FOR A BETTER LIFE: THE INTEGRATION OF THAI MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND LABOR MIGRANTS IN ICELAND

A Dissertation in
Anthropology and Demography

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades Thai women began coming to Iceland for a better life, whether by marrying an Icelandic man, reuniting with Thai family already in Iceland, or through employer sponsorship. These three means are termed the “auspices of migration.” By 2006, however, Iceland’s policy of prioritizing workers from the European Economic Area made it nearly impossible for Thais and other non-Europeans to secure a work permit, leading to an increase in marriage-based migrations among this group. The main objective of this dissertation is to examine how the auspices of migration affect host country language skills and economic integration, the power and influence of Thai women in homes shared with Icelandic men, and reciprocal exchange networks between Thais and Icelanders. 858 Thai adults were living in Iceland at the time of the study, including 665 women. Fieldwork among this population took place over a period of 22 months. In my analyses I focus on qualitative interviews with factory workers, participant-observation in the Thai community, and quantitative survey data from a sample of 109 Thai women.

Results have shown that women who came to Iceland under the auspices of an employer had the best Icelandic language skills of all three groups of women, and as a result they also had better economic outcomes than those who came by other means. Additionally, employer-sponsored migrants reported belonging to more egalitarian households with less-traditional divisions of labor and more equitable distributions of decision-making power. In contrast, migrants sponsored by an Icelandic spouse reported the highest levels of cross-ethnic exchanges when compared to those who came to
Iceland under other auspices. Migrants sponsored by employers were far more likely to be limited to Thais-only in their exchange networks. These results suggest that the auspices of migration matter, and that Icelandic labor and migration policies constrain migrants’ choices in reaching Iceland. Such policies also condition the incentives and disincentives to linguistic, economic, cultural and social integration that migrants encounter upon arrival.
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I was studying at the University in Iceland in 2001 when I first visited Kolaportið, Reykjavík’s flea market. It was there that I heard two women speaking Thai, a language I had never imagined hearing in Iceland. Approaching their Thai-import booth in the market, I pressed my palms together in the traditional Thai wai greeting and said, “Sawatdii kha.” They returned the greeting, curious. I awkwardly explained that my mother was from Thailand and that my father had been Icelandic, but that I was American. They nodded and then asked what city my mother was from. I asked if there were many Thais in Iceland and they answered, “Oh yes, hundreds!” My eyes widened, but our conversation petered out quickly with smiles and nervous laughter. As I wai’d again and turned to leave, they murmured to each other about my being a loog-khrung, or “half-child,” literally, in Thai.

I began to see other Thais around the city, since they (like myself) had dark hair and eyes and were easy to pick out in an ethnically Icelandic crowd. Thai women used public transportation, shopped at malls, bought food at grocery stores, and joined in Icelandic public festivals. There were also places where I almost never saw them: on the university campus, in Western restaurants, at Icelandic social gatherings, and at the clubs and bars on the weekends where young Icelanders would go. I wondered what it was like for Thai women to live in this strange northern land. Iceland was a country that I found difficult to warm up to myself, even with my whole host of Icelandic relatives. I wanted to know why these Thai women had come to Iceland and how they coped with what I saw as a harsh and demanding environment for immigrants, especially from Asia.
Then, browsing the University of Iceland’s bookstore that winter, I stumbled onto an anthropology book edited in part by E. Paul Durrenberger. The blurb mentioned that he had done research in Thailand and Iceland, and that he was a professor at Penn State. The connection was compelling enough that I contacted Paul immediately. By the time I returned to Seattle that spring I had already started my application to graduate school. Paul served as my stalwart advisor in the department until his retirement. His support was unflagging from my first “deciduous” days in State College, rafting together on the Hvítá river in Iceland, and all the way up through my defense. Paul, thank you for inspiring my vision from the very beginning and for modeling good anthropology.

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\[
\text{Og þegar þú komst inn í líf mitt breyttist ég}
\]
\[
\text{Þú komst, þú komst við hjartað í mér}
\]
\[
\text{Ég þori að mæta hverju sem er}
\]
\[
\text{Þú komst, þú komst við hjartað í mér.}
\]

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation examines Thai marriage, family, and labor migration to Iceland using ethnographic and survey fieldwork. The goal is to explain different levels of social and economic integration of Thai migrants into Icelandic society. International migration is one of many complex issues resulting from globalization (Alba 1998), and the presence of a phenotypically unique, foreign population in Iceland has increased noticeably in the last decade. Iceland’s “context of reception” or attitude towards migrants is beginning to resemble that of mainland Europe's, with segments of the Icelandic population reacting negatively to those whose appearance, language, and religion differ markedly from their own.

This project employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand why some migrants integrate more successfully than others and what role the host society plays in determining outcomes of integration. Migration studies evolved in the fields of economics and sociology, centering for the most part on global capital flows, labor markets, and social networks (Massey 1999). Anthropology has been a latecomer to the migration studies scene, despite the discipline being well suited for the in-depth study of small populations over long periods of time. An anthropological approach is therefore in high demand in migration studies, considering that most immigration research (particularly concerning Europe) tends to be done by sociologists, political scientists, and population scientists.
Within the cross-disciplinary literature of migration studies, anthropology’s most familiar contribution has been that of transnational theory (Glick Schiller et. al. 1997) and includes analyses of migration’s impact on marriages and families remaining in the source country (Pessar 1997). These perspectives often seek to illuminate the female side of international migration streams, and yet a dominant assumption is that women are still somehow “following” men, or at most accompanying them into the new country (Sinke 1999). There have been few studies focusing on women who migrate first, and then bring their dependents later to the destination country (Kofman 1999), even though this pattern would be a relatively novel example of social capital and migrant networks (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990; Massey et al. 1987). This study seeks to illuminate the “woman as pioneer” type of migration, which predominates among the Thais in Iceland.

A handful of studies have addressed marriage as a specific migration strategy (Plambech 2005; Constable 2003; Brennan 2004; Fan and Huang 1998), but few have addressed whether the integration outcomes of marriage migrants differs from those of labor migrants (Piper and Roces 2003). There is a need for more rigorous research along these lines, given the increasing numbers of women who are choosing to migrate from developing countries to the West explicitly for union formation rather than strictly for

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1 The discussion of marriage as a “strategy” is not meant to imply that women who migrate internationally to join a partner are motivated entirely by self-interest in the form of a visa, residence permit, or financial security. While all of these may be a desirable outcome for many of the Thai women, ethnographically I observed that most were in partnerships based on mutual affection rather than being motivated by what either partner could “get” out of the relationship. When asked why they had come to Iceland from Thailand, many would answer, “For love, of course!” Nonetheless I refrain from using the word “love” to describe marriage-sponsored migration because it is problematic to untangle the myriad motives behind a decision to marry internationally. In many cases the women themselves may not know where the line between love and opportunity should be drawn, or if it needs to be drawn at all. This is my primary reason for basing the study on the women’s original, legal sponsorship for entering the country regardless of their feelings at the time of migration. The means of entering a country are a material fact, even if the actual motives behind that fact are overlapping and sometimes contradicting.
family reunification, sex work or low-skilled labor (Constable 2005). This study addresses the issue of how marriage migrants’ experiences differ from those who migrate for labor using survey data and holistic methods that are the hallmark of cultural anthropology. Its strength lies in an ethnographic focus on women who have pioneered this unique migration stream, eventually sponsoring their siblings and children rather than relying on others to forge a path for them. I attempt to understand Thai migration to Iceland not only by the numbers and individual stories, but also by placing the phenomenon in a larger context and seeing how it is greater than the sum of its parts.

In a 2005 pilot study of 17 Thai migrants in Iceland, I observed what appeared to be two differentially integrated groups. Individuals in one group were more comfortable with the Icelandic language, speaking Icelandic at home as well as in their place of work; many also spoke more English. They often had higher-paying jobs and more Icelandic social contacts, and several of them were successful local entrepreneurs. Those in the other group tended to have little or no Icelandic skills, worked at low-skill factory or fisheries jobs and spent most of their free time with other Thais in the area. Alcoholism and gambling, activities that many Icelanders stereotypically attribute to the Thai migrant population as a whole, were more common among the latter group and seemed to limit these individuals’ opportunities to integrate.

To be clear, Thai migrants who moved specifically to join an Icelandic spouse appeared to be better integrated into Icelandic society, while those who came exclusively to work or join a Thai spouse appear more isolated within the Thai enclave. The contributing roles of social networks, household gender dynamics, and the Icelandic
context of reception towards foreigners all seemed central to understanding the reasons why some individuals adapt successfully to their host society and some do not.

As a result of these observations, I investigate whether Thai marriage and family reunification migrants are more successfully integrated into Icelandic society than their employer-sponsored counterparts. The specific research questions that fall under the purview of this overarching concern include:

1. How do migrants’ original methods of migration sponsorship affect their linguistic and economic integration in their Icelandic host society?

2. How does the household division of labor and distribution of power between Thai migrants and their husbands (especially Icelandic husbands) reflect integration outcomes?

3. Are Thai migrants involved in reciprocal networks with Icelanders or are they isolated within their own ethnicities? If the latter is prevalent, what barriers exist to establishing more reciprocal, socially integrated relationships across ethnic lines?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted fieldwork in Iceland from March 2007 to December 2008 and gathered data using ethnographic participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and a comprehensive survey given to a random sample of Thai migrants in Iceland. Participant-observation, or the craft of immersing oneself successfully into a survey population and remaining acutely aware of the minutiae of their daily lives, involved regular attendance at Thai cultural festivals, social gatherings in people’s homes, informal interviews at Thai workplaces and restaurants, and nearly
three months working alongside migrants in a fish processing plant in Reykjavík\textsuperscript{2}.

Throughout the dissertation, I test the hypothesis that those who came to Iceland under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse are better integrated into their host society when compared with those sponsored by an employer, and even more so than those who came to Iceland to join a Thai nuclear family member.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation contextualizes this research in terms of the economic and migration policy changes that have led to an increase in marriage-sponsored migration to Iceland from Thailand. Chapter 3 discusses the data and methods used in the field, particularly the development and administration of the quantitative survey and the statistical analyses applied to the data. In Chapter 4, I provide a snapshot of the ethnographic fieldwork process from the perspective of the participant-observer, with a narrative describing the first few days of working in the fish-processing factory in Reykjavík.

The three main analyses begin with Chapter 5, which explores the connections between Icelandic and English language abilities and type of job and income. This chapter examines the extent to which migrants are both linguistically and economically integrated into Icelandic society. Chapter 6 explores the balance of both chores and power-sharing (or lack of) that takes place between Thai woman migrants and their Icelandic husbands, delving into whether the couple has integrated Icelandic-egalitarianism into their households or preserved more traditional, patriarchal structures instead. I address the question of whether Thai-Icelandic reciprocal exchanges reflect a level of Thai integration in Icelandic society in Chapter 7. I also examine the roles that

\textsuperscript{2} I describe the experience of working in a fish factory in Chapter 4, “Fieldwork Experiences.”
gossip, trust, and context of reception (as measured by experiences with discrimination) play in the likelihood of migrants being involved in reciprocal relationships. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by providing an overview of the research questions, results as shown in the preceding chapters, and promising avenues for both research and Icelandic immigration and labor policies.

Using ethnographic methods to design a survey and give qualitative context to the study, as well as social scientific methods to systematically gather data from a larger population, this dissertation offers unique insight into one of the fastest-growing but least-studied types of international population movement: marriage in combination with labor migration. This study contributes to both anthropological and migration theory with an in-depth example of how one group of relatively isolated migrants contends with long-distance migration from Thailand to Iceland, and under what circumstances they try or do not try to integrate into their European host society. The study has implications for the formation of more accurate and helpful policies on migrant integration, both in Iceland and in other Western countries.
Chapter 2

The Thai-Icelandic Migration Stream: An Overview

Introduction

Iceland arrived on the international migration scene later than most of its neighbors in Europe and North America due partly to its geographic isolation in the North Atlantic. Unlike the waters of the Mediterranean where migrants from Africa regularly attempt hazardous journeys to Spain and Italy, the more expansive Atlantic Ocean guards Iceland from anyone trying to reach it by unauthorized means. Iceland has also been shielded by its location in another way. Continental Europe serves as a geographic buffer between Iceland and migrant sending countries that offers numerous “intervening” opportunities. Along with a harsh climate characterized by dark and cold winters, Iceland is a less than ideal destination for many migrants. Thus, it had little need to grapple with issues related to international migration before the last ten to fifteen years.

Like much of Europe, Iceland was more a land of emigration than immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries; until recently the largest foreign-born populations in Iceland were those from other Nordic countries (Karlsson 2000, Münz 2008). By the end of the 20th century Iceland’s population had increased to 280,000, with five percent hailing from Northwestern Europe, the United States, Poland, the former Yugoslavia, the Philippines,

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3 Iceland was uninhabited until around the year 870, when settlers from a crowded Norway sailed west and stumbled upon Iceland. These settlers had a brief stopover in Ireland and the Scottish isles, which help explains genetic markers from these populations in modern Icelanders. In this sense Iceland is a “nation of immigrants” much like the United States, since there were no truly “native” Icelanders before the Settlement. After Iceland’s initial period of relative independence, Norway and then Denmark gained control of Iceland, a hold that lasted for nearly seven centuries. Iceland gained home rule in 1874 and full independence from Denmark in 1944, which helps explain why the largest immigrant group in Iceland, until the last few decades, was mostly Scandinavian.
Thailand, Canada, Vietnam, and China. In the last decade the number of foreign-born individuals in Iceland has more than doubled, with a small decrease occurring only with the advent of a deep recession in 2008\(^4\). As of 2009, the foreign-born constituted 11.8 percent of Iceland’s total population of 319,368; of relevance to this dissertation, 1,070 of the foreign-born population were born in Thailand (Statistics Iceland 2009). Figure 2-1 illustrates the distribution of migrant sending countries as of March 2009; the piece labeled “EU Accession 2003” refers to countries that became part of the European Union in 2003, with the greatest proportion of those in Iceland sourcing from the former Yugoslavia.

![Figure 2-1](image)

**Figure 2-1. Countries of Origin of Iceland’s Population, March 2009.**

This chapter lays out the conceptual background and history of immigration to Iceland from Thailand. It also provides an overview of the ethical and policy issues that motivated my research, as well as a justification of this research on the integration of

\(^4\) The proportion of migrants from each of these countries remains similar today.
Thai migrants in Iceland. I explore how Iceland’s immigration and labor policies have affected the migration experiences of Thai migrant women and their families in recent decades, particularly in the wake of Iceland’s decision to join the European Economic Area (EEA) in the 1990s and subsequent shutdown of a central avenue of labor migration to Iceland from outside of Europe. The nexus of Icelandic migration policy, the nation’s economic needs, and individual migrant motivations have led to the dominance of three main ways for Thais to enter Iceland: family formation with Icelanders, reunification with Thai family, and until very recently, sponsorship by Icelandic employers seeking low-wage workers.

While a number of theories in the social sciences address the pressures, processes, and consequences of international migration (Massey et al. 1993), perspectives on the interaction of policy and marriage-driven migration (especially with women rather than men as pioneer migrants) are less developed. Many studies discuss the motivations and experiences of women migrating to join a co-ethnic spouse across a border, or to migrate independently for work (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Parrenas 2001, Parrado et al. 2005), but only a few place women’s inter-ethnic marriage decisions in the broader scheme of migration studies (Constable 2003, Piper and Roces 2003, Brennan 2004). For example, Humbeck’s (1994) qualitative study examines women’s cultural adjustments and motivations for cross-border marriages among Thai marriage migrants living in Germany. Unfortunately, her study neglects the roles of government and economic forces in such marriages. This study attempts to add to the growing literature on the

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5 The EEA includes all of the EU countries in addition to Norway and Lichtenstein.
subject of cross-border marriages as both motive and means of migration, particularly in interaction with a small nation’s labor and economic policies.

**The Bridge from Thailand to Iceland**

The history of Thai migration to Iceland begins with individuals’ unequal access to resources and expectations of different conditions elsewhere. Mills (1999) describes how rural-urban migration from the poor, ethnically Laotian Northeast (Issaan region) of Thailand to Bangkok began in the 1950s, when Chinese migrant labor streams were stopped by the Thai government. It took 20 more years before this rural-urban migration stream began to include women and girls migrating into Bangkok (Rende Taylor 2005) and eventually abroad to Japan, the West, and the Middle East (Mills 1999). Since the 1970s, both Thai men and women have been leaving Thailand in search of better economic opportunity. Women in particular have been known to exit the country in increasing numbers, either to pursue labor as sex workers abroad or to marry foreign men (Phizacklea 2000, Ruenkaew 2002, Lisborg 2002, Humbeck 1994).

Why do migrants choose to leave their tropical home and move to a place as cold and unfamiliar as Iceland? One reason is that Thailand’s political economy does not offer equal opportunities for success to all those living within its borders, particularly to those from the North and Northeast of Thailand (De Jong et. al. 2002, De Jong et. al. 1996). As shown in Figure 2-2 below, the majority of the research participants living in Iceland source from Northeast Thailand, a region that is economically depressed and relies primarily on rice cultivation. Also, a strict social hierarchy in Thailand selects for gender, class, age, ethnicity, skin color, and place of birth, restricting those at the bottom
levels to a narrow range of life choices. This tacitly oppressive system has no doubt given many Isaan Thais, particularly women, an incentive to look for a way out (Mills 1999)—even if this means leaving their homeland for an island in the North Atlantic.

Figure 2-2. Sending provinces of Thai survey respondents in Iceland, 2008.

The first Thai immigrant to Iceland arrived in 1978 as the bride of an Icelandic man, starting about a decade after the stream of Thai women moving to Germany and other mainland European countries had already begun (Humbeck 1994). For nearly ten years afterwards, the number of new arrivals to Iceland from Thailand each year remained in the single-digits (Statistics Iceland 2009). Almost all of the women came via
marriage to Icelanders. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, siblings, parents, and children of the first wave of Thai migrants began arriving with the objective of work or school, alongside a steady population of those who sought an Icelandic spouse. Along with Filipinas and Vietnamese this group of Asians formed the first “visible minority” in a relatively homogenous Iceland.\footnote{Canada has used this admittedly controversial term in their Census since 1981, with the Employment Equity Act defining visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada 2006). While the term may well find itself obsolete in some years, today I find the title relevant in describing the minority populations of Iceland, especially because Iceland has historically been (and still is, for the most part) a phenotypically homogeneous country. Poles form by far the largest of the immigrant groups, but they do not distinguish themselves visually from among a crowd of native-born Icelanders in the same way that Asian groups do.}

Figure 2-3 provides a visual representation of the increase of Thai immigrants in Iceland over the decade preceding the time of this study, with each section shaded to represent the proportion of the growing population belonging to adult women, adult men, and children of both sexes. While the population of adult women has steadily increased over time and the population of children has not changed drastically year by year, the number of adult men coming to Iceland between 1998-2009 has increased substantially. Many of these men may have been sponsored by their mothers while they were still young enough to be brought as dependent family-reunification visa holders and simply aged into adults during their stay in Iceland. What is known is that almost none of these men came to Iceland for marriage to Icelandic women or via sibling-visa sponsorship, depending instead on other means of arrival in Iceland.
Indeed, unlike migration policies in the United States, siblings have never had the option of immigration via family reunification in Iceland\textsuperscript{7}; however, a pioneer migrant could connect a sibling or even a friend from home with an Icelandic contact (either an employer or a potential spouse), enabling the person to immigrate legally. Female anchor migrants asked their employers to sponsor work permits for working-age adults they knew in Thailand, including brothers—a pattern opposite to that of male-dominated migration streams in other countries. Work permits obligated migrants to stay with a single employer and citizenship was not an option until seven years of continuous

\textsuperscript{7}In the United States, the term “family reunification” encompasses visas obtained for spouses, parents, siblings, children, and other family members. In several European countries (such as the Netherlands and Sweden; see European Migration Network 2008), the term is more restricted in scope and only covers family sponsorship for purposes other than marriage. Migration exclusively for the purpose of marriage, on the other hand, falls under the term “family formation” (Kofman and Meetoo 2008). In this dissertation I follow the European distinction between these terms.
residence had passed. As a result, when possible, Thai pioneer migrants and those who followed them used family-reunification permits rather than work permits to bring their children, parents, and co-ethnic spouses from home; there was no such option for siblings.

