

Emerging Educational Subjectivities in the Global Periphery

New Worker Identities for New Times

Michael Corbett and Unn-Doris K. Bæck

Introduction

In the global north the idea of rurality takes on a particular inflection. Northern places, which are often considered to be rural and ‘isolated’, have often been marginalized in metrocentric discourses of development. Associated with these peripheral places are equally marginal backward, rough and uneducated identity stereotypes that have been well explored in the rural studies literature. But things are changing. In this chapter, focusing on the Canadian and Scandinavian contexts, we argue that contemporary resource development has complicated established discourses of modernity and that places outside the metropolis are increasingly central to national development agendas. We investigate how contemporary forms of resource production, and the identity structures that they facilitate, integrate into emerging national cultural imaginaries and educational policy narratives in and about northern and rural regions as either utopian or dystopian constructions. This in turn leads to discursive emphasis on retooling education systems in rural and remote areas. This reassertion and reconfiguration of the rural signals a need for a policy shift that recognises the centrality of modern rural regions to national development strategies. At the same time we interrogate the consequences of the entanglement of traditional primary industries such as fishing and farming with emerging associations with mining and oil and gas development.

In Canada and in Scandinavia the conflation of historic national identity with rural resource production are key metaphors in the cultural imaginary. Simultaneously, places outside the metropolis are increasingly central to national economic development strategy. This has led to new concerns about education in rural and remote regions aimed at creating new worker/subjects for emerging forms of technologically enhanced and increasingly globalised resource development requiring different knowledge and competencies. Drawing on research in Atlantic Canada and in Northern Norway, we interrogate the educational and identity consequences of current policy discourse to find that contemporary change forces a reimagining of the educated subject and a respatialising of the field in which s/he is imagined to work.

In 2011, the Canadian federal government announced that a major C\$25+ billion contract for the construction of warships had been awarded to Halifax and the shipyards owned by the Irving family. The response was something akin to rejoicing in the streets and the CBC headlines on 19 October 2011 read: ‘Jubilation as Halifax shipyard awarded contract’ (CBC News, 2011). Premier Darrel Dexter gleefully intoned that this day would go down as one of the proudest in the history of the province and that thousands of people who had left Nova Scotia for work in western and central Canada could return home to stable employment. By early 2015 no steel was being cut, a brief real estate boom in Halifax had long fizzled out, and the Bank of Montreal (BMO) reported the province’s continuing ‘demographic drain’, the weakest home sales in 16 years, decreasing labour force participation rates, and the continuing lure of high wages in other provinces (Bank of Montreal, 2014).

In Norway a similar story has to do with the emerging oil and gas industry in the northern part of the country – regarding how the global oil industry affects life in geographically remote areas. The northern part of Norway has traditionally had a peripheral position in relation to the national centre located in the south, and has been regarded as an outpost. Fisheries used to be the most important industry in the region, and structural changes in resource management as well as the cyclical nature of the availability of fish have led to recurring crises for small-scale fisheries (Jentoft, 1993). A population scattered across harsh and inhospitable landscapes, an industrial structure related to resource-based industries such as fishing and farming, and a lower educational level than the rest of the national population were all qualities that have served to give this part of the country status as somewhat inferior, backward and even primitive and underdeveloped. Against this backdrop, the petroleum industry created new optimism in Northern Norway.

In this chapter we focus primarily on how development, as described above, affects young people growing up in these regions, especially in relation to education. What happens when small, local communities are transformed into booming industrial sites or hubs for the oil and gas industry with global significance? One major impact in both Northern Norway and Nova Scotia is related to changes in the structure and dynamics of the labour markets.

Today, labour mobility in the context of mobile modernity (Forsey, 2015) results in what Corbett (2010) calls ‘deployment’ in and out of areas of capital expansion. This is now a multigenerational way of life in some peripheral regions. What is new in both Nova Scotia and in Northern Norway is the increasingly sharp call for a new kind of worker who is simultaneously mobile and stable, tough and educated. Apart from the hype of oil and ships, we are interested here in the kind of educated subject imagined for the emerging industrial machinery of contemporary development in rural and remote parts of the global north. Accompanying these development initiatives are new educational imaginaries that focus on STEM subject areas (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and technical skills. At the same time, a parallel discourse that focuses on the need for appropriately educated labour that will remain in ‘peripheral’ areas has complicated contemporary educational discussions both in Canada and in Norway.

