but it was visibilised and politicised in the climate that then prevailed. I therefore explore how different technologies of the imagination aimed at synchronising Vágur, and indeed Suðuroy, from the late 2010s. I chose Vágur because many people mentioned that "exciting" things were happening in the village, and many of the initiatives sought to synchronise with, and even exceed, the societal transformation rather than maintain the present

⁴² <https://kvf.fo/greinar/2018/09/03/one-five-houses-unoccupied>

⁴³ <https://kvf.fo/greinar/2018/11/13/steady-population-decline-suduroy>

(Dzenovska, 2011). That is, the initiatives were intended to align the temporalities and instil hope in the future. As Appel writes: “People around the world talk in terms of developmental time, progress and relapse, of being behind and needing to catch up” (2018, p. 46). This narrative was also present on Suðuroy.

Not everyone depicted the island as emptying, but I decided to focus on those who experienced, instrumentalised, and politicised the emptying because this was a salient theme connected to the wider Faroese context discussed in the previous chapter. People often alluded to what Dzenovska (2020) defined as being trapped between two worlds. On the one hand, some people projected the past and its strong orientation towards the fishing industry into the future (Gaini, 2013a; Wylie, 1982), imagining the past to represent a solution to the current predicament. People just needed to wait. Conversely, other people took inspiration from the wider societal transformations and instigated new initiatives that broke with the inertia of the past. People embraced an open yet unknown future. A situation that resembles the *Leitbild* (a form of mission statement) that Ringel discussed in the context of Hoyerswerda, which “was not a plan, that is, it did not produce a detailed, concrete representation of the future. It only offered guidance into it—like ‘a compass’” (2018, p. 141). The technologies of the imagination identified in the previous chapter simultaneously enhanced the distance to Tórshavn while showcasing the possibilities.

The experience of marginalisation due to processes of emptying indicated further decline in the future. Understanding these circumstances is essential to identifying how people imagine futures and, perhaps more importantly, determining where these futures are located in space and time. Ringel’s (2018) ethnography details how several inhabitants of the then fastest shrinking town in Germany enforced and encouraged the imagination of possible futures and promoted optimism through cultural and educational initiatives. He termed this process the “pedagogies of enforced futurism”. Continuous emptying can act as a nebula of the imagination. This resonates with Dzenovska and Knight's proposition that “emptiness is neither hope nor despair, but the potentiality of both” (Dzenovska & Knight, 2020). Futures are always situated, relational, and dynamic (Glăveanu, 2018; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018a). Hence, it is necessary to capture the perspectival and relational character of the future when discussing the future on Suðuroy. Therefore, while I focus on the initiatives that

potentially localised the future in Vágur, I do so with reference to other places on Suðuroy and the wider Faroese context.

I chose to focus on Vágur because many initiatives explicitly invited people to imagine alternative futures. Many people from across the island and beyond frequently mentioned the “exciting” developments happening in Vágur. This comment was occasionally contrasted with those regarding Tvøroyri, where initiatives were described as being more concerned with maintaining what exists (Dzenovska, 2018). It should be mentioned that I met a person from Vágur who was notably helpful in connecting me with people, most of whom supported changes. While also introducing other perspectives, I therefore foreground how Vágur launched a wide range of unprecedented initiatives, even on the national level, and embraced the uncertainty that arises from breaking with the past. Obviously, the initiatives in Vágur were legitimised by a wider transformation.

5.1. Divergent Imaginations of the Future

On a trip to the local library, two people working at the school instigated a conversation on the staircase leading to the library because they had seen us with a person they knew. After a quick introduction, they offered to show us the teachers’ room, which they described as worn down, though the room reminded me of my time as a teacher: wooden chairs and tables with books and papers scattered on them, and a faint smell of burnt filter coffee. Windows ran all along the side of a room with an exceptional view over the harbour and fjord, dominated by the new fish-processing plant. I asked about the plant because I had heard mixed opinions of it. Both agreed that the 2017 fire was a tragedy and praised the new plant because it had created a lot of jobs. The plant dominates the village of Tvøroyri and ensures jobs for the population (I even met people who travelled to work at the factory seasonally). As a technology of the imagination, it arguably signals a continuation of the fisheries-ruled past into the future, which several people suggested was increasingly misaligned with a large part of the younger population’s interest.

Among the municipalities, villages, and people living on Suðuroy, I encountered many different imaginations of the future or opinions on what the appropriate response to emptying was. Others did not much care. The varying imaginings of the future were

sometimes said to split along village lines. Jógvan used Tvøroyri and Vágur as an example, intermeshing temporal and spatial concerns:

All that about the future. One used to say: “You cannot move backwards into the future. You must look forward when you walk into the future.” This is what we must do. It is the biggest challenge on Suðuroy: “How many really dare to look into the future?” We have a fishery that somewhat directs how we think. When we built the multi-sport centre, there were several people from Tvøroyri who laughed about it. Now we have a building that is about 50x70 metres—about the same size as Varðin Pelagic [fish-processing plant in Tvøroyri]—and one person works there while 120 people work at Varðin Pelagic [...]. If I should reply: “You cling on to fish when the idea is to automatise the processing, so you do not actually need people”. This is the challenge: “Where is the future? Is it the same place that it has always been—for the last 150 years—or is it somewhere new that we have not done yet?” When [Vágur] started the whole thing about the experience economy and tried to kick-start tourism with those huts and the camping site, there was in fact nobody who wanted to invest in the huts [...]. It is like when the fishery started in the 1850s—somebody had to do it first. I believe we are doing the same. We are in the process of opening the doors for others. It is exciting: “Where will it bring us? How far will we go?” [...] When we started with everything we are doing now, there were a lot of people who said it was an impossible fight to turn anything around. However, we have somehow shown that it is a possibility [...] (My translation)

The past was said to taint some people’s imagination. After all, fishery had propelled Faroese society, but “you cannot walk backwards into the future” Jógvan said, suggesting that a lingering nostalgia erected barriers against futures that depart too much from the past. This stretches the present into the future and calls for endurance (Ringel, 2014a). Fisheries are particularly vulnerable to the volatility caused by natural (fish stocks), technological (equipment), and geopolitical factors (nautical borders). Nonetheless, the fisheries always managed to recover. This cyclicity shaped people’s relation to emptying because maintaining the fishing industry and waiting for more prosperous times were considered viable approaches; history demonstrated that conditions would eventually improve (Pedersen, n.d.). However, Jógvan claimed that attempts to carve out an alternative path in Vágur struggled with this legacy. A changing labour market, progressive automatisisation, and the island’s relative emptying were described as both an opportunity and a “crossroads” that hinged on shifting people’s orientations from the past towards the future. In other words, encouragement and daring were necessary to “look forward when you walk into the future”. This tension manifested in the material investments that provided the technologies of the imagination with a tangible form and elicited disagreements over

which futures this new infrastructure promised (Appel et al., 2019; Larkin, 2013). Both the new fish-processing plant in Tvøroyri and the new indoor sports facilities in Vágur represent efforts to counter emptying. However, they operate on divergent temporalities and appeal to different audiences. On the one hand, the fish-processing plant employs the previous model of the future and aims to extend the present (Ringel, 2014). As a technology of the imagination, the new plant enforces a cyclical temporality and possibly reduces agency by fixing the future. On the other hand, the new sports centre builds on the wider Faroese developments to promote discontinuity. As a technology of the imagination, the new sports centre promises a more linear temporality and invites agency by not carving out a fixed path.

Crudely put, according to Jógvan and others, the two largest municipalities embodied and nourished two divergent futures. Tvøroyri was described “cling[ing] on to fish” and the processing plant modernised the past without necessarily changing the future. The plant undoubtedly represents infrastructure intending to counter emptying and, while the plant created more jobs, it primarily addressed the material aspect of emptying. Therefore, it neither expanded the imaginative horizon significantly nor offered synchronisation with wider developments. However, this is not an issue for everyone. The plant’s jobs sustained the village and therefore maintained the emptying at a manageable level. However, when I inquired about noteworthy changes on Suðuroy, younger people primarily mentioned the initiatives in Vágur. In several instances, they also mentioned a sailing club that “kept traditions alive”, an old salt silo that had been converted into a venue, or the evening school. By contrast, the sports centre broke with the past and targeted the symbolic and temporal register of emptying, creating considerably fewer (yet diverse) jobs while markedly expanding leisure activities. It was oriented towards the future and aimed to transform the village rather than sustain it. This example epitomises the tensions between temporalities and futures that I discuss in subsequent sections. There are other initiatives in Tvøroyri, and it should not be presented as a monolithic entity, but this example is instructive because it reveals the politics of the future.

In the village of Vágur, the initiatives to counteract emptying entailed the opening of the future, which departs from Dzenovska’s observation regarding the Latvian countryside, where those who stayed “seem to want to slow down time by extending

the present” (2018, p. 26). The opposite seemed to be the case in Vágur, and the technologies of the imagination were intended to unleash people’s imagination. Jógvan compared this challenge to the pioneers of Faroese fishery, who faced stiff initial resistance but came to be heralded as the drivers of Faroese industrialisation. In the following sections, I analyse how Suðuroy’s emptying is politicised in Vágur and illustrate how various technologies of the imagination expanded the imaginative horizon, stimulated greater im/mobility, and enhanced synchronisation.

5.2. A Winding Road to an Uncertain and Open Future

The municipality of Vágur is the second largest on Suðuroy and is situated on the southern half of the island approximately 25 minutes’ drive from the ferry terminal. In 2007, a 2.5-kilometre tunnel connecting Ørðavík with Hov opened, shortening the drive to its current length and removing traffic from the one-lane road snaking along Suðuroy’s eastern coastline. The old road was constructed in 1958 and first connected the northern and southern halves of the island. Vágur had 1,388 residents at the end of 2020, amounting to a year-on-year increase of 36 people or 2.6%. The total population of Suðuroy increased 2.1% by comparison. As mentioned, one of the local points of contestation was the rivalry between Tvøroyri and Vágur, which, as far as I could tell, had political, economic, and symbolic ramifications. This rivalry impeded several unified responses to emptying and hampered attempts at synchronisation. Karl, a man born in Denmark who had lived on the island for many years, used the Berlin Wall to describe the impasse:

I want to say that at the time when the Berlin Wall fell, we talked about it being placed here. There has always been competition between Våg [Danish name for Vágur] and Tvøroyri, and it will always be there, and some who do not like one or the other—maybe because someone’s grandad did something. They remember the conflict but not why it started. This has gotten much better, but they are still fighting whenever deciding where to locate something [infrastructure]. (My translation)

The metaphorical Berlin Wall between Tvøroyri and Vágur was widely known, and the rivalry was a recurrent theme in conversations, although I never witnessed any direct tension. There seemed to be no consensus regarding when, where, or why the rivalry began. People mentioned several reasons, such as struggles over political and economic resources (which were becoming increasingly scarce in tandem with the

emptying), trepidation concerning further deterioration, or grudges originating decades ago. Others believed the rivalry simply amounted to friendly banter. Nevertheless, a few examples were commonly repeated and are illustrative of the rivalry's consequences. First, during the planning of a new high school, the local municipalities was unable to agree on where to build it. Neither Tvøroyri nor Vágur were willing to concede the school to the other and, as a compromise, it was placed in a small village halfway between the two. Second, the short-lived establishment of a shared football team to play in the men's first division under the banner of FC Suðuroy. Separately, the local clubs struggled to sustain a football team sized appropriately enough to remain competitive. Therefore, the islands' three largest clubs (Tvøroyri, Vágur, and Hvalba) decided to pool resources and talent and create a shared team. This collaboration unequivocally broke down only a couple of years after its conception. The details and reasons for the split were murky. Some claimed that Tvøroyri was afraid of losing their legacy as the first club in the Faroes⁴⁴, while others blamed the collapse on disputes concerning where to train for and play official matches. In fact, most people I spoke to simply did not know what happened. Third, an increasing demand for language schools developed in response to the growing number of foreign nationals moving and settling on Suðuroy. However, the absence of a national programme meant that the local evening schools were mandated to organise language courses⁴⁵, with each municipality being responsible for planning and executing them. I learned of three different language courses on Suðuroy and that initiatives to establish an island-wide programme had failed, possibly because pooling resources signified another element "moving elsewhere", thereby fuelling the emptying of smaller villages. Fourth, I heard a similar story in relation to tourist offices. Plans were made to open an office in the ferry terminal (being the obvious point of contact with incoming tourists) to represent the entire island, but this collaboration also broke down. Until recently, the northern and southern halves of the island each had a separate tourist office, and these did not appear to work closely together. They had two distinct websites, rendering the path to information obscure for tourists. I also noticed that the free maps available in the offices only illustrated "their" half of the island. Naturally, I am unaware of what happened behind the scenes. After I last visited Suðuroy, I was told that a person had been hired to promote the island and that

⁴⁴ Tvøroyri was the first football club in the Faroes and was established in 1892.

⁴⁵ <https://integration.fo/faroese>

the information was being centralised on VFI's website. A map of the entire island is now available in the tourist offices⁴⁶. Whereas people talked about stark social boundaries, they seemed more symbolic in nature (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), having less of an impact on actual social relationships while nonetheless impeding some degree of collaboration. People attributed increasing inter-village mobility and attending the same schools with eroding the social boundaries.

This rivalry interweaved the past, present, and future and was partially maintained by policies sponsoring localised development to ensure the continued existence of smaller villages. In the context of emptying, some feared what would happen if one or two villages grew “too big” and amassed the political and economic resources necessary to overcome smaller villages' autonomy. On the trip to Vágur and the indoor sports facilities' swimming pool detailed earlier, the middle-aged man who drove us back to the centre came from Sumba, the most southerly village on Suðuroy (and in the Faroe Islands). During the short drive, he explained that centralisation had already happened on Suðuroy. Sumba used to have basic infrastructure (convenience store, postal office, bank, and so forth), but now everything was in Vágur. His experience highlights the relational aspect of emptying and its uneven effects, even between villages on Suðuroy. Despite these concerns, several people stated that all the smaller municipalities had voted in favour of a merger, but Vágur had turned the proposal down. According to new public management principles, having seven municipalities is inefficient, and decentralisation was detrimental in relation to the devastating crisis of the early 1990s (Justinussen, 1997). The village of Fámjin serves as an illustration. It is situated on the west coast of Suðuroy and has 88 residents as of December 2020. The village is only accessible by a one-lane road through a windy mountain pass. I was told that the village's school had just one pupil—something possible because the municipalities are only responsible for maintaining the buildings, whereas the government is responsible for paying teachers' salaries.

When I asked people whether they could imagine a future with just a single municipality on the island, most were in favour but unconvinced it could happen without external pressure or interference. Some imagined two municipalities to be a

⁴⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/visitsuduroy/photos/a.258237427596476/5299484136805088/>

more plausible scenario instead, effectively dividing the island into two administrative divisions, one in Tvøroyri and one in Vágur. That said, efforts had been made to create a unified front to counter emptying. In 2018, the seven municipalities prepared a report titled “Suðuroy and the Future”⁴⁷ for a meeting with the government in Tórshavn. The report detailed a number of issues previously described (e.g., stagnating populations, declining birth rates, ageing populations, and lower comparative economic development). It outlined 11 recommendations to widen the local possibilities and boost synchronisation. These recommendations included the need for additional educational opportunities, the construction of a sub-sea tunnel (the subject of the next chapter), investment in various cultural initiatives, and improvements to public transportation.

I now turn to the technologies of the imagination in and around Vágur and discuss how these contributed to the development of pragmatic engagements to the future. I am not attempting to determine which futures are “right” and “wrong” but to detail imaginative effects. For example, when talking to a young couple who lived on the island, I asked what change they had witnessed. The initial response was: “not much”. After a moment of silence, one of them mentioned the swimming pool in Vágur. “But that’s in Vágur” the partner responded. It is not that “nothing happens” but rather that the technologies of the imagination in Vágur appeared to have a different effect on staying, particularly for the younger generation, naturally depending on other categorisations as well, as the future was often perceived to be more hopeful there. People expressed that Vágur was more effective at making the village attractive and even suggested that Tvøroyri could look to Vágur’s example in making changes directly visible. It was even occasionally suggested that villages should replicate Vágur’s initiatives of removing acute signs of deterioration. However, as one resident said, “It takes time to change this entire universe. It is a micro-universe, wherein one has always done the same and had little need to think about the possibilities”.

5.3. Vágur’s Attempts to Synchronise

The forthcoming list of initiatives is not intended to be exhaustive, and there is no single identifiable cause behind the excitement people express regarding what is

⁴⁷ <https://kvf.fo/greinar/2018/05/29/ideas-brighter-future>

happening in Vágur. However, I identify various technologies of the imagination that conceivably nourished this excitement and instilled hope in the future. This analysis is focused on the initiatives that contest and aim to reverse emptying and reject the fatalism established by the past. They align with what Glăveanu (2018) calls imagining a future towards others; that is, avoiding the establishment of a fixed and monolithic vision of the future but allowing for different futures to interact (despite this being almost impossible in practice). However, as I was catching a ride home to Tvøroyri from Vágur one day, the driver expressed reservations concerning the development in the village and said “[the local development] is not as harmonious as [people] portray it”. He explained that internal factions exist and not everyone agrees with the initiatives. His preferred solution was a middle-way because he felt that those pushing for changes were “driving on the edge” because fisheries still sustained the village. People were being “too negative about fisheries”, he said, having worked in the industry as well. He feared that, if the economy suffered a downturn and all the investment had gone into sports centres and tourism, which did not currently generate any considerable sums, there would be nothing left to sustain the village. Nonetheless, he was not against the initiatives *per se*. He merely wished for a more nuanced debate. He mentioned that one of the local factories in Vágur had just laid off 40 workers despite being owned by one of the richest people in the Faroes. Several attempts notwithstanding, I was unfortunately unable to speak with many others who shared his viewpoint. The initiatives presented below are therefore locally contested and not wholly supported, which limits the scope of the analysis. One of the goals of the abandoned visits was to talk to people contesting the development in Vágur, although it is not certain that I would have succeeded. Nevertheless, analysing the initiatives’ imaginative effects in relation to im/mobility and staying remains pertinent due to the frequency with which people deemed them “exciting”.

5.3.1. Material Facelifts

The technologies of the imagination that pertain to the material aspect of emptying and are manifest in new infrastructure are relatively swift to reveal effects, highly visible, and thereby signal a more prosperous future. Evident degradation, such as derelict houses, dilapidated soccer pitches, or unkempt public spaces, indicates further decline. Such circumstances can invite imaginations of foreclosures and further emptying. Therefore, the municipality encouraged a “face-lift” of the village, entailing

that beautification of public places by constructing new sidewalks, organising designated parking spots, establishing well-kept parks, and painting colourful facades. This aestheticisation of the villagescape signalled a clear distancing from the emptying. “The way you look tells us who you are” Jógvan said. I propose that “the way you look” also tells people where they are heading. This echoes Goffman’s (1956) ideas of impression management, which propose the front stage is meticulously controlled to provide a particular impression: in Vágur's case, a promise of a hopeful and visibly less empty future. As technologies of the imagination, these material transformations provoke a symbolic change rather than an enlargement of the imaginable, since they provide no new jobs but ostentatiously oppose emptying. They provide rapid and tangible results that seek to alter the affective valence of the future.

Certain material technologies of the imagination, co-sponsored by the local municipality, aimed at both expanding the possibilities and enhancing synchronisation. In 2015, the first Olympic-sized swimming pool in the entire Faroes opened in Vágur, named after a famous swimmer from the village, Páls Høll⁴⁸. The construction was a substantial undertaking achieved through community commitment, specifically through crowdfunding and crowdsourcing. The local bank issued special loans that allowed people to support the construction without paying interest rates, raising approximately 2 million Danish Kroner. Moreover, the pool's construction was largely completed by volunteers, and more than 200 people evidently participated in some capacity. As a result, a village with a relatively small budget managed to afford a swimming pool and paid approximately ¼ of what is usually expected. Similar to the sports centre, the swimming pool materially expanded the leisure possibilities and proved significant for two reasons. First, the process signalled to people that they can claim agency over the future, effectively opening the future to suggestions, and proved that it is indeed possible to build something otherwise considered impossible. Second, constructing the first Olympic-sized swimming pool in all of the Faroes produced greater synchronisation and perhaps placed Vágur at the forefront of societal transformation in several respects. Building the first Olympic-sized swimming pool reinforced the sentiment that “exciting” events are happening in the village, though some questioned the return on investment.

⁴⁸ <http://www.palsholl.com/en/>

Several similar technologies of the imagination are also important: First, the construction of 10 cabins to increase the number of beds available for tourists; second, a distal learning centre⁴⁹ to enable people to study remotely and therefore reduce the imperative to become mobile; third, a sports school that attracts many young people to the village who, through their presence and “smiles” facilitate perspective-taking processes similar to those described in relation to tourism. Most recently, a completely new dormitory was built to host the pupils from the sports school⁵⁰. Moreover, a co-working space⁵¹ was established, as part of an arctic collaboration, to entice short-term stays for professionals, and the first FabLab⁵² in the Faroes was established to expand the possibilities for more creative activities. Pioneering infrastructure projects therefore promise a future with more possibilities, instilling hope of a sufficient magnitude to temporally synchronise Vágur what is observable elsewhere in the Faroes.

I will not detail each project individually, but I propose that these technologies of the imagination have significantly expanded the imaginative horizon and directly addressed all four constituents of emptying. While these initiatives have not quantitatively produced many additional jobs, they have qualitatively widened the scope of possibility and attracted new mobilities that fill the villagescape. Noticeably, many young people either visit the sports centre or enrol at the sports school. These initiatives contribute to engendering staying because more futures in the village become imaginable and, indeed, desirable. Witnessing the continuous construction of new infrastructure signals hope in the future and, given several of the initiatives are firsts in the Faroe Islands, they imply greater synchronisation with “progress”. While the future might not have arrived yet, waiting or actively working to “trick time” are now considered viable strategies. These technologies increase the possibilities for leisure, education, and professional activities alike. Moreover, the establishment of a distance-learning centre enables those who contemplated studying elsewhere to complete at least part of their studies remotely and bypass the mobility imperative (Farrugia, 2016).

⁴⁹ <https://vagur.fo/fjarlestrardepilin-sum-learning-center/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.his.fo/hjem>

⁵¹ <https://www.arcticdigitalnomads.com/>

⁵² <https://www.fablabs.io/labs/fablabvagur>

Most of the new infrastructure, from the cabins built to accommodate tourists to the sports school established to host young people, also directly attracts new forms of mobility. The presence of tourists and students in, their appropriation of, and mobility around the villagescape makes it noticeably less empty. Villagers said that watching people wandering the streets or students running happily around the village generates ample opportunity for perspective-taking, which can transform villagers' relation to the place. The same applies to tourists and the professionals visiting the co-working centre. Stimulating mobilities provides another tool for pushing the boundaries of the imaginable by expanding social norms and providing social recognition. These different forms of im/mobilities help combat the sense of emptying and desynchronisation because people are now increasingly moving through the village, which, in turn, renders staying more plausible for some.

These technologies of the imagination are part of a new future in which people are encouraged to “think outside the box” and launch further new initiatives. These signal and concretise a hopeful and open future—as studies on infrastructure often highlight (see Harvey, 2018; Larkin, 2013)—that directly counters emptying. The layering of the technologies made people view Vágur as a place where “exciting” things are happening, reducing the need to search for a better elsewhere. Similarly to the Lord Mayor of Hoyerswerda in Ringel's study (2018), the plan in Vágur is not to produce a roadmap of the future but instead to fill the village with hope and encourage agency. These transformations of infrastructure and increasing mobilities appears to form a new regime of im/mobilities around questions of the future.

5.3.2. Symbolic Facelifts

We learned of a “dance festival” happening during a trip to Vágur and decided to attend. We were told that it is a relatively new initiative. The event was held in a red building (an older indoor sports centre) situated a little outside the village and only about 100 meters from steep cliffs and the ocean. There was a soccer pitch with artificial grass on the side of the building. I had grown accustomed to these artificial pitches all over the Faroes, often in what I would consider unusual locations close to the seafront. On the unmarked gravel parking area outside, a group of camping wagons with Faroese license plates were parked. When we entered the red building, the large foyer was decorated with team pictures in faint greyish colours. The event was set to

start soon but few people had arrived. We walked down a short staircase leading to the sports area. Two women sold tickets from a table next to the entrance. We paid 500 DKK. I suspect that we were the first guests because most people inside appeared to be conducting last-minute preparations. The floor was covered in some protective grey plastic. Strings of small white LED lights covered the entire ceiling, and there was a large stage with pre-arranged instruments at the back of the room. The stage's centrepiece was a substantial cross. Several rows of long tables covered in white cloth and with blue plastic chairs stood in front of the stage. To the side and somewhat shielded from the main room, there was a large tent-like structure with smaller tables—also with a space for performances. The bar was in front of the tent. We ordered at the bar and, after a few minutes, were handed two foamy beers. We sat on the wooden benches normally intended for sports visitors while two men covered the large cross levitating above the stage. When the place slowly began filling, we were surprised by the demographics. Several young men at the local pub in Tvøroyri had said the festival was primarily for older people, yet we had expected at least some younger people to turn up, discounting those working in the bar. I suspect the average age range must have been somewhere in the fifties. We picked a seat inside the tent with an expansive overview; after most tables had settled, two couples sat down at ours. Emmanuel and I sat next to each other and asked if they wanted to swap to sit two by two, but they dismissed the suggestion because “You were here first”.

We looked through a home-printed leaflet on the table, which contained the lyrics of 34 songs in Faroese, Danish, and Swedish. The majority were in Faroese. The event turned out to be a collective singalong of old hymns and songs, and most people actively sang along. At the larger tables, people also locked arms and swayed from side to side while singing. About seven to eight songs in, a man in a white shirt and black tie stood up to officially open the buffet, which was on a long table at the centre of the room. They served grilled red meat, grilled potatoes and onions, gravy served in a thermos normally used for coffee, and an iceberg salad with the occasional slice of tomato. After the first portion, a man in a blue shirt came to Emmanuel and I. Despite us not having had any contact with him before, he explained in English that we could take more if we wanted. A few beers in, we started to talk to the man sitting next to Emmanuel while the three others at the table continued talking amongst themselves. They came from Tórshavn and did not visit Suðuroy often but liked this event. He

explained that the group often travelled to different events around the Faroes in their camping wagons. We asked what he thought of the island and, after a period of silence, replied that they were “behind”, with reference to the societal transformations. After discussing whether his children and he preferred to remain in the Faroes for education, the conversation petered out. Just before we left for the bus, which was departing at 10:45pm (the last bus going back to Tvøroyri), one of the singers—who the man next to Emmanuel described as the sixth most famous singer in the Faroes—was collecting the leaflets. He asked if Emmanuel was Italian and whether we worked at the fish-processing plant in Lopra (one of the neighbouring villages), but we had to disappoint him and explained why we were there. Just as we were leaving, people started clearing out the tables in front of the stage, presumably to make space for dancing. On our way towards the door, the man in the blue shirt asked if “everything was okay”, referring to the food. “Yes” we said and talked briefly about where he was from but had to cut the conversation short to catch the bus.