Figure 2-3 and the population pyramid for the 2009 Thai population in Iceland below (Figure 2-4) reveal that the majority of Thai migrants have always been working age, with relatively few Thai-born children or people older than 60 years old. There are more women than men, and the men also tend to be younger—again, because nearly all of the latter depended on female pioneers to establish themselves before assisting male family members with migration.  

Figure 2-4. Population Pyramid of Thailand-Born Population in Iceland 2009.

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8 It is still too early in the settlement of the Thai population of Iceland to predict whether the current gender imbalance will eventually right itself; one might hazard a guess, however, that if more men are allowed to enter Iceland under the auspices of sponsoring family members, more Thai women and the second-generation of Thai children might choose to marry endogamously rather than with Icelandic men. It appears unlikely that Thai migrant men will find local Icelandic wives, since among Icelanders there does not appear much demand for Thai men as husbands compared with the demand for Thai women as wives.
Both male and female migrants from Thailand are often concentrated in low-skill, low-wage industries: fish and other food processing, care work, and janitorial work. Chapter 5 of the dissertation investigates the connection between work in low-skill employment and Icelandic and English speaking ability, but first we must understand the initial demand in Iceland for migrant laborers in these industries and the role of policy in either accommodating or discouraging such demand. It is therefore necessary to briefly examine the country’s recent economic history.

### The Business of Fish and Foreign Workers in the Icelandic Economy

Late-20th century forces of urbanization and globalization pulled young Icelanders out of the rural countryside, leaving small, once-thriving fishing towns to face serious labor shortages (Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska 2008). Among those who stayed, there was dwindling motivation to do the malodorous, cold, exhausting work of fish-processing that had sustained the villages since the late 19th century. As one factory owner (a native-born Icelander, in the business for 30 years) put it,

> Starting even in the 1960s, fish work was seen as low-class and Icelanders began to slowly stop working [in that industry]…. [Icelanders] really are the best workers, but they don’t want to do the work anymore.

By 1998, the number of Icelanders employed in the fish industry had already declined to only 9.8 percent of the employed Icelandic population; by 2005, it decreased further to 5.7 percent (Directorate of Labour 2009).

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9 74.4 per cent of 137 respondents who answered my survey question (from an original N of 145) were employed in low-skill, low-wage work.
Even in Reykjavík, educated Icelanders tended to shy away from not only fish work but other kinds of manufacturing jobs: candy and chocolate factories that made nammi (sweets) for their children; meat-processing plants that butchered and packaged the nation’s pork, beef, chicken, and lamb; and large-scale bakeries that produced Iceland’s daily bread, requiring grueling graveyard shifts. Hospitals and nursing homes also required growing numbers of care workers to assist aging Icelanders. All of these employers needed workers who were willing to labor for long hours under difficult conditions, basically for minimum wage. The pool of low-wage native workers stagnated as the country transformed into a post-industrialized nation.

These structural changes were not unique to Iceland, but the country’s geographic isolation had buffered it somewhat from the troubles that other Western nations experienced with guest workers and immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s (Münz 2008). This same isolation obviously became problematic once the demand for laborers exceeded supply in the lowest sector of the Icelandic labor market (Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska 2008). There were simply not enough Icelanders who were willing to do the “dangerous, difficult, and dirty” jobs that have become bottom-sector employment for immigrants not only in Iceland, but in most developed countries. As is common in countries with dual labor markets (Piore 1979), foreigners began to avail themselves of Iceland’s low-wage labor opportunities; the type and number of incoming foreign laborers could only be determined by the overlap of both migration and economic policies.
European Integration and the Evolution of Policy

Iceland’s current integration with the European Union’s (EU) labor market is the result of a long process of policy decisions, moving the country’s economy closer to Europe from the margins of the continent. Iceland first joined the Nordic Council in 1954, then the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1970, and finally the EEA in 1994. Previously Iceland lacked any restrictive labor-movement policies, but as part of its decision to join the EEA the country agreed to grant work permits to EEA-citizens ahead of applicants from non-EEA countries (Ministry of Social Affairs 2008, Alþing 2009). This decision conformed to the central purpose of the Area, which was to remove barriers to the free passage of labor, goods, capital, and services across borders. Iceland thus retained sovereignty over its fishing grounds (a major reason for why the country did not want to join the EU), while simultaneously gaining access to goods, labor, and capital for its growing industries.

Despite the requirement to grant work permits to EEA citizens above all other applicants, the first ten years of EEA membership did not have much effect on migrants coming to Iceland from outside of the Area. There were plenty of jobs to be found for all who wanted them in Iceland, a land of historically low unemployment rates—hovering around one to two percent for as long as the country has kept unemployment statistics (1957), except in the case of rare but severe economic crises when it has jumped to between five and nine percent (Karlsson 2000; Directorate of Labour 2009). There was an especially large demand for workers of all backgrounds after the neoliberal Icelandic government privatized the national banks in 2000, leading to an explosion of financial
growth across the Icelandic economy and individuals making significant profits from trading fisheries quotas.

As the years passed, more EEA citizens began to take advantage of the Icelandic labor market and many employers found creative ways to hire from their preferred pool of Asian workers. In a reversal from previous decades, when employers had depended somewhat on their own foreign employees’ entreaties to sponsor the work permits of siblings and friends, in the early 2000s some factory owners began approaching their Thai and Filipina workers and asking specifically who the company could bring from home to work in Iceland (Interview with factory owner). While the employees gladly responded to their bosses’ requests, the availability of work permits was not to last.

Icelandic employers and potential migrant workers from non-EEA countries alike were ultimately stymied by the EU’s 2003 Treaty of Accession admittance of ten mostly Eastern European countries. Technically, residents of these countries gained the right to free movement on May 1st, 2004, but the EU allowed Iceland and other countries to close the gates to their labor market during a temporary transition period (Münz 2008). In 2006, Iceland lifted the postponement and the new EEA residents were free to work in Iceland without a permit. Iceland’s Directorate of Labour (Vinnumálastofnun) essentially stopped issuing work permits for low-skilled non-EEA workers in fall 2005 in anticipation of a massive flow the following spring. The most dramatic change was among the Polish population in Iceland. Their numbers grew from 2,167 in 2005 to 10,540 in 2008, multiplying nearly fivefold within just three years (Statistics Iceland 2009).
In this manner the way for third-country nationals (citizens of countries outside of the EEA) desiring to work in Iceland was almost completely shut down. The Directorate of Immigration (Útlendingastofnun) also tightened its family reunification laws in 2004; sponsored parents had to be age 66 and over, while spouses had to be at least age 24 before migrating. Additionally, Figure 2-5 demonstrates a visible decrease in the numbers of work permits issued to applicants of Asian countries; the only exceptions made were for applicants who were specialists, students, au pairs, or athletes.

Figure 2-5. Changes in Work Permits Granted to Asian Citizens 2005-2008.

Very few of these designations applied to prospective Asian immigrants, other than to a small influx of technology specialists from India in 2008 (Letter from Baldur Áðalsteinsson, Directorate of Labour on November 19, 2009). Clearly, if Asians and
other non-EEA citizens wanted to find a way to work in Iceland, they would have to find other ways to achieve their goals.

**Additional Geographic and Policy-Related Barriers to Migration**

As of 2006, Morocco and Turkey were the top two sources of non-EU immigrants entering the Union (Münz 2008). In Iceland, aside from a temporary increase in contract workers from China to build the Kárahnjúkar dam in the mid-2000s, the top non-EU, non-Western source countries have been the Philippines and Thailand (Statistics Iceland 2009)—countries half a planet away. Surprisingly, at least given their numbers in the EU, citizens of Morocco and Turkey have not come to Iceland in significant numbers. Then again, it seems they would have little reason to do so given that the proximity of mainland Europe provides a greater chance of successful entry compared with Iceland. Obviously, this cannot be the only reason why migrants from these countries are less present in Iceland while migrants from distant Asia remain the largest population of non-Western immigrants in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2009).

Another reason may be that Iceland never had any colonies, and in fact it was a colony of Norway and then Denmark until independence in 1944. Other than Scandinavia, there are no historical or linguistic ties for citizens of other countries to draw upon as a reason for migration to Iceland, as there are in France, Italy, Belgium and other European countries.

Geography and colonial history aside, it is perhaps most important to consider the crucial role of family reunification and family formation (marriage) migration along with the “cultural logics of desire.” that account for the motivations for cross-border marriages
between Western men and non-Western women (Constable 2003). It is clear from 2008 data, presented in Figure 2-6, that citizens from both the Philippines and Thailand represent the highest proportion of applicants for family-reunification permits to Iceland, the vast majority of which are sponsored by Icelandic men (Directorate of Immigration 2009).

Figure 2-6. Top ten nationalities requesting family-reunification permits in 2008.

Access to the global “marriage-scape” (Constable 2005) is the original way by which Asian immigrants found themselves on a path to Iceland. Perhaps this serves as a partial explanation of why Moroccans and Turkish migrant groups, composed of a much higher percentage of men than the majority-female Asian population in Iceland (Münz 2008, Statistics Iceland 2009), have little opportunity to migrate in such a manner. Both male and female third-country nationals may desire to work in the EU. Still it is women who have a certain advantage in being able to immigrate as a wife, a worker, or both. It

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10 See Appadurai’s (1996) original discussion of various “scapes,” (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, and technoscapes among others), his term for new fields of movement and communication facilitated by a globalized “imagination.”
should be noted that the analytic distinctions between these categories are often blurry, even among the women themselves (Piper and Roces 2003).

As a reflection of the “cultural logics of desire,” Western women generally do not seek to marry Moroccan and Turkish men. However, Western men have long shown specific interest in non-Western women, and certainly many non-Western women are drawn to the appeal (and visa status) of marrying a more “modern,” Western man (Constable 2003, Esara, 2009, Tosakul 2010). The West’s attraction to the exotic as a facet of Orientalism cannot be ignored, at least as a partial cause of this phenomenon. Certain men may be drawn to the idea of marrying someone perceived as more “traditional” and obedient due to being from a non-Western background, especially in comparison to women from the men’s home society. Using Norway as an example, Flemmen and Lotherington (2008) observe that apart from the more common cross-border marriages with neighboring Danes and Swedes, Norwegian men have married women primarily from Thailand, the Philippines, and Russia. Norwegian women, on the other hand, enter non-Scandinavian cross-border marriages primarily with men from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States (Flemmen and Lotherington 2008), a pattern that likely exists on a smaller scale in Iceland. Thus the options for migration by marriage are significantly gendered, heavily favoring women over men.

Since Iceland’s 1994 decision to join the EEA, and especially after the admission of the eastern European countries in 2005, family formation (marriage) is no longer just one of several options for legally immigrating to Iceland—it is virtually the only alternative for most non-EEA women looking to migrate. Non-EEA men desiring to move to Iceland as laborers have even fewer options available and must depend on their
mothers, wives, or daughters to sponsor them as family-reunification migrants after first taking several years to establish themselves. Would-be migrants to other Western countries typically have the option of smuggling themselves across land or sea borders. In contrast, laborers wishing to enter Iceland illegally have only the impractical options of either stowing away on a container ship or ferry and hoping to remain invisible upon arrival or overstaying a visa after flying into Iceland. Both options require significant access to capital that the majority of non-Western migrants lack.

In contrast to Icelandic and other European nations’ policies, a situation in Norway illuminates a different kind of “gendered geography of power” (Pessar and Mahler 2001). In Svalbard, an extremely isolated archipelago located at 78 degrees North in the Arctic Ocean, approximately 70 Thai people make a living without requiring work or residence permits. This is the result of a unique treaty signed with Russia in the early 20th century. A few Thai women with Norwegian husbands anchored this stream in the 1990s, and then recruited both male and female workers from Thailand in roughly equal numbers. Thus, the current gender ratio among Thais in Svalbard is reportedly more balanced than that of countries where marriage (by women) is the only viable form of access.

Some Thai women in Svalbard do eventually end up marrying Norwegian men, a decision which gives them access to the rest of Europe without becoming dependent on a man for the right to work and reside in Svalbard. Still, marriage is not a prerequisite for getting to Svalbard in the first place. Thai men in Svalbard generally do not have the option to marry Norwegian women, and as a result are unable to leave the archipelago for anywhere other than Thailand. They are geographically cut off from crossing into
Norway, and they possess no visa or permit to enter any other country than their own (Jensen 2009); once again, the “privilege” belongs to females and their attractiveness as partners in marriage to Western men. The difference from Iceland here is that in Svalbard, Thai women can choose to marry local men after arrival or not to marry at all. This detail plays an important role in determining the possible integration outcomes of Thai migrants in Iceland compared with Svalbard or other locales where migrants are not forced to consider marriage as a means of migration.

Despite the Icelandic government’s recent development of a policy of integration, the government’s goals for its migrant populations are not entirely clear. Does Iceland sincerely want to aid the full integration of all types of migrants into Icelandic society regardless of skills or origin, or would they rather raise the bar of migration and citizenship so high that only the most attractive, primarily European migrants are able to access the Icelandic labor market? In effect, doing so allows EEA citizens to dominate the low-wage job sector without ever having to express a desire to integrate into Icelandic society, while also increasing the pressure on marriage as the path of least resistance for non-EEA citizens entering Iceland.

Privileging EEA citizens and well-educated specialists ahead of all other categories may well have stemmed the flow of non-EEA workers into Iceland, if that has been the government’s policy goal. For people who are desperate to move abroad and seek a better or at least different life, however, choosing from such a narrow range of options can lead to serious consequences for the nation and in some cases, the migrants themselves. Women entering Iceland as total dependents of male sponsors risk abuse and social isolation from the services and networks that exist to help them (Merali 2008),
unable to engage in the types of reciprocal exchanges with both other Thais and Icelanders that I discuss as a measure of social integration in Chapter 7. These situations of isolation, while far from universal, result in the precise opposite of “integration” even when the women themselves want to join mainstream Icelandic society.

**Marriage as an Unsustainable Response to Policy Changes**

Recent changes in Icelandic labor and immigration policy have played a role in deterring the volume of third-country nationals seeking to work in Iceland, in particular Asians. During an informal interview, one young Thai female cashier working in a Reykjavík grocery store revealed her awareness of the cut-off point between coming to Iceland as a labor migrant versus having little choice than to come as a marriage migrant: “My older sister brought me here, since she got married to an Icelandic guy. I was lucky to get in before they shut down that way for Asians to get here. I don’t want to have a boyfriend or husband.”

For marriage migrants, a foreign spouse must typically dwell in Iceland and remain married to an Icelandic citizen for at least three consecutive years before becoming eligible for permanent residence and citizenship. Other family-reunification permits require migrants to dwell in Iceland for seven years before applying for citizenship. It is likely for these reasons that there have been low numbers of applications from Thai citizens for au pair and student permits since 2004 and significantly higher numbers of family reunification permits (Figure 2-7).
As we saw earlier in Figure 2-6, the highest numbers of family reunification applicants in 2008 came from the Philippines and Thailand, respectively—countries which have consistently been denied work permits since 2005. Also, without indication as to their national origins, 48 percent of the total 1,728 family reunification permit applicants in 2008 were granted to women aged 18 and up, with an additional 37 percent granted to children under age 18 (Directorate of Immigration 2009).

Figure 2-8 illustrates an increase in marriages to Icelandic citizens since the drop in work permits granted to third-country nationals in 2005, as well as an increase in sponsoring children of foreigners most likely initiated by ethnic Thais. It is clear that the majority of the applicants for family-reunification permits from Thailand arrived via marriage to Icelandic citizens. The next largest percentage went to children reuniting with a parent or both parents in Iceland, and the smallest percentage obtained permits via reunifications with a co-ethnic spouse.
Despite the success of a few migrants who have found alternative ways into Iceland, female migrants realistically only have the strategy of marriage migration as a road to long-term residence in Iceland. This is not to say that all non-EEA female migrants are determined to use marriage solely as a means to get into Iceland; on the contrary, it was clear in my ethnographic work that the majority of cross-border marriages between Asian women and Icelandic men were bona fide and entered into with good faith, regardless of the often vast cultural and socio-economic differences between the two parties. During home visits and interviews, I observed a variety of Thai-Icelandic couples; it was rare to suspect that either side of such a partnership would have been actively coerced into a cross-border marriage, though of course the range of agency each party possesses in making such decisions is another discussion entirely (Constable 2003,

For the most part these cross-border couples, as well as the less common co-ethnic Thai migrant couples, were doing the best they could to maintain functioning, mutually satisfying lives together—a portrait illustrated by the data and analyses in Chapter 6 of the dissertation, where I examine the power balance and division of labor of survey participant households. On the whole, the population of Thai women in Iceland did not appear to exist in a bubble or enclave; on the contrary, given the chance nearly all engaged with their surrounding new culture and sought out ways to keep their family multi-cultural rather than isolated in one or the other. For example, despite nearly all being devout Theravada Buddhists, Thai women urged their children to take part in traditional Icelandic Lutheran confirmations. At the same time, many Icelandic husbands attended Thai festivals alongside their wives, understanding little of the language or traditions but expressing enjoyment of the food and environment all the same. One woman mentioned that her husband ate Icelandic food for breakfast and lunch, but that he had no choice but to eat her Thai food for dinner every night—laughing as she added, “I cook with very hot peppers, so if he is ever bad to me I can use extra hot peppers in his food to punish him!”

\textsuperscript{11}Scholars of marriage migration debate whether women in developing countries who emigrate for marriage do so of their own free will or if their choices are structured by the limited options for mobility and success available to them at home. For example, if a woman in Thailand is relatively well-off and highly educated, what are the chances she would still choose to leave home and marry a man living in Europe? Additionally, do men in developed countries choose to marry someone from another culture entirely of their own free will, or are their own choices structured by a lack of access to their local marriage market due to greater economic reasons or a lack of human capital?
Another Thai woman told me that she did not initially come to Iceland to be with a man, since an extended relative had helped obtain a work permit for her to come to Iceland. However, she had dated a Thai man in Iceland for a while who ended up being unfaithful to her, and she left him for a farang (Western/white) boyfriend. She stated that her current husband did drink and smoke, but that “at least he’s faithful,” and helps with supporting her family and children from a previous marriage.

Icelandic spouses assisted in sending remittances to the wife’s family or hosting the wife’s parents in their home, and a number of Icelandic husbands also traveled with their wives to Thailand to help build a new house for their in-laws. During my ethnographic research at the factory, one woman returned from an annual trip to Thailand with a thick album of photos from her home village. She insisted that I look at pictures of the brand new sports-utility vehicle she had just purchased for her parents, as well as the new house she and her husband had been sending money home to build for the last several years\(^\text{12}\). Both items were far nicer than anything the woman appeared to own in Iceland.

Problems arose most often, however, when a marriage “broker” was involved in organizing what must be considered almost purely a transaction of commodities rather than a bona fide relationship\(^\text{13}\). Brokers, often co-ethnic relatives or friends of the prospective migrant, would pay an Icelander a reported 500,000 Icelandic krónur, equivalent to nearly USD 7,000 at the time—far more than the average Thai migrant.

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\(^{12}\) Mills (1999) discusses the pressures on Northeastern Thai women to migrate away from their village in order to both provide financially for their families and also to achieve a thansamay or modern lifestyle. Such a lifestyle is represented by the ability to consume “modern” or more Westernized clothing, cars, televisions, housing and other symbols of perceived financial and social success.

\(^{13}\) The term “bona fide” does not by any means imply that a marriage is immune to conflict—only that it was entered into in good faith.
from Isaan could ever afford to pay up front—for his willingness to participate in marriage migration fraud. Again, while such situations are exceedingly rare in Iceland, they do exist; it is these situations that present the greatest likelihood of victimization and abuse.

Let us imagine that a Thai woman from a small village desires to emigrate, and she contacts (or is contacted by) a woman who travels back and forth between Iceland and Thailand. The woman, a broker, knows of an Icelandic friend of her own husband who is looking for a Thai wife, or is at least willing to marry a Thai woman in exchange for compensation. The broker arranges for the two to meet, either virtually online or in real life, and they agree to marry. The prospective migrant will eventually need to enter Iceland on a family-reunification residence permit obtained by her spouse. Assuming that the immigrant and her new husband pass the Directorate of Immigration’s marriage interview, a policy in effect since 2003, the new immigrant would be expected to work off the debt to her co-ethnic broker. Sometimes the man involved would charge her even more for the guarantee of his silence to the Icelandic immigration authorities. This form of self-selected smuggling is not unique; it happens in any country where marriages to local citizens (and therefore residence permits or visas) can be bought or worked for as a commodity (Mix and Piper 2003).