The population implosion and the chronic economic crisis

Most of the early reportage on the shipbuilding contract in Nova Scotia was rife with the

emotionally laden idea that Nova Scotia's iconic migrant labour force would finally be able to return home to find good work in the province and not have to leave for Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia, as they have done for generations. Now the tone has shifted radically. A recent government-sponsored analysis of the province's economic prospects, apocalyptically entitled *Now or Never* (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014), opened with a description of a population ageing so rapidly that it will soon be unable to maintain basic services and infrastructure: 'Given low birth rates, we cannot grow the population unless the economy is generating more jobs to stem out-migration and attract immigrants. We cannot sustain economic growth over time unless renewed population growth provides more workers, more entrepreneurs and more consumers' (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014, p. 18).

Now or Never opens with the prediction of provincial population loss by the third decade of the 21st century. Today, the image of the population implosion is on the lips of virtually every politician. In Nova Scotia, only Halifax and the Annapolis Valley regions gained population between the census years of 2001 and 2011. In the most mobile cohort, those between the ages of 20 and 34 years of age, all regions other than Halifax lost population (Government of Nova Scotia, 2015).

In Norway similar tendencies can be found. Traditionally, Northern Norway had a limited labour market with a higher unemployment rate than the rest of the country. In the developmental phase of the petroleum and mining industries, but also after, the new industries generated increased employment, decreased unemployment, increased commuting into the region, and increased labour immigration in the north. This contributed to slowing down a negative depopulation trend and, in some places, even increasing the population (Aure, Abelsen & Nilsen, 2012). This development is, however, highly place specific. Overall, there was a 4.4% increase in the population 16–66 years of age in the northernmost county of Finnmark between 2001 and 2015. At the same time, only four out of the 19 municipalities in Finnmark showed a population increase during this period. One of these is Hammerfest, with a 17% increase for men and a 13% increase for women. This compares to a 33% decrease in one of the other coastal municipalities, Loppa. The population decrease is greatest amongst the younger generations due to low birth rates and high out-migration.

Both in Norway and in Atlantic Canada it seems as though all of the forces of modernity are arrayed in support of a great emptying of young people from most rural areas, new opportunities notwithstanding. There is the lure of high-wage work in the Alberta oil patch, or in the Snow White field in Hammerfest. For mobile, elite industrial workers, these opportunities are now global in scope. There are also the bright lights of Montreal and Oslo with the enticements of what Baeck (2004) calls the 'urban ethos'. There is also an established 'learning to leave' educational culture (Corbett, 2004, 2005, 2007) where many youth living in rural and remote places who experience success in the formal education system, leave their home places, often for good. Indeed, *Now or Never* identifies and connects a triangular population strategy that simultaneously addresses out-migration, immigration and low educational attainment as key focal points for social policy (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014, p. 6).

Changing opportunity structures: re-educating the new worker

Local labour markets constitute an important opportunity structure for young people in the sense that the possibilities they see at their places of residence will affect the choices they make for the future. Different places constitute different opportunity structures since they provide different conditions and barriers that directly and indirectly provide opportunities for individuals (Baeck, 2015). Local or regional labour markets constitute a structure within which the young evaluate their educational and occupational choices. There are, for example, other alternatives to school in areas with less knowledge-demanding labour markets than in areas where the majority of work places demand formal qualifications. It must also be said that established interests continue to benefit from informally educated labour, which is effectively trapped in local labour markets.

Actors' interpretations of the available opportunity structures are also affected by their own positions, the capital they possess, and also by input they receive from different sources. Discourses in the media, in school, in local communities, through national and regional policy and authority structures, and through the oil or the shipyard companies themselves, all 'tell stories' to the young. These stories in turn colour young people's perceptions of the opportunity structures and give direction to their actions.

An ageing population is a particular feature of regions peripheral to political economic power in contemporary Western societies. Today, many peripheral rural regions have more or less successfully transitioned from spaces of production to spaces of consumption (Woods, 2010; Brown & Schafft, 2011). In the post-productivist countryside, a different view of community emerges and it is one that focuses more on service industries, connections and relationships between near and distant places, and complex symbolic practices (Peters & Bulut, 2011). It is now well understood how spatial production now features consumption more than production (Bauman, 2000; Castells, 2009; Barrett, 2015) and productive work is increasingly mechanised and organised through information technologies. As young people leave 'declining' communities, the population has changed character. In the case of Nova Scotia, the population is not only older, but those parts of rural Nova Scotia which feature relatively accessible coastline, attract a wide variety of economically privileged in-migrants.