This vignette demonstrates that the technologies of the imagination extend beyond material conditions. The technologies also operate on a symbolic and social level; that is, they can change the meaning of a place through people holding events and displaying the local transformations to others. Jógvan also described a local transformation comparable to the effects of tourist-promotion discussed earlier, exemplifying this idea with a cat seeing itself as a lion in the mirror. Material transformations simultaneously produce and are products of changing and contested imaginations of the future. However, if the transformations are not disseminated and visible, those who no longer live on the island are less likely to return, and people from elsewhere cannot be not expected to visit. For this reason, the municipality of Vágur began to broadcast positive stories regarding the village on national radio every second week, presenting stories of transformations to provide people with the symbolic resources necessary to (re)imagine the village. As technologies of the imagination, the dance festival and the broadcasting of positive stories had a primarily symbolic *modus operandi* and a local audience. These technologies therefore sought to abolish ideas of desynchronisation that the person we spoke to embodied (see Isfeldt, 2020). Positive stories are intended to attract people and capital through countering narratives of emptying. This is particularly necessary when transformations are abundantly clear elsewhere. Several people explained that there was, and arguably still is, a

predominance of negative representations of Suðuroy that is reinforced by articles regarding empty houses or higher probabilities of poverty. In addition to telling me that people from Suðuroy “behind”, others informed me that “all they [people from Suðuroy] do is complain”. Representations of this nature presumably reduce people’s inclination to move, return to, or even to visit the island. Increasing mobility in and around the island was described as one means of combatting the negative representations. The dance event is an excellent example of that. If people visit, witness, and experience the transformations first-hand, and leave with a positive impression, it conceivably reduces negative representations. This corresponds with Glăveanu and de Saint-Laurent’s (2018) claim that direct with others’ experiences reduce stereotypical representations. Another example is the soccer cup hosted at the indoor sports centre, which attracts elementary pupils from schools all over the Faroes. Gathering an unprecedented number of children in Vágur who see and directly experience these new facilities similarly counteracts negative representations. Moreover, for Suðuroy’s inhabitants, it creates a sense of fullness and of living in a “cool” village. In other words, diverse forms of mobility are not only entangled with staying, they also transform the meaning attached to the village and its future, laying the foundation for a new regime of im/mobilities.

While the material and symbolic technologies of the imagination target a diverse audience, I was told that one of the rationalities behind the initiatives was to foster “positive childhood memories”. If people have fond memories from their childhoods, they are more inclined to imagine a sedentary future, resulting in either staying or considerations of returning, which contrasts with leaving to “escape” emptying. In other words, the rationality is to ensure that people do not leave because there is no future or “progress” but leave for other, less significant, reasons. For example, one person expressed feeling trapped in specific “streams” that blocked her ability to imagine things differently (which I explore in Chapter 7), and this experience led her to leave. She did not contemplate returning for many years. Despite intentions to build a community embracing all proposals, those who return and push for change do not all have the same success (Cassarino, 2004). Being socially supportive and encouraging everyone to pursue the future they imagine can contribute to breaking with the past but can also produce contestations, which I explore in the next section.

5.3.3. Contestations over the Future

Launching new initiatives to expand the imaginable and bring the future “closer” requires social legitimisation (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015). People therefore attempted to overcome social barriers by encouraging and actively supporting *any* initiative. Those who accepted the invitation to “dream big” encountered resistance and had to be prepared for a possible backlash from the local community. Nevertheless, those who discussed facing opposition also implied that the intensity has diminished in tandem with more visible material and social transformations. Resistance was attributed to the smallness of the village and its high levels of recognisability and social control. Transgressing norms can have enormous consequences both socially and economically. While the construction of new infrastructure was intended to unleash people’s imaginations, the redirection of capital away from fishery challenged continuity and livelihoods. As the driver expressed, some people felt that their imagined futures were taken away with every new sports facility erected.

Several people suggested an order in who can be agentic towards the future in Vágur. The technologies of the imagination seemed to target a specific audience disproportionately: people who had lived elsewhere for a time and were considered more “entrepreneurial” or “developed” rather than those who were thought to have succumbed to a form of fatalism and lacked initiative. In Cassarino’s (2004) words, those who had lived elsewhere had the resources and preparedness. As an exchange for settling, those who had lived elsewhere were promised support for whatever their imaginations might be. It is as though these returnees become time travellers who arrive and instigate “the future”; however, this produces an unfortunate side-effect of dismissing those who disagree and do not “know any better”, producing a temporal hierarchy within the village:

Oliver: When you say people are welcoming, do you see generational differences between who embraces and who doesn’t?

Heini: Yes, I’d say you clearly see people who have been to Denmark to study or abroad, that they have a lot bigger horizon than the other ones who have been living here always. That’s just natural. Then again, the world has never been smaller than now. Everybody is conscious about what’s happening in Angola or something like that. You get a lot of information all the time. So, I’d say the mentality of the people is changing overall, but people who have been living abroad are already up there while the others are climbing.

Generational difference was one axis of difference often mentioned. Heini lived abroad for several years before returning to Suðuroy and states that returnees “think differently”—a comment I heard regularly and which fits the narrative that mobility equals development. Some claimed to be able to pinpoint who had lived abroad based on their behaviour at the pub or even from their walking style. Mobility was equated with developing a broader horizon, whereas those who stayed were occasionally portrayed as espousing a degree of parochialism. Coincidentally, one reason for striving to enhance mobility on and around Suðuroy was the belief that doing so could break down existing “streams” and thus expand imaginative horizons normatively, without people having to be mobile themselves. Changing the temporality and bring about the future were not only considered contingent upon attracting more people but equally the “right people”:

Julia: I also think that it is really about being able to think outside the box. I just think that a lot of people struggle with that. Now I also want to be a bit, I don't know if one could say provocative, but I think that one problem is that many who choose to take an education—nearly all my friends are nurses, and some are doctors. I don't think you become particularly smart when training as a nurse or doctor. I actually think that you become a little square. [...] It is actually part of the problem here, that it is what ensures work here, so I think it is very natural that a young woman says: “I want to become a nurse, and I will most likely move back. There, I know I can always get a job.” But you don't get those people back who can really contribute with something. They just return and need a job. It is about how one can make it attractive and get those individuals back who can really think and know how to create something. I don't really know how to, but it is nonetheless missing. Most of them end up in Tórshavn. One could say that in Tórshavn, the development is going like [gesturing an upward trajectory], and we, now we have been somewhat lucky here in Vágur, but otherwise the pace is very, very slow here. (My translation)

Others suggested that education also mattered, explaining that not everyone had an equal voice because of different capacities or inclinations to “contribute” to transformation in Vágur. Julia said that people who chose an education simply because it permits them to return are not necessarily the “right” kind due to their outlook. Their mobility trajectory, education, and presumably other factors intersected to determine who was the “right” people. Indeed, those wanting to stay in Vágur occasionally developed a pragmatic stance toward their future, choosing an education that maximised the possibilities of obtaining a job. Mobility was not described as the only decisive factor when determining who is “right”. Education, too, was also important.

To further synchronise Vágur, some spoke of the necessity to create and foster an atmosphere for entrepreneurial people—those who “know how to create something”—to keep pace. While such entrepreneurial logic is embedded in capitalistic logic (Dzenovska, 2020), it probably gained traction due to events elsewhere in the Faroes. Combatting what can be described as a form of impoverished imagination depended on attracting the “right” people with a “wider horizon”, who could look beyond what already existed. This (temporal) ordering establishes a link between im/mobility and morality (Charmillot, 2021; Zhang, 2018) by differentiating based on mobility and education between those who are the “right” people to imagine and shape the future and those who are not. Those who stayed are said to claim ownership through the fact that they did not move away. The moralisation of people was defined not only in terms of their mobility but also their assumed capacity to imagine the future differently, which was linked to their im/mobility trajectories. This differentiation of stayers hinged on neoliberal ideas of (linear) progress. The ordering therefore depended on which forms of mobilities equalled “time travel”. Hence, the technologies of the imagination are never neutral and are more tailored for a specific audience in Vágur, and people who returned to Vágur possibly faces social expectations of being drivers of change (Kleist, 2016b), which might be embraced or resisted depending on the perspective.

As a whole , the technologies of the imagination identified around Vágur addressed the four registers of emptying. The technologies materially expanded possibilities (e.g., the sports centre, distant working centre, and cabins for tourists); socially recognised initiatives that break with the past (e.g., providing support for new ideas and perspective-taking); symbolically changed people’s relation to the village (e.g., diffusing positive stories, organising a visible facelift, and arranging events such as the dance festival); and temporally synchronised Vágur with the wider Faroese transformations (e.g., the Olympic-sized swimming pool and FabLab). Clearly, these overlap and cannot be easily placed into merely one category. Furthermore, the technologies expanded the imaginable and consolidated hope in an uncertain yet exciting future—although not necessarily for everyone. The construction of new infrastructure and the growing mobility of people demonstrating interest in the village was a means of countering emptying. It is interesting to note the link between im/mobilities, emptying, and imagination. Increasing mobility away from Suðuroy

exacerbates emptying and shrinks the future. The proposed technologies of the imagination that stimulate mobilities, whether they take the form of tourists visiting villages or students staying at the sports school, signal that the village is on a different path than before and moving from ruination to “progress”. Changing the regime of im/mobilities is linked to the experience of emptiness and what people can imagine. Therefore, increasing mobilities transform people’s affective valences towards the future, presumably before it has even materialised. In addition, a sense of agency might play an important roles in sedentarising people’s imagination because being able to trick temporalities and change the content of the future seems to prevent existential immobilities.

The emptying gradually reversed in Vágur due the initiatives presented (among others). When approaching emptying as a process, it is therefore neither a condition experienced as a foreclosure of the future nor an attempt to maintain or extend the present; it can also function as a nebula for the imagination and be transformed. No monolithic future was propagated but instead uncertainty was embraced, and the future was increasingly located in space (Vágur) and time (near future). In combination, these technologies of the imagination reduced the need to move elsewhere and made it easier to visit, return, and stay. While the population on Suðuroy and in Vágur is not changing much, the change is particularly evident in what I call pragmatic imaginations of the future.

5.4. Pragmatic Imaginations of the Future

To avoid falling into a deterministic trap, I also explored the individual strategies and refractions that resulted from the technologies of the imagination. Almost everyone I spoke to from the generation above the current high schoolers (30 to 40 years old) said they left Suðuroy as soon as possible. Research has extensively documented the “mobility imperative” in smaller villages or rural areas (Farrugia, 2016) and cited reasons for leaving: claustrophobia (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006), seeking greater anonymity and academic possibilities (Pedersen & Gram, 2018), limited local opportunities (Kuhmonen et al., 2016), leaving a place with “no future” (Crivello, 2015), and being disconnected from the central labour market (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020). However, as Rönnlund (2020) argues, the relationship between staying and leaving is often ambiguous and never straightforward. Research conducted in the

Faroe Islands five to seven years ago has suggested that most young people imagine living at least part of their lives abroad (Gaini, 2013a). This urge to move away has several causes: geographical isolation, new outlooks, leaving being associated with personal development, and the freedom to make mistakes that heightened anonymity affords (Hayfield, 2017). Gaïni (2018) has illustrated how young people imagine the islands' changes in the future, which I propose reflects the current societal transformation. However, in contrast to Hayfield's study, among the high school students I presented for or spoke to during my stays, I detected greater ambivalence towards staying compared to their older counterparts. Few people outright rejected the possibility of staying in the future, although I met exceptions. For example, I met a young woman who was eating a boiled potato as I was leaving a party at Olavsøka in 2019. She was in her early 20s, and "managed to escape Suðuroy before it was too late". Similarly, I spoke to a mother of two, who described how her oldest child become depressed when arriving in Tórshavn after visiting Denmark—feelings that only intensified when arriving on Suðuroy—and her youngest complained of how limited the social norms were on the islands compared to in Denmark. These sentiments have not disappeared but seem to have diminished, although I recognise that just highlighting age is limited in scope.

The technologies of the imagination had varying imaginative effects on people. When I gave a talk at the local high school, I asked the students to anonymously answer several questions on Mentimeter. I wanted to understand whether they could imagine sedentary futures and whether they had appropriated or resisted the technologies of the imagination. Many expressed a degree of isolation due to their reduced motility (Kaufmann et al., 2017), largely due to Smyríl and the disconnect it maintained. However, quite a few also indicated a willingness or desire to live on Suðuroy, though they conditioned this future on other factors. Hayfield (2018) also proposed that younger people on Suðuroy were split between being excited regarding the developments and concerned about being able to secure employment. Of the 27 who answered, only five replied "no" to the question of whether they could imagine a sedentary future. However, nine tentatively answered "yes" but only insofar as certain transformations occurred, such as constructing a sub-sea tunnel. This surprised me, considering how I had heard the previous generation mention that entire cohorts had left the island and that the ones who had returned were the "only ones" to do so.

When speaking with younger people and those working in the educational sector, I recurrently encountered a strategy that permitted one to stay and maintain immobility capital (Piccoli & Moret, 2021). This strategy might be tentatively termed “a pragmatic relation to the future”. People acknowledged the limited possibilities on Suðuroy compared to Tórshavn, Denmark, or beyond. Therefore, those wishing to stay and be a part of the “exciting” future adjusted their futures accordingly. For instance, while there are few jobs for rocket scientists on the island, the hospital employs many nurses. Some decided to become nurses because there would almost always be jobs to find. Others attempted to anticipate what gaps in the job market might emerge or retain flexibility by opting for a generalist education. I discussed this strategy with two people working in the educational sector:

Oliver: I have also heard that on Suðuroy, one of the nurses—a specialist—stopped, and then there was another who started to take the education because now she could see that it would soon be possible for her to do what she wanted; so she has waited until now. She must have been just below 40, if I had to guess.

Sanna: But I also speculate if we see something in our time that there is sort of a fashion of which education one should have. At the end of the 1980s, everyone should read Business Administration, and then there was an architect wave, there was a dentist wave, a physiotherapist wave, then came an occupational therapist wave, and I don't really know what is happening now. Though one can see that, for instance, the dentists who are finishing currently, and if you take all the professional dentists, then they are from just graduated to mid-30s and those who are retiring soon. There are very few in-between because one can calculate that: “Oops, now we must hold back a bit”, then it can become relevant again.

Olaf: And then one can, of course, say that it is a counselling problem?

Sanna: You never know [laughs]. It is a consideration.

Olaf: But I know that some of the old dentists have done something to motivate and talk about. Now we must hurry up and get some more because there is a lack, and we can, of course, say that there are some who ask me: “What if I want to be certain to get a job on the Faroe Islands, what do I need to choose when I am around 20–22?” You know what, it is actually challenging to predict how things will look in five, 10 years. Many come and ask: “I know what I am interested in, but I do not dare to specialise too much because there is only one position. Therefore, I will take something general.”

Oliver: So, they actively ask you: “What can I do to stay on the Faroe Islands?”

Sanna: Yes.

Instead of becoming mobile in search of a better future, several people actively adjusted the content or temporality of their imagined futures to engender staying on Suðuroy, specifically asking counsellors for advice. This strategy can further be divided into at least three different strategies. First, some deliberately tinkered with the temporality of their imagined future (Ringel, 2016b), pushing it further from the present and waiting for a possibility to eventually open (e.g., for one of the islands' dentists to retire). They decided to wait for the *elsewhen* to arrive. Second, others adapted the content of their imagined future pragmatically (e.g., deciding to become a nurse because they are almost always in demand). They therefore considered the possibilities and the local labour market when imagining the future. People's staying was instilled with a hope that outweighed mobility's potential to represent "time travel". Third, several recognised that Faroese society cannot absorb many people with highly specialised training and therefore opted for a more generalised path. Staying is a decision that is continuously made (Hjälml, 2014), and some decided to stay abroad during the wait. These strategies illustrate a degree of pragmatism concerning the future's temporality, spatiality, or content. I therefore argue the broader technologies of the imagination (identified in the previous chapter) challenged staying on Suðuroy by accentuating relative emptying: however, the more localised technologies of the imagination helped mitigate the uneven imaginative effect and possibly impacted people's willingness to stay. This change is embodied in the pragmatic engagements with the future, and the general "excitement" concerning events in Vágur.

While imaginative horizons and actual possibilities were indeed slowly expanding, the future had, more importantly, become hopeful. Commuting could be a fourth strategy for those unwilling to compromise on their professional life, although I met few people who commuted, and none said it was a sustainable or permanent solution. Mobility could temporarily unite two contradictory futures. Altogether, the growing willingness to be pragmatic concerning the future suggests that the technologies of the imagination have had a certain sedentarising effect. An "exciting" future with the promise of progress and an invitation to participate in its making can prompt for pragmatism, meaning that adapting or waiting is rendered a viable strategy due to the transformations.

5.5. Discussion

In this chapter, I have proposed that specific technologies of the imagination in and around Vágur have countered both emptying and the uneven effects of the broader technologies. These localised technologies combatted the prior lack of hope that led people to search for the future elsewhere. They aimed at breaking with historical continuity, embracing uncertainty, fostering greater synchronisation with the wider Faroese transformation, and decentralising agency (related to the future). I proposed that these technologies of the imagination addressed the four constituents of emptying and operated according to distinct rationalities. The material infrastructure qualitatively expanded the imaginable, primarily in terms of leisure activities, and indirectly stimulated increases in mobilities. Socially, inhabitants were encouraged and supported in becoming agentic over the future, a process further reinforced by the enhanced social recognition that resulted from more people visiting. However, I also identified contestations and moralisations regarding who the “right people” were for driving the development, forming a regimes of im/mobilities based on people’s engagement with the future. Symbolically, diffusing positive stories and arranging events to showcase transformations both addressed negative representations and created hope in the future. Temporally, building first-of-its-kind infrastructure (e.g., an Olympic-sized swimming pool or a FabLab) in Vágur synchronised the village with the Faroese transformation. While the emptying and sense of desynchronisation were accentuated by what was happening elsewhere (Isfeldt, 2020), they simultaneously functioned as a reminder that feats previously considered impossible were possible. The future might not have materialised yet but the initiatives and mobilities slowly improved the affective valences.

Generational differences displayed this shift. While those 15–20 years older left without imagining a return, the younger generation seemed increasingly able to envision a sedentary future, even if doing so entailed a degree of pragmatism. I consider this the effect of the technologies of the imagination while I admit that future research should explore how age intersect with other categories. Moreover, both the futures and the initiatives are entanglement within diffuse power relations, several of which are legitimised by a wider transformation. From the perspective of those welcoming a break from the past, “taking a beating” was expected when exercising agency towards the future. People with certain im/mobility trajectories were

sometimes portrayed as the “right” ones to continue the synchronisation process because of old narratives that linked mobility with development and new perspectives. In the attempt to synchronise, other voices and imagination were often invisibilised, differentiating between the stayers.

This chapter demonstrates the relational experience of emptying and addresses the uneven effects of technologies of the imagination. However, I also propose that the analysis reveals the technologies’ non-deterministic nature, the tensions between local and national levels, and how local initiatives are used to mitigate asymmetries in wider synchronisation. Technologies of the imagination, whether of a material, social, or symbolic character, can transform affective valence—embodied by hope—and trick the relation between temporalities. Instead of focusing solely on how societal conditions impinge on people’s imagination of the future, it is important to explore how people act agentially towards the future and alter their circumstances. I further argue that the technologies of the imagination impact the regimes of im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) and im/mobility trajectories (Schapendonk, 2020). Stimulating mobilities around specific places can, somewhat counterintuitively, actually engender staying by diminishing the imperative to be mobile, to “go somewhere”. By the same token, the fact that these technologies of the imagination can undermine certain futures might encourage some people to leave, for example those related to fisheries. The technologies of the imagination are therefore also mechanism of differentiation and hierarchisation. I argue that studying specific initiatives and their imaginative effects can help mobility scholars explore how the future changes regimes of im/mobilities, including who is included. People who see the transformations as signalling an “exciting” future are more inclined to imagine a sedentary future, or perhaps actively alter their imagination, which enhances the likelihood of visiting, staying, or returning. Emptying relates to the directionality of mobilities and, in this regard, technologies of the imagination can reverse this relation by changing the location of the future and the speed with which it arrives.

Furthermore, I argue that agency towards the future played an important role. In addition to increasing hopefulness and synchronicity, the sense of having agency shaped people’s im/mobility trajectories. When the circumstances spelled existential immobility and people saw no way of acting towards the future, they were inclined to

leave. However, if they did feel capable of acting towards a future, staying remained a possibility. In that sense, “existential mobility” (Hage, 2009b) does not merely relate to “going somewhere” or “not going somewhere” but also involves people’s sense of agency in a specific setting and the sense of relative societal progress. The technologies of the imagination addressed the four constituents of emptying but equally provided (some) people with agency regarding the future.

The previous sections explored the unevenness of technologies of the imagination and examined how localised initiatives mitigated this asymmetry. The following chapter analyses how technologies of the imagination enter people’s imagination and refract through their unique experiences and trajectories. The next chapter also illustrates the tension regarding structures intended to shape people’s imaginations and addresses how this friction manifested. I use the question of whether to replace Smyríl with a sub-sea tunnel as a case in point.

6. Smyríl and the Futures

During one visit, Smyríl had just returned from maintenance and people described the temporary replacement as horrible. I talked with a person in an almost empty local café over a coffee with hints of cacao. She likened the replacement ferry, Prince, to something out of a 1980s James Bond movie. The crossing lasted almost four hours instead of the usual 100 minutes, she said, and stories circulated about unprofessionalism amongst the foreign staff operating it. Another person jumped in and explained that some of his friends did not go “up north” for these reasons, and my friend added that people only took the ferry if they absolutely had to. Three weeks with a slower ferry made discussions of Smyríl salient and highlighted the importance of Smyríl to connectivity, mobility, and—as I explore in this chapter—the imagination. People living under comparable circumstances often imagine different futures, and the docked Smyríl revitalised discussions concerning mobility to and from Suðuroy, as well as staying.

In the previous chapter, I identified the technologies of the imagination around Suðuroy and Vágur that had addressed the relative emptying. I now want to introduce more voices and explore how people relate to and use these technologies. As Snealth et al. (2009) emphasised, the imaginative effects (of the technologies) are indeterminate, meaning that people use them as symbolic resources beyond their intended form (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). People are, to varying degrees, agentic regarding the technologies’ structuring forces, and imagine futures in relation to others (Glăveanu, 2018a). I therefore analyse the ways people use, reappropriate, and contest the technologies when imagining their futures, centring on the question of whether to replacing Smyríl with a sub-sea tunnel. I focus on the technologies of the imagination’s polyphonic manifestations and imaginative effects.

Technologies of the imagination are occasionally entangled with local, national, or even global interests; however, they are always refracted through people’s unique experiences and circumstances. I explore what power *does* to the imagination by analysing what futures are promised by the construction of a sub-sea tunnel (Suðuroyartunnilin) connecting Suðuroy with the “mainland” (the cluster of larger island centred around the Tórshavn) because Smyríl is set to retire in 10 years. I

propose four ways the tunnel, as a technology of the imagination, is refracted through people's imaginations: implausibility, resistance, appropriation, and ambivalence.

I first provide a brief introduction to Smyríl and its past, present, and future role in shaping Suðuroy's relation to the Faroes and beyond, including the emptying already discussed. In doing so, I draw on people's experiences, histories, and my own experiences with the ferry. I then present the intended and politicised imaginative effects that a sub-sea tunnel presents and propose that it contains promise for Suðuroy in addressing emptying and engendering staying by enhancing motility (Kaufmann et al., 2017). I subsequently identify the imaginative effects produced by the technology of the imagination represented by the tunnel and map the individual factors that refract these effects.

6.1. Introducing Smyríl

I had many experiences with Smyríl V during my visits. Several crossings were extraordinarily pleasant; others were nauseating. I gradually became aware of how central Smyríl was to life on Suðuroy through my own experiences, the rhythm the boat created, and how people spoke about it. Smyríl largely determines when people move to and from the island, and, unlike transportation by car or train, the boat is extremely weather-dependent, which can cause friction and slow mobility. Perhaps its significance is captured by the way people spoke about "Smyríl" rather than the "ferry", implying that it is not just *any* mode of mobility.



Figure 13. Photo of Smyríl V (Christensen, n.d.)

One crossing in January 2020 remains firmly imprinted in my memory and is also extensively documented in my field notes. I had arrived in Tórshavn the previous day to conduct an interview and was sitting in a café close to the non-commercial harbour while waiting to catch Smyríl's afternoon departure. The weather had deteriorated rapidly throughout the day. Everything outside was tinted grey, and strong winds hurled raindrops violently at the large harbourfront windows. I could see the smaller boats outside swaying forcefully from side to side. I vaguely anticipated that the crossing might be rough but pushed the thought away; after all, I had never been prone to seasickness and had spent many summer days sailing with my grandparents. Sometime after lunch, it was announced that the evening departure was cancelled because a storm was swiftly approaching. I boarded Smyríl around 4pm and found a free couch close to the front windows. The seating area outside the café was covered in a patterned blueish faded carpet. A mixture of couches and chairs made from a light and shining wood-like material stood next to rounded-edged tables with a light laminate surface. Most objects were fixed in some manner. On the early crossing, the cafeteria served breakfast. The later crossing offered a salad buffet, assorted drinks, open-faced sandwiches, burgers, and french-fries. The cafeteria was closed most of this crossing. Just moments after the ship left the protective cocoon of Tórshavn's

piers, the waves began banging loudly against the hull and the bouncing movements began. Initially, I was relatively unphased by the situation, but it escalated rapidly. It felt like riding a rollercoaster blindfolded because it was already pitch-black outside, and Smyríl was being tossed around by the waves. The weather app revealed winds of up to 25 m/s. Once we cleared Nólsoy, an island offering a degree of shelter from the Atlantic, the waves grew larger and more violent. When Smyríl smashed into the ocean, bright blue water covered the windows up to the sixth deck, and the sounds of the impact made my imagination run wild. At some point, I noticed bright flashes of light outside the window. At first, I wondered whether it was a helicopter but later deduced that the phenomena stemmed from the keel rising above the water. Thirty minutes into the crossing, the motion started to affect me, and I felt a creeping nausea. My palms were sweating, and I had to lie down. I was incapable of doing anything—not even listening to music or reading. I probably stayed in this docile state, staring mostly at the ceiling, for at least an hour (I completely lost track of time), and the storm indicated no signs of waning. To my astonishment, people around me were still having regular conversations, although nobody moved around. There were few people onboard. Considering the weather forecast, some had presumably decided against taking the trip. I felt a rush of excitement run through my body at the first sight of lights coming from the shore. Given it was too windy to dock at the terminal, the crew had opted to anchor at the pier, which meant those on foot, such as myself, had to exit through the lower levels where the cars were parked. However, the massive door at the rear was stuck, and we waited amongst the cars for about 20 minutes. Once the crew succeeded in opening the door, the wind immediately hurled rain at people, and I found it rather difficult to maintain a balance between gusts.

Depending on the weather and people's propensity for seasickness, the embodied experience of the crossing can be as rough and nauseating as just described. Cruising between the rugged Faroese coastline and the seemingly endless North Atlantic can also be magnificent and otherworldly. These varying experiences exhibit the importance of the embodied aspect of mobility (Adey, 2017). This vignette also suggests the slower-paced (Amit & Salazar, 2020) and weather-dependent mobility that Smyríl represents can reinforce the island's relative desynchronisation (Vannini, 2012).