While one could describe the prospective migrant as exercising agency in her decision to emigrate from Thailand, a migrant’s vulnerability to exploitation upon arrival cannot be ignored. At Kvennaathvarf, or the Reykjavík Women’s Shelter established in 1982, women actively seek out or are referred to confidential assistance for emotional or physical abuse (Gurdin 1996). Five percent of the women visiting the center in 2008
originated from Asia; 30 to 40 percent of the total women coming to the shelter were foreign. While their exact numbers are unknown, the number of Thai women visiting the shelter each year has also increased since the early 1990s (Kvonnaathvarf 2008) and is disproportionate to the number of Asian and specifically Thai women living in Iceland. This is a problem unique to their demographic.

As reported by Kvonnaathvarf in 2006, 54 percent of the abusers of foreign women are Icelandic men. There have been known cases of serial abusers who marry women for less than three years at a time, divorcing them just before becoming eligible for residence permits and then marrying a new woman (Interview with Director of the Women’s Shelter). There have been cases where, after these abusive marriages have ended in divorce, some women have appealed successfully for the right to continue living Iceland rather than being deported; however, this is not known to be the norm (Interview with Margrét Steinarðsdóttir, Intercultural Centre). Guðmundsdóttir (2009) reports that women from inside the EEA who seek help at Kvonnaathvarf are in a much better position relative to those from outside the EEA, since the latter mostly depend on their husbands to maintain their visas.

Icelandic men are not the only abusers of foreign women; the remaining 46 percent of the abused foreign women at the Women’s Shelter in 2006 reported that the offenders were co-ethnic men from their home countries, often husbands or boyfriends (Kvonnaathvarf 2007). It is difficult to generalize from such small numbers about how

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14 A surprisingly high proportion of the abusers of foreign women are in fact foreign men, most often from the same home country as that of the women being abused—a large number of these cases were from Eastern Europeans, it was reported. This points up the fact that it is not only Icelandic men who take advantage of their wives’ vulnerability, but also fellow co-ethnics from the women’s countries of origins who may have “brought” a wife to Iceland from home or married someone from home they met during their stay in Iceland.
many more women may have asked for help if they had known of the existence of a woman’s shelter, and also had the opportunity to get away from their husbands and seek refuge. However, even with these few statistics, it is obvious that the phenomenon of third-country nationals marrying solely for the purpose of migration to Iceland is not without consequence.

Thai women’s decisions to use marriage as a vehicle for entering Iceland are constrained by the reality of the residence permit timeframe and their dependence on the marriage lasting three to four years before they can risk leaving. Recent laws allow women to report their husbands for abuse without fear of deportation, but these changes are new (Alþing 2011a) and it is not yet clear how much the news about this law has filtered down to the women in need of hearing about it. Additionally the burden of proof is often on the woman, and it is her word against her husband’s in some cases. As one Thai woman who had lived in Iceland for 17 years stated, “I was married to an Icelandic man for the first three years I lived in Iceland, but he didn’t want me to work or even leave the house. I got my Icelandic citizenship and divorced him, and now I am bringing my children from Thailand to live and work here.” This woman did not specifically mention any instance of abuse with her former husband, but similar stories abounded in the ethnography—migrant women who were bound to remain in unhealthy, sometimes abusive marriages due to residence-requirement policies and a lack of freedom to migrate legally in any other way. As I describe at the beginning of Chapter 6, another Thai woman’s significantly older Icelandic husband decided that he didn’t want me to talk with his wife after I had been in their home for several hours, especially when he could not understand what we were saying in Thai. The woman expressed fear of retribution
from him if she participated even in my written survey, and said under her breath as I was leaving, “I can’t go [anywhere] because the man doesn’t want to go anywhere…. I just have to wait for him to die.”

**Conclusion**

The last few decades of Icelandic economic and political history provide a context for the recent increase of immigration in Iceland, specifically among populations from Asia and the newest members of the EEA labour market. A portrait of the current Thai population in Iceland reveals that many migrants hail from the lower and middle classes of Thailand and lack the necessary financial or human capital to migrate to Iceland independently. Their migration decisions, as well as those of the individuals who follow them, are both constrained and incentivized by the nexus of gender, geography, and policy.

With the 2006 admission of the new EEA countries to Iceland’s labour market, third-country nationals who could once migrate via employer sponsorship now have little other choice than to get married as a way into Iceland. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of family-reunification permits based on marriage since 2005, including those from Asian women marrying Icelandic men\(^\text{15}\). Foreign women with Icelandic husbands form a disproportionate number of those seeking refuge at the Women’s Shelter in Reykjavík; it must be considered that a greater percentage of these family-reunification permits are being given to those in sham marriages, even if such

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\(^{15}\) From my own sample, 14 women reported arriving in Iceland between 2006 and 2008.
marriages do not feature prominently in the dissertation research results to follow. Such marriages do exist, and they are a growing problem among this unique population.

As mentioned earlier, the Icelandic government has made several human-rights based amendments to their 2002 Law on Foreigners, granting abused or trafficked spouses the right to petition for a temporary residence permit even if the minimum residence requirement has not yet been filled. These amendments resemble the US’ Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (US HHS, 2011) as well as similar laws enacted by Iceland’s Scandinavian neighbors. However, the extent to which foreign and particularly Thai women in Iceland have been informed of their rights using language that they understand is unknown and deserves further attention. Iceland has also attempted to filter out “suspicious” couples with marriage interviews since 2003.

Given the sheer increase in applications for family-reunification permits, however, the Directorate of Immigration might consider intensifying their marriage investigations if at all possible, both for the sake of the law and for the well-being of those hoping to improve their lives through migration. Certainly, such investigations could also be used against bona fide couples who may lack the appropriate “proof” of a true relationship and may exacerbate problems of discrimination against minorities trying to immigrate to Iceland in bona fide relationships, but it would appear beneficial to be overly cautious rather than not careful enough with enforcing visa requirements. Iceland might also consider providing third-country nationals with an alternative to family-reunification migration. Setting annual quotas of work permits approved for each country in selected industries, for example, or providing an annual lottery of work permits with the means to obtain permanent residency or citizenship in the future, might
be possible alternatives that would reduce the number of sham marriages taking place in Iceland. Enabling the sponsorship of siblings as a part of family reunification sponsorship would also alleviate the pressure on marriage as a way of entering Iceland to work.
Chapter 3

Data and Methods

Introduction

This chapter explains why Iceland is an ideal research site and the methods that were used to generate information on the incorporation of Thai immigrants in Iceland. The discussion of methods covers both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. The latter includes a description of the development of the survey instrument, the sampling frame, and the challenges of fielding this study. I also describe secondary data supplied by the Icelandic government and from non-profit organizations in Iceland.

Iceland as a Field Site

Unlike most countries that serve as migrant destinations, Iceland is a relatively small island that is distant from its nearest European neighbor. Because it is impossible to reach by land and difficult to reach by sea with makeshift vessels, the situation for studying immigrants and their level of integration is qualitatively different in Iceland than in many other countries. In the larger industrialized countries of continental Europe that have been dealing with international migration issues for several decades, it would be impossible to seek out the original “first” immigrant from Turkey, Morocco, or other source countries. The immigrants in each country now number in the millions and the original immigrants’ children and grandchildren have long established themselves in their parents’ adopted countries. Moreover, he “first” immigrants may no longer even be
alive. In Iceland, however, the flows are so recent and novel that it is still possible to observe the process of immigrant integration in the first generation. The oldest members of the second generation (born in Iceland) in Iceland are in their 40s and early 50s.

Additionally, individuals wishing to travel to Iceland from outside of Europe (specifically, outside of the Schengen Area\textsuperscript{16}) must obtain visas based on offers of employment, family formation and reunification, or tourism. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, there exists the possibility of individuals overstaying their visa and perhaps the smuggling of some migrants as stowaways on ships, but otherwise there is no other way for immigrants to cross “illegally” into Iceland. Thus Iceland does not have the same problem that countries such as the United States might have when dealing with permeable land borders. Every entry and exit is regulated and recorded at all ports of entry, and the National Registry of Iceland also maintains a comprehensive list of individuals currently residing in Iceland.

Although the National Registry is not always current since it depends to a large extent on individuals registering their residence or reporting changes when moving, this listing of names, addresses, countries of birth and citizenship statuses is a potentially invaluable resource for studying immigrants in Iceland. Every resident of Iceland is obligated to have a ten-digit national identity number, called a \textit{kennitala}. Visitors who overstay their tourist visas may not have these national identity numbers at first, but it is very difficult to get by in Icelandic society without one. Indeed, it is required for even the simplest transactions and benefits. The national identity number is made up of a

\textsuperscript{16} The Schengen Area was established in 1985 and consists of 25 countries, overlapping in many cases with membership in the European Union and Eurozone—but not always. For example, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland are all part of the Schengen Area but share no association with the European Union, though all belong to the European Economic Area (EEA).
person’s birthdate and a four-digit code that refers to whether or not that person was born in Iceland.

In addition to names and addresses mentioned above, these national identity numbers are also linked to each individual’s bank account number. The online-bank version of the registry is a tool that anyone with an Icelandic bank account can access freely and without special permission. The idea of a similar system existing in any other country is difficult to imagine, mostly due to security issues. In Iceland, however, a nation of just 320,000 used to having a searchable online database of every Icelander who has ever lived in addition to the exact genetic connection between any two Icelanders, the idea of having access to so many strangers’ personal information may not be terribly disturbing. For most of their history Icelanders have shared a sense of everyone literally being “family” (Pálsson 2002), so there is still little reason to fear a “stranger” taking over one’s identity for wrongful use.

The physical isolation of this nation, paired with its history of diligent recordkeeping, creates an almost laboratory-like setting for the study of immigration. Assuming researchers gain permission from the Data Protection Authority (Persónuvernd) for their work and succeed in obtaining complete sampling frames from the National Registry, it is possible to conduct research in as ideal of a situation as possible. In social science research, the ability to draw a true simple random sample of a difficult-to-locate minority population is a welcome luxury in an urban, logistically challenging field location.

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17 I am referring here to Íslendingabók, or “The Book of Icelanders,” maintained at http://www.islendingabok.is and accessible to anyone registered with an Icelandic national identity number.
Research Design and Limitations

This study was originally designed as a static group comparison (Bernard 2002). The two groups of interest were those who came to Iceland under different auspices of migration. The static group comparison introduces a threat to validity in that it is post-migration only and there is no measurement of how similar the two groups were before migration took place. I attempted to address this problem by asking participants about whether they came from particular areas of Thailand, using proxy variables for measuring socioeconomic status before migration, and inquiring about educational achievement in Thailand. In the end, of course, it is impossible to control the assignment of participants to specific groups. Bernard (2002) stresses that it is possible to improve otherwise weak survey data by using open-ended interview data. In other words, it is best to use mixed methods to conduct ethnographic research as a complement to quantitative, self-administered questionnaires.

It is important to note that while this study began as a static group comparison, the situation became more complicated after I arrived in Iceland and realized that there were more than two groups of interest among the Thai study population. The ethnographic factory work revealed a population of women married to Thai men (not just Icelanders) or who were grown children of Thai mothers who had sponsored their immigration after first establishing themselves in Iceland. I had to expand the scope of my study to include this population of employer-sponsored migrants, creating three groups instead of the original two. Thus, my design changed from a two-group to a multi-group comparison (Spector 1981).
The Survey Instrument

Composition

In 2005 I carried out a one-month pilot study among the Thai population in Iceland, focusing on gathering purely qualitative data from in-depth interviews. I recruited participants using snowball sampling, meeting one or two of them at a time in Thai restaurants and karaoke bars. I followed the interview schedule presented in Appendix A and used a digital voice recorder whenever the respondent gave me permission to do so. The effort of transcribing all of the digital recordings from Thai into English forced me to recognize the limits of my own language ability. In many cases I had to replay the same spoken sentence seven or eight times, realizing that I had misunderstood the gist of the response in the midst of the interview itself. I could not afford to make the same kind of mistakes during the dissertation research, so I decided to rely more heavily on a quantitative survey for the majority of my data collection upon return to Iceland two years later.

The 133-question survey that I authored and administered in 2007-2008 included eight modules about individual and household background, migration history, family and friendship networks, social activities, transnational activities, work and remittance information, and gender roles within each participant’s household. All of the questions were based either on topics that arose through the 2005 pilot-study or topics that corresponded to central ideas in both anthropological and migration theories (Glick Schiller et. al., 1997).

After the initial ethnographic work took place, I drafted the survey in English “with translation in mind” (Behling and Law 2000:24), knowing that it would never be
administered in its source language. Since my ability to write Thai well is quite limited, I had the survey translated into Thai and then orally back-translated by a different person into English. Limitations of time and money did not allow for a more thorough, written back-translation of Thai into English. It also would have been impracticable (given my target sample size of 200) to test the survey on 25-75 individuals before general distribution, as recommended by Converse and Presser (1986). Instead, I used the first five to ten surveys as a gauge for fine-tuning the instrument. I made one additional modification to the the module about gender roles at a later point during the fielding of the survey. I used this limited data in the statistical analyses for Chapter 6, which is why the sample size for the regressions in that chapter are smaller than those in other chapters.

**Sampling**

After two years of letters, e-mails and phone calls to the National Registry to request access to their database of individuals from Thailand, I obtained project approval from the Icelandic Data Protection Authority and the National Registry provided me with a hard copy of all registered Thai individuals living in Iceland soon afterwards. The printed database included the names, identity numbers, addresses, and citizenship status of individuals born in Thailand as well as the names and identity numbers of the heads of each Thai person’s household. The total Thai population of Iceland at the time of the survey (2007-2008) was 1,061, with 858 individuals age 18 and over eligible for the survey. The number of individuals from Thailand in each of the eight main regions of Iceland is shown in Figure 3-1. 67.8 percent (719 people) live in the Reykjavík
Metropolitan Area, a proportion similar to the overall distribution of Icelanders living in their capital versus in the rest of the Icelandic countryside.

**Figure 3-1. Distribution of Total Thai Migrant Population by County, June 2007**

Using the National Registry’s list of names and addresses, I initially drew a simple random sample of unique addresses belonging to Thai men and women aged 18 and older. Less than 70 percent of the addresses were intentionally sampled from the Reykjavík Metropolitan Area in order to match the proportion of Thai people living there relative to the rest of Iceland. Then, starting in the neighborhoods closest to my own, I began to look up each address in the Icelandic online white pages\(^\text{18}\) and placed calls using a script written in phonetic Thai. I delivered surveys in person whenever possible, but also by post to all adult members listed for each address in the sample, attempting to

\(^{18}\) [http://www.ja.is](http://www.ja.is)
proportion the number of surveys distributed per town to the number of Thais listed as living in that area. If the address drawn was no longer current (in other words, no Thai names were listed on the mailbox, a common practice in Icelandic houses and apartment buildings), I sought out the household’s new address using my online bank’s access to the Icelandic National Registry as mentioned earlier. If the respondent did not live at the more up-to-date address, I left the survey in the mailbox of the last known address and kept track of the method of delivery for each survey in my notes.\(^{19}\)

**Distribution and Response**

I attempted to make personal contact with someone at every address in the sample. This required extensive multi-day trips into the Icelandic countryside to deliver surveys by hand. Even if the returns for such investments of time and money were not high, it was important to obtain as representative of data as possible from different regions of the country since a migrant’s experience of living in an isolated town of a few hundred Icelanders and a handful of Thais might differ significantly from that of someone living in a relatively urban center with hundreds of other Thais nearby, like Reykjavík.

One such trip targeted the most remote section of Iceland, the northwestern corner or West Fjords (Vestfirdir). It required about nine hours of driving, half of which took place on unpaved roads, simply to reach the urban “capital” of the region (Ísafjörður) which had a population of 2,600 Icelanders and six Thais in 2008. I spent two additional

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\(^{19}\) Most of the non-randomly distributed surveys come from Reykjavík, since many of them were distributed at a large Thai cultural festival that took place in the city. I include a variable to account for distribution method in the analyses ahead.
days driving around the region to return to the main Ring Road circling Iceland, since there were 20 Thais living in the area and I had pulled several of their names as part of the sample. I met one person face-to-face, talked to several more by phone, and left surveys in 11 mailboxes—nine responded, a surprisingly high response rate compared to the rest of Iceland.

I spent a longer trip driving around the 830-mile (1,335 km) perimeter of the country, delivering an additional 41 surveys by hand and receiving just over half that number in response. Finally, in addition to the other, shorter side trips I took to neighboring towns in the Reykjavík area, I also took a three-hour ferry ride to the Westman Islands south of Iceland (Vestmannaeyjar) in order to meet and give surveys to two of the four known Thai residents of the islands. Both invited me into their homes for coffee for warm conversation, and both returned their surveys immediately with every question answered. The only downside of that trip was that I was unable to meet with the first known migrant who had arrived from Thailand to live in Iceland several decades ago, though I did talk at length with her daughter who was about the same age as myself.

Each survey included a self-addressed, stamped envelope for respondents to return completed surveys at no personal expense. As a small incentive for return, the survey included an optional raffle ticket for two small prizes at the end of the survey period. Out of 215 individuals across Iceland who were originally selected to receive a survey via simple random sampling, 105 of them responded (49 percent).

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20 This type of encounter was rare since most Thai-Icelandic children I met were in their teens or younger, due to the age of the migration stream from Thailand.
As time in the field grew short and respondents regularly asked whether they could “help” by giving extra surveys to other Thais they knew (a question I had answered negatively throughout the bulk of my fieldwork, in an attempt to maintain simple random sampling), I shifted my strategy to a mix of opportunity and snowball sampling and handed out another 126 surveys in Reykjavík. Forty more individuals responded to this method (32 percent), bringing my total N to 145 out of an original 341 surveys distributed. Out of these 145 surveys 72.4 percent came from the simple random sample and 27.6 percent came from the non-random sample, a distinction I tracked using a flag variable in my data. The total response rate combining both methods was 42.5 percent. The original sampling frame consisted of 858 adults, with a gender distribution of 22.5 percent men and 77.5 percent women; survey respondents were composed of 17.9 percent men and 82.1 percent women, close to the actual gender distribution of Thais in Iceland.

Selection Bias

One of the most serious obstacles to validity in this study is the problem of selection bias (Bernard 2002). During the 2005 pilot study participants told me about migrants who had come to Iceland for a few months or a few years before returning to Thailand after some time due to being extremely unhappy, depressed, and unwilling or unable to integrate into Icelandic society. The sheer design and timing of my research precluded me from having contact with these individuals who had come and gone, even though in many ways they would a very useful population with whom to talk. Their departure may have been precipitated by dissatisfaction with the migration experience,
mistreatment from members of their own community, or negative reception by Icelanders at large.

I did accidentally encounter individuals who turned out to be “short-termers” or new arrivals in Iceland during my stay, but they were often the most reluctant to participate in the research. In addition, some were impossible to locate due to not maintaining current addresses in the National Registry or having left the country altogether. Migrants who came on three-month tourist visas were probably the most under-represented population among my sample because they did not exist on the National Registry’s records and were often not in the work force or connected to the Thai community at large.

Another source of selection bias is in the types of people who actually responded to the survey despite my attempt to procure as random of a sample as possible. Many potential respondents felt intimidated by the length of the survey and said it would be too intellectually difficult for them to complete, since they did not feel very confident in their ability to read and write Thai. Others claimed during telephone calls and in-person meetings that they were working too much and did not have time to complete a survey, even when I told them it was okay to take a few weeks to return it. I understood from my own time working in the factory that many immigrants worked 12-hour days in one job alone, with some taking on a few more hours in a different job in the evenings. The demands of both work and family undoubtedly affected to ability of some respondents to participate in this research.