These regions have shed some of their singular attachments to particular productive activities like farming, fishing and logging; but still, these elements of rural communities and economies are never completely gone. Rather they become part of a rural economy that has other dimensions. The transformed primary resource and secondary industry labour market do require elements of industrial productivity of the kind imagined, for example, in the shipbuilding project that many Nova Scotians dream will lure back the industrial workforce that regularly makes the 'long commute' to the western oil fields. Whether this comes to pass is uncertain; the informally educated migrant labourer may not be the ideal modern worker imagined in contemporary policy discourse that has positioned formal education as an important mechanism of subject formation and cultural change. Not surprisingly, education policy documents in both countries are largely silent about culture and the arts but bullish regarding vocational education and STEM subjects.

The new opportunities for the young are emphasised, and in Norway new educational programmes, especially designed for (and sponsored by) the oil and gas industry, have been launched. Most of these seem quite specifically focused on the employment needs of the

industry. The Norwegian government is also in sync with the oil and gas industry when they communicate to young people from the north about the importance of choosing educational and occupational paths that are right for the northern region. For example, the Norwegian minister of petroleum and energy has taken an active part in conveying this message in public statements, news articles and through partaking in education fairs for the promotion of the petroleum sector at schools, colleges and universities. The Norwegian Oil and Gas Association is deeply engaged in questions concerning competence and recruitment to the industry, emphasising that in the coming years there will be a special need for people (including women) with a science and technology education or a trade certificate.

The new worker of the future does not appear in the form of the informally educated, tough and robust, deployable northern worker who is by now a mythical character in Atlantic Canada and in rural Norway. He or she drives a top-of-the-line pickup truck purchased in the oil patch. He may live in Alberta or Saskatchewan or take part in the 'long commute', shuttling back and forth fortnightly or monthly for work stints (Walsh, 2012). Nearly 40,000 people, or about one-third of the population of Fort McMurray Alberta (the principal site of oil sands production), is what is designated by the municipal census as 'non-permanent population' living mainly in project accommodations (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, 2012).

Still, many northern workers continue to dismiss education, as did their forebears who worked on farms, in factories, on fishing boats and in the mines. They have been a problem for education systems for generations. But this rural identity construction is under attack for a number of reasons including the need for labour back home in the periphery, a declining population base, and fluctuations in commodity prices that lead to job shedding in mining and gas.

New 'ideal worker' identity narratives found in recruitment materials for Irving and the Norwegian oil company, Statoil, contain key corporate framing around environmentalism, linguistic and gender diversity and the importance of community in an attempt to simultaneously brand resource extraction companies as responsible corporate citizens and the region as an attractive place to live. Many of the available positions in fields require university education. As of January 2015, Irving was recruiting the following university degrees in its 'career track' programme: Engineering, Computer Science, Human Resources, Marketing, Public Relations, Commerce, Accounting, Finance and Supply Chain. The Statoil recruitment situation is very similar.

New educational narratives and the spatialisation of educational performance

All of these changes influence educational discourse in rural areas in many ways, not least of which is a respatialisation of educational geography made possible by national and international comparative metrics (Luke, 2011; Ball, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2013; Sellar & Lingard, 2014). The local effects of the scaling up of educational data are felt in the micro-geographies of regional school boards and even local schools where educational performance is drawn into global matrices and to the current focus on STEM-related education (Schafft & Biddle, 2015).

In current policy discussions the scaling up and scaling down of standardised educational

achievement analysis is combined with the discourse of the population implosion to generate an intensified focus on educational reform. Much like the heated and even alarmist rhetoric in *Now or Never*, a recent report on educational reform from the Nova Scotia Department of Education (DOE) employs similar language to rationalise major and immediate change (Government of Nova Scotia, 2015). The Minister's prologue puts it starkly: 'Time and again, test results show our students are falling behind in math and literacy, nationally and internationally. Over the years, there have been several different reports and public consultations that reached similar conclusions' (Government of Nova Scotia, 2015, p. 5).

The county of Finnmark illustrates the same phenomenon. National standardised tests show that students there perform below other Norwegian students. Also, dropout rates from vocational education and training (VET) in Finnmark are alarmingly high. In 2009 only 31% of VET students in Finnmark graduated with formal qualifications five years after starting secondary education compared to 58% in the top county of Sogn og Fjordane in the south of Norway. The policy analytic frame is one of rural and regional education systems that are backward and underperforming.