Under normal weather conditions, the crossing takes approximately 100 minutes, and Smyríl makes two to three round trips depending on the day. Cancellations are reasonably common in the harsher winter months. The comings and goings of Smyríl dictate the rhythm on the island in many ways. Every time I stayed for a while, I noticed myself attuning to the ferry's rhythm and often watched it from the window of the house we rented. When sharing this experience with people living on Suðuroy, I found that Smyríl was simultaneously described as a blessing and a curse (see also Vannini, 2012). This sparked my interest in exploring the varying imaginations surrounding whether to keep Smyríl or construct a sub-sea tunnel and thereby establish a permanent connection. Since 1886, five generations of Smyríls have transported people, freight, and goods between Suðuroy and the “mainland”. With each successor, travel time has been reduced and comfort increased. Below is a visual illustration of the five generations of Smyríl, with the oldest at the bottom and the newest at the top:

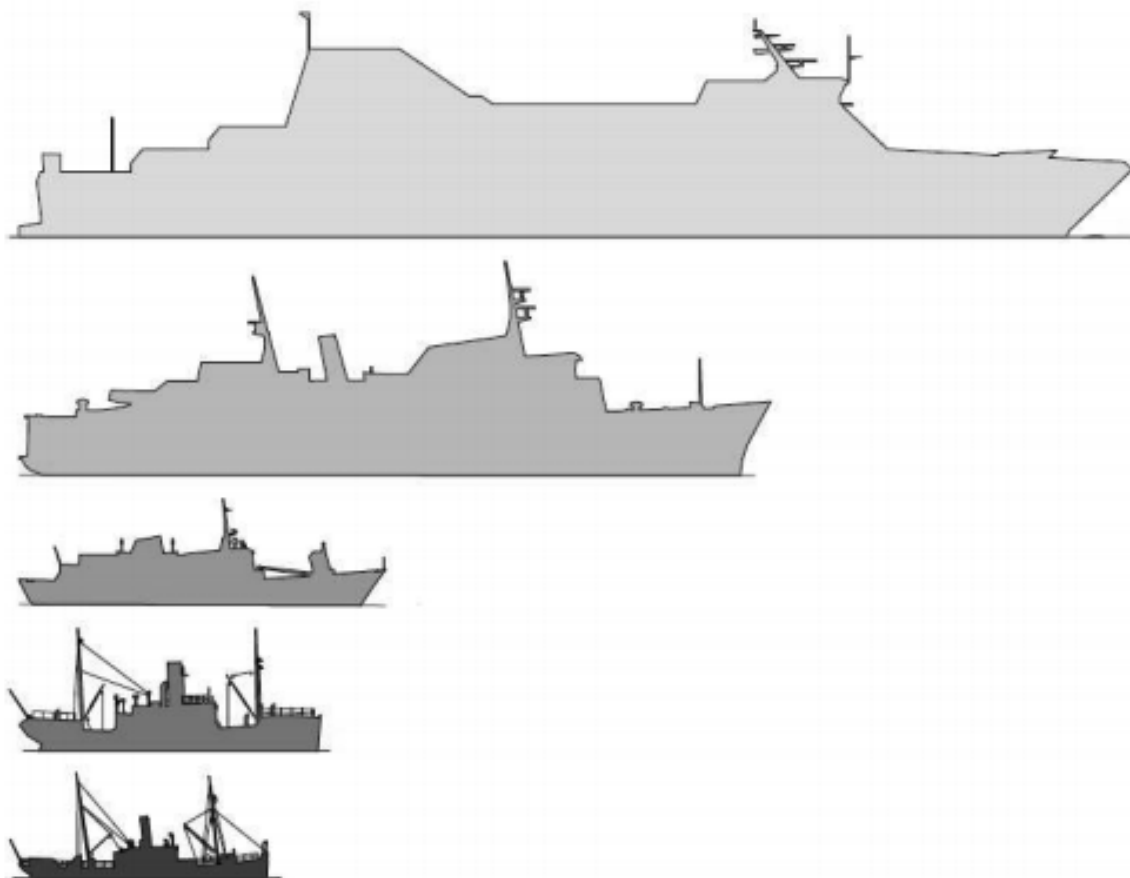


Figure 14. Illustration of the five generations of Smyríl (Steinhólm & Heinesen, 2017)

The first generation of the Smyríl lineage was launched because rapid industrialisation necessitated a more stable connection to move people and goods between the islands. A local merchant house turned fishing conglomerate, A/S J. Mortensen, financed the purchase of an old steamer, retroactively referred to as Smyríl I, which began sailing in January 1896 between most of the larger Faroese villages and even made a number of trips abroad. In 1917, Faroese County assumed responsibility for the route, and the crossing has been publicly managed since then. Smyríl II and III were launched in 1932 and 1967, respectively, and each increased carrying capacity, reduced travel times, and made the trip to and from Suðuroy more frequently. Smyríl III made the crossing from Tórshavn to Suðuroy in approximately three hours, though its route had been reduced to include only Tórshavn, Klaksvík, and Suðuroy (Tvøroyri as well as Vágur). Nationwide improvements to the Faroese road network in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in cars becoming the primary mode of transportation. This, in turn, created greater demand for a new ferry capable of transporting cars in addition to people. In 1975, Strandfaraskip Landsins—the Faroese public transportation company—bought Smyríl IV. This ferry was a substantial upgrade from Smyríl III, as illustrated above. Indeed, Smyríl IV was purposefully designed to withstand harsher weather conditions and had a carrying capacity of 100 cars and 300 passengers. It also reduced travel time to two hours. People were now able to travel to and from Tórshavn within a single day. The latest generation, Smyríl V, further increased capacity to 200 cars and 1,000 passengers. Smyríl now only sails between Tvøroyri and Tórshavn. It carried 222,896 passengers and 83,800 vehicles in 2015 and transported 264,298 passengers and 105,456 cars in 2019. The peak year was 2018, with 275,507 passengers and 108,833 vehicles⁵³.

Smyríl V is estimated to retire in 10 years. The question of whether to replace the boat with a sub-sea tunnel must be understood within the broader political project of unifying a country consisting of 18 islands, levelling socioeconomic inequalities, and addressing emptying. Establishing a “fixed link”—as a sub-sea tunnel would be equivalent to in the terminology of islands studies (e.g. Baldacchino, 2007)—is a contested issue amongst the inhabitants of Suðuroy. Many imagine a sub-sea tunnel to be necessary for the survival of the island because it promises integration with the

⁵³ <https://www.ssl.fo/en/the-company/statistics/>

central labour market (Pristed Nielsen et al., 2020). The tunnel would also reduce the friction and increase the speed of mobility (Cresswell, 2010) and, in doing so, expand the possibilities available to those who decide to stay on Suðuroy. Drilling is currently well underway to Sandoy (the would-be stop between Suðuroy and the “mainland”). In 2020, 5 million Danish Kroner were allocated for preliminary seismographic research, test drilling, and socioeconomic impact assessments⁵⁴. Suðuroyartunnilin will be approximately 17 kilometres long, cost an estimated 3.3 to 3.4 billion Danish Kroners, and be completed around 2030. In comparison, the sixth generation of Smyril is likely to cost a little below 1 billion Danish Kroner but will demand high annual maintenance expenditures⁵⁵. Funding and approval ultimately rests with the Faroese Parliament, and, while there has been no final approval, consecutive prime ministers have expressed support for the project⁵⁶⁵⁷. However, I heard several people living on Suðuroy speak of marginalisation regarding the allocation of public funds:

Símun: The biggest problem on the Faroes, as I see it when it regards Suðuroy, is that no matter what we want to do on Suðuroy, then we’re talking about money, and regardless of what you do up north, then it does not matter how much it costs or how much material you use. On Suðuroy, it cannot cost more. If it can, then it should preferably cost less. This is our problem on Suðuroy. We do not get the money we need. And, up north, they can spend as much as they want to.

A sub-sea tunnel promises socioeconomic connectivity and political unity. In his New Year’s speech on the last day of 2020, the Faroese Prime Minister described the tunnel as a means of “bringing our islands and our people even closer together”⁵⁸. However, people occasionally question the congruence between the temporalities of the state and the individual regarding the tunnel. Local and national politicians often herald the tunnel as a countermeasure to the emptying and unequal opportunities that prevail. However, some imagine this not to be the case and express concerns regarding side effects; for example, the loss of the island’s status as a sanctuary or an increase in housing prices. In accordance with Sneath et al. (2009), I argue that it is important to understand the futures promised by the technologies of the imagination and determine how these are refracted through people’s experiences and im/mobilities.

⁵⁴ <https://kvf.fo/greinar/2020/02/05/minister-suduroy-tunnel-ready-2030>

⁵⁵ <https://www.landsverk.fo/fo-fo/tunnil-til-su%C3%Bouroyar-ver%C3%B0ur-i-tveimum>

⁵⁶ <https://kvf.fo/greinar/2015/09/22/nu-skal-suduroyartunnilin-breiddan>

⁵⁷ <https://kvf.fo/netvarp/uv/2020/10/01/100-mi-kr-um-ri-til-suuroyartunnilin>

⁵⁸ <https://kvf.fo/greinar/2021/01/01/prime-ministers-new-years-speech>

Before detailing the politicised future promised by local politicians, I first define what I mean when referring to promises.

6.2. Promised Futures

The inspiration for exploring the futures promised by the technologies of the imagination was born out of reading the edited volume of “The Promise of Infrastructure” by Anand, Gupta, and Appel (2019). I stumbled upon this book when seeking to find ways of addressing questions related to Smyril and the sub-sea tunnel. As part of the abductive processes, this book guided my reflections on infrastructure by asking what such projects *do*, what they *promise*, and *for whom*. Appel et al. claim that infrastructural initiatives “are promises made in the present about our future” (2019, p. 27), which corresponds to the definition of promises in the Merriam-Webster dictionary: “a statement telling someone that you will definitely do something or that something will definitely happen in the future”⁵⁹. The dictionary further adds that a promise entails “an indication of future success or improvement”, which is what I label a positive affective valence towards the future. Promises are the rationalities ingrained in technologies of the imagination and, at least to an extent, intentionally produce a specific temporal orientation and foregrounds specific imaginations. Infrastructure is simultaneously a material crystallisation of societal imaginations and the harbinger of other futures’ undoing (Gupta, 2018). The promise of a better future occasionally triggered by infrastructure is neither static nor universally shared; infrastructure exists both within and between distinct temporalities (Appel, 2018), re-arranges the possible (Harvey, 2018), and creates modalities of control (Anand, 2018). This raises several questions: “What do infrastructures promise? What do infrastructures do? And what does attention to their lives—their construction, use, maintenance, and breakdown their poetics, aesthetics, and form—reveal?” (Appel et al., 2019, p. 4). Infrastructure is always political. As Gupta writes:

The hope is that building infrastructure will result in higher levels of economic growth and improvements in the well-being of the population. In this sense, investments in infrastructure are intended to bring about a desirable future but whether that future will actually come to pass is always unpredictable. (2018, p. 63)

⁵⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/promise>

While promised futures are “unpredictable” and indeterminate, I wish to explore their imaginative effects in relation to the possible construction of a sub-sea tunnel on two levels: First, the politicised promises; second, how these promises are used, questioned, or contested in people’s imaginations. The act of replacing Smyríl is not neutral but inevitably entangled with political agendas concerning what the future should be (Appel et al., 2019; Ferguson, 1999; Harvey & Knox, 2012). Larkin (2013) suggests that infrastructure both facilitates actual and imagined circulation and indicates a particular imagination of the future that is often intermeshed with notions of “progress”. These can then impact the relation between synchronisation and desynchronisation discussed in previous chapters. Constructing a sub-sea tunnel promises a synchronised and “fuller” future. Harvey and Knox (2012) propose that roads promise an increase in the speed of mobility, political integration, and economic connectivity. These three dimensions echo the promises commonly made by national and local politicians when discussing the sub-sea tunnel. For Suðuroy, a sub-sea tunnel was often heralded as being able to counter emptying, increase mobility, and engender staying through enhancing motility. Pels suggests that, in relation to the future, researchers need to ask: “What is it, when is it? Where, and for whom does it work? Whose future is it, and whose does it exclude?” (2015, p. 782).

I approach the sub-sea tunnel as a technology of the imagination because infrastructure is also generative of indeterminate imaginative effects. In the next section, I disentangle the futures promised by the sub-sea tunnel based on the imaginations politicians tend to promote and how people relate to, use, or contest these imaginings.

6.3. Promising Greater Connectivity and Synchronisation

Smyríl’s retirement and possible replacement by a sub-sea tunnel have triggered a wide range of imaginations. I begin by mapping official promises because they are powerful in guiding people’s imaginations given the current situation on Suðuroy. Following the “trajectory” of the ferry concretises questions of relative societal transformation—past, present, and future—and highlights the manifestations in people’s imaginations. Below is a rendering of how a road sign in Tvøroyri might look after the tunnel is constructed.



Figure 15. Possible sign if a sub-sea tunnel is constructed (Steinhólm & Heinesen, 2017)

At the closing of the pub mentioned previously, I first heard people describe the sub-sea tunnel as the solution to the emptying that the whole event was so emblematic of. Politically, and amongst some people living on Suðuroy, the sub-sea tunnel was imagined to be capable of solving the socioeconomic and demographic challenges. Enhanced connectivity was said to widen possibilities by establishing a fixed link that would improve and diversify the local economy, reduce obstacles to mobility, and produce new capital flows. Some mentioned that these promises made imagining a sedentary future more plausible. Scholars in the field of island studies have demonstrated that fixed links (such as bridges or tunnels) can produce economic prosperity, improve people’s access to the central labour market, and halt various types of exoduses (e.g., Baldacchino, 2007; Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020). However, researchers have also revealed that islanders do not always welcome fixed links with open arms due to trepidation regarding becoming a mere appendage of the so-called “mainland”, which could lead to further depopulation, rampant gentrification, and losing the island’s “sanctuary” status. A sub-sea tunnel creates a permanent openness and eradicates the closure, insularity, and stillness that some prefer (Baldacchino, 2007; Vannini, 2011a, 2012). Thus, a sub-sea tunnel does not only produce the hope of a connected future. It simultaneously triggers imaginations of further emptying—the very aspect that the sub-sea tunnel promised to combat. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to establishing fixed links (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020; Leung et al., 2017). Imaginations related to the question of connectivity are often ambivalent. It is important to acknowledge that islands are not isolated, insular time-capsules that are replete with immobility and peripheral because of their geographical specificities

(Baldacchino, 2012, 2018; Nimführ & Otto, 2020). Islands are also relational constructs that are made and remade in movement (Pugh, 2018). Given that the same applies to Suðuroy, when changing infrastructure transforms im/mobilities, the island itself naturally also transforms.

Across the political spectrum, most of the local politicians on Suðuroy seem to favour establishing the sub-sea tunnel. They also appear to share the belief that the central government does not act swiftly enough⁶⁰ and that it should provide definitive answers regarding the practicalities of construction and a concrete timeline for it^{61,62}. Local politicians propose that the sub-sea tunnel will “save Suðuroy” or “secure its future”. For example, in articles from 2018⁶³ and 2019⁶⁴ published on a local media website, Dennis Holm, the former Mayor of Vágur, argued that Suðuroy is relationally⁶⁵ becoming “a smaller and smaller part of the Faroe Islands” (my translation). Statistically, this is evident in the declining percentage of the population living on Suðuroy relative to the country’s overall population⁶⁶. The emptying has been portrayed as continuing or worsening if the sub-sea tunnel is not built soon. This point is also raised in the report “Suðuroy and the future”. The picture painted is often dire, with Suðuroy designated as not benefitting from the socioeconomic, material, and demographic transformations observable on the “mainland”. This situation has led to urgent calls for the central government to begin construction of the sub-sea tunnel sooner rather than later. The report written by the municipalities concluded: “The municipalities on Suðuroy have reached a consensus that the sub-sea tunnel will be one of the most necessary initiatives for Suðuroy in the future and recommend that Lagtinget start the project immediately” (my translation). Politicians promise that the sub-sea tunnel will synchronise Suðuroy with the transformation happening across the Faroes and promise that it will counter the emptying and, on a more individualised and indirect plane, ensure improved access to additional possibilities. The sub-sea tunnel is considered capable of evening the playing field and situating Suðuroy within a context of “progress”. However, not everyone embraces this future.

⁶⁰ <https://sudurras.fo/?p=19562>

⁶¹ <https://sudurras.fo/?p=16648>

⁶² <https://sudurras.fo/?p=19047>

⁶³ <https://sudurras.fo/?p=6845>

⁶⁴ <https://sudurras.fo/?p=7607>

⁶⁵ <https://sudurras.fo/?p=11319>

⁶⁶<https://hagstova.fo/fo/folk/folkatal/folkatal>

6.3.1. Smyríl as a Social Hub and Temporal Decompressor

People predominantly spoke fondly of the slower pace of Smyríl (Amit & Salazar, 2020; Vannini, 2012) compared to more individualised modes of mobility (e.g., cars). They emphasised that the crossing also functions as an important place for socialisation. New transportation infrastructure inevitably transforms the constellation of im/mobility (Adey, 2006; Cresswell, 2010), particularly in terms of route, speed, and embodied experiences (Adey, 2017). Magni, a young man with a highly mobile background, who is both from Suðuroy and is intent on staying, called the island paradise and viewed Smyríl as important to maintaining this paradise. He imagined that the sub-sea tunnel would transform life for the worse and eradicate the social experience linked to travelling with Smyríl:

I don't like it [sub-sea tunnel]. I like it a lot on the boat. It's very good, I think. Especially for football, we go, have a good time, play cards, eat breakfast, and just take it easy before the game. I think it will change a bit if we go to drive to the game. I don't like it when the tunnel is going to come.

Magni resisted the promise of easing friction and increasing speed by replacing sailing with driving because the crossing was not merely a journey from A to B—the trip was an end in and of itself. The promise of greater connectivity did not nourish his imagination in a positive direction; it was associated with loss and a renunciation of the cherished social experiences associated with Smyríl. Others similarly resisted the promise of faster and more reliable mobility because it also entailed an individualisation. They enjoyed having a bite to eat at the onboard cafeteria, talking with familiar strangers, and experiencing a slow temporal “decompression”. Such aspects were frequently described as essential features of sailing with Smyríl. Elin explained that the crossing was inherently social in nature and that part of the charm was randomly meeting distant acquaintances or people she would not otherwise encounter. The future promised by replacing Smyríl with a sub-sea tunnel was disruptive of this social dimension and eliminated these random encounters, which made a number of people hesitant to support the initiative. I experienced this social aspect on Smyríl several times, either when meeting a familiar face by chance while boarding, lining up at the cafeteria, or when strangers unexpectedly started a conversation after I had settled in for a nap. Refracted through these experiences, establishing a sub-sea tunnel does not promise an exclusively hopeful and

synchronised future to those who appreciate the slower, social character of Smyríl. These examples highlight a tension between individual experiences and the technologies of the imagination's structuring power, which manifests in how a promise refracts in their imagination. Voices such as those above were often silenced by a dystopian portrayal of the state of Suðuroy and urgent (and louder) calls to connect the island in order to avert impending catastrophe. Ambivalences were therefore present between the collective and individual futures promised.

Others compared Smyríl to an acclimatisation chamber that both synchronised and desynchronised with other temporalities (Vannini, 2012), such as the faster-paced Tórshavn (Amit & Salazar, 2020). Ronja, who grew up in the capital but had lived on the island for over 30 years, explained the feeling of travelling back to Suðuroy with Smyríl:

Ronja: No, it has always been this experience that when we have been in Tórshavn or abroad or wherever we have been, when you came onboard Smyríl, then it was like: "Ah, now we are free from that race."

Oliver: So, it is like you find some kind of calm when...

Ronja: Yes.

Ronja found the crossing relaxing and a pleasant mode of mobility, underscoring the joy she associated with the gradual desynchronisation from the faster pace in Tórshavn. She acknowledged that a greater and more permanent synchronisation of Suðuroy might be necessary, as emptying might continue to accelerate if nothing changed. However, she did so not for her own sake but for that of the younger generation, and such a drastic and irreversible alteration to the mode and pace of mobility was feared to undermine the spatial and temporal insularity that Smyríl maintained.

From elaborating on the inherent tension, I now propose four ways the promised futures manifest in people's imagination after being refracted through their unique experiences and trajectories.

6.3.1.1. *Questioning the Plausibility*

Politicians promised that a sub-sea tunnel would counter emptying, but not everyone was convinced that such a notion was plausible. Heini had studied in Denmark but decided to move back to Suðuroy after several years. He used the potential economic prosperity and easier mobility to imagine a positive future ahead. However, considering the island's current state of emptying and the ongoing demographic deterioration, the promise rang rather hollow to him in both the near and distant future:

If the government does not schedule a tunnel in the next four or five years [...], the population will continue to go a bit down. Right now, it's on the up, but, for example, in Vágur, they are minus 28 people from last year. Here there is a plus 30, and all the other villages on the island have a plus. The biggest one is plus six or something like that, apart from Tvøroyri. But if you look at the island, there were 1,400 people less than 15, 20 years ago. So, I don't see us coming up to that level again until we have a tunnel or something like that. Even if we have a tunnel, I don't know if it will grow that much again.

Heini implied that, based on his experiences, the temporality of the state is slower than the temporality of Suðuroy's emptying and therefore questioned whether the sub-sea tunnel would deliver the promised effects in time. Even if the sub-sea tunnel was constructed, he did not imagine the population would increase drastically. Much damage had already been done. This imagining was refracted through his direct experiences with decades of decline and a familiarity with Suðuroy's past as the centre of the fisheries' early days, which acted as a baseline. To an extent, this sentiment links to Ferguson's (1999) research on lost modernity in the Zambian Copperbelt or Zeitlyn's (2015) notion that past futures haunt the present. Heini viewed Suðuroy's future to be in the past, and the sub-sea tunnel was not imagined capable of returning what was lost. Heini questioned whether the sub-sea tunnel could reverse the emptying and inspire people to stay. The technology of the imagination and its promise was considered implausible because, in many ways, the damage was already done, and the state simply operated on a temporality that was considered too slow.

Karl was equally unconvinced regarding the plausibility of the tunnel's promise. He moved to Suðuroy from abroad many years ago and worked in the service sector. Karl saw the promise of economic connectivity as a double-edged sword and expressed

scepticism concerning whether people would miraculously begin to settle on Suðuroy once the sub-sea tunnel stood complete:

Oliver: But [constructing the sub-sea tunnel] will probably also transform the island somehow?

Karl: No doubts about that. It would be colossal—if you drive one hour in a car and then you're in Tórshavn. But you also risk that the normal commercial life will perhaps dwindle because it is so easy to drive to Tórshavn, where you get everything in one place. And again, there are many who have one hour of transport to the centre. If you take Denmark, you can take any country really; then, one-hour transportation is not much. It is up here.

Oliver: It is up here? Then it would trigger more emigration? Perhaps it can have a positive effect that some...

Karl: No, I don't think so. I don't think people who live in Tórshavn will move down here and settle and work in Tórshavn. It is possible on Sandoy because it is not that far, but it will not have the effect that they move down here and settle. Not if they work in Tórshavn. I know there are some who sail with Smyríl almost every day because they are working in Tórshavn, but I don't think there will be a big effect from [building the tunnel]. (My translation)

Karl imagined that the sub-sea tunnel would significantly improve people's ability to visit Tórshavn. However, being employed in the service sector, he worried that the tunnel might destabilise and be potentially detrimental to local commercial life. Easier and faster mobility meant that people might become less inclined to consume locally because a much wider range of options would be reachable and thus readily available in Tórshavn. Karl therefore questioned whether the sub-sea tunnel would reverse the emptying or fuel the process. He did not imagine people would move away initially, but if their capital was increasingly being spent elsewhere, it might close local businesses and force people to leave in the long term. Connectivity might challenge some people's ability or desire to stay. He also questioned whether commuting would become an option, as driving to Tórshavn would still take an hour.

Heini and Karl both questioned the feasibility of the tunnel's promise based on their own experiences and circumstances, highlighting the indeterminate effects of technologies of the imagination and people's agentic capacity. People's experiences, unique trajectories, and concerns—particularly those related to emptying—therefore refracted how they used the futures promised in their imaginations, which led them to

question whether such futures were plausible. I next turn to those who resisted the promise.

6.3.1.2. *Resisting the Promise*

Some people actively resisted the promised future ingrained in the sub-sea tunnel. Liao and Szabó Gendler's (2011) concept of *imaginative resistance* is useful in capturing that some people "find it difficult or problematic to engage in some sort of prompted imaginative activity" (p. 84). This resistance usually entailed people using the promise to imagine possible "side effects" that problematised the imagination, often mixing it with representation from elsewhere.

Reducing the friction and increasing its speed were heralded as making Suðuroy an attractive place to live because entering the commuting sphere of Tórshavn would grant access to the central labour market. Consequently, some imagined that a surge in local housing prices would likely result from heightened connectivity. Such a surge had already begun to happen on Sandoy, an island where a sub-sea tunnel was nearing completion, or on Vagár (the island where the airport is located) when it was connected to a sub-sea tunnel. Given these examples, people imagined a rush to buy cheap houses because they could now live on Suðuroy and work in Tórshavn. While people occasionally claimed that they were "economically better off" on Suðuroy compared to people living in the capital, this did not refer to net income (wages are significantly higher around Tórshavn); rather, lower housing costs equalled lower mortgages and higher disposable income. Indeed, some imagined that buying a house in Tórshavn would reduce their motility (Kaufmann et al., 2017) and diminish their ability to take advantage of the possibilities associated with living in a city because a larger portion of their income would be earmarked for paying mortgages. The intended imaginative effects were resisted because the promised future challenged people's socioeconomic positions, particularly when using comparable cases as symbolic resources.

A new tunnel was also said to hold potential for increasing the number of tourists. People felt that Suðuroy was receiving a negligible fraction of tourists and their associated spillover effects, an impression also supported by a VFI-conducted questionnaire (2019). The blame often fell on the two-hour crossing, limited tourist infrastructure, and visibly less marketing promoting the island. The promise of

connectivity and the presence of additional tourists was not simply imagined as stimulating regional development. People also feared tourism could disrupt the slower pace of life, commodify social relations, and overcrowd Suðuroy—an aspect that was already mediatised (see also Isfeldt, 2020). News coverage of or images from the most popular tourist destinations in the Faroes (e.g., Mykines or Saksun) were replete with tourists occasionally taking pictures of people, looking through house windows, or walking carelessly on people's land. Such impressions nourished negative imaginations of what might happen after the sub-sea tunnel was constructed and tourism hit the shores of Suðuroy with full force. Such a future clashed with the insularity and slower pace that had been decisive in several people's decisions to stay.

Others feared that the flow of tourists would commodify social relations, effectively threatening a long-standing and commonly praised egalitarianism as well as a stronger sense of community (Gaffin, 1996; Gaini, 2013a). Elin provided a fictitious example of a food truck owner being asked to supply 30 chickens, to which the owner responded: "Are you crazy? Do you think I have 30 chickens lying around?" Another example related to whale meat. Whaling is not commercialised on the Faroes; instead, everyone receives a share of the meat after a catch. Selling the meat was often said to be morally wrong. A French couple visiting the islands for the first time shared a story of how they had tried to buy whale meat from a person they had met. However, the person had no idea of what to charge for the meat and, when they only had half the sum he had initially suggested, he accepted that. Direct and indirect experiences with tourism also led to imaginative resistance because it was coupled with unwelcome capitalist and individualised interactions.

The temporality of the promised future was also subjected to imaginative resistance, as exemplified by my conversation with Símun, who was trained abroad but recently returned.

People moving back, people moving back. The simplest answer would be people moving back, but how to get people moving back is an even more difficult thing to do. We need jobs for those people to fill so they can come back, and we are building tunnels. That's crazy now. Undersea tunnels as well. Most politicians think that a Suðuroy tunnel will solve the issues, but that doesn't solve the issues because it's ten years from now. Won't be open until ten years from now, and the problems that we are seeing now in the demography and the social-political aspects are going to happen from now or up to five

years. If you only take 2018, there were 36 children born on the whole of the island. It used to be 100 to 90 each year. Slowly going down. Those children in five years when they go into day-care, can only fill two day-care classes. That means that another daycare has to close. They are going to have to fire people. Then if you take those numbers and move them to first grade, you only have a place for one class. So, you also have to fire people, and close down. If people don't move back, the numbers will actually worsen. People will be unemployed and will move away.

Símun imaginatively resisted the promise because it was perceived to be located too far into the future to counter the immediacy of emptying, which he feared would only increase until 2030 (the promised completion date of the sub-sea tunnel) and become a self-perpetuating force. He therefore questioned the temporality of the promised future, highlighting the discrepancy between the state's generally slower temporality and that of individuals or (emptying) regions. Governing populations is a long-term project and, even with both the state and Símun being aware of the demographic and socioeconomic challenges, direct experience with emptying added to the urgency and trepidation regarding foreclosures. Indeed, these considerations compounded feelings of being desynchronised and silenced and refracted how the promises were applied in Símun's imagination. He imagined irrevocable damage occurring if the sub-sea tunnel was not built before 2030, noticeably asserting that Suðuroy would have "closed down" before the sub-sea tunnel stood complete. He is not against its construction; however, the temporalities did not align. I propose that this temporal misalignment stems from Símun's personal experiences of emptying rather than statistical information. He left the island after the 1990s crisis, which heightened his imagining's urgency and rendered negative consequences both tangible and profound. In other words, the symbolic resources Símun used to imagine were less distanced compared to statistics and social representations, and his experience with emptying thus refracted and resisted the promised future.

Torkil had moved to Suðuroy from Denmark to attempt new endeavours but had recently started to consider returning because of the lack of leisure and educational possibilities. He spoke fondly of his time on Suðuroy and did not dismiss returning in the (undefined) future. On the subject of the sub-sea tunnel, he also rejected the promise, echoing others, because it was too distant to have any impact:

Oliver: Do you think a tunnel will change everything?