Time spent at work also affected the number of people I was able to contact personally since I often knocked on people’s doors during the late afternoon or early
evening and dropped off surveys in their mailboxes if I could not make a personal contact. Except for those in the West Fjords that I described earlier, this method probably reduced the likelihood that someone would feel obligated to respond since they had little idea who I was if they hadn’t heard about my project from others in the community. I tried to follow up on the no-contact surveys as often as possible with a phone call, but even then the individual did not always answer the phone and I would have to hope that the person had enough personal interest in filling out the survey that he or she would return it.

In retrospect, I might have elicited a higher response rate by using snowball or respondent-driven sampling (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004) instead of using the provided sampling frame, simply because the population of Thais in Iceland was so small and everyone seemed to know everyone else—much like the Icelanders themselves. In other words, while the government-provided data was certainly useful in its own way for locating individuals and knowing their given names (since many Thais only knew each other by nickname), the population of Thais often knew more about each others’ locations and backgrounds than the government did. Thus, they might have been used to generate a more comprehensive sample.

Main Predictor Variable

The research questions the dissertation focus on the auspices of migration, a term used by Cerrutti and Massey (2001) in their study of Mexican labor migrants to the

21 Had the fieldwork taken place just a year or two later, there might also have been the option of using the social networking site http://www.facebook.com as a resource since a group titled the Icelandic-Thai Association (Íslenska-Tælenska Félagið) has collected over 800 fans, nearly all Thai individuals living in Iceland.
United States. Cerrutti and Massey themselves borrowed the term from Tilly and Brown, who used it to refer to “the social structures which establish relationships between the migrant and the receiving community before he moves” (1967:142). In Cerrutti and Massey’s study, this translates into differences in the migration experience based on a man’s decision to migrate for employment rather than for family ties—a Thai woman choosing to cross oceans and leave her home country for Iceland would face a similar opportunity structure based on whom she already knew in Iceland and her access to either marriage or labor markets in the destination country.

I constructed the auspices of migration variable from responses to three survey questions (see Appendix B: Quantitative Survey (English)). The most important question asked, “Who sponsored you for a permit/visa to come to Iceland the first time?” There were six possible answers:

- “I did not need a sponsor,”
- “My boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancé at the time,”
- “My spouse at the time,”
- “My family member (parent, sister, etc),”
- “My friend at the time,” and
- “My employer at the time.”

Next, in order to add in the ethnicity of the sponsors to my predictor variable, I considered responses to a previous question asking that if the respondent originally came

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22 An earlier survey question asked about “reasons” for migrating to Iceland, which included a similar list to the one used for the sponsorship variable here. I had intended for that question to be the primary sponsorship measure, but because I allowed respondents to mark more than one response I was unable to use the data as a clean “auspices” predictor. The question I used in the end had the fewest missing cases, and only one answer was allowed. It did not ask about respondents’ “reasons” for migration, but it attempted to establish the actual means of getting on a plane and arriving in Iceland. For the purposes of this study, the latter is a more accurate measurement of “auspices” than the former.
to Iceland to join a significant other, “What ethnicity was this person?” with three choices:

- “Thai,”
- “Icelandic,”
- “Other.”

If the person had originally said that her sponsor was a spouse at the time, but then marked that the ethnicity of that spouse was Thai, I coded her as being under the “Thai family/spouse” auspices of migration.

As a final step checking for consistency, I examined responses to a third question asking “When you first came to Iceland, how did you cover the expenses of the move (e.g. plane ticket, shipping costs, etc)?—Please mark all that apply to you.” This question had seven possible responses:

- “My employer in Iceland paid for the move,”
- “My Icelandic spouse/girlfriend/boyfriend (faen) paid for the move,”
- “My Thai family (in Thailand) paid for the move,”
- “My Thai family (in Iceland) paid for the move,”
- “I paid for the move with my own money,”
- “I borrowed money for the move,” and
- “Other.”

Aligning these last responses with the previous two, I was able to create the new, more accurate migration sponsorship variable, accounting for ethnicity of the sponsor as well.23

Overlapping categories from the original sponsorship question that focus on “boyfriend/girlfriend/fiance” and “spouse” were collapsed into a single category, termed

23 It is possible that because respondents self-reported their sponsorship, some may have misrepresented their sponsorship category on purpose or by accident. This was the main reason I wanted to draw upon three survey questions rather than only one, to ensure as much consistency and accuracy as possible within a self-reported category.
here as “Icelandic spouse/fiancé.” Additionally, my original intent for the “I did not need a sponsor” response was to allow a category for individuals who may have immigrated to Iceland from another European country—in which case, they would have already had European citizenship or a visa to enter the Schengen Area, and would not have needed a proper sponsor to enter Iceland. Very few respondents used this category, and in the end it was not clear whether they were checking it for the right reason, or in order to avoid saying who their real sponsor had been. The categories of “My friend at the time” and “Other” were also difficult to handle, since again, respondents who wished to avoid saying who their real sponsor was seemed to default into these categories. I decided to collapse all of these problematic categories into one for the new variable, calling it “Other/NA,” and only list descriptive statistics for this category earlier in the paper. I did not use the category in any of the regression analyses since only a handful of people fell into this category and thus could not be analyzed separately.

One may also question the overlap between categories, since it would be easy for an individual to have, for example, a Thai sibling talk to an employer about sponsoring the person in Thailand to come work; in this case, the respondent might name her sponsor as either Thai family or the employer and still be correct. However, since the question of sponsorship rests primarily on the official filing of a visa application, I would consider the “official” sponsor in the example to be the employer rather than the Thai family. The outcome would be similar if a migrant met a potential Icelandic husband online, for example, and while the migrant left Thailand in hopes of finding a job upon arrival, it is the husband who filed the documents necessary for the migration and most likely paid for the plane trip as well—not the employer. Tilly and Brown (1967) illustrate the idea
succinctly, explaining why there can only be one auspice of migration when it comes to analysis even though there may be multiple motives or reasons for migration:

We may say that an individual migrates under the auspices of kinship when his principal connections with the city of destination are through kinsmen, even if he comes desperately seeking a job. Likewise, we may say that he migrates under the auspices of work when the labor market or a particular firm provides the main organized relationship to the new community, even if he also has kinfolk there (Tilly and Brown 1967:142).

Finally, it needs to be said that while many Thai women came to Iceland under the auspices of marriage to an Icelandic man and were in relationship with an Icelandic man at the time of the study, this is no guarantee that the woman’s sponsorship remained consistent throughout her residency in Iceland. It may be that she came to Iceland using a tourist visa of three months’ duration in order to get to know a man in Iceland, perhaps someone that her co-ethnic sister or friend arranged for the woman to meet. Then she may have returned to Thailand for several months (or years, in some cases) before deciding to marry an Icelander and move permanently to Iceland, only to divorce the man after some years and instead acquiring employer sponsorship or earning permanent residency. None of this changes the fact that her initial means of arrival to Iceland depended on the sponsorship of a potential husband, even if he was only applying for her to receive a tourist visa. For the purposes of this study, I consider a Thai migrant with a similar migration history as having been sponsored by an Icelandic spouse or fiancée rather than by a family member or employer.
Thai Migrants in Iceland: A Portrait

Table 3-1 below summarizes the characteristics of the average Thai female migrant from Iceland (“All Women in Sample”) based on my survey data, followed by a breakdown of migrant characteristics according to the three auspices of migration. Migrants’ average level of educational achievement is roughly equivalent to that of finishing junior high in the US system (9.5 years), while average age at migration is in the late 20s (28.2 years). The majority of migrants come from a farming or agricultural background, with 66.3 percent hailing from families with at least one parent working as a farmer. Over 90 percent reported being able to write Thai well.

Interestingly, while most migrants reported previous employment in Thailand, the highest rates of employment among the three auspices came from those sponsored by Icelandic spouses (98.1 percent). The lowest rate is that of women who came under the auspices of Thai family (66.7 percent), matching up with a considerably younger age at migration (25.3 years) in comparison to the other two auspices, both averaging near 30 years of age.

The mean number of years that migrants have spent in Iceland is just under a decade (9.2 years), making the average age of Thai migrant women in Iceland in her late 30s to early 40s at the time of the survey. The vast majority of women migrants are married or cohabiting (88.8 percent), mostly with Icelandic men. Nearly 60 percent

24 The vast majority of Thai women migrants’ education took place in Thailand. Exceptions included one woman who migrated to Iceland at the age of four completed her education in Iceland and reported being fluent in Icelandic but not very literate in Thai. Another woman came to Iceland at age 15 and finished Icelandic primary school (grunskóli), compulsory through age 16. A few other respondents came to Iceland as teenagers but did not attend school in Iceland. The rest of the respondents came to Iceland after age 16 and were not obligated and did not choose to attend primary or secondary schooling in Iceland.
Table 3-1: Means and Percentages of Independent Variables According to Auspices of Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at migration</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Age</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes Thai well</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one parent farming</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hometown in Northeast Thailand</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother was/is employed</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in Thailand</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic/cultural exposure:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total years in Iceland</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands English well</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Icelandic language classes</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks Icelandic well</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has at least one Icelandic friend</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First residence in Reykjavik</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic citizen</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Buddhist Association in Iceland</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family/residence:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married or cohabiting</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>98.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently have Icelandic partner</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of children in Icelandic school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current residence in Reykjavik</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ethnic density by region (logged scale 1-6)</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has at least one Thai relative in Iceland</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term ties to Iceland:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay until children graduate</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have children in Iceland</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social environment:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination experiences (0-15)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable trusting Thais</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable trusting Icelanders</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of gossip among Thais</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed (formal)</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side employment (informal)</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works in a low-skill job</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work hours:</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=109)</th>
<th>Sponsorship of Initial Migration to Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero (not working at all)</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work (&lt;35 hours/week)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
currently live in Reykjavík, and over 70 percent have children in Iceland and own their own homes. The average household size is constant across the auspices at 3.4 persons, suggesting that most migrants live in households with perhaps a significant other and one or two dependents. Two-thirds of survey respondents are Icelandic citizens, though the percentage drops to 58.8 percent for those sponsored by employers. This may be due to the fact that the respondents have obtained a permanent resident permit or the equivalent of a US “green card” and do not see a need to become a citizen. Over two-thirds also report being members of the Buddhist Association in Iceland, and a majority (just barely, in the case of Icelandic spouse-sponsored women at 51.9 percent) report having at least one other Thai relative living in Iceland.

With regards to employment, 61 percent of respondents work full-time outside the home; the same percentage report having informal side jobs or alternate sources of income. No less than 82.2 percent of all employed in low-skill, low-wage jobs such as in factories or janitorial positions, with little variation amongst the auspices. Just 15.9 percent of respondents are not involved with the labor market, generally due to being homemakers, retirees, or students.

Among women sponsored by employers, nearly two-thirds report speaking Icelandic well; this is the highest percentage by far across the auspices. The majority of this group also reports understanding English well (56.2 percent), a striking contrast to the less than 30 percent who understand English well in the other two auspices. The average number of Icelandic classes taken by migrants is just 2.4, a value that is fairly consistent across the auspices.
Analysis

For each chapter my analysis began with data exploration using frequencies and cross-tabulations of means and percentages. Next I often used Pearson’s r correlations to examine relationships between some independent variables before moving on to regression analyses. I used ordinary-least squares (OLS) regression when predicting interval-ratio variables and logistic regression analyses when the dependent variable was categorical. I ran bivariate regressions using two variables at a time; then, after examining the results, I retained theoretically important and statistically significant variables for my multivariate or “best predictors” models. Due to its centrality to the study’s research questions I include the dummy-coded migration auspices variable in every multivariate analysis regardless of significance in the bivariate analyses.

Spector (1981) echoes Bernard (2002) in recommending researchers use multiple methods of data collection to avoid common method variance, where participants in self-administered surveys tend to report more consistent behavior or attitudes than are actually present in reality. This mixed-methods approach was my goal for this study in Iceland, particular the segment of time I spent working in the fish factory and attending Thai festivals and gatherings in people’s homes—an approach I describe in much greater detail in Chapter 4.

Secondary Data Sources

In addition to the multiple sources of qualitative data I used to ground and supplement the survey, I called upon several secondary sources to provide further quantitative data related to the Thai population and immigrants to Iceland in general. As
a result of working closely with the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland to help distribute their own Survey of Immigrant Attitudes, I entered a number of workplaces of Thai immigrants and conducted semi-structured interviews during employee work breaks. Thai women often seemed to feel more comfortable discussing issues related to their personal lives while at work, since at home their husbands or children might eavesdrop on our conversation. I could not hand out my own survey to Thai migrants while I was on the clock for the Institute, but I used the opportunity to observe and takes notes on workplace dynamics that were different from what I had experienced in my own fish factory experience. While the Institute unfortunately did not follow through with providing access to data from their project, I collected my own qualitative data in the form of field notes and also built rapport with future respondents to my own survey that I would meet again a few weeks or months later.

Statistics Iceland, or *Hagstofan*, maintains comprehensive websites in both Icelandic\(^25\) and English\(^26\) that are easily accessible and helpful for any kind of social science research related to Icelandic populations. For my descriptive statistics I drew heavily from the section of Hagstofan’s website titled “Population by origin and citizenship,” which offers data on immigrant populations in Iceland based on sex, age, citizenship, municipality, country of birth, and year of arrival going back to the 1990s. Unfortunately, not all sections of the website allow a researcher to select fields based on country of origin—many only specify data at the regional level, in which case “Asia” was too broad to be of much use in some of my descriptive tables.

\(^25\) [http://www.hagstofan.is](http://www.hagstofan.is)

\(^26\) [http://www.statice.is](http://www.statice.is)
For more specific data at the country-of-origin level, particularly the material I presented on Thai labor force participation and the issuance of different types of visas in Chapter 2, I exchanged personal communication with staff at the Icelandic Directorate of Immigration (Útlendingastofnun) as well as the Directorate of Labour (Vinnumálastofnun). Several people employed at the Intercultural Centre (Alþjóðahús) were also crucial sources of information since they operate what is essentially a resource clearinghouse for immigrants of all backgrounds in downtown Reykjavík.

Finally, I also interviewed employees of the Women’s Shelter (Kvennaathvarf) and others who work regularly with immigrant populations in Iceland, such as the director of human resources at a clinic employing a large number of immigrants, a Lutheran pastor known as the “immigrant priest” and the principal of an elementary school with a high number of immigrant children.

Conclusion

This chapter covered overall research design and sampling issues and a discussion of the multiple source of data used for this study. Discussion of the more intensive fieldwork that took place in a fish-processing factory for nearly three months follows in Chapter 4.

The strengths of this project’s static group comparison research design are its simplicity and ease of administration as well as its ability to address research questions about the relationships between variables. Weaknesses of this design include an inherent inability to draw strong causal conclusions due to the cross-sectional nature of the data collected.
Both Spector (1981) and Bernard (2002) recommend using multiple methods to counteract the weaknesses of such study designs, a task made manageable in this study by the ethnographic emphasis on a wide range of data collection methods. My approaches ranged from qualitative participant-observation and semi-structured interview questions to a strictly quantitative survey. Secondary data sources were used to supplement the primary data collection and provide context for the statistical analyses to follow. These sources included qualitative data from a separate study that I helped the University of Iceland’s Social Science Research Institute carry out in the field, quantitative data from Statistics Iceland and the National Registry, and interviews with directors and employees of government and non-profit organizations in Iceland.

Overall, the classic anthropological approach of using a variety of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to answer research questions strengthened the design of this study, and ethnographic fieldwork described in Chapter 4 will provide additional rich context for interpreting the analyses to follow in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
Chapter 4

Fieldwork Experiences

Introduction

This chapter describes the project's anthropological centerpiece of participant-observation and qualitative data collection, the most labor-intensive of which took place during the first four months of fieldwork in Reykjavík, Iceland\(^{27}\). First I discuss both the positives and negatives of fieldwork with a study population from a similar ethnic background as my own. Next I explore the barriers faced in locating a sensitive immigrant population in an urban, complex society, followed by my reasoning for choosing a fish-processing factory as a study site. I then provide an in-depth description of the project’s ethnographic approach including getting a job, adjusting to the workplace, and building rapport with Thai employees at the factory. Lastly, I close with a discussion of the lessons learned from each portion of the fieldwork experience.

The “Half-Child” Ethnographer

It is necessary to describe the role of my own background and linguistic skills both as an aid to collecting data and as a potential threat to reliability in the study (Carmines and Zeller 1979). My ethnicity, a mix of Thai and Icelandic—colloquially known as *loog-khrung* in Thai, or literally “half-child”\(^{28}\)—was often instrumental in

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\(^{27}\) The ethnographic work provided an essential foundation for writing the project's quantitative survey as described in Chapter 3, the data and results of which I address in the following chapters of the dissertation.

\(^{28}\) Thais use this term to describe a child with one Thai parent and one *farang*—usually white/European—parent. The word comes from the Thai pronunciation of the country of France (which established
gaining strong, often immediate rapport with the majority of respondents, despite my 
less-than-perfect command of both Thai and Icelandic. Often, the first five to ten minutes 
of interaction with any given Thai woman consisted of her own informal (yet pointed) 
interview regarding who my mother was, where she was from in Thailand, where she 
lived now, my educational achievement, my marital status, who my husband was, what 
he did for a living, how much his salary was and, drolly, whether or not he was a 
“butterfly” (jao choo)—in effect, asking whether my husband was cheating on me.29 

After I passed muster by answering all of their questions both as carefully and 
candidly as I could in Thai, laughing and never taking offense no matter what line of 
questioning they pursued, most Thai women allowed me to ask them any questions and 
were eager to meet in person whenever possible. Regardless of how long each 
conversation ended up taking, this reverse-interview process was an essential part of 
enlisting survey participants and for doing any research at all with the Thai population. 
There were a few memorable cases where Thais (especially men) were suspicious of my 
motives from the very beginning and did not understand or did not want to understand 
why I had “chosen” to talk with them. These individuals remained reserved both on the 
phone and in person, answering with one-word responses and basically saying that they 
were “too busy” to answer the survey.

Given that women married to Icelandic men dominate the Thai population in 
Iceland, I expected to meet several Icelandic husbands along the way in my fieldwork. 
What I did not expect, however, was the degree of control that a small number of the 

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29 The question about my husband’s fidelity was perhaps one of the most common I encountered, especially 
among older women who had single sons.
husbands exercised over their Thai spouses during our interactions. To be clear, these situations only took place a handful of times. When cold-calling people at their publicly-listed home landlines, occasionally a spouse or child would answer the phone and bluntly ascertain who I was before handing the phone to whomever I was asking for. I would usually decide in the moment of hearing the tone and gender of the person’s initial “Halló,” the Icelandic phone-answering greeting, whether I would introduce myself using Icelandic or Thai and how “official” my greeting should be.

Every now and then, however, the (male) person answering would begin asking me a series of suspicious questions in Icelandic after my introduction, or if the wife answered and I inadvertently spoke Icelandic rather than Thai, she would hand the phone to her husband instead and let him “deal” with me. During home visits, some husbands would not allow me to interview their wives without themselves being present, even if we spoke Thai together and the man could not understand. These were often the most stressful situations in my fieldwork, both on the phone and in person. One particularly bad home visit nearly turned hostile (described at the beginning of Chapter 6), and I was forced to leave what would have been an excellent survey opportunity for fear of incurring harm to the woman involved.

**Locating the Population**

Asian-born people are the largest non-Western minority in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2008). As described in Chapter 2, this fact makes the immigrant population of the country significantly different from that of mainland Europe since in comparison, the Middle Eastern and North African population of Iceland is relatively quite small. Despite
Asians being the country’s largest “visual” minority group (people who look significantly different from the natives), staff at Reykjavík’s main immigrant resource center Alþjóðahús (The Intercultural Center) told me that there was no single area where a majority of Asian residents lived; in other words, there was no Thai “town” in which to physically base myself as a researcher and have everyday access to the study population. Thai restaurants and groceries were scattered across the Reykjavík metropolitan area, most of them located far from the owners' homes, and the one Thai Buddhist temple (staffed by one Thai monk) only had access to a small, self-selected portion of the Thai population who came regularly to the temple\textsuperscript{30}. Many Thais attended religious and cultural festivals hosted by the temple or the Thai-Icelandic Association (Taílenska-Islenska Félagið) and this enabled me to carry out early participant-observation, but I had no systematic way of tracking down individuals in the population.