In Nova Scotia the story is much the same, with the rural school boards generally lagging behind urban jurisdictions in terms of measured educational achievement. On the basis of a provincial consultation in Nova Scotia that solicited input from the public, the DOE concludes that a major reorientation of the curriculum (particularly in maths and literacy), administrative structures, teacher education, leadership, inclusion, and a new focus on entrepreneurialism and STEM subjects is necessary. Regardless of whether or not this vision of system reform actually reflects the deeply problematic nature of the existing system (Corbett, 2014a, 2014b), the vision is one of a reorientation of the culture of schooling.

The Minister's construction of reality addresses a clear and present danger, one that aligns with population decline and the general tone of the *Now or Never* report. The twin sources of panic – low educational achievement and the population implosion – come together to fill in some of the analytic and policy details in *Now or Never* and apply the logic to the province's education system. In the following section we will outline some of this material and explore the kind of worker it imagines.

Changing rural images and dreams: place-specific development

Important characteristics of the new natural resource-based industries in the periphery is that they are considerably more knowledge intensive and more heavily industrialised than the traditional industries, which means that the road to success in the petroleum industry goes through a specific kind of education, and particularly through STEM education. In order to be able to fully benefit from the oil adventure or to return to build ships, young people need the right admission ticket, which can be achieved through education.

The Norwegian oil companies claim that they are interested in youth (Eni Norge) with stable, local attachments. Irving Shipyards make the same claims about luring people home from the western Canadian oil patch. However, the majority of the workers required appear to be highly specialised and highly mobile elite workers who operate globally. The oil and gas sector is a notoriously unstable labour market largely based on short-term contracts designed for flexible workers. In Finnmark, the majority of design and developmental solutions and

prefabrication in the high-activity initial phase of oil production took place in Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden (Eikeland, 2014). Most of the companies engaged in Finnmark in this phase brought their own staff, primarily male long-distance commuters flown in and housed during the construction period. Their task in Hammerfest was specific and required a minimal degree of contact and interaction with the regional business environment (Eikeland, 2014). After the initial developmental phase, the petroleum sector has relied heavily on outside labour and employers seem to search for qualified workers outside the region. A survey from NAV Eures in 2010 showed that 38% of the employers in Finnmark were planning to recruit workers from the EU in the upcoming year (Aure, Abelsen & Nilsen, 2012).

It is likely that a similar pattern could play out in Nova Scotia with the shipbuilding contract, where much of the design and development work appears to have been contracted out to European firms (CBC, 2013). It seems that access to the petroleum sector and the good jobs may not be automatic for local youth. Indeed, the escalation of the discourse around the need for a better educated workforce may be seen as a victim-blaming defensive position (see the section on ‘shock doctrine’ below) on the part of both government and industry when these new industries do not transform local labour markets in the way that was imagined.

Over time, the northern parts of Norway and Nova Scotia have also become more similar to the rest of their respective countries, developing services associated with modern society. At the same time, internal differences within these regions have increased due to the new presence of industry in certain communities and not in others. The results of this presence may take very concrete and visible forms. In the Hammerfest region, for example, increased activity provided a new waterfront promenade, renovated city streets/road networks, and kindergartens and schools were modernised and beautified (Eikeland, 2014). It is likely that these upgrades have an effect on how the locals view their communities, which may be why a 2008 Hammerfest youth survey showed that more young people wanted to live in Hammerfest than in 2004 (Aure, Abelsen & Nilsen, 2012). The survey did not, however, say anything about whether young people living in the small, rural communities surrounding Hammerfest had also changed their views about their own home places, which might look different in the shadow of the bright lights of the new and upgraded city of Hammerfest.

In Atlantic Canada, family incomes in some rural communities have been increased by mobile work and there are a variety of forms of evidence to support the transition effected by remittance money. The impact of contemporary forms of mobile work – its multiple effects on social, economic and cultural development in Canada – is not as yet well understood. What is clear, though, is that both population and wealth associated with development have tended to concentrate in urban centres like Halifax and Hammerfest. In Atlantic Canada, part of the workforce is highly mobile while other parts are not. Overall, the centralisation (urbanisation) tendencies continue, within the northern regions, but at the same time migration to resource boom areas concentrates population, at least temporarily, in select non-metropolitan locations. As the BMO report illustrates, there is little to suggest that this pattern of concentrated wealth and population will change. In Finnmark more than 90% of the petroleum-based revenue in 2010 came from the Hammerfest region.