Torkil: Yes, I think so. I think it will be very different at least, but it is so far into the future—it will be 30 years before something happens, so... if you are talking of one to the mainland?

Oliver: Yes, exactly.

Torkil: Yes, it is a bit difficult to say because it is so distant.

Oliver: It is not something that people think too much about?

Torkil: No. No, at least not the people that I speak with; it is not even a thought yet, because they know that it is 35–40 years in the future. I think it is so far into the future that people do not think about it.

Torkil resisted the promise based on what he had heard. His imagination was refracted through traces of social others and their overall sentiment towards the sub-sea tunnel, combined with having moved to Suðuroy partly due to its relative isolation. Unlike Símun, who did not resist the temporality of the technology of the imagination but rather its belated effects, the social others ventriloquised in Torkil's imagination seemed to resist the temporality based a sense of marginalisation. I suggest that this mismatch between temporalities and the imaginative resistance had roots in the experiences of emptying, causing people to question whether the central government would act because they feel little has been done to counter the process over previous decades. Almost as a form of slow violence (Ahmann, 2018), the central government's inactivity in the face of the flight of people and capital led to an imaginative fatalism in which the situation come to be considered as simply an immutable hand that people had been dealt. Feeling politically and economically marginalised—not receiving what was considered the necessary attention and financial support from Tórshavn—raised further resistance towards the promised future.

These four examples demonstrate how the promised future was imaginatively resisted through factors that include direct experience of emptying, retaining sanctuary status, preserving a slower pace, and avoiding the individualisation and commodification of social relations. There was a clear clash between different temporalities. Several individuals' experiences with emptying refracted the structuring force of the technology of the imagination, either enhancing the sense of urgency or succumbing to a form of fatalism induced by decades of unbridled emptying without a centralised response. Both led to imaginative resistance. However, whereas the former hinged on

a promise materialising too late, the latter was not convinced that it would materialise at all. The state maintained the slower *modus operandi* embedded in long-term state-building projections. This discrepancy in temporalities produced an imaginative resistance grounded in experiences and demonstrate the multiple ways staying might be transformed. Various people also advocated for ordering a new ferry because it represents a barrier to greater connectedness, synchronisation, and imagined side effects. Nonetheless, most people expressed ambivalence, often believing that, while the sub-sea tunnel was necessary for the island's future, elements of that promised future could impede their lives. I now turn to those who use the official promise to imagine a better future.

6.3.1.3. *Using the Promise*

People also actively used the promised future as a symbolic resource in their imagination. Exploring this point further requires returning to a dark and stormy November evening in 2019. I was meeting Elin to discuss the draft for the focus group presentation; however, she suggested that we visit a couple of her friends. I was shaking from the cold on the way to her car. The streets were deserted. When we arrived, Elin walked inside, only knocking on the door after she was halfway through the doorway. I stood hesitantly at the entrance because I felt uncomfortable appearing unannounced, but the couple's hospitality and curiosity quickly subdued my feelings of being an intruder. Both were born on Suðuroy and expressed a degree of nostalgia for the social life "back in the days". They said Suðuroy was bustling when they grew up but had now dwindled drastically. The couple completely understood why, given the circumstances, their children had no desire to stay on Suðuroy. Due to the couple's experiences and the politicised portrayals of the island, they considered it to be emptying and its future slowly shrinking. The couple described the island as "dying" and imagined that constructing the sub-sea tunnel would offer new life. While discussing the demographic trends on Suðuroy and in the Faroes more generally, Elin interjected and said she preferred Smyríl over a sub-sea tunnel or, at the very least, wanted to have both. The couple remained unconvinced, and the husband expressed that he liked visiting Tórshavn because there was so much more to do and that going there helped to reduce the occasional feeling of isolation and stuckness. The wife agreed and proceeded to share a story about a workshop she wanted to attend in Copenhagen; unlike her peers who lived in Tórshavn, who could easily fly there and

back the same day, she had to dedicate three full days to participate in a four-hour course.

According to the couple, lessening mobility's friction was seen as crucial to expanding possibilities because the speed and weather-dependency of Smyríl hampered that option at present. I asked why they stayed on a “dying island”, and the couple said their house was the decisive factor. They had spent a lot of energy building their house but would lose a lot of money if they sold it now due to lower relative housing prices. Using the future promised, they imagined that the sub-sea tunnel could help them take advantage of the possibilities in the capital without having to move permanently. On the one hand, if they decided to move away from the emptying island, the sub-sea tunnel was imagined as facilitating doing so by raising local housing prices. On the other hand, if they decided to stay, the sub-sea tunnel was imagined as providing sufficient motility to engender such staying. These imaginations all draw on the promised future and the rationalities embedded in the technology of the imagination. A third option, which I discussed at length in the previous chapter, is that the sub-sea tunnel might help transform or reverse the relative emptying, but this was not discussed at the couple's dinner table that evening. Further, while the husband said he liked Smyríl, he also recognised that taking Smyríl regularly, such as when commuting for work, removed a little of its “magic”. The tunnel represented an opening of new possibilities and greater synchronisation (Glăveanu, 2020c; Vannini, 2012). In contrast, Smyríl reinforced the couple's sense of desynchronisation, reduced their motility, and thwarted their opportunities for using mobility as a coping mechanism—an element further explored in Chapter 8.

Helgi, a young adult who lived on Suðuroy but planned to move to Denmark soon, echoed this sentiment and explained that imagining a return was contingent on the sub-sea tunnel. Helgi shared several mundane experiences that underscored this point. For example, whenever he wanted to go to the cinema or visit a bar in Tórshavn, he had to spend four hours on Smyríl and needed to find a place to sleep. By contrast, with a sub-sea tunnel, he added, the trip would simply be a 45-minute drive. Helgi continued, when he and his friends went to a party in Tórshavn, nobody wanted to depart early because hangovers and a heaving crossing did not represent a particularly enticing combination. Visiting a bar was therefore effectively a two-day endeavour.

Helgi used the promised future to imagine a return, primarily because a sub-sea tunnel, through making commuting viable, was imagined as enlarging professional possibilities otherwise hard to access with the current infrastructure.

I heard a similar explanation from Ingrid, who moved to Suðuroy many years ago because her partner was from the island:

I absolutely think one is isolated, but I also think it is a choice. I decided to isolate myself here. When I need a boost, I go abroad or to Denmark despite [studying] remotely. I feel this is a way for me to connect, as you say, to be up to date about what happens around us, and then I can go home again and “Aah, here it is slow”, but still have a life in an OK gear.

Ingrid's experience resonated with the above couple's in that she occasionally felt isolated and restricted in terms of what she could do yet continuously decided to stay. She portrayed the isolation as Janus-faced, oscillating between being desirable and undesirable. Whenever Ingrid reached the threshold where insulation morphed into isolation (Vannini, 2011a), and she wanted to widen her possibilities, mobility functioned as a deliberate strategy to “get a boost”. The form of mobility varied from a quick trip to Tórshavn, Denmark, or travelling even further. Being mobile, in turn, reaffirmed her appreciation of life on Suðuroy, ensuring that she never crossed the threshold of not wanting to stay. Ingrid actively maintained her staying through her mobility. Ingrid's experience of slowing down corresponds to what Vannini (2012) calls “island times”, a timescape specific to an island that, to a certain degree, is experienced as being “out of time”. Smyríl functioned as both a temporal marker and a temporal decompression chamber. Ingrid coped with her stuckness by being mobile, which illustrates the importance of disentangling the dynamic relation between mobility and immobility. The future promised by the sub-sea tunnel was welcomed because it meant obtaining access to absent social or cultural activities. Therefore, greater connectivity presented a means of momentarily expanding possibilities and mediating stuckness. The sub-sea tunnel and its promised future are used to imagine placing formerly distant possibilities within reach and therefore render sedentariness in the present and future more plausible.

Building on the politicised portrayals and experiences of (overcoming) stuckness, the examples depicted how people used the future promised by the sub-sea tunnel in their imaginations in line with the intended effects. Greater connectivity and enhanced motility were linked to an expansion of possibilities, thus compensating for what was perceived to be comparatively lacking on Suðuroy. The promises ingrained in the tunnel intend to keep people waiting until changing infrastructure and faster mobility can have a sedentarising effect, ensuring that emerging feelings of stuckness can easily be reduced. Most of the people using the promise focused less on the island-wide transformation but imagined the sub-sea tunnel as heightening their possibilities, though the two cannot be easily separated. The technologies were not only refracted through people's experiences concerning the perceived relative emptying but also reflected how mobility can function as a mitigating instrument. I now turn to several more ambivalent imaginative effects and mismatches between the future of the island and that of the individual.

6.3.1.4. *Ambivalence*

The promised future was not only questioned, resisted, or adopted—some people also developed ambivalent imaginations, often due to tension between the collective and individual levels. For example, in their imaginings of Suðuroy's future, several used the promise that a sub-sea tunnel would increase connectivity and halt the emptying. However, a person also informed me that, while the tunnel might be “needed”, it is not necessarily aligned with personal futures.

Símun: I have settled on an island, and therefore I would like to live on an island. I understand the reason for the tunnel, it is not that [...] I will of course never be one to oppose the construction of the tunnel, because it is development that our island needs, but I still believe that we will also lose some of the good things about this island.

Dávid: Something romantical.

Símun: Going fishing...

Dávid: There is something about the socialisation. Some people you only talk to onboard Smyríl.

Símun: Yes, those two hours. It is no shame to have a conversation.

Símun seemingly agreed the sub-sea tunnel was “needed” to safeguard Suðuroy’s future; however, this indirectly challenged what underpinned his continuous decision to stay. He feared that a fixed link would destroy several of the “island qualities” that he appreciated, reflecting a possibly differentiation of stayers indicated earlier. Such ambivalences were often present when I discussed the sub-sea tunnel with people, implying that technologies of the imagination are used differently depending on what level they target. Símun was born on Suðuroy and returned to stay after spending several years abroad. He had been involved in local politics, currently owned a small business, and simultaneously imagined the sub-sea tunnel to be a necessity to halt the emptying and a threat to a desired “islandness”. Although he expressed no intention of opposing the tunnel’s construction, Símun still felt it came with a cost. Vannini has proposed a comparable dialectic between insulation and isolation:

Insulation and isolation are two opposite sides of the same coin, as it were, the coin of islandness. Insulation refers to the more positive (as perceived by locals) dynamics occasioned by dwelling in communities that are one step removed from some of the hegemonic spatial mobilities practiced in large cities. Isolation refers instead to the more negative (again, as perceived by locals) dynamics which originate as a result of their peripherality and marginalization. (2011a, p. 267)

The conceptual distinction between insulation and isolation resonates with Símun’s description of the isolation produced by emptying. The sub-sea tunnel is imagined as countering this isolation while challenging insularity, therefore promising connectivity at the expense of the perceived virtues of being detached (e.g., slower pace, less mobility, and a sense of community). Both Símun and Elin prefer to keep synchronisation at arm’s length (Vannini, 2011a). Símun was trapped between using the promised future and his wish for a degree of boundedness. This entrapment might even represent a tension between two conflicting temporalities—a more cyclical one in which the future is characterised by a continuity with the past and a more linear one in which a break with continuity is necessary to “save” Suðuroy. Moreover, Símun also seemed to express a tension between his refracted imaginations and the forces seeking to structure the future. In this case, one is likely to trump the other.

Permanent openness was imagined as signifying the downfall of Suðuroy’s sanctuary status; however, it also promised a means to manage both emptying and the encroaching sentiments of stuckness. Faster and frictionless mobility was

imagined to be necessary to secure the collective future of the island. However, constructing a sub-sea tunnel entailed relinquishing the insularity that attracted some people. The technologies therefore produced ambivalent imaginations resulting from discrepancies between collective and individual levels.

6.4. Discussion

In this chapter, I expanded on previous sections and argued that the technologies of the imagination contain promised futures that, in turn, are refracted through people's unique experiences, circumstances, and (im/mobility) trajectories. I presented a fragment of the polyphony, proposing four ways in which these promises manifest in people's imagination, using the question of whether to replace Smyríl with a sub-sea tunnel as a case in point. Promises are part of the technologies' structuring forces that provide symbolic resources for people's imaginations and specific temporalities; however, their imaginative effects are indeterminate in the process of becoming symbolic resources. Moreover, while agency manifests in people's imaginings, clearly not everyone has an equal voice. I argued that the sub-sea tunnel was heralded as one of the key solutions in reversing Suðuroy's emptying because it promised socioeconomic connectivity and frictionless mobility, expanding the imaginative horizon and offering greater synchronisation—all to promote sedentariness through enhancing motility. However, the staying promised by greater connectivity was heterogenous. I proposed that people engaged with the promised future by questioning its plausibility and imaginatively resisting, using, and employing its promise ambivalently. Factors such as personal experiences, class, current im/mobility practices and attributed meanings, and time spent on the island seemed to have played a role, as did the island's perceived relation to the rest of the Faroes. On the one hand, the sub-sea tunnel promised new modes and entanglements of im/mobility considered able to enhance local economies and open access to the labour market and a range of social and cultural events. On the other hand, removing Smyríl as the safeguard of Suðuroy's pace and "islandness" was perceived as eliminating the insularity others valued. Altogether, the sub-sea tunnel aimed at situating Suðuroy within wider Faroese developmental efforts and instilling hope in the future.

More specifically, I argue that direct experience of relative emptying can weigh on some people's imaginations. Indeed, such experiences can carry more weight than the

promised futures embedded in technologies of the imagination and the “distant” mediated representation of a dying island they were described as capable of preventing. This point suggests that not all symbolic resources operate on a level playing field; rather, those based on direct experience have a potentially larger impact on the imagination and refraction process. While I proposed to tentatively group the manifestations into four non-exhaustive categories, the ways in which people’s experiences shaped them were not always consistent. For example, some used experiences of emptying to question the temporality of the promise while others doubted its feasibility. Several factors are important for the refraction process, such as social others, different positions, time spent on the island, im/mobility trajectories, and the distancing of symbolic resources. However, such elements are not deterministic. Those with long exposure to emptying and little intervention from the government’s side occasionally questioned the tunnel’s ability to actually produce what was promised. For people engaging in imaginative resistance, this stemmed from focusing on side effects. Their imaginations were merged with individual concerns (e.g., housing prices, too many tourists) and “distant” stories from places that had been in similar positions. Others approved of and used the promised future as a baseline due to feeling stuck, anticipating being able to overcome these impressions through mobility. They emphasised how the sub-sea tunnel could halt the emptying through enhancing synchronisation and affording easy access to a wide range of possibilities they thought were lacking, which, in turn, could engender staying. Others developed a more ambivalent imagination, differentiating between what was necessary to secure Suðuroy’s future and the aspects that they valued. In short, the interaction between technologies of the imagination, imagination, and im/mobility does not follow a straightforward line and is optimally studied with reference to people’s experiences over time (Salazar, 2021b; Zittoun, 2016).

In addition to concretising questions concerning the imagination, technologies of the imagination and their ingrained promises are useful analytical concepts when exploring the tricking of temporalities and unravelling the weight of varying symbolic resources. Through such a lens, I propose it is possible to capture the tension between the structuring forces that impinge on the imagination and people’s experience-based, agentic capabilities. This point adds to the sociocultural canon by grounding the analysis in specific contexts and life courses without neglecting either. Moreover, it is

necessary to move away from the abstract process of identifying the symbolic resources that inform the imagination. Instead, to capture the distancing and (uneven) power relations, it is crucial to understand such symbolic resources' formation and impact. Technologies of the imagination and their promises provide certain temporalities, contents, and rationalities that structure the imagination, albeit in indeterminate ways. While I did not discuss the differences between villages or directly compare generations, I suspect that these aspects factor into how promises enter the imagination.

Understanding the forces that structure imaginative processes reveals a considerable amount concerning present and future im/mobility, people's agency, and inequalities that directly and indirectly shape the ways in which people move or remain still. Most research on im/mobilities has placed limited emphasis on the processes of the imagination, often focusing instead on outcomes. While the literature has stressed that "we cannot understand new mobilities [...] without understanding old mobilities" (Cresswell, 2010, p. 29), it is equally important to interrogate "future" im/mobilities. For example, the mere promise of greater connectivity can transform the meanings people attribute to staying or moving and what they resultingly imagine. It is important to consider how this process evolves dynamically and include people's experiences because the same technology of the imagination produces many divergent imaginings. Existential mobility (Hage, 2005, 2009b) can be transformed by context when the future signals hope. If people can wait, the future will arrive within 10 years. To understand im/mobility is also to understand the dynamic process of the imagination, which includes being able to identify those who are mobilised and those who are immobilised. The promise of the sub-sea tunnel seemed to indicate a potential regime of im/mobilities, differentiating stayers and generating new mobilities. Most studies that have explored the future, migration, and/or mobility have tended to focus on "exceptionalised" mobilities, such as migrating, returning, and leaving. However, it must be emphasised that more mundane forms of mobility, such as being able to visit a larger town relatively effortlessly, play a substantial role in keeping the imagination sedentarised, particularly for those who occasionally feel stuck. Other might view infrastructure that facilitate "mundane" mobilities as a threat to their livelihood or the ways they produce place.

With that, I conclude the second section of this thesis, shifting the focus towards the first-person perspective. I have argued that technologies of the imagination ground the study of the imagination and reveal how temporalities and affective valences are transformed. Furthermore, I have proposed that the technologies operate as forms of governmentalities that directly and indirectly shape the regimes of im/mobilities. Rather than focusing on relatively abstract semiotic processes, I have indicated how various initiatives have addressed the emptying while stressing its uneven relational effects. This chapter moved away from disentangling the technologies of the imagination. Instead, it has concentrated on understanding such technologies' refractions and considering how such refractions manifest in imaginations given people's experiences and social position. I now focus on people's experiences and how the process of imagination unfolds dynamically in relation to both movement and stillness. I also explore what role, if any, technologies play in this regard.

7. Imagination and Im/mobility Trajectories

The previous chapters focused on how—if at all—the future promised by the possible construction of a sub-sea tunnel manifested in people’s imagination and refracted through their experiences and circumstances. This chapter marks the beginning of the third section, in which I examine people’s imagination and im/mobility by focusing on their experiences to provide a dynamic account (Kalir, 2013; Salazar, 2021b; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Centring on people’s experiences offers a non-exceptionalising means of capturing what people actually do in specific regimes of im/mobilities. Such a focus also addresses the entanglement of im/mobilities and permits consideration of how the process of imagination unfolds over times and spaces (Cangià, 2020; Zittoun, 2020). I selected five persons’ trajectories, ranging from a person who visited Suðuroy regularly to another who lived elsewhere but recently returned to be part of the “exciting” transformation. I explore the (relational) factors that articulate the interaction between imagination and im/mobility and situate these in the context of Suðuroy and the Faroe Islands.

Moreover, these five persons were pragmatically selected because I either interviewed them multiple times or conducted an interview with them once and had additional contact later, adding a pseudo “real-time” longitudinal dimension. This dimension is often overlooked in migration and im/mobility studies (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2013). However, I was unable to trace the twist and turns of these people’s trajectories in as much detail as originally planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore relied on various degrees of reconstructive efforts—as the writing unavoidably demonstrates. As Breines et al. (2021) remarked, it is difficult to “follow” im/mobilities for conceptual and practical reasons (see also Hage, 2005; Hannerz, 2003), and simply demarcating where trajectories begin and end is notoriously complicated. In this regard, the initial plan to conduct multiple parallel case studies slowed the process of “following” because it was just not feasible, but I still managed to recurrently talk to several people. I analytically decided to emphasise the periods in which I routinely visited the island, supplemented with aspects of these persons’ pasts and futures. It is a practical and theoretical impossibility to follow people identically and therefore Wingers et al. claimed that “it is the researcher who should define which (and how many) trajectories are relevant for the question under study” (2011, p. 15). Moreover, I decided to

anonymise these five stories because they are easily identifiable. I also remained acutely aware of what I wrote and did not, as Scheper-Hughes (2000) warns against, let the pen flow too freely, not including out easily traceable information and not just writing about the negative experiences.

I pay particular attention to the emergence and experiences of stuckness because it was a recurrent theme. I attempted to identify how this feeling is produced, how it impinges on people's ability to imagine a future, and how it encroaches on the way they move or remain still. I propose two strategies several people used to transform their experiences of being stuck and five ways that the imagination and im/mobility came to expression. The differential impact of the technologies of the imagination is also backgrounded in this chapter, though not forgotten.

First, I present a synthesis of the sociocultural psychological model of the imagination and the concept of im/mobility trajectories, arguing that such a merger enhances sensitivity to the spatial and temporal dimensions of people's development. I argue that the fusion provides a holistic approach to studying how imagined futures develop alongside im/mobility trajectories and contributes to the making of a "mobile" sociocultural psychology (Glăveanu, 2020; Zittoun et al., 2018). Second, I present the five trajectories, revealing how imagination are dynamically entangled with im/mobility according to people's unique lives and the local and national contexts.

7.1. Between Spaces and Times

Echoing Salazar (2011, 2014, 2020) and others (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020b; Zittoun, 2020), who have suggested that im/mobility and imagination represent two sides of the same coin, I intend to detail what makes the coin flip and in relation to what. Most research explicitly linking the two perspectives often draws on the notion of imaginaries, a rather static, overarching, and content-oriented concept with roots in philosophy and originally concerned with the imaginary glue holding societies together (e.g. Adams et al., 2015; Castoriadis, 1997; Strauss, 2006; Taylor, 2002). However, as Salazar and Zittoun have both proposed, research on the future as a dynamic sociocultural psychological process remains scarce in the field of im/mobility research. Research combining the concepts tends to emphasise exceptionalised mobilities, such as migration, returning, or leaving and fails to address the seemingly

more mundane mobilities, such as going shopping in a neighbouring city. Imagination can “slow down, accelerate or even immobilise the rhythm and possibilities of mobility” (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020, p. 5).

I first justify the combination of perspectives, outlining the features of trajectories: how they unfold as people move in time and space, what factors might produce twists and turns, and where imagined futures come into play. Though the two perspectives have remained separate, they share a compatible processual ontology and a relational epistemology, analytically giving precedence to people's experiences. Moreover, both perspectives account for changing material, social, geopolitical, and symbolic constraints, and the possibilities that shape trajectories.

7.1.1. A Sociocultural Psychology Approach to the Life Course

Most of sociocultural psychology's recent conceptualisations of people's development over their life courses—what I refer to as the temporal dimension—spring from two seeds (see Zittoun, 2012; Zittoun et al., 2013). The first seed springs from Elder and colleagues' sociology of the life course, which has been extensively applied in longitudinal and quantitative studies on cohort, generational, and period effects (Mayer, 2009) or in more qualitative attempts to study human development (Shanahan et al., 2016). Elder and Giele (2009) articulated five key assumptions epistemologically compatible with those of sociocultural psychology: Development is a lifelong process, people participate in the construction of their life courses within a set of constraints, life courses evolve and are deeply embedded in historical contexts, timing matters, and life courses are “linked” or “networked” (Vacchiano & Spini, 2021) with the lives of others. Wingens et al. acknowledged that “every life is different”, proposing that “the interplay of structure and agency over time is at the heart of the sociological life course approach” (2011, p. 6). However, extant studies tend to operationalise this life course perspective from the “outside” or “third-person perspective” (Zittoun et al., n.d.-b), focusing largely on certain sociological or historical events and on the “snapshots” or “outcomes” of transitions (Wingens et al., 2011). However, such an approach risks ignoring the relational process of development (Valsiner, 2006) and homogenising similarities (Sato et al., 2018) by fixating on “stages” presumed to be shared among a group of people. These shortcomings are evident in several studies that have applied a life course perspective; for example,

Coulter's (2013) research on undesired residential immobility, Fischer and Malmberg's (2001) study of the impact of insider advantages on im/mobility over the life course, and Stockdale and Catney's (2014) examination of urban-rural migrations. While these studies provide insights into factors that impact people's transitions, they aggregate similarities and neglect people's experiences.

The second seed springs from Baltes' (1987) life-span psychology, which focuses on psychological functions and developments at the intersection between biological growth and cultural mastery over the entirety of people's life spans (Baltes et al., 2006). Essentially, this perspective focuses on what happens when human biological functioning begins its inevitable decline and culture begins to compensate. Development is theorised as occurring through selective optimisation and adaptation, recognising that it is a multidirectional effort to "maximise gains" (Baltes et al., 1999). This process is accomplished by selecting achievable outcomes for old age, compensating for the loss of certain functions by the mastery of culture and optimising the functions still available (Baltes, 1987). Human development is characterised by plasticity, and Baltes described life-span development psychology as "the study of constancy and change in behaviour throughout the life course (ontogenesis), from conception to death" (1987, p. 611). While a life-span perspective supports the notion that development is a lifelong process and not additive, following different routes for different people, it nonetheless stipulates a somewhat mechanical and rational interaction between people and cultures. This approach does not resonate with the emphasis on experiences that I pursue. Following Zittoun (2012), my ambition is not to capture or quantify typicalities but rather to explore how trajectories unfold as people move or remain still and theorise the imagination as a potential developmental process.

Sociocultural psychology of the life course seeks to "understand how people develop and act within their sociocultural environment" (Zittoun, 2016, p. 7; see also Hviid & Villadsen, 2015; Märtsin, 2019), stressing how people make sense of their lives—past, present, and future. Lives are assumed to unfold towards an uncertain yet developmentally significant future (Valsiner, 2011; Valsiner & Connolly, 2005), undergoing moments of stability and rupture in response to psychological and sociological forces (Zittoun, 2006). In congruence with the principles of sociocultural

psychology, each life course is unique, is constantly in dialogue with social others, and is guided by a dynamic melody (Zittoun et al., 2013) or pattern (Cabra, 2021a; Zittoun, 2019b). For example, in her exploration of life around the Czech hill, Říp, Zittoun demonstrated how two women living under similar historical conditions had vastly different life courses (Zittoun, 2019b). The general principles are expressed in exploring and identifying the process' underlying development and recognising that many different paths can reach the same “point” along the life course—referred to as multilinearity (Zittoun et al., 2013). From this perspective, development is non-linear, and several models have described the role played by the process of imagination (Vygotsky, 1931; Zittoun, 2018) as a form of teleogenesis that guides people towards certain futures, actions, and im/mobilities (Zittoun, 2015b, 2016).

I maintain that imagined futures are an indicator of development preceded by the dynamic process of the imagination. The future enables people to make sense of the past and present (Power, 2020), and reimagining the future entails changing the relation to the world. In other words: “The development of a person during her life course is also the development of the imagination of her past, future, and alternative lives” (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 55). Moreover, the sociocultural approach is sensitive to the relations that promote and inhibit the process of imagination (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). Imagination and changes to life courses are intimately linked to the material, sociocultural, geopolitical, and economic conditions surrounding a person (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). Focusing on the imagination therefore provides a means of exploring what futures people can and ought to imagine without divorcing the process from the context. Imagined futures are taken as an indicator of development because they capture changes in how people relate to the world and its structuring forces. Existing studies are unclear regarding when an imagined future translates into im/mobility; nor do extant models entertain the idea that there might be relatively stable elements that persist over time. These are several of the theoretical questions I hope to address here.