\textbf{Figure 4-1. A mixed Thai and Icelandic audience at a festival for the King’s birthday.}

\textsuperscript{30} My survey revealed that seven women owned or had owned their own businesses, ranging from Thai groceries to restaurants to cleaning services. Not all Thai business owners were surveyed, however, so the actual number of Thai migrant women with their own businesses is likely much higher given the number of Thai restaurants listed in the national phone book.
The only semi-accurate indicator of the location of Thai residents was the Icelandic phone book. Visually scanning each page and looking for distinctly Thai names among the overwhelmingly Icelandic patronymic last names of -dóttir and -son garnered some results. However, there was the complicating factor that for immigrants who arrived before the mid-1990s, the Icelandic government maintained an assimilationist policy requiring all naturalized citizens to change at least one part of their names (given or surname) to an Icelandic name (Durrenberger 1995). Many changed their entire names and inadvertently masked themselves as Icelandic natives, at least for my purposes with the phone book.\footnote{Certainly, most Thai individuals arriving after the government changed its naming policy tended to keep}
Here we encounter the familiar situation in urban anthropology (Foster and Kemper 1974) where locating a sensitive non-centralized population is a very different process than it would be living in the middle of a rural village where the entire population might walk by the researcher's door on a daily basis. Even in the small capital city of Iceland (population of approximately 200,000), there was no single place that I could situate myself in order to collect data in a consistent manner except for during festival days, which were the only times that a large gathering of Thais could be found in one place. I needed to find an alternative.

Figure 4-3. Thailand float in the parade for Icelandic Hinsegin Dagar, or Pride.

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their maiden names even after marrying an Icelandic native. There are no family names in Iceland, only patronyms that both men and women maintain for life, and even Icelandic women must request special permission from the government to change their name after marrying a foreign man. Therefore it is somewhat possible to “date” a foreigner’s arrival year in Iceland simply based on their name in the phonebook, revealing whether he or she arrived before the mid-1990s or afterwards.
Immersion via Employment

In August 2005, I used snowball sampling to conduct 17 in-depth interviews with Thais in Iceland as a pilot study. Responses indicated that Thai immigrants, regardless of their level of education, were often first employed in various low-skilled jobs in Iceland. These jobs were centered particularly in the fish-processing factories, janitorial, and care industries (hospital and nursing-home staff). An anthropologist at the University of Iceland, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, had once invested time working in a fish factory in order to gain access to a rural Icelandic population (Skaptadóttir and Rafnsdóttir 2000). She suggested that I look to the fishing industry for part-time work with the Thai population. Additionally, staff at The Intercultural Center advised me that there were a large number
of Thais working at one particular fish-processing factory in Reykjavík—conveniently, this factory was located just a mile away from my apartment in the city, so it was perfect in terms of both research interest and logistics since I did not yet have a car. I looked up the factory online, noticing that their website had multiple translations in Thai, Polish, and Vietnamese, and placed a call.

It was Inga, the owner of this fish factory, who returned my call first and spoke to me enthusiastically in English. After she discovered that I was a dual Icelandic-American citizen and thus would not need the company to sponsor me for a work permit, Inga was even more open to hiring me. She warned, “Working at a fish factory is not 'good,' and everyone [in Iceland] looks down on it... [it's] even below working in a hospital or shop,” but that if I insisted on working there, she would take me on. I added that I had no experience in the job, but she replied: “Everyone comes with no experience... they just come with a will for a better life. They save money and send it home; they don’t spend a lot on themselves.”

We settled on a half-day schedule so that I would have time to write my notes and conduct other research in the second half of the day. She gave instructions to come to the factory for an introduction to the physical plant the next day, both to sign paperwork for my employment and also to get a tour of the facility and to meet my coworkers before starting my work two days later.

32 All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of research participants.
**Ethnography of a Fish Factory**

**First Impressions**

Before I could see the factory, the pungent odor of fish indicated its location. The large, white concrete building was otherwise nondescript, no address visible, with just one sign and a few cargo trucks outside bearing the name of the company. There was a small, locked door in front with a keypad and speaker next to it, and a small sign saying “Vinsamlegast hringið dyrabjöllunni,” or “Please ring the doorbell” in Icelandic. I wasn't sure if this was the right door (there was also no visible doorbell, despite the sign), so I walked around to the side of the building where the trucks were parked.

There was a long row of cars jammed up against this side of the building, and several of them had red and yellow tassles hanging from the rear-view mirrors. Looking closely, I saw that there was a small Buddha image attached to each tassle, something that I had seen on my Thai relatives’ cars in the United States. A gray metal door stood open halfway down the side of the building, with cigarette butts littering the ground around it. This appeared to be the employees’ work entrance to the factory, not the official entrance. Since the company owner with whom I had spoken on the phone yesterday had told me to come to the “office,” I headed back around to the door with the keypad to figure out how to ring that doorbell.

A smooth area underneath the speaker appeared to be some kind of button, which I had missed before. I pressed it, and the speaker emitted a loud beep, followed by a voice asking what I wanted, in Icelandic. I used my halting language skills to answer that I was the anthropology student who had called yesterday, and had an appointment to talk with Hrefna about a job. After a slight pause, the speaker clicked on again and the same
voice told me to come inside. The lock on the door buzzed open, and the fishy smell abated as I entered the building. A blonde woman came part way down the stairs to meet me, then turned and indicated that I should follow her.

She led me to a comfortable, professional-looking office space upstairs, where another blonde woman sat behind a desk, typing at her computer. “This is Hrefna,” the first woman told me, before walking back to her own desk across the room. Hrefna looked up, shook my hand, and began speaking quickly in Icelandic, and then asked if it would be better for us to talk in English or Icelandic—a question that most Icelanders don’t ask foreigners. I explained that even though I had an Icelandic name and passport, I was from America and I would be grateful if we could use English and be sure of understanding the important details.

She agreed, and we spoke briefly about my research goals. Satisfied, she asked for my national identity number to enter my name in the computer, and then she called one of the Thai factory employees with her cell phone. Addressing the worker as “Pearl,” she explained in Icelandic that there was a student from America in the office, and would the worker come up and give her a tour? The worker acquiesced, and Hrefna and I stepped into the hallway. A Thai woman in her mid-30s, dressed in what appeared to be blue and white scrubs and a hairnet on her head, emerged from another door and approached us.

Pearl and I smiled at each other, and I brought my palms together at my chest and bowed my head deferentially in the wai, a Thai gesture of introduction and respect from a younger person to an older one. I also said “Sawatdi kha,” the polite and customary Thai greeting that I had learned at home since I was a child. She laughed in surprise and
returned the *wai* hand gesture to me politely, though her head inclined only slightly, more as a nod of acknowledgment than a sign of respect\(^\text{33}\).

Hrefna bent her head to the side in a puzzled way during this exchange, all of which took place within a few seconds. But then she smiled and went on to explain to Pearl, in Icelandic, that I was a half-Thai, half-Icelandic student from America doing research about Thai people, and that I was going to be working at the factory as part of my research. Pearl's eyebrows lifted and she smiled again at me with clear curiosity, but waited to ask questions until after the formalities were out of the way.

Hrefna handed me what seemed to be the factory's standard uniform to be worn over one's clothes. The uniform consisted of a thin blue cotton wrap tied around the waist, covering most of the upper body and thighs; heavy white rubber Wellingtons that went up to the knees; a narrow length of white material that turned out to be a hairnet; blue latex rubber gloves; white plastic sleeve covers (with elastic edges for keeping one's sleeves clean, Hrefna explained); and a disposable blue plastic apron to wear over the front of everything as temporary splatter protection. The flimsy nature of the thin apron on top alarmed me at first, though I soon discovered the problem was less about fish splatter and more about the pungent smell that would never truly wash out of my work clothes\(^\text{34}\).

\(^{33}\) The depth to which one should bow one's head when greeting a Thai person is determined by a strict social hierarchy. If the difference in age or social status is significant (e.g. a child greeting her grandmother), then one's chin should nearly be touching one's chest, with eyes down in deference. The proper response from the older person is a mere nod, or a polite but simple *wai* with the hands lower on the chest, eyes looking ahead.

\(^{34}\) A more durable white apron was to be given to me later on.
Getting to Know the Factory Floor

Pearl led me out of the office and into the factory, which was made up of several large, high-ceilinged rooms, both upstairs and downstairs, that covered 25,000 square meters. The temperature was not as cold as expected, given that the walls and floors were made of drab gray concrete and there was no source of heat, but the smell of fish was immediately overwhelming and the noise of clacking machinery made it necessary to almost shout to each other.

We began in an area with a large tub of whole fish, which Pearl explained was þorskur or the Icelandic name for Atlantic cod. She did not quite pronounce the last “r” of the word, a habit I noticed with many of her Icelandic words. Pearl spoke to me almost exclusively in Thai, saying with a smile that I should be practicing the language since I was a loog-khrung. At times she spoke very quickly and with unfamiliar vocabulary, however, and I lost track of her sentences. We occasionally switched to English, which she was only somewhat comfortable speaking.

She referred to herself as “P,” the self-referential pronoun that a Thai person uses when speaking to a slightly younger person\(^{35}\). Pearl told me that I could call her by her Thai nickname, “P’Maew” instead of Pearl, which was her Icelandic nickname\(^{36}\).

P’Maew pointed around us at the different sections of the factory, explaining how the fish came in whole and ended up leaving in various packaged pieces, with nothing

\(^{35}\) It is also the title of respect used when a younger Thai person directly addresses someone slightly older than herself, but not one old enough to be one's aunt or uncle. That relationship would require a different term of respect.

\(^{36}\) Thais only use their real, given names in formal situations; among friends and relatives, everyone uses one-syllable nicknames prefaced by titles of respect when appropriate. Very few Thais actually know each other's full given names, a problem when it came to sorting out Thai social networks later in the project.
going to waste. Even the “throwaway” parts of the fish were sold and used in dog food. The factory workers stood on plastic crates next to the machinery, where cod pieces moved in front of the workers on white plastic conveyor belts. On the conveyor belts, which ran at all different speeds, the fish lay in various states of being whole, decapitated, de-gilled, de-skinned, filleted, de-boned, ground up, frozen, packaged with ice, and finally, crated for shipping. The floor was slick and wet in most places, a combination of ice runoff, fish blood, fish skin, and pieces of fish that had fallen from the whirring conveyors above.

We descended a very narrow, metal spiral staircase into a much colder room with a very high ceiling. The workers here were focused on removing worms and bones from the machine-filleted fish, which had the skin still attached on one flat side. P'Maew explained that this was a different kind of fish, ýlsa (in Icelandic), or haddock. The conveyors moved slowly here, drawing fish out of one large machine where they had been roughly filleted and deposited into a large, slippery pile. Workers grabbed one fish at a time from the large, moving pile and put it on their own stationary platforms, waist-high, next to the conveyors.

There were lights installed under each white plastic platform to “candle” each fish and shine through it from below, allowing workers to see the small, curled-up red worms that were in the fish's flesh. The workers stood over the slow-moving conveyors where they quickly flicked out the worms and sliced out the spinal bones from the fillets with long, narrow knives, before “cleaning up” the appearance of each fish (cutting off any leftover fins or skin pieces that the machine had missed) and tossing it behind them into plastic tubs full of ice. When the tubs became full, a Polish man would come along and
heft the large tub up and over to a stack of other tubs near the wall. There was a Thai
male forklift driver who also came along at intervals to move the stacks of tubs to the
shipment area.

There were ten women working at the candling station, five on each side; one side
had all Polish women (from names such as Agniewska, hand-written on the front of their
white plastic work aprons), and the other side had five Asian women. Three of the
Asians smiled at P'Maew when she came in the room, and she introduced me loudly as a
loog-khrung. I wai'd them, and they immediately smiled and wai'd back carefully (given
the long knives they were holding) and shouted to P'Maew, asking who my mother was
and where she lived in Iceland. P'Maew told them that I came from America as a student
and that they wouldn't know my mother, and they simultaneously laughed and shared
bemused looks as P'Maew led me to the next room.

Another area downstairs had machines that chopped the fish into square-sized
“bites” (bitar, in Icelandic) as well as a machine that ground up leftovers into a paste, used for Icelandic fiskiböllur (composite fishballs, used in more traditional Icelandic
cuisine). An older Thai man stood a bit slouched at the paste machine, digging a shovel
over and over again into the huge bin of fish parts and pushing them towards the intake.
He looked up and nodded as we passed by and I wai'd him as well, though the machine
was too loud for us to say anything to each other.

An adjoining room had multiple tubs of whole cod waiting to be processed, brought in fresh from the fishermens’ boats that morning. Each fish was typically several
feet long, and quite heavy and substantial in size. Foreign male workers hauled up each
fish and decapitated it with a kind of mechanized hatchet, then removed its cheeks (an
Icelandic delicacy) quickly by hand, to be set aside in a separate bin. P'Maew explained that this was *nak ngaan* or “heavy work” in Thai, and very dangerous because of the bulky fish and the automated decapitation. The managers assigned women to less dangerous jobs like picking out bones and cutting up fish, since that was “more appropriate for women.”

After the tour of the downstairs, we went back up the spiral staircase and passed by a complicated arrangement of conveyor belts and workers who were working very quickly. We reached the *frystihús* or flash-freezing room, where a group of both Asian and Polish workers carefully placed endless cod *bitar* squares on a very slow-moving conveyor belt. The belt moved the steady stream of fish pieces, each one tucked and separated from the others as neatly as possible by hand, into the wall-sized flash-freezing machine. They emerged a few minutes later near the ceiling, rolling off the conveyor belt and clanking like rocks down a ramp into a large container. From there, workers bagged, weighed, and packed the frozen *bitar* with ice in Styrofoam boxes.

An older Thai man and woman worked with sorting and packaging the frozen fish, and P'Maew used the general *Loung* and *Pa* titles of respect to introduce them to me. They smiled quietly and returned my *wai*. P'Maew said that Loung had been living and working in Iceland for a long time, and that Pa was his wife. P'Maew also told me that I would be starting my work in that room the next morning at 7:30am. We said goodbye to Loung and Pa and headed back towards the office, but not before P'Maew stopped us to talk in a quieter corner of the factory.

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37 *Loung* is a title of respect used to address an older man, usually one who would be older than one's mother or father. It translates directly as “older uncle,” but can be used outside of the family as a general sign of respect when addressing an elder. *Pa* is a similar title, except that it is used to address an older woman who is older than one's mother or father, and translates directly as “older aunt.”
In a series of gentle but persistent questions, a familiar dynamic between an older Thai woman and a younger person, P'Maew wanted to know everything about me: where exactly I was from in the US, where I was studying, how I came to Iceland, how long I was staying, who my husband was, where he was from, when was the last time I went to Thailand, what I did there—each answer led to another question. I laughed and answered most of her questions in Thai, though English took over for more complicated situations.

I told her in turn that I was there to understand more about the life of Thai people in Iceland and what it was like for them to live and work in such a different place. P'Maew answered right away, “The problem with Thai people working here [in this factory] is the language.” Very few of the Thai workers speak Icelandic, she said, and most of them would rather work more overtime, or simply go home and rest, than take classes or practice with Icelanders. They feel that the Icelanders will not speak to them, she explained, and they also feel self-conscious about themselves, even though some of them have lived here for ten or more years. P'Maew stated, “If you want to learn a language, you have to be willing to speak it, even if it’s wrong. But many Thai people don't want to try.” I nodded and made a mental note to include more in-depth questions about language use on the survey, especially after other workers repeated similar sentiments in future conversations.

P'Maew added that the Filipino immigrants were lucky because they had much stronger English skills than the Thai people did, before even coming to Iceland. She also expressed great interest in having me help her daughter, born in Thailand and recently brought to Iceland, to speak better English and apply for college in Iceland. The
conversation ended there, as Hrefna came out to collect the uniform and give instructions to show up at the non-office entrance of the factory at around 7:15 the next morning.

**First Day on the Job: “Touching the Fish”**

The smell of cigarette smoke blended with the smell of fish as I approached the factory's side door just after seven o'clock the next morning. There was an Asian man having a smoke outside the entrance. We exchanged “Good mornings” in English and his accent confirmed that he was from the Philippines. I told him that I was a new employee and asked where I should go. He flicked his cigarette and pointed to the door—I thanked him, and went up the set of stairs inside. There were three doorways at the top, none of which was labeled. I had no idea where to go and didn't want to make the mistake of going into the men's locker room, so I just stood and waited for someone else to appear.

The first person who came up the stairs was an Asian woman who didn't look much older than myself. I smiled and quickly *wai*’d her in case she was Thai, and she returned it, then indicated wordlessly that I should follow her. She led me through the doorway on the left into a long room with many windows and tables—and over to an area where a Polish-speaking woman appeared to be in charge of handing out workers’ supplies. The Thai woman said a few words in Icelandic and pointed at me, and then to a closet. The woman nodded and opened the closet door, rummaging inside to find a large box of latex gloves, a handful of the hairnets I had seen the previous day, and a few rubber-banded bunches of white plastic sleeves. She put them all in a bag and then shuffled me into the next room, which felt warm and had several washing machines and a
dryer spinning loudly. The woman took one of the blue cotton wraps from a tall stack of them folded on a shelf and also gave me another blue plastic apron to wear over the wrap, indicating that I should do this all myself in the days ahead. This was all done without words. At the end I asked her in English if she was from Poland, and she smiled and nodded.

We walked back into the other room, where several pairs of eyes seemed to follow me. Most of the employees came in for free coffee or tea here before starting work in the morning, and several Thais were seated together at one table. The Thai woman helping me announced to them in Thai that I was “The girl who came with P’Maew yesterday,” and I wai’d everyone quickly. They chuckled and raised their palms politely to me. Then the Thai woman led me through a shortcut to the factory floor, where I had to punch in my numbers at the clock-in keypad. It took me a few tries to get the sequences of buttons correct, but finally the computerized display flashed a “Góðan daginn, Jóhanna” (“Good morning,” in Icelandic). My guide punched in her number after me, and I saw that her name was Sunitha; I pointed it out to her, and asked if that was her name—she said yes, and that I could call her P'Sunitha. She led me back through several doorways to the women’s locker room.

By this time, more people had arrived for work and there was a stream of women shuffling in and out of the locker room, all appearing to be either Asian or Polish. The Filipinas were leaning against the lockers in one corner talking in their own language—I asked them if it was Tagalog, but they said that it was Cebuano, since they were all from the island of Cebu. They occasionally made jokes with the Thais in English, and laughter would erupt from half of the locker room. The Polish women sat in their own groups
talking and did not seem to interact much with the Thais or Filipinas, though that seemed to be more an issue of language than anything else. Very few of the Polish women spoke any English, compared to the Thais and Filipinas.

The Polish woman from the canteen popped up in front of me holding a pair of blue and white Adidas *inniskór* or “indoor shoes,” and also a large pair of white rubber boots. There were several names written on the side of the rubber boots, all of which had been crossed out—she told me to write my name on both pairs of shoes. The boots were too big, but the Polish woman said that they were out of everything else. She told me to wear the Adidas sandals in the locker room and canteen, and the rubber boots were for the factory floor only. I asked her how to say “thank you” in Polish, and one of the Thai people standing near me giggled and said, “Say it like *zen koo-ya.*” The Polish woman laughed and nodded, then went back to the canteen.

As the clock approached 7:30am, people began to suit up. I did the same and we all walked out onto the factory floor together in our blue and white uniforms, looking not unlike a band of Smurfs. Everyone around me grabbed heavy white aprons from a coat rack, names scrawled across the front with a permanent marker. I put on my temporary blue one, causing several people to ask what my name was. They were surprised to hear that it was Icelandic, and someone chuckled and said under her breath, “Icelandic people don’t last very long.”

I asked one of the women around me about what I should do, and she directed me to P’Maew and Sara, the latter being the Icelandic supervisor on the factory floor. P’Maew smiled and told me that she wanted me to get used to “touching the fish” in the *frystihús*, and she instructed Loung and Pa (the older people I had met the day before) to
teach me what to do. The machinery had already started whirring and clacking. There was a Polish woman there, whose name was difficult to read on the front of her white apron, but she didn’t speak a word of English. I asked her what the Polish word for “hello” was, but she shrugged and went on with her work. I told her my name and asked what hers was, and she answered with a look of surprise—from that point on it was all body language with her.