With out-migration comes stagnating birth rates and an ageing population. Other places do,

on the other hand, enjoy the benefits of the booming oil and gas industry, and the positive trends have a tendency to be self-perpetuating. Developmental differences between geographical places in the Norwegian north and in Atlantic Canada have always existed, because of differences in possibilities for landing fish, building the best harbours for fishing vessels and so on. Places have developed differently and unevenly (Harvey, 2006). Therefore, it has always been problematic to speak of the relationship between the north and the south in Norway, or the east and the west in Canada, in simple centre–periphery terms. However, new industrial developments seem to have enhanced these mechanisms, and the driving forces behind inter-regional and intra-regional disparities seem to have become stronger, faster and more insistent.

Not a moment to lose: educational shock doctrine and managing cultural change

Some years ago Naomi Klein (2008) coined the term ‘shock doctrine’ to describe the way that panic is sown in populations to keep people off balance and unsettled. This is done in two ways. First of all, the actual panics and disasters are exploited by leaders to promote neoliberal social and economic policies. Secondly, immediate and desperate problem situations are manufactured in various ways by leaders in order to consolidate their power. Today it is undeniable that there are many pressing and dangerous problems that we face collectively, which results in a general feeling of what Anthony Giddens (1991) has called ‘ontological insecurity’. He refers here to the unpredictable consequences of modernity where the technologies we invent to solve problems actually create new sets of unintended and unforeseen trouble. Climate change is the quintessential example. The framing of the twin problems of population implosion and a ‘discredited’ pre-modern education system fits into well-established problem scenarios such as the massive out-migration of educated youth, the restructuring and even collapse of established resource industries, and places that have not urbanised in the way that other parts of the country have.

The key problem identified in Nova Scotia in the *Now or Never* report is to arrest the social and economic collapse imminent in the population implosion through culture change, and particularly the adoption of a neoliberal shift towards a focus on entrepreneurialism and the self-reliance required to shrink the role of the state. The shipbuilding contract is expected to lure people back from the Canadian west and from other places. But will the population have the skills for the leap into modernity? Will returning out-migrant ‘leavers’ from previous generations be enough to fill the jobs gap and, indeed, will they even want to return?¹ *Now or Never* argues that other strategies are needed, including immigration, more inclusive social attitudes and the inculcation of significant cultural change and entrepreneurialism.

Like *Now or Never*, which focuses substantially on cultural deficiencies and entrenched, complacent attitudes of the population, a recent publication from the provincial Department of Education, *The 3 Rs*, goes on to claim that cultural change in education is urgent:

There is not a moment to lose: our students are in school now, awaiting better learning opportunities to prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. Their future depends on having the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a quickly changing economy.

Nova Scotia's future depends on healthy, well-educated and socially responsible citizens to build the economy.

(*Government of Nova Scotia, 2015, p. 34*)

In Norway the educational issue that has received most attention recently is completion of upper secondary education. From the perspective of educational authorities, completion rates are too low, especially in vocational education and training, and especially in the north.² This analysis relates to national and regional policy documents emphasising changes and challenges faced by national and regional business interests. In the north, the importance of producing and maintaining a sufficient and well-qualified workforce is considered crucial. Due to structural change related to local economy and working life, such as the downsizing of primary industries including fisheries, other more knowledge-based industries such as marine biotechnology, petroleum, the maritime sector and tourism become increasingly important. Also, the traditional industries are themselves changing in terms of increased demands related to formal competence. In a knowledge-driven economy, formal competence becomes one of the most important national, regional and individual assets, and in policy documents this is seen as an important driver for increased innovation and worker competence.

A prerequisite for ensuring a competitive regional business life is that the young people complete formal education. Against this background, the government has launched a number of costly measures designed to improve throughput in secondary education, and even though the political discourse in Norway may have a softer tone than in Canada, there is no doubt how seriously the government views the situation. In a government white paper entitled *Students in Tomorrow's School*, the main goal of the education system is described as enabling students to keep up with changes in society and in knowledge development that are taking place at an increasing speed. These processes pose new demands on individuals, society, working life and the educational system. In Norway, regional differences in completion rates in secondary education and in national standardized test scores in primary education suggest that young people in the high north relate differently to the educational system than their counterparts further south (Bæck & Paulgaard, 2012; Bæck, 2015). Compared to young people in other places in Norway, northern youth therefore lag behind in the government-appointed race towards a knowledge society. From a government perspective, this situation needs to be corrected for the good of the individual and for strength of the society as a whole.