Through processes of imagination, people can reorient their life courses (Zittoun, 2018; Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015) and transform societies (Hawlina et al., 2020). Although several scholars have theorised how imagination develops moving through institutions (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013) and in im/mobility (Cangià, 2020;

Cangià & Zittoun, 2020; Zittoun, 2020), there is arguably still room for extending these theories, specifically in terms of including more mundane mobilities and disentangling the entanglements over time. The imagination's triggers, its contents, and how it acts towards the future are partially dependent on affective valences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). For example, in extreme situations, people might start to imagine escapist alternatives (Bryant & Knight, 2019) or lose the ability to imagine the future (Griffiths, 2013; Lindberg & Edwards, 2021). Imagined futures are also critical to understanding the meaning attributed to im/mobility, such as feelings of being stuck (Cangià, 2020; Straughan et al., 2020). With reference to migration, Hage called this existential mobility with reference to migration:

Migrants and would-be migrants, like everyone else in the world, like to feel that 'they are going places', and they prefer to be 'going places' by staying where they are in environments with which they are familiar. It is only when they are 'going nowhere' or 'too slowly' in such familiar environments that they start thinking of physical mobility. (2005, p. 470)

However, I argue that questions of existential im/mobility extend beyond migratory decisions to include other forms of im/mobilities. How the person imagines the future directly relates to how they experience im/mobility at a given point, which can further impact whether they decide to be mobile or remain still. Affective valences represent a qualitative evaluation of an imagined future's desirability. As demonstrated, if the future is deemed "boring", people are likely to search for it elsewhere or change their current im/mobility practices. These concrete manifestations in people's im/mobility provide a means of detecting which imaginations become developmental triggering significant changes in people's trajectories. The manner in which affective valences are contextual and impact engagement with the future is referenced in fictional works by George Orwell (1993), who wrote, "When you are approaching poverty, you make one discovery which outweighs all of the others [...] the fact that it annihilates the future" (1933, p. 19). Moreover, Samra Habib (2019) wrote about the tension between religion, queerness, and imagining a different future:

I wanted a different kind of life. A life where I wasn't afraid. A life where I didn't have to ask for a man's permission to read, to go to university, to drive a car. But I feared that the feminist ideals I had learned from books, teachers, and peers at school wouldn't register with my parents. Besides, Nasir and I were already married. I knew how messy things would get, especially because we were family. (2019, p. 60)

These two examples highlight the different forces—such as poverty or religious normativities—that can both impact people’s imagination of the future and alter its affective valence. Instead of assuming that the process of imagination is an escape from the “immediate situation”, the situation itself conditions the affective valence. Overall, studying imagination as a sociocultural process concerns exploring and theorising what futures (or absences thereof) guide people’s life courses, how and why these emerge given specific circumstances, what remains stable and what transforms, and what people do accordingly—linking the imagination to im/mobility trajectories.

7.1.2. Following Trajectories

Im/mobility trajectories and trajectory ethnography (Schapendonk, 2020) emerged from Marcus’ (1995) multi-sited ethnography—more precisely, his methodological suggestion to “follow the people” (p. 105). Marcus’ article responded to anthropologists’ objections regarding the boundedness of their field (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997) and its lack of connections to other fields (Hannerz, 2003) by offering a clear departure from more static assumptions that linked people to places (Ferguson & Gupta, 1992; Malkki, 1992). Anthropologists were invited to follow people, things, or phenomena across fields.

This invitation was also evident in Clifford’s (1997) proposition to reorient the ethnographic process from “roots to routes”. As Salazar et al. summarised, “He [Clifford] argues that anthropologists need to leave their preoccupation with discovering the ‘roots’ of sociocultural forms and identities behind, and instead trace the ‘routes’ that (re)produce them” (2017, pp. 4–5). Mobile approaches have recently gained traction within migration and im/mobility research because such approaches reject predefined notions of what constitutes a trajectory—epitomised by the preoccupation with “migrant journeys” as the liminal space between fixed sedentary points (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016; Schapendonk et al., 2020). Defining trajectories beforehand ignores the myriad immobilisations and mobilisations that certainly also occur (Collyer, 2007; Khosravi, 2010b). The result is a bipolar and linear perspective that assumes the paramount significance of cross-border mobilities (Schapendonk, van Liempt, et al., 2020) and disregards events occurring “before” and “after”. Mainwaring and Brigden described the journey “as an experience with indeterminate beginnings and endings, transcend easily conceptual borders, as well as physical ones”

(2016, p. 244). The point is therefore not to focus on border crossing a priori but understand when, why, and for whom crossing borders can be significant in relation to other categorisations while acknowledging that other im/mobilities can be equally important. Following people's im/mobility trajectories can also represent a move away from the migrant-centric perspective (Schapendonk et al., 2020). Scholars have demonstrated that following people (Kleist, 2018; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014), things (Hui, 2012; Kleist, 2020), or practices (Menet, 2020) can provide a number of pertinent methodological strategies for capturing the entanglement of im/mobilities (Schapendonk, van Liempt, et al., 2020). The emphasis is on the ambiguities and the unpredictable twists and turns along trajectories (Schapendonk, 2020). Schapendonk et al. defined im/mobility trajectories as:

open spatio-temporal processes with a strong transformative logic (Carling 2017; Schapendonk 2020; Van Geel and Mazzucato 2018). They may include multiple journeys across various places and do not necessarily follow a linear directionality. These im/mobility trajectories represent the outcome of multiple intersections of individual aspirations, social networking, policy interventions and mobility regimes (Schapendonk et al., 2018). As such, they are deeply entangled with trajectories of other people, capital, rules, and information. The concept of im/mobility trajectories thus reflects the idea that mobility and immobility are constantly contingent on each other. (2020, p. 3246)

The im/mobility trajectories approach highlights people's experiences of movement and stillness (Schwarz, 2018), aiming to understand how they navigate regimes of im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Lipphardt & Schwarz, 2018; Schapendonk, 2020). Similarly to the sociocultural psychological perspective, im/mobility trajectories are defined as open-ended (Breines et al., 2021). Kalir (2013) and Khosravi (2010b) convincingly demonstrated that, by following people's experiences, research is more effectively equipped to answer what modes of im/mobility are significant and why. It is therefore oriented towards the experiences and entanglements of im/mobility over time, directly challenging sedentary ontologies and epistemologies (Schapendonk et al., 2020). Trajectories are not discrete or linear (Griffiths et al., 2013; Schapendonk, 2020). Instead, the im/mobility trajectory approach explores "how [trajectories] are produced, facilitated, slowed down and blocked" (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014, p. 263). Nevertheless, per Breines et al., the unit of analysis can be difficult to establish, and studying im/mobility trajectories does not exclude the "rather immobile and localised practices" (2021, p. 9).

Extensive literature exists concerning the imagination and the future in migration research (Chambers, 2018; Hage, 2009b; Pine, 2014). Moreover, there is a burgeoning scholarship on hope (Kleist, 2016a, 2017; Mar, 2005; Vigh, 2009) and the linkages between imaginaries and mobilities (Pelican, 2013; Salazar, 2011b, 2014, 2020). Nevertheless, few studies have explored these interactions through the dynamic lens of the imagination and emphasised exceptionalised mobilities. I intend to demonstrate how the imagination guides im/mobility trajectories and is transformed by them. In this vein, I propose integrating the sociocultural psychological model of imagination with im/mobility trajectories to further theorise human development both in and through im/mobility, which is always oriented towards the future. This integration represents only a minor step towards addressing the need for more longitudinal studies that can unravel the relation between imagination and im/mobility.

7.1.3. Integrating Perspectives

Imaginative trajectories can change through time, space and context: a lens on mobility can help us understand how imagination itself can be triggered, blocked or transformed across time through the embodied act of moving. (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020)

Imagination can guide people through, encourage, or inhabit different forms of im/mobility (Zittoun, 2020), which are transformed as people move through time and space and are related to the im/mobility of others. I suggest that combining these two perspectives creates a new space for theorising how imagination and im/mobility evolve over the life course. There are also a few points at which they can supplement each other. First, both centre on people's experiences as they move through various sociocultural and institutional contexts. However, one emphasises temporalities and imagined futures, while the other emphasises space and im/mobility. Second, both aim to understand what people can do under certain sociocultural and material conditions. Third, they share the assumption that trajectories are unique, unpredictable, and most accurately captured through people's experiences. In other words, they are epistemologically and theoretically compatible, which permits the connection I am attempting.

Sociocultural psychological research on life courses often neglects human and non-human modes of im/mobility. I argue that, by integrating a conceptual vocabulary from the im/mobility trajectories approach, it is possible to open a new avenue for

exploring and theorising how imagination develops across spaces. I propose that affective valences (e.g., stuckness or hope) are particularly important here, as defined in section [1.3.1.3](#). I now turn to the five trajectories.

7.2. Imagination Along Im/Mobility Trajectories

These five stories were patched together from qualitative, reconstructive interviews combined with numerous conversations. The act of following people poses questions concerning what I actually follow and how to articulate the boundaries between the beginning of one trajectory and the end of another (Breines et al., 2021). The process was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic halting this research in March 2020. At that point, the amount of following I had done varied considerably from person to person. I therefore decided to focus on the one-year period during which I visited the Faroe Islands but was forced to rely more on reconstruction than I initially intended to. As Breines et al. (2021) discussed concerning studying marketplaces, the practice of following also entailed a considerable degree of immobility.

Most of the following occurred on the island of Suðuroy. However, I also visited several people in Denmark, highlighting that following is not merely a geographical endeavour but concerns mapping people's trajectories in as close to real-time as possible. Following, per definition, is not merely being face-to-face. It equally involves keeping in touch and trying to fill gaps. The selection of these five stories was based on two criteria: one theoretical and one practical. First, I aimed to present different im/mobility trajectories to illustrate similarities and differences in terms of the role played by the imagination. Second, I selected people I had more contact with than others during my stays and therefore "followed".

7.2.1. Staying Rendered Imaginatively Impossible

When I met Arne in his home on Suðuroy in 2019, he greeted Emmanuel and I at the entrance wearing beige chinos and a t-shirt, his hair combed neatly to one side. Arne showed us into a sparsely furnished living room with a wooden dining table and a TV in the corner near a dark couch—everything seemed used but clean. The blinds were down, and a few frames decorated the wall. Extra chairs were lined up against the wall. He had prepared coffee for us. His nesting was on hold because he recently moved to the island and was unsure of the duration of his stay. Arne was in his 20s and had lived

most of his childhood and adolescence in a large metropolitan area outside Europe. Most of my interactions with Arne happened over a month because he left Suðuroy between my second and third stay. We conducted one biographical interview with Arne, had numerous conversations, and went on a few excursions together. Arne had a mobile upbringing due to his parents' professional life.

Before arriving in the Faroe Islands, which was the product of a rather spontaneous decision, Arne had already travelled around Europe. He had lived in several countries for shorter periods until eventually settling in another Scandinavian country for a couple of years. His im/mobility was driven by the pursuit of a concrete and highly specific future, though without a fixed location. He admitted knowing little about the Faroes before arriving, implying that the technologies of the imagination had not “reached him”. Instead, he used symbolic resources from television series and movies to imagine what it might mean to live in a small community:

As stupid as it sounds, whenever I watched, and I always saw specific American movies or TV shows, and I saw them living in small places, and just the difference [...] how different it was for the people in those places and the lives they have and stuff like that, I always thought it would be really interesting to experience that. As weird as it sounds, the fact that everyone knows what's going on and little rumours and all that, how the relationships are that you develop with people. For example, yesterday at the [local soccer] club, they were celebrating 127 years. This is like the second oldest club in the world. It's crazy—127 years this club has been here, it's older than Manchester United, all these huge clubs. But I remember thinking: “Wow, this is such an old club”. And all the people come to celebrate it, and they all know each other, but it's all a small community, and also, they probably feel like they're responsible for this club because it's been 127 years that this community has kept this club going. It's things like that that I wanted to experience and feel that sense of community.

Considering that Arne had spent most of his childhood and adolescence living in a large metropolitan city of several millions inhabitants, he had no direct experience of what living in a small community entailed and therefore relied on distanced symbolic resources (Glăveanu et al., 2018). American movies and television shows nourished his imagination of what to expect, which is evident in the tropes propagating ideas of strong communal attachment, intimate social relations, and a heightened sense of responsibility, which he contrasted to the global phenomenon that is Manchester United. Although Arne developed an imagining of life in smaller places through media technologies (Appadurai, 1996), it did not initially generate mobility.

Imagining life in small communities had no solid “where” or “when”. Rather, it represented a playful alternative to the present. Another almost monolithic imagined future guided his trajectory, which was socially recognised by Arne’s older brother (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015), who already follow the path Arne wanted, and wider society (Wingens et al., 2011). I suggest that Arne’s brother was used as a symbolic resource. Im/mobility around Europe was instrumental in bringing his future closer, and the moments of stillness were a response to emerging opportunities.

Arne worked hard throughout his late adolescence and early adult years and acquired the necessary skills to make the future seem plausible. “At that point of my life, if I wasn’t [able to actualise the future], I would just prefer not to live. Seriously” he said, recognising that a singular future guided his life back then. There were no imaginable alternatives for Arne. The twist and turns along his life course were appraised from the “end”.

Combined, Arne’s brother and existing social pathways provided social legitimation for his pursuits. Moreover, his brother taking the same route, he illuminated the path to actualisation and constituted a blueprint for this imagination:

I think it has guided a lot of what I did, but yes so, I kind of rose through the ranks with [profession] in [country] and [city], kind of following my brother’s footsteps. He was always doing what I needed to aim for to do, so it was a good thing to chase, and I knew what I needed to do to get there because I saw what he was doing, so that was really [...] I think it made it easy for me to follow the same path as him.

Arne’s brother encouraged him despite their father’s initial scepticism. Studies have demonstrated how imagination guides and manifests in dialogue with social others (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b), some having a louder voice than others. In sociological accounts, Wingens et al. wrote, “Trajectories are structurally defined as a kind of social pathways for people’s lives provided by societal structures and institutions” (2011, p. 16). Arne’s imagination gained form through affective ties to his brother. This echoes the ideas of “linked lives” (Elder & Giele, 2009) or “networked lives” (Vacchiano & Spini, 2021) that reinforce a structurally defined pathway.

When imagination is studied as a process emphasising symbolic resources, a blind spot can be created regarding questions of stability. However, there is clearly a relatively stable image of the future guiding Arne's trajectory, although the path does not always unfold in a direct line. Arne described the encouragement from his brother and the observation of each step Arne took to actualise the same future his brother pursued as paramount, reaffirming the future's plausibility and functioning as a beacon illuminating the path ahead.

An accident then temporarily shattered Arne's hope of actualising his dream. He recalled this period as particularly challenging yet—once again—managed to overcome the setback by following his brother's example. Arne's brother had struggled with a serious illness in his younger years, and Arne described how impressed he was with his brother way of coping, which motivated Arne to “work himself out of the situation”. A situation that could have turned into existential immobility became an active form of waiting (Hage, 2009a), enduring a gruesome schedule while saving money for a one-way plane ticket. Transnational mobility represented the possibility of time travel, revitalising hope in the future. However, his imagination also changed alongside his im/mobility trajectory and experiences (Zittoun, 2020):

I guess living in [country] really shaped the way I would want to live in the future or where I would want to live. That had a big effect on me, as I really enjoyed my time there, and I thought that Scandinavian people were [...] I really liked them, especially out of all the cultures I've met, the people I've met through my travels. [...] So yes, so then it's just been me [pursuing the imagined future] for the last three or four years, trying to make my way, trying to get ahead and where I was trying to go. But it's been a lot of ups and downs along the way. But I'm still quite happy with what I've done, but I think now especially I'm a lot more relaxed about it. [...] Now, if I was to go back to [country], I wouldn't see myself as I have failed, I've had a good experience, I've had a good time, and I think that's probably been the major change that I have had learned living overseas.

The unambiguity and singularity of Arne's imagination equated any deviations with failure. However, gradually through his im/mobility and experiences of diverse manners and paces of life, his imagined future slowly transformed from its uncompromised form to being open-ended in terms of its content (“what”) and temporality (“when”), the location (“where”) had been secondary. Arne felt this shift was positive in hindsight because he previously had no margin for manoeuvre, severely constraining his present. He was trapped in a castle in a sky of his own making. He

now appreciated experiences other than those related to a singular future. Uncertainty in the short term and the experiences he had along the way became significant in themselves, even constitutive of how his imagined future changed. He remained ambivalent in a manner similar to what Glăveanu and Womersley (2021) called *simultaneity*, highlighting that people's affective valences (regarding the future) can be simultaneously imbued with both hope and despair, depending on the temporality of the imagination (Griffiths, 2014). Arne's imagination was ridden with uncertainties concerning what was possible (Glăveanu, 2018b). While Arne could not imagine the short-term future, which was "scary", he remained hopeful overall:

So yes, I guess the future is very open at the moment, and that's kind of scary but also exciting. But I don't know. [...] That's the decision I have to make is whether I keep trying to push with [field of work], which I think I will do, to be honest, or whether I go back and get a more stable job, a normal job, but I don't think that will make me as happy. And I think in the end, I actually want to work in [in the field] now when I finish my career, whether it's [profession] or [profession] or something like that.

Arne's future was no longer ironclad, which he described as simultaneously "exciting" and "scary". I propose this newfound openness begat adventure—kindled by his father. Arne moved from evaluating unforeseen events and possibilities from the perspective of the "end" to valuing experiences in themselves. Thus, Arne slowly abandoned his brother as the main symbolic resource, though fragments of the future he represented remained detectable. He still imagined maintaining some relation to that vision but in a more flexible fashion. His im/mobility contributed to dismantling the stability of the imagined future and instilled a more pragmatic means of imagining the future. Openness ensured that the twists and turns were no longer "burdens". It branched out to new possible futures—and one that rendered staying particularly implausible:

Uncertainty is the word I would use to describe the next six months, but that's okay with me. I'm used to that. [...] I guess the other thing is the reason probably why I'm not happy to stay here or live here, I think I need to [...] I'm like [age], I'm not desperate with it, but I need to [...] I'm ready to settle down and start thinking more about family and all that type of thing. Obviously, you can't put a timeline on it, but I would like to have a [...] Family is really important to me and something I get a lot of joy from. So, it's a reason why I maybe don't want to live in a smaller place at the moment, so I can meet people and see where things go. You know what I mean, I'm not meeting many girls around here and stuff like that. I remember one of the guys from Norway. He lived in a small town, and he's like 32, 33 now. And he's starting to panic and worrying about getting a girlfriend, and I don't want to be in that situation. [...] So, that's really important for me

in the future, because like I said, I think family is [...] With [profession], it's always been so important, and I placed too much importance on it, and I've realised I'm happier when it's still in my life, but it's not as important as before because I think if anything has too much pressure on it, it becomes a burden, it's not as enjoyable. So, I think it's really important for me to have other things outside of [profession], and that's why I love travelling and new experiences. And then family is also another thing that I think; it's like another part of your life, so I guess I need to work towards that because I feel like, at the moment, living the way I am is neglecting. [...] I'm not meeting any girls or anything like that, and I think obviously, it's hugely important who you decide to, you know. I'm not someone who I think would want to not get married. I definitely want to get married and have a family.

Arne described his time on Suðuroy as a positive experience, though he acknowledged that the breakdown of his monolithic future had left space for neglected or side-lined imaginations to emerge. For example, the imagination of finding a partner and starting a family became salient. However, Arne did not perceive this imagination to be possible on Suðuroy because of the deficit of women and the smallness of the community. He deemed finding potential partners unlikely if he stayed.

A yet undefined elsewhere became increasingly attractive because staying on Suðuroy was associated with palpable barriers to establishing a family. Staying threatened to transform into stuckness and existential immobility (Cangià, 2020; Hage, 2009b). Arne did not intend to wait passively but sought to alter the situation through mobility. He used a person whom he met while staying in another Scandinavian country as a symbolic resource to imagine what could happen if he stayed. Arne stated that this person was in his mid-30s and living in a small town. Despite resolute efforts to find a partner, he remained unsuccessful and grew increasingly desperate. Arne attributed this failure to the smallness of the place the person lived in. This past encounter was projected onto Arne's possible future. While the imagination of starting a family had no well-defined temporality, he still felt that the longer he stayed, the longer he was "not progressing". The appeal of establishing a family had roots in Arne's mobile upbringing and affective ties:

It's always been just us because we've never had [...] I don't know my cousins [...] And the same with my grandparents, we had a relationship a little bit from when I was younger, on one side, not so much on the other side. But it's always been my family; it's just been us.

Growing up as a child on the move and away from extended family members consolidated the tightness of the family unit (see also Levitan, 2018; Zittoun et al., 2018). Arne said that he had almost daily contact with his brother although they lived in different countries. This closeness formed the basis for imagining starting a family himself because it was a significant element of his life. “I don’t meet any women here”, he added. Suðuroy did not allow for the actualisation of such imagination. At the same time, mobility was linked to “chasing experiences” after he ceased evaluating events in light of a monolithic future. Mobility attained a new meaning based on experiences of moving through and within various European countries and his father’s mobility, who had travelled considerably and always returned with stories from distant corners of the globe:

We tend to work hard in the family, and it’s really important to have goals in your life and the things you are chasing. [...] And yes, then [my father] had, like I said five or six years where he was living in Africa and, I think, had some amazing experiences there. I loved speaking with my dad about that and hearing about all the things he did and the stories he had from those times, and I always remember growing up thinking that I wanted to have stories like my dad, even though he probably made up half of them. But you know, have stories like and live a life like he had because he’s done some amazing things, lived in really crazy places and lived some crazy situations.

Arne’s quest to “chase” new experiences through mobility was presumably nourished by his father’s stories, instilling a propensity towards being mobile and implicitly connecting geographical mobility with existential mobility (Hage, 2005). He emphasised how these stories always fascinated him—even if they were fictitious—and were later reinforced by his own experiences. Hence, another element that reduced his ability to imagine staying was that living on Suðuroy was not compatible with “chasing” things. However, Arne did not outright reject the imagination of living in a smaller village. In fact, his time on Suðuroy (and elsewhere) had confirmed that it was certainly possible, albeit only insofar as the timing was right and after having achieved certain milestones (Elder & Giele, 2009), that is, having a partner and a more permanent position:

I also realised how much enjoyment you can have in just the simple things in life. A lot of these communities, the people live a simple life here. [...] When we went travelling the other day, it was like a movie. There was a lighthouse, and there’s the guy who owns the lighthouse, like he controls it, and he has his little cottage next to it and all his little garden outside. And my friend was talking, and I just sat and watched him for 20 minutes

just go about his day. It was such a simple life. He's like cutting the lawn, and then he's doing all those types of things. He's not got a phone or anything like that. And maybe 20 years, not 20 years, but when I was back in [city], I could never understand why you would live like that. But now I've lived in these smaller communities, and I understand how much joy you can get from the little things and the simple things, and that was why. And that was another one, because I knew there was a reason that people can live in one place for their whole life and not get bored because there's things you can enjoy from that life. And I guess because I knew I was in, not a dangerous place, but I knew I was in this bubble with [profession] that this is all there is, there's only [profession]. I knew I needed to get outside of that, but the only way to do that was to actually understand how you can enjoy the other things in life. And that was probably one of the biggest ones I learnt, when I was in [Scandinavian country] especially was like, I could have retired from [profession], and yes it would have been hard, and it would've been a big change, but if I'd have left, say, got a job doing something that I enjoy and had a boat, and I had a good family, and I got fishing on the boat on the weekend, or I go up the mountain, I could have as good a life as someone who lives in the city with 20 million people. I could still enjoy myself. I guess that's the biggest thing I would take from living in a smaller community.

The lightkeeper Arne observed while driving around Suðuroy with a friend epitomised his ambivalence towards staying but simultaneously characterised the transformation in his imagination. Arne had realised that a “slower” life was possible, which he associated with smaller villages, implying that Arne experienced places like Suðuroy as having a different temporality. This was almost a romanticisation of a “simpler” life. His experiences of living in small villages facilitated a form of perspective-taking (in this case with the lighthouse keeper) that produced a new appreciation for different ways of life beyond the big cities (Gillespie & Martin, 2014), which was used in his imagination. Arne's first imagination of living in a smaller place, loosely nourished by television shows and movies that did not initially impact his im/mobility, had now entered the realm of possibility after having experienced it first-hand.

Following Arne, I have argued that his im/mobility trajectory was initially guided by a singular imagined future, using his brother as a symbolic resources. This imagination generated considerable im/mobility through Europe but simultaneously constrained him because all deviations equalled failure. He ended up on Suðuroy by chance. The “where” of Arne's future was not fixed but perceived as steps to bring about an elsewhere; that is, to accelerate time (Ringel, 2016b). Through the perspectives and experiences Arne encountered, his imagination gradually transformed, and the singular future was gradually dismantled, branching into new imaginations. While his

adjusted imagined future was uncertain, it unintentionally made staying impossible because the imaginative horizon on Suðuroy could not actualise his new imaginations, particular those concerning starting a family or “chasing experiences”. However, Arne did not categorically reject a sedentary future; the timing was simply not right. Anticipating stuckness or existential immobility (Cangià, 2020; Hage, 2005), Arne again turned to mobility as the solution. Changing im/mobilities at the “right times” (Elder & Giele, 2009) was instrumentalised to maintain a sense of progression and accelerate time. Arne’s imagination of the future proliferated and his trajectory became guided by a more open future, though one still incompatible with Suðuroy.

7.2.2. Imagining Sedentariness Through Mobility

I first met Barbara in Spring 2019 when I overheard her speaking Danish at a local café Emmanuel and I frequented. We spontaneously met her in the streets a few days later, and I asked if she would talk to us concerning living on Suðuroy. Several days later, she visited the little house we rented for an interview but ended up staying. It was a sunny day, and she joined us for a beer on a patch of uncut grass in front of the house after the tape recorder was turned off. An hour or so later, we headed inside because of the cold, and I made pizza, though the old oven was suboptimal for that project. Barbara grew up in Denmark before moving to Suðuroy several years ago. She was one of the few people I met consistently throughout my stays. Her decision to move to Suðuroy was first rather random and had a gradual build-up. She was reacting to a diffuse feeling of being existentially stuck, which triggered imaginations of elsewhere and a later mobility to escape the her previous circumstances. Her sense of an absent linear progression was alleviated by moving in space. Stories and images that a Faroese school friend had displayed to Barbara were then used to tentatively establish the Faroe Islands as the “where”:

I went [to school] with some girls; first, a girl who lived [in the Faroes], and two girls who lived in Iceland. And they had this big showing of where they came from, and I was just sold with the Faroe Islands and Iceland, so it just stayed in my mind, [...] and me and [ex-partner] were just doing nothing [...]. So, I said one day, let’s just move to the Faroe Islands, just get away from everything, get a break, and get some calm in our lives, and then we just decided to do that.

The experience of “doing nothing” that Barbara described can be characterised as “existential immobility” (Hage, 2005), and moving to Suðuroy represented “a way

forward”. Mobility promised to break the temporal suspension. Staying in Denmark was increasingly infringing on her ability to imagine future, and she felt incapable of changing the situation there. Stuckness can trigger the imagination (Cangià, 2020), and the images and stories of the Faroe Islands were then used as symbolic resources to concretise the imagination, evidently guiding her im/mobility. Randomness also impacted where she settled in the Faroes. Coming from a large city, she wanted to avoid living in just another “big city”, such as Tórshavn. When searching the internet for rentals, Suðuroy therefore seemed ideal because of the lower rents and its geographical distance from the capital. Once the decision had been made, Barbara further nourished and differentiated her imagination of what to expect by watching scenic YouTube videos from VFI and reading about the islands. Her imagination was polyphonic because Barbara relied on symbolic resources from multiple sources at once—it is likely that the technologies of imagination created and diffused by VFI had an effect.

I asked Barbara if she already had a timeline for how long she wanted to stay on Suðuroy and if she could imagine staying. Barbara expressed no well-defined temporality, yet her imagination contained a future that was possible but had not yet been temporalised. Its actualisation was contingent on crossing an affective threshold: whether she started to feel stuck again:

I think I’m going to stay here as long. [...] I don’t think I’m going to move back to Denmark. I have a really good friend who lives in Iceland, and I think I’ll maybe go there for a while, but after moving out, it’ll be very difficult to go back to Denmark again.

Barbara could not imagine living in Denmark, which, I suggest, was due to the place still being associated with stuckness. Similarly, when Barbara imagined the possibility of leaving Suðuroy to go to Iceland, it was conditioned upon feeling stuck and was without an explicit “when”. Her imagination of Iceland was also nourished by the stories and images shared by school friends and later reinforced by several visits to the country—trips she described as having been “great”. Experiences and social others had been vastly important for recognising and guiding Barbara’s imagination (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015) and im/mobility (Cole & Groes, 2017; Schapendonk, 2020), particularly in making some elsewhere more appealing than others. Her destinations

were not random *per se*. Instead, the trigger came from moments when she felt as though she was not progressing towards the future.