We laid out the cod bitar, which still had skin on one side, before switching to triangular, skinless pieces of cod that needed to be laid out in a “pretty” way before the machine froze them. We had to smooth everything down so that the fish looked as optimum as possible, with nothing loose or sticking out on the sides. When I did it wrong, the Polish woman would quickly rearrange the fish, showing me how to do it correctly. We pulled piece by piece out of large, ice-filled tubs, with thin blue plastic sheets separating each layer of fish. My hands began to feel numb in the hours of handling the icy cod chunks.

Loung and Pa both helped us with this task, though their main job was to get fish off the conveyor belt once it had already been flash-frozen. When there was a break between sets of frozen fish, one of them would come over and chat with me to ask about my mother and what I was doing in Iceland. They were quiet people, both from one of the more remote regions of Isaan or Northeast Thailand, and Loung had been in Iceland for much longer than his wife had. They also had a daughter in school in Iceland, and Pa said that her daughter spoke Icelandic very well. I wanted to ask her more about her family in Iceland, but I was getting behind on my fish-arranging task and the Polish woman was starting to frown at me.
After what seemed like a very long time standing at the conveyor belt, the Polish woman pointed at the clock and Pa told me that we had a 30-minute coffee break. The machines quieted down and the women walked towards the locker room, tossing their latex gloves into an industrial-sized garbage can on the way. P'Sunitha had stuffed several pairs of gloves into my pockets before we started work, and now I understood why—most women were peeling off two or three pairs of latex gloves, which was probably warmer than just a single layer. It was something I would remember for the next shift.

We took off our wet boots and put on our sandals, then washed our hands in the sink near the entrance to the locker room. An African woman named Martha introduced herself to me in English at the sink, asking what my name was and where I was from; she told me that she was from Nigeria, and said that she was very interested in moving to America someday and wanted to talk more with me later. I nodded, and went to my locker to get my snack before heading to the canteen.

**Canteen Conversations**

The energy of several different languages and conversations spilled out of the canteen into the hallway; people bustled around the room getting coffee, tea, and heating things up in the microwave. Everyone ate from their small plastic tubs, which were full of food made from home. There was very little mixing between the different ethnic and language groups in the room; all of the Poles sat together at their own tables, and the Filipinos and Thais sat mostly apart, though they blended at one or two tables along with a few Vietnamese and Martha from Nigeria. There was one table of Icelanders in the
middle of the room, where four or five of the floor managers sat and ate together.
P'Maew sat and talked with them in Icelandic for a few minutes, and then got up later to move to one of the Thai tables.

I walked over to P'Sunitha's table and they motioned for me to sit down; everyone at the table was Thai, except for one older Asian woman who didn't seem to speak Thai, and a Polish man who was sitting quietly, drinking his coffee and looking over the room. The Thais told me that the older woman was from Vietnam, and that everyone called her Mama—at the mention of her name, “Mama” looked up and me and smiled warmly, and said a few words to me in heavily-accented Icelandic and English. She called me and the other Thai women “Dottie”, which seemed to be her pronunciation of the Icelandic word dóttir, or “daughter.” I tried to say hello to the Polish man, but he was not terribly engaged with our table or anyone else in the room.

The smell of warm jasmine rice, curry and coconut milk wafted around the table; all of the Thai people were eating Thai food or instant ramen noodles, while I ate my flatkökur (Icelandic flat bread) spread with butter, and an apple. I told them that my mother had once had a Thai restaurant, but that I never learned how to cook Thai food. A younger Thai man at the table, whom I found out was P'Sunitha's boyfriend, P'Som, spoke up at the same time that I did, both of us joking that I could only cook gai tod—a very simple Thai dish, basically a salty omelette—and all of the Thais cracked up laughing with me. Mama did not understand any Thai, but she seemed used to following their conversations, as she smiled and laughed along with them.

A middle-aged Thai man at the table, whom I found out was named P'Ton, also poked fun at my use of the Thai word kin (informal for “to eat”) instead of the more
formal word *thaan*, which is a more polite, “upper-class” way of saying *kin*. I explained to them that I didn't learn much proper Thai at home, as most of the language I grew up with was informal, between my mother and her sister. Another Thai woman at the table, who had been quiet until now, spoke up and asked if I knew about the Isaan language—which is the regional dialect spoken in the rural northeast of the country, and was more similar to Laotian than to the official Thai language. I told her that I knew what the language was but that I didn't speak it, since my mother came from the capital city of Bangkok. The woman nodded knowingly, then told me that she spoke at least five languages: Isaan, Central/Bangkok Thai (the official language), Cambodian, some English, and a little bit of Icelandic. She, like several other Thais at the table, said that she came from the biggest city in the Isaan area, Nakorn Ratchasima. I asked them to teach me some words in Isaan, and they giggled and told me that the word for “delicious” in Isaan is *saep*, not *aroy* as I had learned it in Central Thai. They laughed even harder when I tried to say it, and I laughed along with them, knowing that an American accent was no help in the matter.

There was a pause, and someone glanced at the clock on the wall and said “*Moht way-laaw,*” or “Time's up!” It was a few minutes before 10:30am. There was a general sigh as we all stood up from the table and joined the others heading back into the lockers. The last Thai woman seated at the table, whom I hadn't heard speak yet, hung back to talk with me after the others had already left. I asked for her name, which was P'Muu, and how long she had been in Iceland—she was a few years older than me, and had just arrived last year. I asked how she came to be in Iceland, and she said that her husband was Icelandic. P'Muu hadn't learned any of the Icelandic language yet since she had been
working at the factory, and she spoke only a little English. We smiled and I asked, “So how do you communicate with your husband?” And she giggled and said that they relied on bits of English and hand gestures, mostly.

As we all prepared to go back onto the factory floor, P'Sunitha appeared at my shoulder as she tucked a long golden chain under her neckline. There was a small Buddha figure hanging from the chain, considered a measure of protection for the wearer. An interview question came to mind and I casually asked P'Sunitha whether Thai people went to the local wat or Buddhist temple very often\(^{38}\). She laughed a little when she answered, saying that she had only gone there two times in her seven years of living in Iceland. P'Sunitha said that it was not so much that she disliked the temple itself, but she disliked most of the other Thais who went regularly to the temple. I pressed her a bit for her reasons and she said that they “talk too much.” P'Muu, who was listening to our conversation and seemed to be friends with P'Sunitha, said that the other Thais at the temple basically talked too much about other people's behavior, what they did or didn't do right, and that she and P'Sunitha just felt that there was too much gossip going on at the temple for them to feel comfortable going there very often. I made another mental note to include a survey question about Thai social activities and a fear of gossip.

\(^{38}\) During the pilot study for this project in 2005, there was talk about a singular Thai wat in the Reykjavík suburbs that was notoriously difficult to find. There is one Thai monk at this temple, which is actually just a house at the end of the street in a residential neighborhood. It is the only Thai temple that exists in all of Iceland. Icelandic neighbors disliked the extra cars constantly parked in the street near their houses, the monk and templegoers often told me, since the temple only had a small driveway and no parking lot.
Extracting Bones and Building Rapport

After the break, P'Maew asked me to go downstairs and apprentice myself to another task: removing the worms and bones from filleted fish. This was the station I had seen the day before, where there were five women standing in a line on either side of the slow-moving conveyor belt. P'Maew led me down the narrow spiral staircase, and then found a pair of long, skinny fillet knives for me to use. She told me that the knives got dull quickly, so she would have to show me how to use the electric knife sharpener upstairs the next day. In the meantime she gave me two knives in order to switch between them during the shift, as pictured in Figure 4-5 below. I stepped up on one of the raised platforms to reach the cutting surface, and P'Maew asked my Thai neighbor, a short, round jolly-looking woman, to teach me what to do. And then she left.

The woman next to me was named P'Dang, and she was in her early 30s. She spoke to me in Thai, first telling me how to use my knife to carefully flick out the curled bloodworms from deep in the fish's flesh, but it took time for me to get the hang of the task. I did not understand everything she said in Thai, so I occasionally asked my other neighbor, who happened to be Filipina and spoke English, for help. I seemed to be cutting all the wrong things, throwing away good pieces of the fish and keeping the waste parts on the first several fish I cut, but P'Dang was patient and showed me over and over again how to do it correctly.
We talked and laughed as we worked for the next two hours, though of course she was more efficient than I at simultaneously talking and handling the fish. I went through my mental list of interview questions to ask her, but before long she was giving me a narrative of her life and answering my questions before I could ask them. This is certainly one of the methodological incentives of ethnographic work, as respondents...
often bring up topics that the researcher might never have otherwise considered had the conversation taken place in a more structured setting.

P’Dang told me that she did not learn English very well because she disliked school, and had to stop before she finished elementary school. Her family needed her to help to take care of the buffalo since the animals were central to their work as rice farmers. She started doing manual labor (lifting and moving heavy boxes in a warehouse of some kind, she told me) in a paid job when she was 13 years old, in order to bring in more money for her family. She has seven siblings, with one brother studying in Bangkok and several others still living at home and helping her mother on the farm. Her father had died just over a year previous from an alcohol-related disease. P’Dang had just returned from a visit home to Thailand in February last year and then he died in March or April, so she was obligated to fly back immediately again for his funeral. Usually, she only goes home once every year and her Thai boyfriend goes with her every two years, due to the high cost of flying round-trip from Iceland to Thailand.

When P’Dang first came to Iceland, she was lonely because she had no friends and often cried and wanted to go back home. It took some time to adjust, she said, but now after eight years she does not really feel homesick very often. She asked me directly if I was luey (rich), and I carefully answered that I did not think so, which seemed to satisfy her for the moment. She thought Iceland was an okay place to live, but added, “If I were rich, I wouldn’t live here.” She and her Thai boyfriend lived in Breiðholt, the low-rent neighborhood of Reykjavík that Icelanders consider to be the closest thing to a “slum,” with a relatively high percentage of immigrant residents.
I asked P’Dang if she intended to get Icelandic citizenship since one has the right to apply for citizenship after seven years in the country, but she expressed concern with the Icelandic language exam requirement. Also, she and her boyfriend weren’t sure if they wanted to become Icelandic citizens yet, since it meant that they would be attached to Iceland “forever.” They had been saving money to buy a new car in Thailand and to build a nice house for themselves in her hometown. She promised to show me pictures of the house construction from her last visit to Thailand, later on. My head was spinning with the kinds of survey questions that I wanted to write that evening—questions about commitment to living in Iceland, investing money at home in Thailand rather than in Iceland, and what being attached to Iceland “forever” meant.

There was a Thai man standing on her other side, talking with her now and then about the “slow and lazy” Polish girl working across the conveyor from him. He said that even I, the newcomer, was catching up faster on my work than this girl was. He didn't seem to like any of the Polish people standing on the other side of the line, and he went on talking about them in Thai to those of us who would listen. We all stood working and talking for a couple more hours, until P'Dang pointed at the clock, indicating the next break.

My shift was technically over then, at 12:30, so I went to clock out. There was a sign announcing that today's work would end at 6pm (two-and-a-half hours of overtime), and tomorrow the day would begin at 6am (an additional one-and-a-half hours of overtime) and end at 6pm again—these were 12 hour shifts, with 12 hours off in between. Martha, the Nigerian woman, was standing near me at the time clock and asked why I wasn't staying the whole day like everyone else. I explained that I was a student and only
working half-days, and asked her if everyone generally worked several 12 hour shifts in a row. She remarked, “The Asians always do overtime... but some of the Polish people are really lazy, and they never come in for extra work.” There seemed to be significant resentment from all of the other groups towards the Polish workers, who had become a majority of the workforce only in the last few years, Martha told me.

There would need to be survey questions about the relationships among the immigrant groups, probing to see whether everyone else stood in solidarity against the majority Poles, or if that was just my perception. The survey answers, if done correctly, would be a necessary self-correcting mechanism for my own biased view of these types of situations.

**Under the (Lunch) Table Exchanges**

Despite my shift being over, I wanted to spend time with people before their next shift began at one o'clock so I headed for the canteen. I had already eaten my food during the first break, but everyone at P'Sunitha's table started offering me food while I was sitting there—they would not take “Mai ow, kha” (“No thank you”) for an answer. Someone handed me a small bowl with a bit of fried rice with prawns that she had taken from her own bowl. I said “Kap khun kha” (“Thank you”) over and over again, and they just waved me off and said “Mai pen rai,” or “Don't worry about it.” They said that I must be hungry after my first day at work and that I needed to eat. I smiled and accepted the food, wondering how I should try to reciprocate for all their offers in the future. I told them that I didn't make Thai food very often at home, and they seemed concerned about
my not having a proper rice pot—this began a long discussion about the cheapest place to buy a rice cooker in Reykjavík, quite useful information for a new arrival.

P'Sunitha and another Thai woman at the table were talking about a Thai TV show that they had just seen, and P'Sunitha passed a DVD of the next show in the series over to her friend. P'Maew came over at that point and held out a plastic bag of large sausages to one of the other Thai men sitting at our table, and he gave her a few Icelandic coins in exchange. She laughed and asked if I wanted to try a Polish sausage—I said yes, and she brought over a sample for me to taste. She said that if I wanted to buy some in the future, she could sell me a bag of five sausages for 500 Icelandic krónur (about seven US dollars, at the time). Her husband was neither Thai nor Icelandic, she said, and they had a small business on the side of making and selling sausages to their friends.

P'Sunitha mentioned that she and her boyfriend P'Som went fishing at “Ting-val-EE” quite often—I wasn't sure what place she was talking about, as I failed to recognize the name in her Thai accent. I asked her to say it again, and this time she put a little more emphasis on the first syllable (which is a more Icelandic pronunciation). I realized she was saying her own version of “Þingvellir,” (pronounced “THING-kvet-lur” in Icelandic) which is the name of an Icelandic national park and fishing lake about 45 minutes away from Reykjavík.

I asked P'Sunitha what they did with all the fish they caught at Þingvellir, and she said that the younger sister of a local Thai restaurant owner sells the fish at a low price to

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39 This reverse-translation from the colloquial Thai pronunciation of Icelandic words is very common, particularly because Icelandic words tend to be long, unwieldy compounds that the Thai tongue has difficulty pronouncing. Icelandic is full of enunciated L's, R's, and “Th” sounds that the Thai ear does not discern. As a result the Thais come up with their own version of difficult words, often shortened to one or two syllables for their convenience. I discuss this further in Chapter 5.
other Thais, for frying and eating. Over time, I heard many more stories like P'Maew's and P'Sunitha's. Making and selling one's own food was quite common among the Thais in Iceland, particularly since they could do it on their own time and it did not require them to pay taxes on the small informal income. I decided to add questions about the informal trade and work done by Thais to the survey, since their reputation for making money on the side was often discussed among the other immigrants I spoke with at the factory.

Lunch ended at one o'clock, and the workers began pushing back their chairs from the tables and walking back towards the locker room. Many of them would be at the factory for another five hours that evening, and one man joked to me that he wanted to work just a half day, like me. I thanked everyone at the table again for their generous food offering, and said “Diaw juh kan, kha,” or “See you soon,” before heading down the stairs and out to the parking lot.

There I took a seat on a curb, pulled out my notebook, and began jotting down all the notes that had been mentally piling up throughout the day. After arriving home I would open my running file of field notes and rehash each conversation and interaction I had that day, highlighting specific themes that came up again and again in the ethnography. As my time in the field continued, certain themes became more prominent than others and I began to formulate survey modules. By the time I finished working in the fish factory and received a sampling frame from the Icelandic government I had a sizeable body of qualitative data from which to construct the survey instrument. I continued to keep field notes for other events and interactions in the field as the months passed, however, up until the end of my stay in Iceland.
All in a Day’s Work

The work of distributing each survey for this study often began with a phone call to an address provided by the Icelandic National Registry. In the following case, the person of interest’s name was female, with both her birthdate and that of her Icelandic husband included in the database as part of their national identification numbers. They were over 20 years apart in age. I had learned from experience, however, that the Registry database was not always correct or up-to-date since people divorced, married, and moved often without notifying the appropriate authority. This was something I always had to keep in mind when talking with participants since the data listed on the official record might be completely unrelated to their current living or marital situation.

In this case, I dialed the woman’s number and a man answered, rather groggily. His accent was unfamiliar to me, and so I began to introduce myself in Thai in case he was a relative of the woman’s. The man greeted me with a few seconds of total silence before handing the phone to his wife, who answered cautiously in Thai. I proceeded with the friendliest greeting I could muster, but my accent was apparently obvious enough that she decided speaking in English would be better. She explained that her husband spoke English fluently, and back went the phone to him with a whispered explanation from her to him in Icelandic. All parties were befuddled at this point, but realizing the husband was Icelandic, I began speaking Icelandic with him about the purpose of my call. He exclaimed, “How many languages do you speak, anyway?”, eliciting a laugh on both sides of the line and a lighter tone from that point on.

After further explanation of my project the husband wanted to invite me over for coffee, but said the house was a mess and being renovated so it might be better to wait a
few days. He asked for my number and said he would call me back to arrange a meeting time. The few days passed with no word, a common occurrence with cold calls. The next day I ran errands in that part of the city and decided to call the household again to check in with them. He was hesitant to invite me over, but I offered to just meet in the apartment building’s foyer instead—he agreed. A few minutes later he, his wife, and their infant daughter came out to meet me in the hall. I talked briefly with him in Icelandic, mostly to clear up any doubt of who I was and what I was doing, and then he went back inside the apartment.

I talked longer with the wife, a shy woman in her 20s, and she handed me her baby to hold while she looked over the survey questions. She expressed relief, as many other Thai participants had done, that she would only have to check boxes and not write out too many answers. Many of the Thai migrants from Northeastern Thailand had said they could read “Bangkok” Thai, but it was much harder for them to write it well if they had not continued very far in their formal educations. The woman told me that she had been in Iceland for three years already but that she hadn’t learned any Icelandic, only a bit of English to talk with her husband, and that it was very hard for her to live there without knowing the language well. She did not work. She said that she was starting an Icelandic class, though, which was helping her.

I asked if she wouldn’t mind me sitting down with her to go through the survey together in case there were some difficult parts; she politely declined. I left a self-addressed, stamped envelope with her and she took it with her back inside the apartment. Her survey never arrived in the mail, though I recorded the details of our conversation in my field notes and drew from our semi-structured interview in the foyer when
interpreting results from survey analyses. Her case was frustrating, though not
uncommon in the survey administration, particularly when dealing with migrants who
had arrived only a few years before the study began.

**Conclusion**

The business of this chapter has been to introduce the fieldwork setting and study
population in Reykjavík, examine a workplace-based approach to participant-observation,
and illustrate in detail the qualitative ethnography that provided a framework for the
construction of the project's survey. More viscerally, the intent was to immerse the reader
in the bewildering experience of the first few days of work in a foreign setting, where
one's educational background, culture, and even language skills are of little help—and are
often more of a hindrance—amidst the loud clacking of machinery and the awkwardness
of so many unfamiliar faces and tasks. This immersion is indeed an approximation of the
immigrants' own experiences of adjusting to a strange new world, and it is the essence of
participant-observation.

In hindsight, my fieldwork experience among the Thais in Iceland would have
been enhanced by working in several different factories, in different industries, rather
than one alone. While it was very beneficial to learn about the lives of 20 Thai people
over a period of three months, the population in the factory was limited and I could have
cast a larger net for qualitative data by seeking employment elsewhere. Not all
immigrant employers were eager to hire a researcher, however, so my choice of
workplaces was limited in that sense.
Additionally, I centered myself in Reykjavík instead of spending an extended period of time in an outlying, rural area—this was more for convenience than anything else, since the largest number of Thais live in the capital city, but spending even a week or two living in a small fishing village in the northwest or eastern fjords would have added greater depth to my understanding of Thai settlements in Iceland. I spent many hours on the phone talking with residents of the outlying areas, and met several of them in person while delivering surveys around the country (as I described in Chapter 3), but that is no substitute for living among the smaller villages.