This cultural change mandated for Nova Scotia and Northern Norway includes the promotion of a specific construction of social responsibility aimed at changing how youth see themselves and others. This of course assumes that the opposite currently exists and that Nova Scotians and North Norwegians have not adapted to a socially responsible and inclusive way of living, a contention that, again, is interesting and worthy of debate. If we understand policy as an authoritative allocation of values (Easton, 1953), the Nova Scotian and North Norwegian populations are being positioned in this discourse outside the cultural sensibilities and knowledge practices required for prosperity in a neoliberal world. This is a question of the extent to which youth who face multiple layers of ontological insecurity are prepared for globalized modernity. In these discourses they are assumed to require and desire a place in a globalized economy. Thus, it is the responsibility of the system to prepare them, primarily

through a basic literacy and numeracy curriculum, a focus on science and technologies education, tighter controls on teachers and administrators, more surveillance, the promotion of entrepreneurship, and through a vague focus on inclusive education. The Government of Nova Scotia states the following: ‘In reality, our public education system has lost credibility in the eyes of many Nova Scotians over the past couple of decades. We have not done enough for our students, teachers, or parents to deliver a modern education system that puts us at the top of the class’ (Government of Nova Scotia, 2015, p. 6).

Through this form of discourse, people in Nova Scotia and in Northern Norway are framed as populations outside modernity. Indeed, statements such as these can be seen as an indictment of the failure to modernize, an old and familiar charge that can be read in many ways. For instance, historically, Nova Scotia has served to provide a reserve army of labour that can be deployed into areas of capital expansion when needed. Atlantic Canadians have then been criticised and defined as hopeless rustics and itinerants for fulfilling these roles. When this labour is not needed it is returned to the periphery where people are minimally maintained on social assistance, low-wage labour and a convivial culture of kinship, DIY, self-provisioning, barter and mutual aid (Sacouman & Brym, 1979). Even though the population in Northern Norway has not played the same role as reserve labour in a Norwegian context, the image of the northerner, as seen from the central south, has been much the same.

The irony is that this, in important respects, is the very mythic rural folk culture that is celebrated in tourism promotion for Nova Scotia (Mckay, 1994; Mckay & Bates, 2010) and for Northern Norway (Karlsen, 1998). To change this culture, then, is to change a deeply established way of being that despite its ontological ambivalence, is today very much a part of an Atlantic Canadian and a North Norwegian identity. It is also an image that has stamped the region as a therapeutic, slow-paced, relaxing tourist destination for generations (Kelly, 2013). The deeply ironic and somewhat confounding result of this analysis is that ongoing policies that strip infrastructure from multiply challenged rural communities not only continues, but is accelerated. The ultimate goal appears to be a thoroughgoing reconstitution of the modern rural subject, largely through education (Bennett, 2013; Howley, Howley & Kuemmel, 2014).

There are two fundamental features missing from this analysis (or lack of analysis), from our perspective. The first is the foundational assumption that contemporary change is an inevitable result of uncontrollable forces rather than political economic decisions. This discourse is essentially silent about the way that contemporary capitalism is systematically grabbing and despoiling land and moving people where it needs them for the ultimate benefit of a very small number of very rich and powerful people (Stiglitz, 2013; Fraser, 2014; Sassen, 2014). Contemporary economic thought has been caught in what Thomas Piketty (2014) has described as a massive exercise that denies the fundamental injustice built into the ordinary functioning of the economy. The analyses in the policy documents described above effectively accept that rural depopulation and community disintegration are inevitable results of economic development.

The second related feature in the analysis is the failure to confront the way that ‘business as usual’ actually requires large numbers of marginally educated precarious labour. The iconic northern worker, whom we find in different forms in both Northern Norway and Atlantic Canada, is one face of this ‘precarariat’ (Standing, 2014), one which is relatively well paid

when times are ‘good’ (i.e., when oil prices are high). The northern worker rides the waves of commodity prices, working when they are high and returning home when they are low. The work is hard and dangerous and the money is good when it is there. But work is not always available and eventually bodies can break down.