When we discussed staying on Suðuroy, Barbara implied that the honeymoon phase had petered out, and she occasionally felt stuck due to the social networks and the geographical isolation. Unlike the stuckness that led Barbara to Suðuroy, the transient feelings of being stuck appeared less urgent and not necessarily of an existential nature. Similar to Dwyer's (2009) distinction between "existential" (no object) and "situational" (social and relational) waiting, I propose her stuckness was relational and had not abolished the future because more mundane forms of mobility could mitigate the effects. She stressed that her perceptions of Suðuroy's relative geographical isolation (Vannini, 2011a), its slower pace of life (Amit & Salazar, 2020), and what she perceived as its limited social and cultural possibilities had made staying seem initially exciting and desirable (Kordel & Weidinger, 2019; Mata-Codesal, 2018). However, she had later become more ambivalent. This point reveals the fluidity of the meanings attributed to im/mobilities over time. This ambivalence was reinforced by infrastructure that did not allow for a rapid escape, but she still had no wish to live in Tórshavn.

Moreover, the smallness of the community and increasingly feeling the weight of social control accentuated these feelings. I argue that, while stuckness triggered Barbara's imagination, it did not suffice to contest her staying but instead produced various forms of circular mobility around both the Faroes and abroad. These trips helped her maintain time without permanently moving away. It is not a question of whether people are stuck but determining the gradient of stuckness, the various factors underlying the feeling, and infrastructure's ability to offer a fast and frictionless means of recharging.

Barbara's inchoate ambivalences towards staying were produced in and generative of mobility, as she purposefully attempted to reduce stuckness through mobility:

Oliver: Island stuff, that's a good word. But you hadn't gone island crazy [direct translation of *ø kuller*]?

Barbara: Island crazy. [...] The possibility of moving yourself is out of the question when you've moved all of your things. I don't want to move, but just sometimes when you get a really bad day and are just tired of everything, and just, aargh, I've got to move back to Denmark. Sometimes, it can get a bit anxious. I can't just move if I want to, and if I want to travel home, I'll have to get time off to get away from this island. Sometimes, you can feel extremely stuck here, but I think you get used to it and get over it.

Oliver: Just being stuck.

Barbara: No, and I travel pretty often, so I don't feel so stuck here. I travel a lot more than I would have done when I was in Denmark.

Oliver: So, then you get a break and then it's a [...]

Barbara: Yes, then I'm gone for a week, and then I'm back. I think I've travelled maybe six times in the last seven [months].

Stuckness related to moments when insulation morphed into isolation (Vannini, 2011a), close social networks visibilised social control, and the weather forced social life to a complete and abrupt standstill. Barbara indicated that life on Suðuroy could occasionally be claustrophobic (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Stockdale, 2002). Although mobility provided a way of managing stuckness, it was hindered by having Smyríl as the main artery to and from the island. Barbara was not ready to leave due to the sunk costs involved with settling, which further constituted another obstacle to moving to Iceland. She wanted to stay. Therefore, Barbara used circular mobility to alter the meaning attributed to staying, suppressing the imagination of permanently resettling elsewhere and maintaining time. For example, Barbara mentioned having travelled six times in just seven months, which was more than she would have done in Denmark, supporting the point that mobility can act as an imaginative counterweight. In doing so, she maintained an overall sense of progression. However, mobility is not the antithesis of immobility and, by following their entanglement over time (Kleist, 2020; Salazar, 2021b), Barbara's story paints a dynamic picture of how they constitute each other. People can also feel stuck while moving (Wyss, 2019). I propose that Barbara used mobility as a strategy to manage stuckness and transform the meaning of staying, thus maintaining a positive affective valence towards a sedentary future. The feasibility of this strategy perhaps depends on whether stuckness obliterates imagined futures or remains predominantly relational.

Her trajectory indicated that Barbara deliberately exercised agency over her imaginative processes by adjusting her im/mobility accordingly, ensuring stability, and pushing aside contextual factors challenging the future. Therefore, it was important to understand the gradient and constituents of stuckness. Barbara manipulated the relationship between stuckness and imagination by slowing down or speeding up her mobility at specific times. Cangià explained that stuckness is “a form of blockage and entrapment occurring simultaneously at the temporal, physical, existential and social levels” (2020, p. 3). Barbara’s story illustrates that the composition of these elements can condition the response and form of im/mobility that might ensue.

After discussing how she coped with living on Suðuroy when staying became stuckness, I asked Barbara about her long-term plans in May 2019:

Oliver: Where are you going?

Emmanuel: That’s the question. You said you might not want to spend your whole life here.

Barbara: I think the next stop, if I’m going anywhere, is probably Iceland. But I don’t know yet. And if not Iceland, then somewhere else.

Emmanuel: Somewhere else, but not Denmark.

Barbara: Not Denmark. Just a vacation in Denmark. And I would like it if I could live there in the summertime, maybe, but I get so tired [overtalking].

Oliver: But is it something you discovered after moving here or did you know already when you left that you didn’t want to?

Barbara: When I moved here, but I [...] No, I think I discovered [...] And I also think now, if I move back to Denmark, I think I’ll [end in the same situation] because then it gets boring. I also like the mountains. I like them a lot.

When I revisited Suðuroy in November 2019, moving to Denmark remained unimaginable for Barbara due to fears of ending up in a situation similar to the one she left behind when moving to Suðuroy. She had started to refer to her frequent mobility as “recharging”. Barbara elaborated: “I can only live here if I travel”. Mobility therefore engendered her ability to stay.

Sunlight was scarce during my last visit in January 2020. Smyríl had been cancelled several times due to violent storms, and much of social life had momentarily halted. Barbara characterised this situation as a collective “hibernation”. Violent weather heightened Barbara’s feeling of stuckness, and harsh weather had further limited the island’s possibilities and hampered her ability to use mobility to recharge. She mentioned two significant changes since my last visit: the weather and heightened social visibility. The first dimension, the harsh winter weather, was a habitual part of most conversations during the weeks I stayed in January 2020, and several people independently talked about the prevalence of “winter depression”—a term I had not heard before. The weather largely dictated social and im/mobility practices and gave the island a new and largely unpredictable rhythm (Cresswell, n.d.). Barbara had just returned to Suðuroy after spending Christmas at home but mentioned that the trip lacked its customary recharging effect. Returning had been notably difficult this time, and Barbara blamed the prolonged period of weather-induced hibernation. This experience placed her ability to stay in question, and she even explained that having a television was now an indispensable means of escapism (Hawlina & Zittoun, n.d.). Being physically confined to the house for extended periods amplified stuckness, and her imagination consequently began to drift towards Iceland again. The second dimension, increasing social visibility, related to Barbara’s growing embeddedness in a social network. She now considered herself part of the local community. However, Barbara associated heightened social visibility (Hayfield & Schug, 2019) with a stronger normative pressure to conform. Barbara enjoyed being part of the social network. However, she also expressed ambivalence concerning this change because, while it diminished her sense of stuckness, it created an awareness of what could occur if she transgressed the prescribed normative boundaries.

Barbara shared an anecdote regarding an instance when she was ensnared in a rapidly spreading rumour after a night out, indirectly enforcing the social control and reminding her of the consequences of non-conformity. She afterwards thought twice about what she did, whom she shared confidences with, and where. Barbara used Copenhagen as a reference point because she never censored herself there when speaking on the phone or even when queuing in a supermarket. Rumours served as a powerful instrument of social control. I propose that a new degree of social visibility also embedded Barbara more firmly in the imaginative horizon, reified through direct

experiences, which delegitimised certain imaginings. Even so, Barbara maintained a pragmatic spirit compared to others, stating she could easily leave the island if a serious event transpired—unlike those who had lived here their entire lives.

This newly enhanced awareness of social norms that personal experience had incited constituted a barrier to imagining a sedentary future and bolstered the social aspect of stuckness. I argue that the increasing social visibility contributed to transforming the meaning Barbara attributed to staying and her affective valences of the future. During one of our conversations, she concluded that imagining staying seemed increasingly implausible during winter and also triggered the imagination of moving to a place with “more room for expression”. Barbara was possibly nearing the threshold discussed earlier, and the formerly abstract imagination of a future in Iceland was becoming more concrete. This alternative future that, in spring 2019, had only contained a possible “where” had, in winter 2020, begun to contain a “when” due to evolving feelings of stuckness resulting from a harsh winter and growing social visibility. Here stuckness builds gradually and does not produce a clear imagination immediately. Being regularly on the move had lost a degree of its sedentarising power.

Following Barbara, I revealed how staying and stuckness oscillated with the changing weather and social visibility, and mobility functioned as a deliberate coping strategy that maintained a sense of progression. Moving to Suðuroy resulted from emerging feelings of existential immobility because the future was difficult to imagine without instigating a change in circumstance. Barbara turned to mobility and its promise of reinstalling linear temporality (Griffiths, 2014), with randomness playing a role in where she landed. However, as the honeymoon phase petered out, new—albeit less intense—feelings of stuckness appeared related to insularity turning into isolation, limited opportunities, and a slower pace of life. However, Barbara actively used frequent and circular mobility to maintain a sedentary imagination. Later, increasing social visibility and a particularly harsh winter weather generated a more pervasive stuckness, and Barbara’s imagination of moving to Iceland gradually concretised. I argue that Barbara’s trajectory demonstrates that the dichotomisation of staying and stuckness is unsustainable—forms and meanings of immobility are diverse and dynamic and do not exclude mobility (Salazar, 2021b). Stuckness must be approached as a gradient that depends factors shifting the meanings of so-called immobility, along

with how people act to transform them. Dwyer's (2009) distinction between the situational and existential can nuance analytical distinctions. Stuckness is not just the loss of a future but impacts the imagination in various ways, and the im/mobilities that ensue are linked to the gradient and its constituents. Existential immobility then arises when sufficient or appropriate dimensions coalesce to the extent that waiting for the future (Axelsson et al., 2017) becomes a non-viable option. Imagination is then intrinsically related to the meaning people attribute to their im/mobility trajectories and vice versa.

7.2.3. Mobility Sedentarising Imagination

I first met Finn at Café Mormor⁶⁷ in Tvøroyri in May 2019. The café is situated five minutes' walk from the centre of Tvøroyri, in the direction of Froðba, and is located in a small two-storey house with a rusty sign outside. The entrance was painted light green. An accountant's office stood to its left (indicated by a sign), from which I could hear a person speaking Danish. Through the entrance, a steep staircase and a small hallway led into the first room. The room was painted in yellow and was filled with wooden tables and chairs. Its windows overlooked the fjord and its walls were decorated with a mix of paintings, black and white photos, portraits from a bygone time, and a stuffed duck. Soft jazz played at low volume. A mannequin wearing a grey jacket and a hat stood next to a box of vinyl records. Emmanuel and I greeted two younger men and proceeded to the next room. This room was painted pastel green and decorated with an assortment of old advertisement posters. We sat in a lounging area with a yellow couch and a couple of soft chairs. A few faded portraits hung, descriptions beneath them, and old Faroese and Danish newspapers were piled around the room. The counter was a hole in the wall above a menu written on chalk boards in Faroese. The owner greeted us in English and translated the menu. Finn, wearing jeans cut around the ankles, was sitting at one of the tables and ordered some coffee and a slice of cake. The owner told him that she was going to a funeral and said he could just grab the cake from the oven himself. She then turned to us and asked us politely to pay but said we could stay. Later, we got talking. Finn grew up in Denmark and had recently moved to the Faroe Islands. After talking a little, we decided to meet again once I returned in the summer. The many conversations I have had with him since—in the

⁶⁷ "Mormor" translates into "grandmom" in Danish.

Faroe Islands and elsewhere—form the basis of this analysis. All direct quotations presented are from an interview he agreed to after I had known him for a considerable period.

Finn initially had no concrete imagination of moving to the Faroe Islands and expressed that, prior to making the decision, he had felt at a somewhat “existential standstill” because he was finishing his education. However, the pending transition did not initially prompt any im/mobility but perhaps instilled an openness to change, demonstrating that imagination is not always driving mobilities. He was content with life where he lived and had a wide social network. He expressed a curiosity for mobility, partially cultivated by hearing stories from his parents’ extensive travels and witnessing several friends moving abroad. It was Finn’s Faroese partner who created the link to the Faroe Islands and who proved instrumental in facilitating the move. They visited the islands regularly for years, but the more permanent settlement first materialised when his partner found a job in the Faroes. However, staying on Suðuroy was immediately dismissed; instead, they decided to settle in Tórshavn.

Two months after our first meeting, I was back in the Faroe Islands for Olavsøka—a national celebration named after the Norwegian king, Olav, commonly assumed to have christened the Faroese (West, 1972; Wylie, 1983). Finn had invited me to join them for dinner at his place, together with friends and family. With little idea of what to expect, I arrived alone, tentatively entering a long hallway after knocking several times in vain. Finn was nowhere in the room, so I awkwardly introduced myself to a group of strangers, including his partner, whom I had not met before. The guests, several of whom was wearing the national Faroese attire, sat around a dining table close to a French balcony. At the far end of the room was a packed bookshelf and a collection of vinyls. A few well-kept green plants were distributed around the living room. I noticed their attires had different colours and patterns and, after asking, I learned that they were personalised. Faroese specialities—such as dried fish and fermented whale—were already prepared and later served alongside chilli sin carne.

After five to ten minutes, Finn entered the room and placed a chair next to me. We first caught up, and I learned that he had just finished his education and now worked in the service sector. I asked how the first months had been. He replied that

bureaucratic procedures and entering tight-knit social circles had proven more difficult than anticipated but said that everyone had been exceedingly kind. He liked the Faroes and its nature. His imagination of the future had also gradually concretised over the past two months, and he had begun searching for jobs in a specific sector. The evening turned into a dusk with a grey-blueish tint, which lasted most of the night, and the group sat in a half circle around the French balcony with jackets on. The conversation grew more animated. Finn said that the experience of preparing his last assignment had fuelled this new imagination. However, he also mentioned sporadically feeling “trapped” (Vannini, 2011a, 2011b), amplified by living on islands and with infrastructure that restricted his ability to simply go somewhere whenever he wanted a change of scenery. Not having the same social network or cultural possibilities available compared to the place he moved from also played a role. In other words, this feeling of being “trapped” was relative to the place he lived before and impacted Finn’s ability to imagine a sedentary future. He expressed that one of the factors causing this experience was the absence of social life and cultural events occurring independently of him:

It is probably a question of degrees, I would say. I have also thought much about it, and something I have realised that I thrive on is this feeling that something is happening independent of me. Despite that, I am not participating in everything, [...] then something is happening. People are out. People are doing something that is interesting. This feeling you have to some degree in Tórshavn and not at all on Suðuroy. So, it is this feeling that life is happening independently of you. If I should speak about it in a banal or mundane manner, then this feeling that some social events are interesting, that there are some parties that you do not attend, exist nevertheless, whereas when you are on Suðuroy, then you feel like the entire [village] is part of the same group that you are in.

Finn had realised that he needed events happening around him to “thrive” regardless of whether he participated, which was also one of the reasons for opting not to live on Suðuroy because “not much happened” comparatively. Finn recognised that Tórshavn offered, perhaps increasingly, social and cultural opportunities similar to those he had enjoyed before moving—although in less quantity. He also believed that Suðuroy’s smaller population made it difficult to sustain social activities, implying that the size of the community might generate a fatalism because social relations were formed based on belonging—not necessarily shared interests—and this reduced prospects of randomly encountering new people. The day after, I randomly met Finn and his partner while having a drink with an Australian woman at Sirkus, a three-storey bar

in Tórshavn. We headed out into the massive crowd of amassing people. Two or three people played music from a lift, which looked a little dangerous. We continued towards the place in front of the parliament building, where the midnight singing was due to occur. Light bulbs decorated the trees. The square was filled with people, many of whom were locking hands and singing Faroese songs while slowly moving around.

One week later, I was back in Tórshavn to meet Finn. We decided to take a boat to attend a local festival on Nólsoy, a small island 20 minutes from Tórshavn. Surprisingly, it was one of those rare Faroese summer days when the sun intensified the grass' greenness, and the ocean resembled a darkened mirror. After the short crossing and a quick stroll through the island's only village, we bought beers and decided to hike up the mountain while waiting for others to arrive. As we walked through the marshland towards the cloud-covered peak, we talked about the future. Finn was still trying to find a job in a specific sector while realising options were limited in the Faroes. Moreover, he did not want to leave at the time. Moving to Tórshavn had been energy-consuming, and his partner had just started a new job, so Finn was committed to giving life there a proper chance. He had found an advertisement for a position abroad and had written to the person responsible for hiring to ask if remote work was possible, which it was. Finn believed this might be a good compromise, hoping that regular and circular mobility would lessen the lurking sense of entrapment and, in turn, engender his staying. His imagined future was marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, the future was materially and affectively sedentarised by the sunk costs involved in moving to the islands and wanting to make a genuine effort to stay for his partner. On the other hand, feeling occasionally trapped made his future drift elsewhere and caused him to contemplate being more mobile. He expected regular transnational mobility would balance staying and entrapment. His experience of moving to the Faroes also cast doubt on the somewhat rose-coloured, romanticised stories of mobility his parents had shared—a process he called “demystification”. While his parents' travels had arguably instilled curiosity, it was challenged by his experience.

Fast forward to a dark and windy afternoon in November 2019 on Suðuroy. While I was having a coffee at a local café, Finn unexpectedly entered. Since my last visit in August 2019, he had started working in another European country and now spent

about one week away each month. Otherwise, he worked remotely. He described the place where he worked as buzzing with life compared to Tórshavn. Moreover, while he had initially found transnational commuting exciting, the meaning had quickly changed. Mobility had become somewhat tedious, amplified by the fact that travelling from the Faroe Islands required a layover in Copenhagen, increasing travel time and adding extra costs compared to if they had lived in another European capital. Furthermore, heightened mobility became a chore and stole time that he could have spent with his partner. Planes, trains, and buses had lost some of their charms, and his mobility experiences triggered an ambivalent imagination. His imagination and sense of time slowly transformed with changing im/mobilities.

While working abroad had facilitated a temporary reduction of trappedness, it also provided Finn with new experiences and reminders of how life could be different and of what he was missing. Regularised circular mobility had partially held its promise but increasingly required too much energy and time away from his partner. I propose that Finn's mobility and periods abroad triggered imaginations of less mobile future due to consideration for his partner and reminders of an alternative life. Constantly moving between places emphasised relative differences. What was first imagined to be the solution transformed into a hurdle. A combination of localised constraints and excessive mobility triggered his imagination, and Finn began imagining a more sedentary future as a result (e.g. Cresswell, 2012; Fuller, 2010). He was unsure if Tórshavn was the right destination for slowing down because the conditions that produced the sense of trappedness remained present. However, without mobility, Finn feared that stuckness would again grow pronounced. He therefore began to imagine a future elsewhere.

During my last stay in winter 2020, Finn and I met at a noisy bar in Tórshavn over a couple of pints to conduct a formal interview. Finn explained that he and his partner had begun to discuss the possibility of moving to Denmark. He expressed that circular mobility had only moderately reduced the feelings of entrapment—it had not removed the negative affective valences of a sedentary future in the Faroes. Imagining a future elsewhere had become increasingly concrete and was seen as a way of changing his situation. A future elsewhere would reduce travel time to his workplace and meant living in a lively city in which he already had an established social network. Moving

would directly address several negative elements of living in the Faroes, such as excessive mobility, the difficulties of entering social networks, insufficient time with his partner, and feeling events happened independently of him. Regular transnational mobility had decreased the urgency of moving away from the Faroes but had simultaneously consolidated the notion that a change was necessary:

The whole condition that there is not the mental state of emergency, which characterised my time before getting [the position abroad], it has dimmed down significantly. It has probably not increased my need to stay here, but it has definitely increased the prerequisites for me being able to thrive here to a moderate degree.

Although, through changing his mobility, Finn could thrive modestly and resist succumbing to feelings of entrapment, it was not equivalent to imagining a long-term sedentary future. Mobility had sedentarised his imagination for the immediate future while providing new symbolic resources with which to imagine life differently. His experiences of im/mobility (Adey, 2017; Kalir, 2013) and the immobilising role of affective ties (Cole & Groes, 2017; Pedersen, n.d.) contributed to changing his trajectory. Despite the short time he had spent there, Finn mentioned that he had already established meaningful social relationships at his workplace, establishing contacts based on mutual interest instead of connections derived from living in the same community, which he sometimes struggled with in the Faroes.

Two beers into the interview, I asked Finn directly if he imagined staying in the Faroe Islands in the foreseeable future:

It is incredibly hard to admit to oneself because as soon as you say it out loud to another, or you say it in your head, then it sounds like a retreat from trying to make it work. [...] I think I have to need to meet people under different circumstances than what appears to be possible here within some years.

About nine months after our first meeting at the local café on Suðuroy, Finn's imagination had transformed his im/mobility trajectory in several ways. He had initially assumed that regular circular and transnational mobility might present a strategy for managing feelings of entrapment, yet now he imagined a future elsewhere because he did not expect circumstances in the Faroes to soon change, despite the societal transformations detailed earlier. Moreover, the experiences he had gained

through being mobile were used as new symbolic resources for highlighting the relative difference between places. He had to wait longer for the future to “arrive” in the Faroes than he was willing to.

Following Finn, I have revealed how his imagination transformed in tandem with his changing im/mobility and experiences, emphasising the decisive role of affective ties, social networks, and relative possibilities. Finn’s staying transformed into a sense of trappedness after experiencing difficulties penetrating social networks and having fewer cultural opportunities relative to the place he had moved from. Moreover, living on an island made it challenging to simply change the scenery when needed. Wanting to give living in the Faroes a genuine chance, these circumstances fashioned the idea that regular and circular mobility might engender his staying. Finn anticipated that changing his im/mobility trajectory could mitigate feelings of being trapped. However, this coping strategy proved only “moderately effective” because increasing mobility was experienced as stealing time away from his partner, providing new experiences of how life might be elsewhere and visibilising the difference in imaginable futures. In other words, the mobility that was first conceived as potentially engendering his staying and mediating feelings of being trapped, gradually produced the opposite effect; that is, imagining being elsewhere still more.

7.2.4. Slow Sedentarising of the Imagination

I first met Fríða in the late hours of Olavsøka in 2019 and have since met her several times in the Faroe Islands and Denmark. She was in her 30s, grew up on Suðuroy, but now lived in Denmark. This analysis centres on one qualitative interview and other causal conversations. Fríða left Suðuroy without a clear idea of whether she would return. Although she expressed excitement regarding the current societal transformations, imagining returning and staying remained ridden with ambivalences. On the one hand, the technologies of the imagination made a future in the Faroes increasingly plausible. On the other hand, harsh weather combined with what she described as a “resistance to change” impeded that imagination.

When I asked Fríða why she left Suðuroy in the first place, she attributed the decision to a curiosity for what lies beyond the islands, which surfaced at a young age:

Fríða: Yes, I think so. The first time I left was with a friend. We went to [the European capital], and we were 16 years old. We stayed with a family for two weeks, and it was great, and then more trips followed. More different trips.

Oliver: Was there a time when you thought, “Now I must leave for somewhere else?” Have you always wanted to live elsewhere, or is it something that [...]?

Fríða: I don’t know about always, but I have always thought about how it would be to live somewhere else. Yes, I think so, at least when I was a teenager. There, I thought about how it would be. I think so.

Fríða was eager to explore the world and other ways of life when entering her teenage years. She explicitly linked this inclination for mobility to growing up on an island, where the sharp and omnipresent geographical borders clearly demarcated the “here” and “there” and almost stimulated images of elsewhere by default. Gaïni makes a similar point, proposing that “geographical isolation has, ironically, to a certain extent encouraged the wanderlust and migration of generations of young Faroese Islanders” (2013a, p. 25). Hayfield has also illustrated how many young Faroese imagine a life abroad (2017).

Fríða mentioned her first trip abroad to a European capital with a friend as an important experience generative of additional mobility. Fríða questioned whether this wanderlust was nourished by her parents. People occasionally portrayed the older generation as being relatively immobile and having a somewhat parochial outlook—despite being content with life on Suðuroy. She and her family did not travel to a significant extent during her upbringing, but she regarded relative immobility as the norm back then, and others I spoke to suggested the same. Travelling to faraway places was less commonplace than now, although Denmark was still a frequently visited destination. It is likely that the high cost of flying or the time-consuming journey (33 hours) across the North Atlantic on the *Norröna* (the international ferry) reduced people’s mobility to and from the islands. Fríða intimated that the mass media and internet compensated, providing new cultural elements that effectively expanded the imaginable for younger generations, with the television being widely diffused in the 1980s (Andreassen, 1992). This point echoed Appadurai’s (1996) proposition that technological advancements that facilitate the circulation of people and media images produce a heightened awareness of potential lives to be lived. Thus, consuming media created awareness of the asymmetry between imaginative horizons regarding what

was possible elsewhere—supposedly affecting the younger generation to a greater extent—and geographical isolation reinforced the relative difference.

As previously detailed, many people moved away from Suðuroy, particularly during the devastating 1990s fisheries crisis, creating precedents and a socially recognised pathway. However, for Fríða, not “fitting in” also played a role:

Oliver: But is it something that you have gotten from your parents [her curiosity and imagination of elsewhere]?

Fríða: No, not at all. I just think that I never really felt that I fitted in on Suðuroy because when you only know Suðuroy, then you feel like, “It is me, right?” Or that is how it is, and only when you begin to travel can you see that there is something completely different outside. I think that has triggered the lust to travel.

Oliver: Yes, and do you think others also have this experience of not fitting in on the island?

Fríða: Yes, I think so. For example, when you live in Copenhagen, then you can easily find your types, and then that’s that. This is not the case on the Faroe Islands—very little, at least—because there are so few people and few groups, so everyone is friends with everyone and types you might not be friends with in Copenhagen.

One of the main factors reinforcing Fríða’s wanderlust and imagination of living elsewhere was the feeling of “not fitting” on Suðuroy, partly due to her inability to “control” her social network. Friendship was based more on belonging than mutual interest. Once Fríða started being more mobile, this difference became apparent because she started to meet new people with different perspectives. Changes in her im/mobility gave Fríða the possibility to engage in new perspective-takings (Gillespie, 2006a; Mead, 1934b), facilitating a distancing and self-reflection. Beforehand, she assumed that “it was just her”. I propose that the limited mobility in and around the islands during Fríða’s upbringing preserved a contracted imaginative horizon due, in part, to a scarcity of diverse perspectives to engage with, impoverishing self-reflection. Mobility entailed encountering alterity and new perspectives that allowed Fríða to view her relation to Suðuroy in a different light, expanding her sense of possibility (Glăveanu, 2020a) and providing further symbolic resources with which to nourish her imaginings (Vygotsky, 1931). It also opened time and produced changes to her im/mobility trajectory. The conditions on Suðuroy were uncondusive to imagining a

sedentary future for Fríða because the smallness and limited mobility reinforced a community of faith (Charmillot & Dahinden, 2021; Kristiansen, 2005) with strong normative boundaries. Meeting people based on mutual interest, as opposed to out of obligation, was said to be difficult. This aspect of communal life was contrasted to Fríða's growing awareness of what was possible elsewhere and her positive experiences from visits abroad. To overcome these constraints, Fríða increased her mobility and, through doing so, gradually became cognisant of the barriers that blocked her imagination on Suðuroy, albeit gradually and in tandem with her mobility.

Zittoun et al. (2020) argued that the contours of imaginative horizons can only be identified retrospectively. However, moving to the individual level, I suggest that moving in space can have a similar effect—experiencing different imaginative horizons also strengthens awareness of relational differences. Movement in space can precipitate symbolic movement (Gillespie et al., 2012; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015), which arguably transpired in Fríða's case. The changes to her im/mobility expanded the imaginable, igniting a self-perpetuating cycle.

Fríða remembered how the local discotheque was full during the weekends as a teenager but also how it slowly dwindled. Fríða's experiences of incremental emptying arguably worsened after her mobility increased because she could contrast the emptying with many elsewheres. It made the emptying “at home” prominent by comparison. She expressed that Suðuroy had, at best, stagnated and, at worst, declined, describing local conditions in which “nothing has happened” and a Suðuroy that “has declined”.