Taking into consideration the weaknesses of the fieldwork experience, the details recorded in my field notes ground this study in the lives of real people rather than depending solely on bare numbers and outputs from a statistical program. It is these same stories which I will revisit in various ways later in the dissertation, drawing on the human faces and experiences of international migration to flesh out the survey analyses and results.
Chapter 5

Language and Economic Integration

“Snake-Snake, Fish-Fish”

A clock mounted high above the factory floor finally clicked to 12 o’clock noon, signaling the start of our lunch break as workers began to exit the factory floor. A narrow hallway separated the main fish processing room from the women’s locker rooms, with a sink running the length of one wall and metal shelving on the other—the latter was used for switching out our tall, white rubber Wellington boots for comfortable slip-on inniskór or house sandals. The group of Polish women in front of me threw away layer after layer of latex gloves as they filed past a garbage can, having put on several pairs in order to keep their hands a little warmer during the shift.

I stood with a group of Thai and Filipino women as we waited to wash our hands at the sink, fingers lingering in the hot water after several hours of handling frigid fish—we smiled at the Polish women and exchanged brief comments about the weather in a mix of languages. Next we pulled off the white aprons with our names scrawled on the front, pushed up the plastic sleeve-protectors covered in fish scales and blood, and removed the blue cotton scrubs that protected our street clothes. The company provided a row of hooks on which to hang our aprons outside the locker room, though most of us left our white, shower-cap like hairnets on out of convenience since we would be returning to the floor in 30 minutes.

In this manner we passed through the doorway and transformed from featureless fish handlers into women of various shapes, colors, and languages, with some chattering about soap operas from their home country that they planned to watch after work while
others gossiped about their boyfriends and the video games with which they were obsessed. One woman reached into her locker and pulled out a stack of used jeans, igniting sounds of interest from those around her. This was a regular activity, as I had seen her bring in used jeans a few times by now and realized that she was selling them for a small profit to her coworkers. She used bits of English, Icelandic, and Polish to talk with the workers who weren’t Thai like herself, explaining her prices while some sat down to casually try on one pair at a time With her co-ethnics she spoke a dialect of Thai that was closer to Laotian than anything else. The bartering then began in earnest. I asked her once where she had learned so many languages, and she replied that while she hadn’t finished high school in Thailand she had been living in Iceland for so long that she’d had to learn a bit of everything—nguu nguu, plaa plaa, or “snake-snake, fish-fish” as the translation from Thai goes—in order to get by.

As the used-jeans market proceeded in the locker room, the rest of us shuffled out of the main locker room entrance in our slippers and made our way to the canteen down another hallway. I sat down at a table with a few Thai people, including the parents and teenage daughter of one family, an older Vietnamese woman, and a quiet man from Poland. The Thai mother in the family had brought a document on official letterhead, written in Icelandic, and smoothed it out carefully on the table.

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40 Well over half of Thai women in Iceland reported hometowns in the most rural, agricultural, and generally disadvantaged region of Thailand known as Isaan, on the northeastern Khorat plateau (57 percent of 107 respondents). Two-thirds came from families with at least one parent working as a farmer and an even greater percentage (86.5 percent) marked “Yes” when asked whether or not they spoke the Northeastern Thai dialect known also as Isaan. A rigid social and economic hierarchy in Thailand assures that only individuals with actual connections to Isaan would claim to speak its language; the relatively affluent, elite denizens of Bangkok speak almost exclusively Standard or “Bangkok” Thai. For their part, individuals from Isaan do not speak Standard Thai as their first language. At home and with friends they nearly always speak Isaan, which is a very close relative of neighboring Laos’ language.
As more people began to join us at the long table, the mother beckoned to another, younger Thai woman and asked her to tell her what it all meant. The newcomer to the table, a foreman and the highest-ranked Thai employee at the factory, was well known for her literacy in Icelandic compared to the others. I had watched several of the other Thai workers bring documents for her to translate during breaks. She scanned the top of the page for clues to its meaning before walking over to the table full of Icelandic managers. She showed one of them the document in question and another female foreman helped her decipher it into more basic Icelandic. The paper turned out to be a government-issued tax document. The Thai manager returned to our table and sat down, explaining the document’s meaning in Thai to the original inquirer before the woman nodded and began to fold it back up to store carefully in her lunch sack. She did not write down any notes. I later learned that the original woman with the document had been living in Iceland for four or five years, but had worked so many hours in the factory every day that she neither had the time nor the linguistic background necessary to take any Icelandic classes.

**Introduction**

This chapter seeks to describe the proficiency of Thai migrants in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing Icelandic, as well as the incentives and disincentives to learn it. Specifically, I have two main questions: 1) How do the auspices of migration affect proficiency in the language of the host society? 2) How do the

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41 For more in-depth treatment of the auspices of migration as a main theoretical variable as well as a history of Thai migration to Iceland in general, please refer to the introductory chapters of this dissertation.
auspices and Icelandic speaking skill affect the economic integration of migrants? This requires attention to both employment patterns and income.

From my 2005 pilot study, I hypothesized that Thai women who migrate via marriage to Icelandic men have better Icelandic speaking abilities than migrants who come for other reasons. Barring extreme circumstances (where marriage migration serves as a vehicle for human trafficking), women married to Icelanders ideally have access to at least one native language-speaker and are immersed in a wholly different language environment than others who came for work or family reunification. I expected the latter to be less proficient in Icelandic, mostly as a result of having fewer occasions for linguistic immersion. Exceptions may be care-workers who must interact verbally with both young and elderly Icelanders on a daily basis, resulting in their Icelandic language skills being higher than those of marriage migrants. Due to their profession, however, the incomes of the former may still be low.

I also hypothesize that marriage migrants will be more economically integrated in Icelandic society as a result of their stronger language skills. This should be evident in both the likelihood of employment and income from employment. Thai women married to Icelandic men have access to a wider array of native resources by virtue of their marriage, increasing the number of both strong and weak ties available to them for obtaining more lucrative employment (Granovetter 1973). Other migrants, having been recruited to work in mostly low-skill, low-income industries and lacking the social and financial connections necessary to advance to better paying jobs, will be less-successfully integrated into Icelandic society.
In this chapter I first present conceptual background and a case for the institutional nature of the Icelandic language in Iceland, followed by data and methods for the study. I then describe Thai migrants’ current language skills and the incentives and barriers for learning Icelandic. Next I present three regression analyses with the auspices of migration as a central predictor in each analysis, answering the two primary research questions. I examine determinants of Icelandic language proficiency, followed by an analysis of Icelandic language skills as a predictor of employment before turning to low vs. high income. An appendix to this chapter follows, explicating the vast linguistic distance between the Thai and Icelandic languages (Beenstock et. al. 2001, Chiswick and Miller 2005).

Conceptual Background

The intersection of international migration and language has long been a topic of interest in the social sciences. Economists have been concerned with how and under what conditions immigrants learn the language of their host society, primarily as a way to understand the link between language, income, and type of employment (Chiswick 1978, McManus et al. 1983, Koussoudji 1988, Chiswick and Miller 1995, Hayfron 2001, Delander et al. 2005, Chiswick and Miller 2010). Most of these studies conclude that there is a strong relationship between host-country language skill and earnings, with labor-market incentives for immigrants to become fluent and thus earn a higher salary.

Other analysts focus on language as a barrier to immigration or citizenship. For example, Germany requires demonstrated fluency in German before granting immigrant visas (Slonim-Nevo et al. 2009). Some studies highlight the role of language as both a

Chiswick and Miller (1995) assert that host-country language fluency among immigrants is a result of three factors. The first is an economic incentive from learning the host country’s language, decreasing with age-at-entry since there are less working years available in which to maximize the economic returns to host-country language acquisition. The second is efficiency in learning the language; that is, the ability to learn the language, often related to educational achievement and developmental capacity upon arrival. The third factor is exposure to an environment that encourages language acquisition, such as enrolling in language classes, having children in the public schools, and years of residence in the country. Chiswick and Miller (1999) and Martinovic et al. (2011) also conclude that lack of contact with other home-language speakers fosters host-language proficiency. This social exposure factor would also include immigrants who have children in host-country schools, since parents of schoolchildren have to interact on a regular basis with their children’s teachers and with their children who are learning the new language at school and trying it out at home.

Additionally, Espenshade and Fu (1997) structure their analysis of immigrants’ English language proficiency around pre-immigration and post-immigration characteristics. The latter includes three variables measuring “commitment to stay:” homeownership, immediate relatives nearby, and citizenship. I follow the precedent of
Espenshade and Fu here, including variables that take all of these factors into account when predicting language acquisition.

Many studies also include the ethnicity of migrants’ spouses as a means of predicting migrants’ language abilities (Dustmann 1996, Chiswick and Miller 1996, Espenshade and Fu 1997, Hayfron 2001, Polek and Schoon 2008, Dribe and Lundh 2008, Van Tubergen and Kalmijn 2009), with nearly all finding that endogamous migrants tend to have worse language skills while those married to native speakers have better skills. Polek and Schoon (2008) compare Polish women who migrate in order to marry Dutch men to Polish women who migrate without marital intentions, finding that occupational status was more important than marital status for explaining language fluency. Unfortunately, their study does not address whether non-marriage migrants come primarily for labor or for reuniting with co-ethnic kin. Both are entirely different means of migration with the potential for different outcomes in language abilities, economic integration, and social networks, deserving further investigation.

Additionally, in support of the hypothesis that the auspices of migration affect economic integration, Dribe and Lundh (2008) find that immigrants who are intermarried with Swedes are much more likely to be employed and have higher incomes than those who are endogamous. They conclude that this association is mostly due to the increased human capital and access to employment that exogamous marriage to natives provides immigrants, particularly women from Asia who enter with lower educational achievement levels.

It is also important to recognize that Thai migrants lucky or motivated enough to have become familiar with English before emigrating almost certainly have an easier time
of getting by in Iceland, at least initially. English and Icelandic are cousins on the
Germanic branch of the language family tree (West and North, respectively). The two
languages also share a nearly identical alphabet and hundreds of cognates. Thai (and
Isaan), on the other hand, hails from the relatively distant Tai-Kadai family of
languages—completely unconnected to the common Proto-Indo-European roots of
English and Icelandic (Lewis 2009).

The “institutional assemblage” of language

It is not clear whether the Icelandic government views its various minority
populations as having differential linguistic instruction needs. The Icelandic Ministry of
Social Affairs first drew up a “Government Policy of the Integration of Immigrants” in
2007 to clarify what they see as the central role of Icelandic language acquisition in
immigrant adaptation to Icelandic society. The Policy’s definition of an immigrant or
innflytjendur (literally “in-mover”) is that of a person “born overseas, or both of whose
parents are born overseas.” Moreover, immigrants “share the characteristic that their
native language is not Icelandic” and “the term native language refers to the first
language learned by a child” (Ministry of Social Affairs 2007:2; emphasis mine). In
other words, children born in Iceland who do not speak Icelandic as a first language are
considered immigrants regardless of their citizenship status.

Iceland does not observe the same rules of jus soli\textsuperscript{42} citizenship practiced by the
United States, where citizenship is conferred on anyone born on American “soil.”

\textsuperscript{42} Latin, “right by soil.”
Instead Iceland observes a form of *jus sanguinis*[^43], a policy of prioritizing citizenship for those who have Icelandic “blood” in one form or another. Any potential citizens (including children) who do not qualify are required to reside in Iceland for a specific period of time before becoming eligible for citizenship. A more accurate term for describing Iceland’s immigration policy could be summed up by the term *jus lingua*[^44], at least according to the priority that the Policy of Integration places on linguistic nativity over “blood” and place of birth. To be Icelandic is to speak Icelandic. Language is arguably a formidable institution of both citizenship and identity in Icelandic society, where the government defines a person as an “immigrant” for life unless one’s parents speak Icelandic in the home from birth.

Baba and Dahl-Jorgensen (2012) describes language as an “institutional assemblage,” expanding on W. Richard Scott’s three pillars of institutionalism: regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutions (Scott 2007). According to Scott (2007), regulative institutions establish rules and enforce the law. In the Icelandic language setting, this would relate to the requirement of 150 hours of Icelandic language courses in order to qualify for citizenship, as well as passing an exam proving one’s Icelandic knowledge.

Normative institutions encompass the transmission of values and norms, embodied quite literally in the Icelandic Language Council’s attempts to maintain linguistic “purity” and to constantly invent Icelandic neologisms for foreign words. The government policy outlined above is clear that for children growing up in Iceland, to

[^43]: Latin, “right by blood.”
[^44]: Latin, “right by language.”
learn a language other than Icelandic in the home somehow invalidates their right to citizenship. A wariness of contamination, whether of the gene pool, the natural landscape, or the language, has operated as a strongly normative force in Iceland through the centuries: “One is Icelandic to the extent that one speaks pure Icelandic. Some are more Icelandic than others. Icelandic society may be exceptional in its reliance on a linguistic totemic operator for cultural reproduction” (Pálsson 1989).

In this scheme, cultural-cognitive institutions maintain meanings and symbols in a society (Scott 2007), with language perhaps serving as one of the most significant symbolic markers distinguishing “us” from “them.” This is most certainly the case in Iceland, where English is considered very much a language of foreigners even after being taught from the early primary grades. Nearly everyone speaks English in Iceland, but the resistance to including English words and phrases in Icelandic sentences is tangible among the older generation. The younger generation tends to Icelandicize popular English words for their own use, having heard such words repeated on their cable or satellite television channels and in foreign movies. While Icelanders might season their

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45 Pálsson refers here to a structuralist term coined by Claude Lévi-Strausse (1968). A totemic operator is “an overarching classification system which organizes all experience into an integrated whole in terms of which one can locate anyone or anything relative to all other beings, things or forces” (Durrenberger and Durrenberger 1986:12). By extension from Pálsson’s argument, Icelanders depend on language as a classification system to locate immigrants and other “outsiders” (literally “outlanders”—útlendingar) relative to themselves. I have observed that regardless of how socially, culturally, or economically integrated immigrants to Iceland become, without true Icelandic fluency they will almost never be accepted as “Icelandic.” The language itself functions as a gatekeeper, above and beyond any other normative force in Icelandic society.

46 Pálsson discusses a distinction of dialect and therefore class among native-born Icelanders, noteworthy in that it contradicts the narrative portraying Iceland as an egalitarian country lacking linguistic stratification. Even for native-born Icelanders, then, let alone immigrants, fluency in Icelandic defines where one “belongs” in society—even a purportedly egalitarian one.

47 One simple example is the use of the word kjútipæ, an Icelandicized version of the word “cutie-pie.”

48 Other than cartoons, there is very little dubbing in Iceland—this is quite different from the linguistic policies of the French, for example. Nearly every movie or TV show in Iceland is subtitled, preserving the original American or British vocabulary and accents.
speech and text messages with slang words from English and Danish, they have a different attitude towards the use of foreign language in their private lives compared to (for example) Lebanese, who unselfconsciously weave entire phrases of English and French into their own dialect of Arabic and often conduct whole conversations in English even when everyone present speaks Arabic. In Iceland, to speak too much of any language other than Icelandic is to identify oneself as foreign, an undesirable trait—in Lebanon, it marks one as all the more cosmopolitan. One Thai woman I interviewed in a 2005 pilot study describes the social networking doors that opened once she committed to learning Icelandic well:

I think that a woman who lives here alone and doesn’t speak Icelandic has a hard time. If she wants to buy clothes, she can’t even ask for a certain size or something like that because she doesn’t know how. And maybe she doesn’t want to go out if her Thai friends are busy, so she becomes lonely. But the Thais here who learn Icelandic, they can have Thai friends, but they also have Icelandic friends. They can visit an Icelandic friend, or ask them to teach her how to cook Icelandic food. Then you can ask about all kinds of other things. That’s how I am. I would go to my friends’ house and say, ‘This tastes good! Can you help me learn how to cook Icelandic food?’ And they taught me.

While examples of regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutions are readily available in Iceland, separately they fail to convey the ubiquitous power of the Icelandic language over nearly every aspect of Icelandic life, across institutional lines. Describing a similar phenomenon in Norway, Baba and Dahl-Jorgensen sees the three institutional pillars as more effectively combined into a single “assemblage” or “nexus” of forces, structuring immigrants’ access to and opportunities for learning the language of their host society (2012). As with Icelandic, Norwegian serves as both a barrier and passageway for migrants attempting to enter mainstream Norwegian society. The state
provides free language classes to refugees, and some companies seeking high-skilled workers pay for their employees to learn Norwegian, but otherwise migrants are on their own to enroll in classes (Baba and Dahl-Jorgensen 2012).

This “institutional assemblage” is nearly identical in Iceland and must be kept in mind when considering the determinants of Icelandic language acquisition. Along with the restricted opportunities of the dual labor market in Iceland, where migrants lacking Icelandic skill almost have no choice but to remain isolated in the bottom segment of Icelandic industry (Piore 1979, Portes and Zhou 1993), it is not only the human capital and resources of the migrants themselves that determines their ability to learn Icelandic and obtain a higher-paying job but also the pervasive structure or “nexus” of state and social institutions—a complex system which resists quantitative compartmentalization and statistical analysis unless complemented by ground-level observation and first-hand participation in these institutions themselves, both of which I accomplish in this study.

**Data and Methods**

**Data**

All of the analyses in this dissertation draw on data from my 2008 Survey of Thai Migrant Integration in Iceland (STMII)\(^{49}\). I begin with 109 female responses for each analysis, excluding males because their numbers are too small to use in statistical tests (N=26). Also, the auspices of migration for Thai men vary considerably from those used by women and require a wholly different analysis—namely, Thai men do not migrate via

\(^{49}\) For more exhaustive detail on the general methodology of this study including survey construction and administration please refer to Chapter 3 of this dissertation, titled “Data and Methods.”
marriage to Icelandic women; nearly all of them come via co-ethnic family reunification or with employer sponsorship.

**Dependent Variables**

**Icelandic Speaking Skill**

The analyses for this chapter are divided into two parts: understanding the determinants of Icelandic language fluency and exploring the role of Icelandic language ability on employment and income. I draw upon a set of three survey questions from the STMII data asking participants to assess their skills in Icelandic, English, and Thai (question format adapted from Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The survey directs respondents to mark one of four levels of fluency for each skill, with columns marked:

- “Not at all,”
- “A Little,”
- “Well,” and
- “Very Well.”

The four sub-questions for each language are:

- “How well do you speak Icelandic?”
- “How well do you understand Icelandic?”
- “How well do you read Icelandic?” and
- “How well do you write Icelandic?”

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50 While the focus of this project was never on Thai men, once I arrived in Iceland for my fieldwork I began to realize that men composed a sizeable portion of the Thai population. The database I received from the Icelandic government confirmed this fact, revealing the number of men to be about one-third of the total Thai population. I decided to gather data from men as well as women so that I could compare migration motivations and experiences by gender. Unfortunately, only 26 men responded to the survey, not enough to use their data in any statistical analyses. In addition, men tended to leave more questions unanswered or answered inappropriately, presenting a serious problem of missing data for their population.
I repeated all four questions in the same fashion for English and Thai language skills; each response coded from 0 to 4, and as with the rest of the survey, the questions are translated into Standard Thai

The divisions between each of the four levels of language skill naturally differ from one person to another. There were no hard and fast rules for respondents to follow when deciding to mark their skill as “Well” or opposed to “Very Well,” for example, so I reduced the four-level ordered variable to a dichotomous one, collapsing “Not at all” and “A Little Bit” into a 0 and “Well” and “Very Well” into a 1. I observed that when Icelanders ask foreigners, “Talarðu íslensku?” [Do you speak Icelandic?], Icelanders’ threshold for agreeing that a foreigner does indeed “speak” Icelandic is rather high. Foreigners appeared to be aware of their host society’s expectations given the common answer of “Pínulítið,” or “very little,” even when I considered the speaker to be better than average at Icelandic. To an Icelander, speaking only “a little bit” might as well be the same as speaking not at all—one must demonstrate a solid grasp of conversational Icelandic vocabulary and pronunciation for an Icelander to declare that the foreigner to be speaks “very well.” Thus, the reduction from four levels to two makes sense both ethnographically and in the literature, as shown in similar studies with language skill as an outcome (Dustmann 1999, Hayfron 2001).