Another face of the precariat is the low-wage cadres of baristas and wait staff, store clerks, data workers, the low-wage service industry, as well as the other forms of ‘unskilled’ labour which relies on physical acumen, speed and automaticity rather than symbolic competence. Much of this labour force requires little formal education, and youth growing up in precarious families can drift rather easily into the same kinds of work their parents do, reproducing familiar patterns of unstable employment across generations. While some of it has been globalized and shifted to more or less permanent migrant, guest or immigrant workers, large amounts of this kind of labour continue to be necessary within advanced capitalist societies. This is entirely unacknowledged in the contemporary economic development rhetoric and there is no acknowledgement that it might be possible to improve the working conditions of ordinary but necessary workers who are essentially blamed for not joining the programme of modernity. This is the powerful and ironic paradox beneath the rhetoric of educational change, entrepreneurialism and innovation. Those who fail to heed its call and ‘fall into’ the service economy are not filling an important place in a contemporary labour market. They are constructed instead in reports like *Now or Never* and *The 3 Rs* as individual failures and a problem for society.

Conclusion: mixed messages for rural youth

As we have seen from Northern Norway, some rural and remote areas find themselves increasingly central to national development agendas because of the resources that suddenly show up there. In Nova Scotia the historic reserve army of labour ready to be deployed where it is needed is receiving new orders and being invited to participate in state-sponsored industry. What distinguishes these places from others is not connected to the place per se or to any qualities that these particular places exhibit. Rather, it has to do with the resources that happen to be at that particular place and what these resources can provide when it comes to economic growth, prosperity, development, urbanization and what can be described as ‘modern’ values. A flexible, educated/educable worker is needed, one that sometimes should be loyal to place and in other times ready to move depending on the requirements of capital. Apparently, not just any kind of (rural and remote) place or person is interesting and useful in terms of national labour and development agendas. As Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, in late modernity, no matter where we are born, there is no national, regional or even local community to protect and nourish. We are our own problem (Bauman, 1999).

Notes

- 1 Much of the answer to this kind of question lies in the vicissitudes of commodity prices, and particularly oil. As we write, oil prices are hovering between \$40 and \$50 per barrel. Economic growth is slowing down and Alberta lost population in the third quarter of 2014 when the slide was just beginning. Pull factors like the stabilising potential of the shipbuilding contract notwithstanding, inter-provincial migration trends and the availability

of workers in Nova Scotia depend to a considerable extent on global markets.

- 2 The average national completion rate five years after entering secondary education is 57% (83% in academic study programmes). In the northernmost county, for example, the completion rate in VET for those starting secondary education in 2008 was 42% among men and 48% among women.

References

- Aure, M, Abelsen, B & Nilsen, T (2012). *Ungdom og Goliat. Unge i Hammerfest, Alta og Honningsvåg om petroleumssektoren som framtidig arbeidsmarked*. Alta, Norway: NORUT.
- Bæck, UD (2004). The urban ethos: Locality and youth in north Norway. *YOUNG. Nordic Journal of Youth Research* 12, 99–115.
- Bæck, U-DK (2015). Rural location and academic success. Remarks on research, contextualisation and methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*. doi: 10.1080/00313831.2015.1024163.
- Bæck, U-DK & Paulgaard, G (2012). Introduction: Choices, opportunities and coping in the face of unemployment. In U-DK Bæck G Paulgaard (Eds), *Rural futures? Finding one's place within changing labour markets* (pp. 9–21). Stamsund, Norway: Orkana Akademisk.
- Ball, SJ (2012). *Global Education Inc.: New policy networks and the neoliberal imaginary*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bank of Montreal (2014). *Provincial Monitor*. October.
- Barrett, G (2015). Deconstructing community. *Sociologia Ruralis* 55(2), 182–204.
- Bauman, Z (1999). *In search of politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bauman, Z (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bennett, PW (2013). *The last stand*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Brown, DL & Schafft, KA (2011). *Rural people and communities in the 21st century: Resilience and transformation*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Castells, M (2009). *The power of identity: The information age. Economy, Society, and Culture Vol. II* (2nd edn.). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- CBC News (2011, 19 October). Jubilation as Halifax shipyard awarded contract. Available at <http://www.cbc.ca/1.1059989> (accessed 26 January 2015).
- CBC News (2013, 2 May). Shipbuilding contract holds \$250M mystery. Available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/shipbuilding-contract-holds-250m-mystery-1.1300816> (accessed 26 January 2015).
- Corbett, M (2004). 'It was fine, if you wanted to leave': Educational ambivalence in a Nova Scotian coastal community 1963–1998. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35(4), 451–471.
- Corbett, M (2005). Rural education and out-migration: The case of a coastal community. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de L'éducation* 28(1/2), 52–72.
- Corbett, M (2007). *Learning to leave: The irony of schooling in a coastal community*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Corbett, M (2010). Standardized individuality: Cosmopolitanism and educational decision-making in an Atlantic Canadian rural community. *Compare: A Journal of International and*