I was curious to learn how Fríða's family and friends reacted to her announcing plans to move away. Fríða explained that no one thought much about it—moving was what young people had to do. The literature on youth mobility has documented that the absence of education and professional opportunities are significant factors in leaving (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006), bolstered by the valorisation of the urban and mobility in general (Looker & Naylor, 2009), generating a “mobility imperative” (Farrugia, 2016). Hayfield (2017) claimed that a “culture of migration” existed in the Faroe Islands, and I agree that several of the conditions were present when Fríða grew up (see also Horváth, 2008; Kandel et al., 2002), including weak socioeconomic

development, sparse and often undesirable employment opportunities, swift deindustrialisation, and exposure to continuous out-migration. However, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, the technologies of the imagination and economic prosperity have changed those conditions. Fríða described moving away as a normal rite of passage (Horváth, 2008) and a means of “developing” (Kaufmann, 2021)—a narrative traced all the way back to Einar’s younger years in the 1940s and 1950s (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). The islands’ colonial past might have contributed to creating the association between mobility and development because people internalised the temporal othering (Isfeldt, 2020). Nonetheless, the societal transformations, infrastructural projects, and the rebranding of the islands also made Fríða begin to consider staying.

I invited Fríða to imagine alternative lives because I thought this exercise could reveal the situated nature of the imagination and explore her experience of what different future places might afford her. Thus, I asked her to imagine her life if she had grown up in Tórshavn instead of on Suðuroy:

I perhaps also believe that my upbringing would have been different because one would have focused on finding people with the same interests rather than feeling that one should be friends with everyone. The thing with travel, I also think it would come at some point or another because it is an archipelago. It is normal for people who grow up on an island that one looks beyond. I think so, and then there are some who do not wish to travel out, but I think it is pretty normal that, at one point, people need it. I think so.

Fríða imagined being less bound by fatalistic bonds and more able to connect with people based on shared interests, reflecting that Tórshavn was associated with lower levels of social control and therefore a larger normative space of manoeuvre. However, Fríða still imagined the need to be mobile, mentioning the saliency of geographical borders and isolation. Geographical features must be regarded as factors shaping people’s imagination because they demarcates people’s experiences. When combined with access to the world through digital media, the ocean arguably makes impossibilities more salient and the elsewherees additionally intriguing and thus more prominently present in people’s imaginations. This is particularly pertinent given the ocean’s omnipresence—certainly in sound if not always in sight—and that most villages are tucked away in valleys and surrounded by steep mountains engulfing the

lived environment. Geographies impose clear limits on mobility and sometimes force immobility (Blondin, 2020), restricting people's symbolical universe.

When I invited Fríða to imagine her life if she had stayed, her imagination was impoverished. "I cannot imagine that I would have stayed", she said. Imagining this alternative trajectory was simply not plausible for her. Fríða used people she knew to have stayed and her experiences of having lived on and visited Suðuroy in her dismissal of that imagination, concluding that "there is not much". She imagined that staying probably meant following the "normal path", entailing a stable job, having children, and buying a house. In other words, experiencing Suðuroy's slow emptying and its constraints precluded her from even imagining an alternative future characterised by sedentariness.

When I candidly asked Fríða if she could imagine moving back to the Faroes and Suðuroy, a sense of ambivalence pervaded her considerations of staying:

I don't know. I actually talked with [partner] about it. For me, it would be ideal to live on the Faroe Islands from May to October and then somewhere warm for the rest of the year [laughing], because then I would do those things I like on the Faroe Islands and then leave when it became too much [laughing].

Fríða was not entirely convinced that a sedentary future was plausible at present but mentioned that she and her partner had discussed the possibility. While Fríða enjoyed the summer activities on the Faroe Islands, she wanted to avoid the harsh winter weather when little was happening. For Fríða, imagining a sedentary future was contingent upon having the capacity to be mobile. Staying was entangled with mobility and depended on her motility (Kaufmann et al., 2017). Improvements to transportation infrastructure—such as the expanding network of roads and the number of flights—increased the plausibility. Nevertheless, Suðuroy was still described as relatively isolated, with mobility to and from the island being slower and weather-dependent. Therefore, living on the islands was not yet on the table:

If I want to live on Suðuroy? As said, it would not be for the entire year—that I won't be able to do. So, it won't be on Suðuroy that I would live because of the attitude of non-cooperation. It is important to me that it [cooperation] works.

Repeating that staying all year on Suðuroy remained impossible, Fríða suggested this related to an “attitude of non-cooperation” derived from her experiences of trying to launch various initiatives. Fríða felt people were resistant to change, particularly in Tvøroyri. This sentiment hampered her imaginations of staying. However, she expressed that matters were different in Vágur, referencing the technologies of the imagination already discussed in Chapter 5; namely, the encouragement and support of initiatives that break with the inertia of the past. When asked if the sub-sea tunnel might change anything, she remarked: “I cannot imagine myself living in Tvøroyri at all now”. Staying was only plausible if she found a job that necessitated regular mobility, elaborating that “a sedentary job in Tvøroyri, I would never be able to do”.

Fríða also stated that she knew exceedingly few people who had moved back to either Tvøroyri or Vágur:

But there are probably more who move to Vágur—there are more things happening in Vágur. I don’t know if it is the social. [...] It is probably the way that those from Vágur talk about Vágur. They are hyping it.

It seemed that imagining a future in Vágur was more plausible compared to Tvøroyri because the initiatives aligned with the changes she imagined for the future. She also positively viewed Vágur’s atmosphere of transformation and the excitement fostered around the village that had been created by disseminating positive stories and building first-of-its-kind infrastructure. The technologies of the imagination had helped portray the village as a place where things were “happening”, promising an exciting and synchronised future while highlighting Tvøroyri’s relative emptying.

In following Fríða, I have demonstrated how a combination of mobility, geographical features, a sense of fatalism, and of “not fitting in” germinated an imagination of elsewhere over time that in turn guided her im/mobility trajectory. Geographically moving between imaginative horizons and taking the perspective of new social others highlighted relative differences in possibilities for Fríða while opening times other than the “normal” path. These elements contributed to rendering the imagination of staying in the Faroes implausible while serving as the impetus for additional mobility. Fríða had begun to consider moving back due to the societal transformation and improved infrastructure, but living on Suðuroy was still contingent on finding a job

that offered regular mobility and alleviated “non-cooperation”. Her imagination also demonstrates the uneven effects of the technologies of the imagination because Vágur was appraised as more feasible. She explicitly referenced the “hype” and, as I have proposed, the invitation to be agentic over an uncertain yet hopeful future. While the technologies of the imagination had not made the notion of staying entirely convincing, they had made it more specific and plausible.

7.2.5. Developing the Imagination Through Mobility

I first met Marin in August 2019 over cake and coffee. She was in her 30s and had returned to Suðuroy after living abroad for many years. Soon after finishing high school, Marin moved abroad, as did most of her peers. This analysis is primarily based on an interview and is supplemented by a focus group I moderated with her and several others six months later. When Marin left, she did not imagine returning, but staying was gradually made plausible after witnessing the societal transformation:

Never. If you ask anybody, they would have said, “She’s gone. She will never return. Never, never, never”. I had never imagined it, but I also think because you are 17–18 years old, you just feel that something is missing. I also felt that people were narrow-minded. You, of course, have to remember that while things change rapidly in Copenhagen, they also change here. Things are not 100% at a standstill. I think there is still a long way to go, but it is on an entirely different way than back then. I also think that is an important message to get out there—everything changes.

Marin experienced the slow emptying and out-migration of friends while growing up. Staying was progressively not viewed as an option. She felt that possibilities were limited on Suðuroy and that some people were slightly narrow-minded. I propose this representation of others might stem from the fact that, unlike most, her family travelled at least twice a year. She had therefore encountered new perspectives and had different experiences that pushed normative boundaries and allowed her to view the island differently. At the same time, Marin challenged the common trope that Suðuroy existed in a temporal vacuum, saying that transformations do occur—if at a somewhat sluggish pace (Amit & Salazar, 2020). Her im/mobility visibilised the relation between imaginative horizons, particularly when she moved away.

Marin further elaborated on how the social environment acted as a barrier to imagining—then and, to a lesser extent, now. She proposed that people were socialised

into a relatively rigid normativity and that those who contested or crossed the boundaries would be potentially ostracised:

I have never heard anyone here say, “When I grow up, I want to become an entrepreneur” or “When I grow up, I want to become an inventor”. You just don’t say something like that around here. You are also not motivated to think along these lines—that it is possible at all. It is pretty square, and it is—how do I say it?—I think some think that people are crazy if you think like that. [...] At least, I believe that when we created this dance school and arranged shows, and you know, we thought that we were quite cool. I also think they thought it was fun enough. But, if I then said, “Now I want to become a professional dancer”, then my mother would say, “Yes”. My mother has always said, “You must do whatever makes you happy”, but I then think I did not feel that I could still not do it because it was simply not an option. It is serious. I also think that you are here.

Marin experienced feeling trapped in certain “streams” growing up that neither encouraged nor rewarded any type of change. Marin said that nobody imagined becoming “entrepreneurs” or “inventors”—two professions noted for the creation of newness and the breaking of norms. This socialisation was said to limit what people imagined and little social recognition was offered for what fell outside “streams” (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015). Marin experienced the current of the streams first-hand when trying to start a dance club, but the normative pressure from the small community encroached. Lawrence et al. (1992) indicated that growing up in a highly religious environment could impoverish people’s capacity to imagine by following a young woman who eventually broke free by reading an encyclopaedia that provided more cultural elements for imagining. I propose that mobility had an equivalent role for Marin. That is, by moving in space, she expanded her sense of possibility and imagining (Glăveanu, 2020b, 2020c). These “streams” Marin identified also created a sense of stuckness (Cangià, 2020; Hage, 2005) or, as Straughan et al. phrased it, “We suggest this ‘temporal immobilisation’ hinders their ability to undertake future-oriented actions and, subsequently, their ability to plan for and control the course of their own lives” (2020, p. 3). Not all futures are temporally “immobilised”; only those that diverge from the “streams”. Neither is stillness inherently negative—despite what the romanticisation of mobility suggests (Bissell & Fuller, 2010; Salazar, 2021b). Indeed, some decided to stay on Suđuroy and were perfectly content. However, Marin felt that the limited margin of manoeuvre led to the prospect of existential immobility and that the future was therefore made elsewhere (Jovchelovitch et al., 2018; Ringel, 2018).

Marin's mother played a significant role in circumventing several of the normative pressures the "streams" posed by providing social and affective recognition. For example, Marin recalled wanting to become a dancer; however, this landed outside what was socially sanctioned (such as soccer, handball, and swimming). Nevertheless, her mother's persistent support empowered Marin to dare transgress these rigid boundaries. She eventually started a dance club, underscoring just how important social others are in relation to legitimising and delegitimising specific imaginations while implying that some relationships are more significant than others. Nevertheless, when Marin eventually moved away, the internalised "restrictive" socialisation followed and continued impacting her capacity to imagine. This changed when she was confronted by a teacher, who asked Marin to either work on being reflexive or cease her education. In her words:

I remember an assignment at [school]. I thought it was a really good assignment and, you know [...] school and stuff had always been quite easy for me. I had never experienced any big challenges. There, I remember that I got 02 [lowest passing grade], and I was, "What?" Then I had a talk with the [teacher], and I thought, "What have I done wrong?" and she said to me, "But your reflections are only three lines", and I replied: "Yes, and what is that again?" Then she said to me, I think her words have meant a lot to me, "Now, you must go home and really think about what it is, and then you need to think about whether or not you want to be here, because if you don't even know what that is. [...] There I got my first [gesturing being hit] ever. (My translation)

Marin further claimed that people are not socialised to imagine "big". Equally, they are not being offered the tools necessary to actualise their imaginations:

I actually think there are many who have great ideas, but they never get as far as to take the next step. Perhaps because one should not think too much of oneself, but perhaps also because they have the competencies to realise them, but I think many prefer if it sustains itself. That is, they just don't dream big here. It is not something you do; it is somehow not in the DNA.

Marin expressed that some people could indeed imagine alternatives to the present but were either barred from sharing them (because they might lead to social ostracisation) or they simply did not know how to actualise them (because there was no adequate support structure). Combined, she thought that people growing up on Suðuroy were not socialised to "dream big", based on her own experience, suggesting that those with less experience of mobility also had the most trouble overcoming the

seeming rigid boundaries. It is conceivable that the “Janteloven”, a series of Danish proverbs formulated by Aksel Sandemose⁶⁸, contributed to keeping people’s imagination in accordance with accepted norms. This is because Janteloven essentially stipulate that people should not think of themselves as superior to others (e.g., “don’t believe that you are something”). Several people I talked with explicitly referred to Janteloven and expressed disregard for conspicuous consumption and the ostentatious flaunting of convention. These proverbs established an upper limit to what people can, or indeed should, change. Imagining alternatives to the present and, perhaps more so, acting to accomplish them clashed with the principles of Janteloven because the nature of advancing an alternative to the present amounts to diagnosing it as in need of improvement. By extension, the person imagining and spearheading any initiative—whether explicitly or implicitly—is claiming to know what the future *should* be (Glăveanu, 2018). When attempting to actualise a future that diverged from the inertia of the past, the person must be willing to take a (metaphorical) beating. These proverbs were undoubtedly more impactful in the past, yet I often heard people refer to them. Therefore, I propose they still act as barriers to unleashing people’s imagination, which was evident in Marin’s reference to the concept of “DNA”. In describing people’s inability to “dream big”, she indicated that the barriers to doing so are deep-rooted and considered almost biological. DNA has traditionally been assumed to be immutable, indicating a tremendous normative power at work. To continue the metaphor, Marin’s belief that mobility enabled people to break free can be compared to CRISPR (a technology that allows for manipulating human DNA). Hence, moving in space was said to have the potential to unleash people’s imagination and equip them to withstand the beating, although this is also possible through ideas and the mobilities of others and ideas (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021).

On these grounds, Marin questioned the technologies of the imagination aiming to engender sedentariness because she equated mobility with “development”. Mobility had helped her find time. Her reasoning was that, if people do not try something else, where would they obtain the symbolic resources to imagine things differently? Marin acknowledged that it is essential to encourage younger people to stay on the Faroe Islands; for example, by offering them the possibility of studying in Tórshavn.

⁶⁸ <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/10-vigtigste-ting-vide-samfund/jantelovens-10-bud>

However, based on her own experiences, she remained unsure that people would obtain the capacity for “taking a beating” if they had not lived elsewhere:

I’m able to understand this point that we want the young to stay here on the Faroe Islands and take their education here. However, on the other hand, I also think that, if you want people back with some vision that lies beyond those made by the norms, then I also think that it is important to have tried something different. I really think that it is difficult to think in new pathways if you have seen nothing else.

This idea that mobility nourishes and develops the imagination possibly originated in her experiences of returning—coming back and seeing “potential changes” everywhere. Travelling in time is linked to travelling in space. Marin used the technologies of the imagination to sedentarise her future, speaking about the exciting developments in Vágur and wishing to “contribute”. Nevertheless, she always implied that mobility was a precondition for pushing the boundaries or, at least, encountering more mobilities.

Portraying those who return as the engines of socioeconomic transformation was also present in Dzenovska’s work on emptiness in the Latvian countryside (2020), though it inevitably also depended on people’s social network and readiness (Cassarino, 2004). Returning is not always linked to development but can be associated with despair and shame when not meeting the social expectations “at home”, as Kleist has demonstrated in connection to deportations (Kleist, 2016b, 2018). Marin imagined that the emptying would persist if “entrepreneurial” people were not attracted, which rested on the success of the technologies of the imagination: “Tórshavn appears as the land of opportunities somehow; every week, something new is opening and things are happening constantly”. Compared to Tórshavn, Suðuroy and its possibilities made it “really difficult to imagine” staying. Marin did not initially plan to move back. However, rising housing prices in Tórshavn made the city a less attractive option and affective ties to Suðuroy finally led her to the island. She was unsure that they would have the financial means to take advantage of the offers in Tórshavn because much of their income would be allocated to paying the mortgage. Living in the capital was also imagined as diminishing her ability to be mobile—she was unwilling to sacrifice her motility because Marin wanted to offer her children the same mobile upbringing she had enjoyed. Nonetheless, there was also an existential reason for the move:

So, somewhere, you become an adult, and then you think, “Okay, what does really matter in life?” Then, I’ve realised that it is about [...] because my father was an eccentric type, and there are so many stories about him, and I love it. I love meeting people who can tell stories about him, and I somehow think that is what life is about, to write stories that my children or someone can tell my children when I one day am not here—that would bring me joy. Also, the fact that we don’t care at all about money and those things, my husband and me. I actually think it is about recognition for me, and that I feel that I’m doing something good for the village. Of course, it must be viable and all that, but I had this discussion with my husband because he thinks it is not the best idea to also [start another project] because it provides no money. I don’t care because, for me, I feel that I am contributing with something.

The decision to stay on Suðuroy exceeded joining and participating in the “exciting” transformation. The decision also concerned what the smallness of the village could offer over the long term—even after she was gone. I propose that Marin used her father as a symbolic resource. She recalled hearing positive stories about him when she was growing up and started to seek the same communal recognition, arguably a reaction to Marin’s experience of being just one amongst many in a large city. Contributing to the village could take many forms and was seen as more important than having a profitable venture. Marin did not find this social recognition and visibility to be possible in larger cities due to high levels of anonymity and competition. However, her father had demonstrated such acknowledgement to be achievable in smaller villages. This imagining concerned timing and was made possible by coinciding societal transformations and personal experiences. Indeed, the societal transformation in the Faroes, particularly on Vágur, opened possibilities, but feeling disillusioned by the anonymity in larger cities led Marin to search for alternatives. The atmosphere in Vágur particularly inspired her:

Marin: Yes, of course, if this fails, then yes. [...] For me, it has always been important to live in a place where I feel inspired, and right now, I feel really inspired here because I think there are so many things to make and do. There is really room for transformation here and, in particular, in regard to sports.

Oliver: But it is not like you have planned to stay the next 50 years. Right now, you have planned for the next [...]

Marin: No, that I cannot say about any place in the world, I think, but that is only me. I think, if you ask my husband, he says, “Yes, I think so”. If the possibilities continue to be there, then yes. Now, I also think that I have a pretty good opportunity with the sports school. It is just to the right leg, or it is by chance that it is situated here and that I’m from here. I can also imagine staying here, but then it is because I’m inspired by living here.

Marin was relatively unconcerned about further emptying and the dystopian fears of a depopulated island, even expressing that the potential failure of her current project did not categorically translate to leaving again. “Feeling inspired” weighed heavier. As long as this feeling persisted, Marin could imagine staying. I argue that “feeling inspired” was simultaneously promoted by witnessing the transformations, the technologies of the imagination promising a hopeful future, and believing that the infrastructure and social practices were “behind” and left room for improvement. Arguably, Marin’s capacity for imagining alternatives to the present and Vágur’s openness made it the “right” place to be. Thus, her imagination did not have a fixed temporality but depended on being continuously able to act in an agentic manner towards the future. So long as the future was deemed hopeful and open, staying remained possible.

By following Marin, I demonstrated how she left Suðuroy to escape normative “streams” and find time without planning to return. Through being mobile, she claimed to have overcome the socialisation that barred people from “dreaming big” and developed a capacity to imagine alternatives to the present. A mixture of witnessing the societal transformation in the Faroes and Vágur and disenchantment with the lack of social recognition in a large city then made returning plausible. Vágur promised social recognition and a foundation for feeling inspired. While Marin concurred with the politicised notion of finding ways of keeping the younger generation on the islands, she also questioned if this was the “right” approach. Based on her experience, if people did not spend time elsewhere, they might not encounter the perspective or symbolic resources required to imagine and pursue alternatives to the present. This issue implied a moral order regarding which im/mobilities were the “right” ones (Charmillot, 2021; Zhang, 2018) based on who was supposedly capable of “continuing” the turn from the inertia of the past towards the capability to “dream big”. Social expectations could make returning difficult. Part of the pull towards seeking social recognition derived from using her father as a symbolic resource, recalling how other people in the village always spoke fondly of him. Thus, Marin’s future could manifest differently, but the crux was “doing something to contribute to the local community”. Staying was contingent on “feeling inspired” and the atmosphere of being supported while promoting change and maintaining the capacity to be mobile.

7.3. Discussion

Yet the imagination is not only a part of conceiving migration. Imaginaries are shaped, changed, and events transformed by migration itself. Imagining departure, going elsewhere, returning, and imagining again form a constant process in which the self is crafted and re-crafted and through which more collective visions are forged and re-forged. (Chambers, 2018, p. 1424)

Imagination is an integral dimension of why and how people practice and experience im/mobility at different points of their lives and under changing circumstances, although the imagination often crystallises over time and through im/mobility. It simultaneously generates and transforms along im/mobility trajectories. Though Chambers appeared to conflate imagination and imaginaries (Salazar, 2020), he nonetheless eloquently captured that interactions were dynamic and contextual. I sought to capture this process while addressing distinct forms of (entangled) im/mobilities.

In this chapter, I attempted to broaden the scope of sociocultural psychology by integrating insights from mobility studies (Glăveanu, 2020), specifically accounting for various im/mobilities (and other factors) that impinged on people's imagined futures. This involved tracing the shifting meanings people attribute to their im/mobility (Cresswell, 2010). These shifts relate to changes in personal experiences, social relations, material conditions, and the relations to other places and temporalities. For example, I revealed that excessive mobility or technologies of the imagination could produce imaginations of more sedentary futures, but stuckness could equally be transformed into staying, and thereby maintaining a future, through circular mobility. Similar to Vygotsky's (1931) point regarding "richer experiences", there was some indication that people's imagination could develop with im/mobility, as when Marin "broke free" from her socialisation. However, I do not wish to romanticise the link because the perspectives of others can represent barriers (Gillespie et al., 2012; Kadianaki & Gillespie, 2015), and others can actively hinder people's imaginations (Griffiths, 2014; Lindberg & Edwards, 2021). The imagination can also develop while remaining still through contact with mobilities (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). It would be a mistake to simply assume that the imagination always becomes progressively differentiated in mobility; instead, the interaction can be

optimally ascertained by following people. The table below illustrates five ways in which imagination and im/mobility interact:

	Trigger	Imagined future	When (temporality)	Where (spatiality)	Im/mobility	Example
Im/mobility to actualise an imagined future	Based on an asymmetrical relation between imaginative horizons	Specific but can be both concrete or abstract	Travelling towards the future through moving or remaining in space	Defined (e.g., want to live in Vágur) or undefined (e.g., “chasing a specific future”)	Instrumental: Speed up or slow down depending on possibilities	Arne travelled through Europe with little regard for the “where” to actualise a monolithic future
Mobility to engender a sedentary future	Situational stuckness: Contextual and relational (e.g., social relations) factors temporarily disrupt progression towards the future	Concrete: Staying in place	Maintaining time	Defined (“in place”)	Shorter and circular mobility to engender sedentariness	Barbara mediated feelings of stuckness by being mobile
Mobility to escape futurelessness	Existential stuckness: Staying impoverishes the imagination (e.g., living through emptying), and waiting is not deemed viable	Impoverished: Possibly due to emptying or social norms	Searching for time	Elsewhere	More permanent mobility or migration	Marin left because there was no imaginable future on the island
Mobility to explore possible imagined futures	Curious about alternatives, possibly triggered by social representations and other cultural elements	Abstract: Not defined yet	Opening time	Either undefined or defined	Undefined: Can be fast or slow as well as temporary or permanent	Fríða’s wanderlust to explore different ways of life
Imagined futures transformed into mobility	Encountering new perspectives, having new experiences, or gaining new symbolic resources	In flux: State between more stable imaginations	Transforming time	Undefined	Undefined: Can be fast or slow as well as temporary or permanent	Finn began to imagine a more sedentary future elsewhere due to experiences linked to mobility

These five propositions are not exhaustive and present just some of the ways imagination and im/mobility were conjoined. In fact, the five overlapped and impacted each other over time. All were simultaneously the product of people’s unique experiences and changing circumstances. First, the instances of social networks and social others highlighted that participation in a social network, having supportive significant others, and a strong normativity can be experienced differently with various repercussions depending on which interaction comes to expression. Second, the varying degrees to which the technologies of the imagination were used illustrated that the context mattered for how the interaction manifested, although I argue that people’s reference point was also significant. The target audience was largely people from the islands and perhaps those who returned to make a change. Those who directly experienced the emptying seemed more impacted by technologies, while those who moved to Suðuroy from larger cities were prone to notice the relative differences in social and cultural possibilities. Third, various forms of im/mobility functioned as a tool to manipulate time and temporal progression, accelerating or bending time (Ringel, 2016b) in ways that ranged from travelling “into the future” by moving in space to maintaining time by engaging in circular mobility.

Imaginative horizons were relationally constructed, expanding or contracting in and with the movement, which can transform its temporality. Furthermore, the nature and distancing of the symbolic resources used in the imagination carried different weights. Specifically, personal experiences or significant others were more important than indirect cultural elements (e.g., representations, films, and books). Again, it was impossible to stipulate a one-size-fits-all model for how the interactions materialised. Nevertheless, the above table represents several of the similarities and differences I identified in following people. It also illustrates the value of using an imagined future to indicate when people change their relationship to the world through adjusting their im/mobility trajectories.

Existing research on im/mobility trajectories (e.g. Schapendonk, 2020; Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2018) has convincingly advanced an argument for “following people”, focusing on their experiences to overcome common pitfalls in migration research. However, I argue that it is also important to consider imagined futures as generative of and generated in im/mobility trajectories because this dynamic sociocultural psychological process underpins how people move or remain in space to manipulate time. The imagination is involved in most im/mobilities and is a complex mesh of the contextual factors, cultural elements, affectivities, and personal experiences that shape imagined futures. Imaginings can form gradually and are not always concretised before changing im/mobility practices., The very absence of an imagined future can also generate mobility. For example, the concept of stuckness—which infuses the future with a negative affective valence—has been theoretically and experientially important to articulating the relation between imagination and im/mobility along people’s trajectories. Stuckness has been theorised as potentially leading to existential immobility (Hage, 2005, 2009b), as triggering or blocking the imagination (Cangià, 2020), and as being situated in power geometries (Straughan et al., 2020). However, I argue that it might be more beneficial to analyse stuckness as a dynamic gradient that can be both situational and existential. Stuckness can emerge across “temporal, physical, existential and social levels” (Cangià, 2020, p. 3). As the analysis has indicated, these dimensions hold different meanings for people depending on the level of threat they are perceived to pose to an imagined future. I propose that certain factors producing feelings of stuckness were a dearth of potential marriage partners, social control in smaller communities, changing weather, natural

borders, social visibility and invisibility, limited social and cultural opportunities, and rigid normative “streams”. The factors producing stuckness over staying were highly idiosyncratic, depending on people’s pasts, presents, and promised futures. When stuckness was not too severe, people could use circular mobility, internally and transnationally, to mitigate its adverse effects or, in other cases, wait for the future to arrive (Axelsson et al., 2017). The type of mobility people instigated seemed to correlate with the severity and persistence of stuckness. This highlights two aspects. First, existential immobility does not only pertain to the question of migration but relates to and can be manipulated by various forms of mobilities—and by oneself as well as others. Second, following im/mobilities over time allows for a more nuanced and dynamic insight into their entanglements.

Furthermore, mobility can become an instrument for overcoming contracted imaginative horizons or even for becoming aware of relative differences. Increasing mobility heightened encounters with “alterity” (Gillespie et al., 2012) and had the power to render these differences regarding the imaginable visible and, in certain cases, help people overcome rigid boundaries. This can be achieved both people’s own im/mobility and that of others (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021). I suggest that this imaginative horizon must be analysed as a relational concept that expands and contracts with the im/mobility of people. Moving between them can sometimes be compared to time travelling because doing so can generate resources for new imaginings, which also suggests implications concerning the process of imagination itself. Symbolic resources carried various weights in the imagination, and personal experiences trumped cultural elements. This relates to Glăveanu and de Saint-Laurent’s (2018) argument that, if they have similar experiences, people can adopt the perspectives of refugees more accurately than when they use social representations. Moreover, if changes to people’s imagined futures indicate a form of psychological development, I argue it is important to investigate how im/mobility trajectories transform people’s lives and their images of the future. Most sociocultural psychological research has focused on migration; however, I have revealed that im/mobilities are equally important to understanding the changes in peoples imagined futures and life courses. In fact, im/mobilities are sometimes used to manipulate the process of imagination or bend temporalities.