- Comparative Education* 40(2), 193–207.
- Corbett, M (2014a). We have never been urban: Modernization, small schools, and resilient rurality in Atlantic Canada. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development* 9(3), 186–202.
- Corbett, M (2014b). Toward a geography of rural education in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education* 37(3), 1–22.
- Easton, D (1953). *The political system, an inquiry into the state of political science*. New York: Knopf.
- Eikeland, S (2014). Building a high north growth pole: The northern Norwegian city of Hammerfest in the wake of developing the ‘Snow White’ Barents Sea gas field. *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 9, 57–71.
- Forsey, M (2015). Learning to stay? Mobile modernity and the sociology of choice. *Mobilities* 10(5), 764–783.
- Giddens, A (1991). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Government of Nova Scotia. (2014). *Now or never: An urgent call to action for Nova Scotians*. Available at http://onens.ca/wp-content/uploads/Now_or_never_short.pdf (accessed 21 January 2015).
- Government of Nova Scotia (2015). *The 3 Rs: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild: Nova Scotia’s action plan for education 2015*.
- Harvey, D (2006). *Spaces of global capitalism: A theory of uneven geographical development*. London: Verso.
- Howley, C, Howley, C & Kuemmel, W (2014). Mining the schoolhouse: Neoliberal education policy in Appalachia. *ASA Annual Conference*. Available at http://mds.marshall.edu/asa_conference/2014/Full/362 (accessed 4 February 2016).
- Jentoft, S (1993). *Dangling lines: The fisheries crisis and the future of the coastal communities: The Norwegian experience*. Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. Johns: Institute of Social and Economic Research.
- Karlsen, UD (1998). Til forsvar for den moderniserte nordlending. In RA Nilsen P Veiden (Eds), *Sosiologisk fantasi: Essays (Sociological phantasy: Essays)* (pp. 132–146). Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal.
- Kelly, U (2013). Find yourself in Newfoundland and Labrador: Reading rurality as reparation. In B Green M Corbett (Eds), *Rethinking rural literacies: Transnational perspectives* (pp. 53–74). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Klein, N (2008). *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. New York: Picador.
- Luke, A (2011). Generalizing across borders policy and the limits of educational science. *Educational Researcher* 4(8), 367–377.
- McKay, I (1994). *The quest of the folk: Antimodernism and cultural selection in twentieth-century Nova Scotia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- McKay, I & Bates, R (2010). *In the province of history: The making of the public past in twentieth-century Nova Scotia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Peters, MA & Bulut, E (Eds). (2011). *Cognitive capitalism, education and digital labor*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Piketty, T (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Trans. A Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA:

- Belknap Press.
- Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (2012). *Municipal census 2012*. Available at <http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca/Assets/Corporate/Census+Reports/Census+reports+Part+1.pdf> (accessed 3 February 2015).
- Rizvi, F & Lingard, B (2013). *Globalizing education policy*. London: Routledge.
- Sacouman, RJB & Brym, RJ (1979). *Underdevelopment and social movements in Atlantic Canada*. Toronto: New Hogtown Press.
- Sassen, S (2014). *Expulsions: Brutality and complexity in the global economy*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Schafft, K & Biddle, C (2015). Opportunity, ambivalence, and youth perspectives on community change in Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale region. *Human Organization* 74(1), 74–85.
- Sellar, S & Lingard, B (2014). The OECD and the expansion of PISA: New global modes of governance in education. *British Educational Research Journal* 40(6), 917–936.
- Standing, G (2014). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Stiglitz, JE (2013). *The price of inequality: How today's divided society endangers our future*. New York: WW Norton.
- Walsh, D (2012). Using mobility to gain stability: Rural household strategies and outcomes in long-distance labour mobility. *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 7(3), 123–143.
- Woods, M (2010). *Rural: Key ideas in geography*. New York: Routledge.