Finally, I propose to move beyond sedentariness as an ontological question, approaching it as a politicised tool of nation-building and a question of governmentalities. In the context of the Faroe Islands, sedentariness is a rationality that permeates the technologies of the imagination (Salazar, 2013; Sneath et al., 2009) to promise a hopeful future for the Faroese nation fashioning a new regime of im/mobilities. Arguably, it is an attempt to anchor people's imaginations through using material, social, and symbolic initiatives to trick both the imagination and its temporalities (Ringel, 2016b). However, as the five above trajectories have indicated, such initiatives can impact people differently depending on their relationship to the Faroe Islands and Suðuroy, which includes their previous experiences and reference points. Those who had grown up in the Faroe Islands and had direct experience of the emptying seemed disproportionately impacted by the technologies of the imagination, whereas those who had recently moved there were less so. Though the targeted audience was diverse, the imaginative effects were not even. This possibly creates the social expectation that those who return are expected to instigate changes, although these returnees might not always be embraced with open arms.

8. Conclusions and Openings

The aim of this thesis was to identify and theorise how the imagination interacts with im/mobility in and around the Faroese island of Suðuroy. I started without a clear-cut agenda or overarching research questions—only a loosely defined set of theoretical perspectives and a general orientation. Instead, I tried to be responsive to the inevitable twists and turns that accompany the research process. Consequently, each chapter explores the interaction the imagination and im/mobility from different perspectives at varying levels and in dialogue with an eclectic selection of literature. The focal points range from identifying the technologies of the imagination addressing the Faroese emptying to investigating how these are refracted through experiences and circumstances when used in people’s imagination. Subsequently, I followed five people’s trajectories to observe how the interaction unfold.

Considering that this monograph is the culmination of almost four years’ work and a substantial personal and academic journey, the research’s scope and emphasis naturally changed along the way, and the chapters—at least symbolically—represent various congestion points. Therefore, I have no intention of providing a coherent model encapsulating every element; rather, this final chapter attempts to tie certain knots and open a more general discussion regarding key theoretical and methodological contributions while considering their potential implications.

I first reintroduce the tentative research questions posed at the beginning and address them in turn. I then highlight several of the theoretical and methodological contributions and openings that can be derived from this work. I end the journey with a brief reflection on various limitations and suggest new avenues of future research and several wider societal implications, returning once again to Einar.

8.1. Research Questions

Although this research process was not driven by fixed questions, I nonetheless ongoingly formulated three to guide the analysis and establish ephemeral gravitational points for myself:

- i. How does the interaction between imagination and im/mobility unfold over time and in changing contexts?
- ii. How do different social, material, and symbolic initiatives alter the relation between the imagination and im/mobility?
- iii. How is imagination generative of as well as transformed along people's im/mobility trajectories?

As previously mentioned, the first research question runs transversally through the thesis, while the second is addressed in Chapters 4 to 6 and the third is answered in Chapter 7. Below, I discuss the questions in turn.

8.1.1. Imagination on the Move and in Stillness

Perhaps the single most important research question concerns the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility. In answering this, I raise two key propositions. The interaction materialises in and is shaped by a (relational) imaginative horizon—which a technology of the imagination can alter—and is always refracted through people's experiences and circumstances. It is a dynamic interaction. While these two propositions intertwine and constantly evolve in dialogue, the first emphasises the contextual conditions that lend substance and direction to the interaction. The second introduces “the person” and their trajectories. These crudely represent the third- and first-person perspectives.

First, changing people's imagination through various initiatives impacts the regimes of im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) and can transform their directionalities, shaping the observable and experienced emptying both diachronically and synchronically. While recognised by Glick Schiller and Salazar, the role of imagination in forming regimes of im/mobilities remains largely unexplored. However, I have demonstrated the importance of the imagination's role in mapping who moves or remain still and how while also creating differentiations. I argue that imagination comes into play through altering where and when imagined futures are located, which can be achieved by changing the relation between places and their temporalities. The directionality of mobilities, in turn, also impacts the locations of the future. Emptying is, to an extent, a function of outgoing mobilities, which can contract the imaginative horizon, obliterate hope in the future, and produce desynchronisation

from the “progress” witnessed elsewhere and promised by modernity. Such conditions diminish people’s ability or willingness to wait out adverse or precarious conditions (Axelsson et al., 2017; Hage, 2009b) because the future is not imagined as arriving anytime soon, leading some to become mobile in search of a better future. Simultaneously, I showed that others might view the same conditions as an invitation to imagine an entirely new future. The opposite also holds true; increasing mobilities towards a place can instil hope in the future and engender staying. Furthermore, I demonstrated how this interaction can be tinkered with by various technologies of the imagination that expand the boundaries of the imaginable, promote agency towards the future, change affective valences, and (de)synchronise temporalities. This point highlights that the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility is necessarily enmeshed (Salazar, n.d.) and that different voices, social positions, and vectors attempt to shape this interaction. The point also emphasises, the entanglement of mobility and immobility and the heterogeneity of each.

Second, I argue that the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility is refracted through people’s experiences and circumstances. This refraction process operates on two levels. First, the ways in which people related to or used the technologies of the imagination in their imaginings were indeed indeterminate and dependent on their trajectories, social relations, experiences of im/mobility, and stories from comparable places. While several of the technologies of the imagination (such as tourism) sought to increase mobility, most also aimed to sedentarise or immobilise the mobility of others. Second, the interaction also changed dynamically in people’s trajectories, with imaginations of the future noticeably changing the meaning people attributed to being mobile or remaining still. Stuckness and staying indicate a relation to and imagination of the future conditioned on social networks, weather, possibilities, and motility (Kaufmann et al., 2017). Imagination is not only conducive to im/mobility (Zittoun, 2020). Mobility also transforms and can act as an active regulator of the imagination. The absence of a clear imagination can equally trigger im/mobilities. In addition, I proposed five ways the interaction was articulated that differed according to the trigger, the imagined future, the where and when, and in terms of the type of resultant im/mobility. The literature on im/mobility trajectories (Schapendonk, van Liempt, et al., 2020) has yet to incorporate the future into any

major analyses, but I argue it is central to understanding the twist and turns of such trajectories.

These two levels are essentially different sides of the same coin. When studying the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility, it is necessary to include both—despite one often taking analytical precedence over the other. This was the case for the second and third section.

8.1.2. Changing Conditions

Chapters 4 to 6 discussed the imagination embedded in concrete initiatives (e.g., sports centres, ferries, hills, tourists) instead of focusing on the abstract semiotic processes that are often the focus of sociocultural psychological research (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b). I also emphasised the construction of symbolic resources in addition to the ways they are used and the rationalities and power relations underlying them. I explained how material, social, and symbolic initiatives operate as governmentalities impinging on the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility. There are four ways in which changing conditions impact the interaction: Expanding the possible, promoting agency over the future, bending temporalities, and instilling hope for the future. I propose that focusing on technologies of the imagination allowed me to address the shortcomings in the sociocultural psychological literature proposed earlier while providing a link to im/mobility practices. When combined, these transformations all contributed to reversing the emptying that defined the 2000s for many. However, the broader technologies of the imagination simultaneously accentuated the relative emptying and desynchronisation of Suðuroy, prompting more localised initiatives to be launched and thereby bridge the distance.

First, building new infrastructure—ranging from roads and cafes to an Olympic-sized swimming pool and a highly technological fish-processing plant—concretely expands the possible (Glăveanu, 2018b). By making a wider range of imagined futures actualisable, the imperative to be mobile is reduced; these initiatives expand the imaginative horizon. However, not all technologies of the imagination quantitatively expand possibilities. Several also aim to reduce desynchronisation and signal a better future ahead; for instance, when building first-of-its-kind infrastructures. Second, the social atmosphere and societal development encourages people to imagine and take

agency over the future rather than project the past into it. However, this invitation to exercise agency might be reversed for the “right kind of people”, fashioning a regime of im/mobilities that differentiates stayers and types of mobilities according to imaginations of the future. In the Faroese case, such people are often those who had lived elsewhere because that was associated with development and a wider horizon—even a form of time travel. This differentiation reveals that specific conditions encourage the imaginations of some while discouraging those of others. It is therefore important to be attentive towards people’s sense of agency and how this impacts their im/mobility. Third, stimulating increasing mobilities or building first-of-its-kind infrastructure represent ways of tricking temporalities by altering their relation. Synchronisation and desynchronisation with ideas of “progress” are important for determining whether the future is made elsewhere. To understand sociocultural psychological processes, it is important to expand current research to also include temporalities and their co-constitution. Fourth, increases in mobility and witnessing the emergence of new cafes, parks, and sports schools instil hope in the future. Waiting becomes a viable strategy even when the future has not fully arrived yet. New buildings or events signal more prosperous times ahead (Appel et al., 2019; Larkin, 2013).

In addition, the technologies of the imagination addressed the material, social, symbolic, and temporal constituents of emptying. Each technology of the imagination targeted one or more registers and combined to drive overall population growth. Different vectors of power were present in the effects but identifying who wielded this power were not central. Research on emptiness often begins from the assumption that places are empty (Dzenovska, 2011, 2018); however, I proposed a processual approach to effectively capture how people actually transform “emptiness” rather than just living within or leaving it. Furthermore, I suggested emptying can be deconstructed into different aspects to add nuance to the study of what constitutes the emptying process. I also added the mechanisms of synchronisation and desynchronisation, which change the relations between temporalities and futures.

Altogether, it is important to situate the imagination more firmly in context and understand the relationalities behind the process. Moreover, it is crucial to explore how people then use the technologies of the imagination as symbolic resources. Changing the imaginative horizon through technologies of the imagination also

impacts im/mobilities by modifying the spatial or temporal location of the future and its affective valence.

8.1.3. Imagination and Im/mobility Trajectories

Addressing the third and final question was the core objective of Chapter 7, in which I presented several of the ways in which imagined futures are both generative of and equally transformed along people's im/mobility trajectories. I proposed a combination of two approaches, addressing gaps in each. A dynamic sociocultural psychological notion of the imagination adds the future as an important dimension regarding how im/mobility trajectories unfold over time, both gradually or overnight, and a slow build-up sometimes preceding the manifestation in changing im/mobility practices. Such a conceptual understanding of the future is also useful in demonstrating how entangled im/mobility practices affect how people develop along their life courses. The migration-centric gaze that characterises much of sociocultural psychological literature has yet to incorporate such an understanding. The interaction discernible in the meanings people dynamically attribute to im/mobility depends on context, present experiences, and affective valences. I used staying and stuckness as illustrative concepts and want to emphasise three suggested interactions.

First, to maintain or consolidate sedentary imagined futures, different forms of mundane and circular mobility can help convert stuckness back to staying whenever feelings of being stuck emerge. Several studies have shown the multifaceted nature of stuckness (Cangià, 2020; Cresswell, 2012), but it is not an either/or condition when following people's experiences and the dynamic entanglement of im/mobilities. Identifying which types of im/mobilities both produce and are produced by stuckness can be addressed by approaching it as a gradient ranging from situational to existential that is equivalent to Dwyer's waiting (2009). However, using im/mobility to mitigate stuckness can fail for several reasons. Repeated mobility can produce imaginations of futures elsewhere, amplifying stuckness through accentuating differences between places. The meaning attributed to being mobile is transformed. Moreover, experiences with places offering what is perceived to be absent can further reinforce imagination concerning moving away in the long term while mediating feelings in the short term. Stuckness is therefore a situated and relational condition, and the future begins to be painted with negative affective valences when stuckness surfaces. Stuckness can also

become existential once imagined futures are deemed unactualisable and waiting is not an option because nothing is expected to change in the foreseeable future. Those with the resources might leave to search for a better elsewhere in order to bring the future closer; that is, trick time. Conversely, changing the circumstances might mitigate existential immobilities but, at the same time, produce it for others.

There is no one-to-one manner in which the interaction between imagination and im/mobility articulates itself. Rather, a composition of elements ranging from social others and weather to unique experiences and societal transformations intersect to lend the interaction substance.

8.2. Theoretical Openings

Considering the broader picture, several theoretical openings emerged from the analysis that are directed at both the sociocultural psychological study of the imagination and im/mobility research more broadly. These openings principally relate to the fact that interaction always unfolds in a specific yet alterable context that is relationally constituted and always refracted through people's experiences.

8.2.1. Imagined Futures as an Indicator of Development

As discussed earlier, sociocultural psychology describes imagination as a developmental process for people (Zittoun et al., 2013) and societies (Hawlina et al., 2020). However, such research rarely asks why some imaginations become developmental or why some persist over time. I propose to focus on imagined futures—the outcomes of the imagination—because they directly shape how people act, make sense of their lives, and move or remain still. This proposition is not an invitation to ignore the process but instead to recognise that imagined futures do not constantly change. Life-course sociologists have proposed studying social pathways (Shanahan et al., 2016), anthropologists imaginaries, and sociocultural psychologists melodies (Zittoun, et al., 2013) or patterns (Cabra, 2021a; Zittoun, 2019b). The latter is defined as a “propensity for a certain movement” (Zittoun, 2019b, p. 144) constituted by “a specific configuration of dynamically coordinated elements, and that has certain stability (...) in a given environment also generates dynamic patterns of feeling, perception, thinking or acting, and thus engages experience” (2019b, p. 32). Cabra (2021a) further proposes thinking of patterns as relational and is swift to focus on

psychological patterns. Approaching imagined futures, I find Abric's core and periphery model of social representations useful. This model effectively captures the notion that a central imagined future (core) often guides people's trajectories. However, Abric's model also allows for a multilinearity (periphery) that often encapsulates the convolutions of trajectories that do not necessarily alter the core.

However, as demonstrated, the imagined future develops over space and time in idiosyncratic ways while maintaining a degree of stability. I argue that changes to imagined futures indicate development in terms of content or temporality. As such, it is possible to introduce a degree of stability, which can be identified and deconstructed. Focusing on imagined futures therefore raises questions concerning the tension between continuity and change. The goal then becomes to trace the process of the imagination and understand the temporal and relational elements propelling changes in imagined futures.

In sum, using imagined futures as an indicator of development provides a means of introducing stability to a processual model. Furthermore, focusing on imagined futures establishes a bridge to migration and im/mobility studies because, while both fields have highlighted the future's role in how people or objects move in space, they have often taken the future for granted and analysed its constituents or development. The sociocultural psychological model offers this nuance and dynamism, situating imagined futures in the contexts in which they occur. However, this model requires higher sensitivity to stability.

8.2.2. Dynamic and Relational Imaginative Horizons

In attempting to situate the imagination in social and material conditions, to extend more abstract semiotic emphases (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b), several have turned to Crapanzano's (2004) idea of the imaginative horizon (Zittoun et al., 2020). However, as Zittoun and I have argued elsewhere (2021), the boundaries of what is dynamically imaginable contracts and expands in partial response to changing im/mobilities and technologies of the imagination (Sneath et al., 2009). I want to further add that imaginative horizons are relational, meaning that their expansions and contractions are relative to other imaginative horizons, each also operating on a different temporality. This relation can both instil hope in the future or spell ruination.

I proposed integrating the concept of emptiness (Dzenovska, 2018) to characterise contracted imaginative horizons, which can restrict people’s imagination of sedentary futures. Such a constrained horizon can lead some to seek their futures elsewhere while inviting others to imagine the future differently. Emptiness can also remove people’s ability to “wait” for the future to arrive because emptying signals further ruination and a desynchronisation from ideas of “progress”. This highlights that the boundaries of the imaginary horizon are partly constitutive of im/mobility practices but are equally transformed by them. Imaginative horizons are thus shaped by temporal and spatial relationalities and are constantly on the move. As with relational and dynamic imaginative horizons, I also proposed to move from emptiness to emptying, shifting focus to the change constituents of emptying’s over time while acknowledging people’s agentic capacities. Furthermore, studies on the future (e.g., Dzenovska, 2018; Ferguson, 1999; Ringel, 2018) often focus on places characterised by emptiness, decline, or shrinkage. However, I have attempted to demonstrate how these conditions can be reversed to reclaim the future through synchronisation; that is, through changing the relationship between temporalities.

Technologies of the imagination can alter the boundaries of the imaginative horizon, bend temporalities, and transform the future’s affective valence. Technologies of the imagination can also target different aspects of emptying. This concept supplements the analysis of symbolic resources by focusing on the “construction”, inherent power relations, and temporalities that precede the use of symbolic resources. Studying the technologies of imagination does not involve, as others have proposed, defining who imagines what future for/with whom (Glăveanu, 2018a; Marková, 2017). Instead, such an analysis centres on the technologies’ manifestations (e.g., new sports centres, tourist campaigns, sharing positive stories) and their imaginative effects—intended or otherwise. Moreover, as Sneath et al. (2009) argue, the imaginative effects are indeterminate and, as I have demonstrated, refracted through people’s unique experiences and positions in the world. Such an approach offers a means of accounting for the many vectors of power, several of which align with state interests. People might use the promise ingrained in the technologies of the imagination while others resist or question it and still others develop ambivalent imaginations based on this promise. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list but a demonstration of the many and indeterminate ways technologies of the imagination are refracted. Studying different

technologies might reveal more. This relates to a second point. It is essential to understand what people do with these technologies of the imagination and when they become symbolic resources. Doing so permits moving beyond semiotic analysis without neglecting the sociocultural and material contexts that condition the imagination in indeterminate ways.

8.2.3. Futurising Im/mobilities

Extensive research on im/mobility theorises the role of the (imagined) future to understand why people become mobile or remain still. Nevertheless, this literature primarily focuses on migration and specific moments in time. This thesis, however, opens a new avenue for exploring all kinds of im/mobilities with reference to a dynamically imagined future while revealing the usefulness of following the imagination over space and time.

The past is paramount to understanding present im/mobilities and their meanings (Cresswell, 2010) but more attention can be provided to the future. Concepts such as imaginaries (Salazar, 2011a), aspirations (Carling, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018), and hope (Kleist & Jansen, 2016) all engage with the future. However, they rarely do so with a dynamic approach and tend to emphasise migrations. A sociocultural psychological model of the imagination can prove useful for capturing the different levels and dynamism (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020; Zittoun, 2020), as such a model presupposes that imagined futures take form between personal experiences and societal structures. To understand the present, it is equally important to comprehend both the future and future im/mobilities, yet being sensitive to the fact that im/mobilities are not always preceded by concrete imaginations.

8.2.4. Governing Im/mobility Through the Imagination

As an extension of the previous section, I propose several theoretical openings in terms of the governance of im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013); namely, that funnelling the process of imagination can be considered a form of governmentality that also plays a part in shaping regimes of im/mobilities.

Bærenholdt (2013) has proposed governmentalities function through im/mobilities—a point that is also present in Glick Schiller and Salazar's regimes of im/mobilities

(Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). However, I want to extend the argument and propose that governmentality also operates through imagination that manifests and is embodied in the technologies of the imagination; that is, “local and multiple, intertwining coherent or contradictory forms of activating and managing a population, and strategies, the formulae of government” (Donzelot, 1979, cited in Rose et al., 2006, p. 8). This can manifest in new infrastructure, tourist campaigns, or regulations but not exclusively so. Imaginaries have been theorised as elements of regimes of im/mobilities (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), but the individual initiatives and their relations are rarely explored. Although, as Pelican has indicated (2013), varying imaginaries act as a potential force vector mobilising and immobilising people, it is important to expand the analysis to the diverse forms of power, such as Foucault’s (1990) description of power as being relational and incomplete. I therefore argue that analysing the imagination over time, and the different technologies that impinge on the process, provide a new way of capturing inequalities and differentiations related to im/mobilities with sensitivity to relationalities as well as individual experiences.

Technologies of the imagination represent the manifestations or instruments of governmentality that, through impinging on the imagination, guide who and what should move and how. Different technologies of the imagination intend to transform people’s imagination, and consequently guide im/mobilities, without necessarily placing the state or other actors centre stage. This allows studying what technologies of the imagination do, through what means, and how they impinge on people’s im/mobilities.

8.3. Methodological Openings

I also want to propose two methodological openings—one related to the abductive process more generally and another to the study of the process of imagination.

First, although abduction is gaining a foothold within sociocultural psychological research and theorising, abductive reasoning is often portrayed as an oscillating relation between data and theory. Brinkmann proposes, “abduction is a form of reasoning that is concerned with the relationship between situation and inquiry” (2014, p. 722). According to my interpretation, this calls for abductive reasoning to permeate the entire research and not just the theory-creation process. This naturally

challenges the methodological cleanliness (Law, 2007) that arguably also characterises much of social science while adding an important step in recognising that abductive reasoning is essentially “an approach and a process that is exploratory, creative, speculative, and about inference” (Rinehart, 2021, p. 7). Being committed to abductive reasoning extends beyond building working theorisations of data and must inevitably include the highly practical elements of conducting research and considering ethical commitments. For example, formulating a research question *a priori* or designing a fixed interview guide and adhering to it is not abductive because it limits the continuous room for being surprised (Brinkmann, 2014; Zittoun, 2017). Such rigidity also hampers the ability to react to prompts (Rinehart, 2021) and restricts the researcher’s ability to adjust according to questions that arise, ideas that emerge, and dialogues that materialise. This commitment manifested in the fact that we did not define a “where” or a “what” at the start of the research. Instead, these aspects were continuously defined and redefined in relation to ongoing research and dialogue with colleagues and people living in the localities (Charmillot & Pedersen, n.d.). In other words, applying abductive reasoning can expand beyond theory creation to permeate all stages of the research, which increases responsiveness to people and ethical sensitivity.

Second, studying the process of the imagination can be a somewhat fraught endeavour because it is not directly visible (Zittoun, 2015c) and therefore demands identifying externalisations; that is, the materialisation of the imagination. The integration of the first-person, third-person, and intersubjective perspectives offers a methodological way forward (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016b); however, as noted earlier, the tendency to focus on semiosis and the symbolic resources that nourish the process neglects the more embodied (Gfeller & Zittoun, 2021) and geographical aspects. I argue that conducting sensory participant observation allows studying the imagination more holistically and makes the researchers' experiences part of the research, which can guide both questions and interpretations. Furthermore, participant observation provides a view into the everyday imaginations that emerge in conversation, what they appear in relation to, where they manifest, and how they are discussed, adding a further layer to uncovering externalisations in qualitative interviews, art, or political projects.

8.4. Limitations

The time available and the complexity of social processes are obviously limiting factors, and I present three limitations related to them. The first relates to the question of whose imaginations are present in this thesis. The second concerns the somewhat generalising gaze that occasionally surfaces. The third addresses studying these processes in “real time”.

First, I centred on the imaginations and voices of those who seek to transform and break with the past, those who had often been mobile. Although I have made an effort to maintain a nuanced picture and incorporate different perspectives, I still chose to focus on this “group” for pragmatic reasons (access) and because their attempts to transform the emptying offered a novel theoretical entry point. This uneven access reflects two elements. First, many of those I spoke to were of the younger generation and sought a break with the past, although these two did not always overlap. They often described the societal transformations as “exciting”, which naturally encouraged me to focus on this aspect. Second, I became interested in the varying initiatives that sought to address the emptying because many discussed them and they were often linked to changing im/mobilities.

Second, in an alternate universe in which COVID-19 never disrupted life and this research project for two years, I would have wished to explore other perspectives in more detail, particularly those related to the tension over the future and what emptying meant. For example, exploring the nuances within the same “perspective” and various intersections might reduce group generalising. To an extent, I hope to have steered clear of that by introducing multi-voicedness. While I certainly wished for more, I still think the analysis has merit insofar as it is understood that its primary focus rests upon those who desire change.

Third, and as an extension of the previous points, I was also unable to study the imagination unfolding longitudinally and in real time. This is, of course, immensely difficult in practice. There are also several intrinsic challenges to this approach—both practical and theoretical. Studying, for example, the changing and contested imaginations around a ferry is achievable if one focuses on one microgenetic instance. However, it is a wholly different encounter and arguably requires a longer scope if

researchers want to understand a long *durée* and determine how elements enter people's imaginations over time. This is particularly the case given that I was expected to finish within four years. A similar logic can be said to apply to tracing the development of and change in people's imagination of the future. Doing so is relatively straightforward over shorter periods. However, if the researcher genuinely wants to see how the process unfolds and not rely on reconstruction, they must follow people around for a considerable period, which can be taxing and conceptually opaque (Breines et al., 2021). Arguably, the researcher might also risk losing sight of the wider picture by focusing on one person. The balance can be challenging to establish. Therefore, I ultimately favoured an approach in which I recurrently returned—enhancing the abductive process (Rinehart, 2021)—to where I could still witness change in real time while continuing to observe transformations over a longer period.

8.5. Epilogue: Towards the Future

I want to end with several speculations and, in the spirit of this thesis, imaginations concerning potential theoretical and political implications. I also suggest avenues for future research and return to Einar to discuss options for countering emptying.

First, there are a number of exciting avenues for further longitudinal research on the interaction between the imagination and im/mobility that were inspired by the trajectory of ethnography (Schapendonk, 2020). While I took some preliminary steps in that direction, I did not “follow” people in the fullest sense. Rather, I followed people at different times throughout the year—although this remained sufficient to begin exploring the role of imagined futures in im/mobility trajectories (Zittoun, 2020). A more immediate study of the imagination over a long period of time would allow for increased sensitivity to the convolutions that are often lost in retrospect while also identifying the elements that remain stable and those that change. Most sociocultural psychological studies focus on the minutiae of the imagination; however, I propose not losing sight of imagined futures. This emphasis might also represent a means of answering the question of whether everyone maintains stable futures because, as I have mentioned, inequalities exist regarding who can imagine what. By extension, I propose to use the concept of technologies of the imagination to more accurately account for the power relations impinging on the process of the imagination, focusing on what they do rather than who wields them. This represents a shift towards a deeper

exploration of the sociocultural and material contexts that condition imagination but also the refraction to capture the tension between structures and agency. While I analysed the technologies of the imagination in relation to sedentariness, I suspect domains such as education or the climate crisis offer equally interesting avenues for further investigations of this kind. More research is also needed to explore how the imagination help shape regimes of im/mobilities. I also argue that temporality cannot be taken for granted (Pedersen, n.d.) but must be analysed in its relation to other temporalities that shape people's imaginings. This similarly applies to geographies and other relationalities, which are largely absent from sociocultural psychological theorising. Altogether, a considerable quantity of open questions remain that relate to attempting to "mobilise" the field (Glăveanu, 2020), which can push the understanding of how im/mobilities impact development further.

Second, when discussing anonymity with Einar, he expressed that he wanted people to be able to "use" his story to promote Suðuroy. I maintain that his experiences, described at the beginning of this thesis, can be used as a prism to illustrate the importance of im/mobilities and disentangle how emptying can be addressed. Perhaps a connection exists between living on Suðuroy when the island was a "developmental centre" in the early-to-mid 20th century (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021) and what underlies the population boom. The various material, social, and symbolic initiatives are, in many ways, seeking to accomplish a similar outcome. That is, the initiatives are intended to increase mobilities and immobilities around the islands, expand the sense of possibility (Glăveanu, 2020a), and produce feelings of (temporal) synchronisation. As in earlier periods, this transformation is still uneven. Echoing Einar's experience of the world coming to him, global tourism and the emergence of new infrastructure can produce a sense that the world is coming to the island. Such developments reduce the lure of the elsewhere and instil hope in the future. A universal solution does not exist, and emptying is not the same everywhere. Nevertheless, the initiatives detailed in this thesis represent several means to reverse emptying that have stood the test of time. The technologies of the imagination are more effective if they address the localised constituents of emptying. It was clear that merely expanding possibilities was insufficient. Possibilities also need to be considered relationally worthwhile. This conjunction of technologies of the imagination played a role in stimulating mobility around the Faroes while engendering a differentiated sedentariness. The technologies

effectively revitalised the societal transformations and were pivotal to locating the future on the islands. As with Einar, the explanation is not solely economic but depends on affective valences and feeling synchronised.

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