I use Icelandic-speaking skill instead of writing skill as an outcome because Icelanders recognize the difficulties of literacy in their language and they do not expect the average immigrant to master the intricacies of Icelandic grammar and writing for

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51 Please see Chapter 3, “Data and Methods,” for a more complete explanation of the translation process. The Thai translation of the survey depended on Standard Thai rather than using the common Isaan dialect because Isaan does not have its own writing system—it is a spoken dialect only. To the extent that migrants have learned how to write in Thailand, they have learned Standard Thai.
many years, if ever. In other words, Icelanders’ expectations of linguistic fluency are quite high, but their expectations are more realistic for literacy. For the specific purpose of this chapter, it would have been ideal to administer a language battery to each respondent and thus have a more reliable measurement of language skill. Budget and logistical constraints did not allow for a more objective, separate assessment of language skill. Although not without shortcomings, the approach used here is common in the literature (Espenshade and Fu 1997, Dustmann 1994, Dustmann 1999).

All but one of the 109 female respondent answered the first language question about their Icelandic speaking skills ($N = 108$); the response rates for each subsequent question diminished in comparison, particularly when it came to reading and writing in both Icelandic and English. Of the 109 respondents, 105 answered the four questions about Thai language skill$^{52}$. I ran bivariate regressions between each of the English-language variables with Icelandic speaking as an outcome (table not shown), confirming that a useful variable for predicting Icelandic skill might be the respondent’s ability to understand English. This is especially relevant considering the structural similarity between the two languages, as mentioned earlier$^{53}$. I include English-speaking skill as an independent variable below.

There are only a few hundred thousand native Icelandic speakers in the world and nearly all of them live in Iceland. It is safe to say that Thais arriving in Iceland for the

$^{52}$ Thai generally prefer to answer questions where they can respond with something “good” that “saves face” [kuu naa], often neglecting to answer questions that might reveal weaknesses, vices, or cause a general “loss of face” [sia naa]. In other words, if an honest answer might cause a Thai to feel the person asking the question may judge or look down on her or him (taking into consideration any status difference between the two people involved), the respondent would rather avoid answering the question entirely than to tell the truth.

$^{53}$ Also see the appendix at the end of this chapter for a better explication of the relationship between English and Icelandic, and why Thai is an utterly different language from both of them.
first time have had minimal exposure, if any, to the Icelandic language. English skill
upon arrival, on the other hand, is more difficult to assess; a weakness of this study is that
while I asked respondents about their English abilities at the time of the survey, I did not
ask about their English skill upon arrival in the country and unfortunately cannot control
for this factor.

**Employment Status and Income**

The second analysis focuses on a dichotomous outcome variable reflecting
whether the respondent is either jobless/not working (0) or employed in a formal job (1).
In the survey respondents answered a question asking about their current employment
position, with a list of 17 possible titles available to choose from. If they marked
“unemployed,” “student,” “homemaker,” or “retired” from that list, I coded them as not
working. All other occupations fell into the employed category.

I also examine a three-level categorical outcome variable: jobless, low income, or
high income. The reference category is low-income. Respondents who fell into the
“jobless” category in the previous analysis remained in the same category here. The
identification of “low” and “high” income respondents was possible with a six-level
question about gross monthly income from employment. The response categories ranged
from less than ISK 100,000 (USD 1,250) to ISK 300,000 (USD 3,750) and above, in ISK

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54 The number of cases for each of these categories are: unemployed = 7, student = 2, homemaker = 7, and
retired = 0. The age distribution of migrants in Iceland clusters around working-age individuals, and
few bring their aging parents to Iceland; thus the lack of retired individuals in the sample.
50,000 (USD 625) increments. Due to the small sample size and very little variance above ISK 200,000 (USD 2,500), I collapsed the answers into two categories. Those who reported making ISK 150,000 (USD 1,875) or less are considered “low” income. Those earning more than this amount are considered “high” income.

The cut-off mark of ISK 150,000 came out of the ethnography, especially during my time employed as a factory worker for nearly three months in a fish-processing factory. Through seeing my own paycheck each month, in addition to hearing about how much overtime my co-workers had to put in just to make ends meet, I established that anyone making more than ISK 150,000 in the Thai population was perceived as doing quite well for him or herself. In comparison, the average gross monthly salary at the national level (private sector, including manufacturing, construction, repair, transport/communication, and financial intermediaries) was ISK 324,000 at the time (USD 4,500), or more than twice what most of the fish workers were making per month (Statistics Iceland 2010).

The means and percentages for each of the three dependent variables described above are listed in Table 5-1 below. As noted earlier in Chapter 3, Icelandic speaking

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55 At the time of the survey (2008), the value of the Icelandic króna (ISK) fluctuated significantly due to the impending economic crisis. When I arrived in Iceland in March 2007, one US dollar was equivalent to ISK 65; by the time I left the country in December 2008, the value had dropped by over half to ISK 148 ISK per dollar (Landsbankinn 2010). Salaries remained frozen during the survey period. I use the value of the ISK at the midpoint of the survey (July 2008), which was ISK 80 for 1 USD, to approximate these salaries in USD.

56 The distribution of income before collapsing the categories is as follows: Less than ISK 100,000 = 7, ISK 100,001 to 150,000 = 39, ISK 150,001 to 200,000 = 28, ISK 200,001 to 250,000 = 6, ISK 250,001 to 300,000 = 7, and ISK 300,001 or more = 3. Five respondents did not answer the question despite being employed, and 14 were not employed at the time of the survey and therefore were instructed to skip the question.

57 The combined state and municipal income tax was around 35% at mid-year 2008, with sales tax hovering at nearly 25%.
skill is highest for employer-sponsored migrants (64.7 percent report speaking it well) in contrast with just 30.6 percent of Thai-family sponsored migrants speaking it well.

Table 5-1: Means and Percentages for Dependent Variables According to Auspices of Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (n=108)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse/Fiance (n=55)</th>
<th>Thai Family (n=36)</th>
<th>Employer (n=17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic speaking skill</td>
<td>108 40.7</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment (formal)</td>
<td>107 84.1</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobless</td>
<td>104 13.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income (&lt;150,000 ISK)</td>
<td>104 44.2</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-income (&gt;150,000 ISK)</td>
<td>104 42.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants fall in the middle, with 40 percent of that group speaking Icelandic well. The highest percentage of women employed formally outside the home are those sponsored by Icelandic spouses (88.9 percent), followed by employer-sponsored migrants and finally Thai-family sponsored migrants at 77.8 percent. In terms of income, both Thai-family and employer-sponsored migrants have the highest percentage of the unemployed, at 17.6 percent each. Marriage migrants, while having the lowest percentage of the unemployed (9.4 percent), in fact have the highest percent of people who are working but earning a low income (49.1 percent). The distribution of women who are earning a higher income is more even, with around 42 percent of each group falling into the higher-income category.
Independent Variables

Analysis of Icelandic Speaking Skill

I describe the construction of my main independent variable, the auspices of migration, in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. I include this three-category variable in every regression analysis throughout the dissertation. In the present chapter, I represent the variable using two dummy-coded variables in each analysis (one for Thai-family sponsored migrants, and the other for employer-sponsored migrants), designating Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants as the reference category. Earlier in the dissertation, Table 3-1 describes all independent variables for both speaking skill and employment/income analyses, cross tabulated by the auspices for migration. I describe the independent variables relevant to this chapter’s analyses below.

I include several of Chiswick and Miller’s variables (1995) in my models predicting Icelandic-speaking skill: age at arrival, years of residence, and educational achievement. All three are continuous variables that I constructed from responses to several survey questions. Respondents wrote in their age at the time of the survey, and on a later question, wrote in the year of their first arrival to Iceland. To create the “Age at Arrival” variable, I subtracted the year of first arrival from the current year (2008), and subtracted the resulting value from their age at the time of the survey. I followed a similar method to create the “Years in Iceland” variable, subtracting the year of their first arrival from the year 2008. I also asked respondents if they had ever purposefully left

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58 Table 3-1 provides a complementary summary of all predictor variables used throughout the dissertation, including the non-language related variables used in this chapter’s analyses. I do not remove the missing cases listwise there because the table is meant to provide general descriptive characteristics for the variables of interest; in the regression analyses, however, in the analyses I delete cases with missing values listwise, which results in a lower overall N.
Iceland for certain periods of time (not counting vacation), and included this value in the final calculation of total years in Iceland.

The survey question on educational achievement was originally categorical, but some older respondents wrote in the actual number of years in school. In order to make better use of the education data, I recoded all responses that were not actual numbers to reflect the post-1977 structure of Thai grade levels: elementary school \([Prathom\ 1-6]\) to a value of six years, junior high/middle school \([Matthayom\ 1-3]\) to nine years, high school \([Matthayom\ 4-6]\) to 12 years, vocational school to 12 years, university/college to 16 years, and graduate school to 18 years. These divisions correspond to the appropriate grades within the current Thai educational system; for pre-1977 values I simply use the raw number reported by the respondent.

I also include non-Icelandic language variables (Thai writing skill, English understanding skill) to account for the potential influence of non-Icelandic language proficiency on ability to speak Icelandic.

I loosely follow Espenshade and Fu’s (1997) framework in the selection of my remaining predictor variables. At-migration measures include whether respondents had at least one parent farming, whether they write Thai well, and whether their first residence upon arrival in Iceland was in the Reykjavík Metropolitan Area (since the concentration of Thais in the capital area is much higher than anywhere else in Iceland, which may help to insulate Thais from having to immerse themselves in Icelandic). I also include current residence (Reykjavík or elsewhere) and a measure of co-ethnic

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59 Prior to 1977, the Thai educational system was divided into a 4-3-3-2 (year) system; thus survey respondents who went to school before 1977 tended to write in their exact years of educational achievement, rather than marking “elementary” or “high school,” for example (Ministry of Education 2010).
density in the respondent’s region (constructed from a natural log of the total population of Thai adults per region) to evaluate the respondent’s exposure to Icelandic-speaking opportunities compared with chances to speak Thai or Isaan.

I include two variables measuring commitment to stay in Iceland: an intention to stay until the children have graduated from high school, and homeownership. Finally, I include a set of four language “boosters” based on my participant-observation; that is, factors that cropped up over and over again during my fieldwork and were nearly always associated with Thai individuals’ Icelandic language abilities. These are the number of Icelandic language courses, having at least one Icelandic friend, having children that live in Iceland, and understanding English well.

**Analyses of Employment and Income**

In both the employment and income regression analyses in Part II, I include several of these same variables that I used to predict Icelandic-speaking skill. The auspices of migration (two dummy variables) and the three key continuous variables that are consistent throughout the literature appear again here: age at migration, years of education, and total years spent in Iceland. Since the main issues for these analyses are whether the auspices of migration and Icelandic speaking skill affect probability of employment and earning a high income, I include the same dichotomous measure of Icelandic speaking skill that I used as an outcome variable in the earlier regression as a predictor.

Specific to the employment analysis, I include a variable measuring whether or not the respondent was employed in Thailand. In both analyses I include two “family
factor” variables. One reflects marital status while the other is a discrete variable of how many children the respondent has currently enrolled in an Icelandic school. I control for these variables due to their known patterns of reducing employment and income. Finally, I include one continuous variable measuring the respondent’s reported total working hours for each week in the analysis predicting income, since the number of hours worked each week is a contributor to one’s monthly income.

**Results**

**What are Thai Migrants’ Proficiency Levels in Icelandic?**

The University of Iceland’s Social Science Research Institute found that in their 2009 Immigrants in Iceland Attitudinal Survey (IIAS), over half of Scandinavian migrants reported being able to express themselves “very well” (the highest of five possible skill levels, presented on a Likert scale). None of the 63 Thai survey respondents to the IIAS said that they could express themselves “very well” in Icelandic, and in fact fully half of them marked only the midpoint on the scale, saying that they could express themselves “neither well nor poorly.” Out of all the immigrant groups surveyed, Thais and Poles ranked highest in being unable to express themselves in any language other than their mother tongue. Also, more than half of the 797 respondents (immigrants from all backgrounds, not only Thai) to the University’s survey said that they found it “rather difficult” or “very difficult” to learn Icelandic. Only 4 percent said that it was “very easy” (Jónsdóttir et al. 2009). While learning Icelandic is not by means

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60 “Married” applies whether a respondent is legally married or in a registered cohabitation with a significant other, since in Iceland the idea of legal cohabitation (sambúð) carries practically the same weight as legal marriage.
“very easy” for the majority of immigrants to Iceland, some immigrant groups have an advantage in learning Icelandic due to differences in educational background, exposure to Western alphabets and languages, and linguistic distance between the home and target languages.

Thai migrants in Iceland face unique linguistic challenges. Icelandic social services regularly produce brochures to help immigrants adjust to their new society, and translations of these brochures in Standard Thai are usually available. This is helpful for those migrants who are educated enough to read the language but presents an additional linguistic burden to those who cannot. Illiterate Thais who speak mostly Isaan and limited Standard Thai are far from being the majority of their population in Iceland, but they are arguably among the most vulnerable of Thai immigrants due to having less access to “official” information that might be vital for escaping abusive situations. These migrants’ presence in the population cannot be ignored if the Icelandic government wishes to inform them of their rights as well as responsibilities, including the availability of Icelandic language classes.

While I do not include a separate table here, I dichotomized responses to all sixteen measures of linguistic fluency (Icelandic, English, and Thai) and examined the results. On average, Thai female migrants tend to speak and understand Icelandic better than they speak or understand English. Around two-fifths (39 percent and 41.6 percent, respectively) of the Thai female respondents consider themselves able to speak and

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61 As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this population is underrepresented in my survey because most of the illiterate respondents I contacted expressed shame at not being able to read Thai and most did not want to participate in the project at any level. This bias is a clear limitation of the study, though the supplement of ethnographic and interview data includes at least some Thais who would be completely invisible using survey-only methods.
understand Icelandic well or very well, while less than a third (26.5 percent and 32.1 percent, respectively) consider themselves able to speak and understand English well or very well. When we break down the mean values of Icelandic speaking skill by the auspices of migration, fully two-thirds (64.7 percent) of employer-sponsored migrants speak Icelandic well or very well. Less than a third (30.6 percent) of Thai-family sponsored migrants report speaking Icelandic proficiently, while less than half (40.0 percent) of Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants speak it proficiently. These results are an early indication that the data may not support my hypothesis of Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants being most proficient in Icelandic speaking.62

Additionally, the migrants’ writing skills in English seem to be stronger than their writing skills in Icelandic, with one-sixth (15.6 percent) of respondents writing Icelandic well or very well compared to nearly a quarter (24.5 percent) writing English well or very well. Reading skills appear commensurate in both languages and just over a quarter (around 27 percent) report being able to read English and Icelandic well or very well. As I stated earlier the vast majority of respondents (94.8 percent reading and 93.1 percent writing) are completely literate in Thai, values that are very high compared to literacy in Icelandic and English.63

62 My assumption from the beginning was that Icelandic spouses and Thai wives spoke Icelandic when they were home together, something that I also observed ethnographically. I only heard a handful of Icelandic men attempt to speak Thai, though one was surprisingly fluent—but many couples (especially those who had not been married long) also spoke rough English together rather than struggle with Icelandic.

63 Again, these numbers may be overestimated due to the self-selection of migrants participating in the survey because they are literate in Thai.
Incentives for Learning Icelandic

Both male and female Thai workers in Iceland congregate in just a few industries: fish- or other food-processing in a factory setting, janitorial work for both commercial and residential employers, and caring for elderly, disabled, or very young Icelanders. While the wages for janitorial and care work do not differ much from wages for fish-processing and factory work, many fish workers expressed that cleaning houses for Icelanders was less physically demanding than cutting up cold fish for eight to twelve hours a day. Many believed that if they could speak better Icelandic, they could “sell” themselves to potential employers (particular private citizens looking for a reliable, trustworthy housecleaner working under the table) more efficiently, and in that sense advance themselves out of the relative drudgery of factory work, or at least up to the managerial level as demonstrated in the chapter’s opening vignette. Respondents to my survey who arrived under each of the three auspices of migration agree that learning the language is crucial for finding employment and adjusting overall:

Living in Iceland, it’s very necessary to learn to speak fluent Icelandic. Language will help you a lot, making it easy to find a job and also gives you the best chance to get a job. [Sponsored by employer and working as a housecleaner.]

You can find a job easily in Iceland if you speak Icelandic. [Sponsored by Icelandic husband and working as a housecleaner.]

Learning the Icelandic language is the very first, most important thing to do for living and settling in Iceland. [Sponsored by Thai family and working in eldercare.]

Moreover, in response to a survey question asking, “Do you feel that it is important for you to speak good Icelandic?” every respondent answered that it was either “Very important” (80.7 percent) or “Somewhat important” (19.3 percent) to speak good
Icelandic, out of a list of four ordered responses. Most Thais migrants expressed several incentives for becoming more fluent in Icelandic, including passing a required test in Icelandic proficiency to obtain citizenship, more satisfying communication with their spouse, in-laws (if Icelandic), and children, or to try and obtain a more desirable job.

If migrants are aware of the benefits of learning Icelandic, why do they not take more language classes? The average number of Icelandic courses taken by all female respondents to my survey is 2.5 (see Table 3-1), which barely covers introductory Icelandic speaking and grammar. One language course typically consists of 25-30 hours of instruction, and the Icelandic government requires 150 hours of formal language instruction in order to apply for citizenship; many women told me that there were so few courses available to them in the outlying areas that they had to take the same introductory course four or five times, limiting their mastery to a very basic level.

Table 5-2 illustrates the reasons respondents offered for not taking more than three language courses. I allowed respondents to mark as many reasons as they liked from a list of six common reasons (those which came up most often ethnographically), as well as write in any additional reason that applied to them. I rank the reasons according to the number of respondents who included that reason in their response.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Not Taking More Icelandic Courses(^a):</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would rather work more than learn more Icelandic.</td>
<td>41.2% (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need a teacher who can teach using the Thai language, not just English.</td>
<td>23.5% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no one to watch my children when I am in class.</td>
<td>22.4% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my current level of Icelandic knowledge.</td>
<td>14.1% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know how to find more Icelandic courses.</td>
<td>12.9% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to learn English instead of Icelandic.</td>
<td>12.9% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (write-in):</td>
<td>15.3% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I cannot read or write, even in my own language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I want to learn Icelandic, but I am worried about my not being able to read and write.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little knowledge of English, and I don’t want to learn Icelandic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I want to learn with a Thai teacher but [her class is] always full.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• [Icelandic is a] difficult language; I gave up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• [The language] is very difficult or impossible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I finished all the courses available [less than four—rural area].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I have to go into town to study, and [the course] is only available once a year, in the summer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is no teacher in my town.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school is very far away from my home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In and out of the hospital during pregnancy; had no time to study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I have no time, since I work from 8am to 8pm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work/class time conflict.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Multiple responses allowed.

The most common reason why Thai migrants do not enroll in more than three Icelandic language courses is tied to the perceived short-term benefits of work itself, even though they understand the long-term benefit of learning the language. One Thai woman said that given a choice between taking an Icelandic class after work or working overtime for “time and a half” wages, Thais will always choose to work because of the immediate financial benefits. Aside from conflicts among work, family, and class priorities, another

\(^64\) In the interest of space I do not present a cross-tabulation of these reasons with the three auspices of migration, but the following observations should be noted. The reason “I would rather work more than learn Icelandic” was by far the most popular answer for women sponsored by Thai family and by employers. It also took a very close second place for women sponsored by Icelandic husbands, where only the need for a teacher who spoke Thai was more popular. None of the employer-sponsored women responded that they were satisfied with their current level of Icelandic knowledge, nor did any state that they didn’t know how to find more Icelandic courses.
frequently mentioned reason was that Icelandic is “beyond” their ability to learn, whether due to linguistic difficulties or the unavailability of regular courses nearby. I now turn to an investigation of why it can be so difficult for the average Thai person to learn Icelandic.

**Barriers to Learning Icelandic**

A problem with Icelandic language instruction in its current form is that when migrants have the opportunity to take language classes, the majority of the courses are taught in English rather than in immigrants’ native languages. This is a situation that would be acceptable if all immigrants to Iceland had similar levels of fluency in English, but such is not the case in Iceland. In the case of one interviewee from my pilot study with the Thai population in 2005, she explained that it had been easier for her to learn Icelandic because she had come to Iceland knowing some English ahead of time. Unfortunately, many of her compatriots did not arrive in Iceland with the same skills:

Thai people are scared to learn Icelandic since they don’t know English. If there were a Thai teacher, they could at least ask them for help and not be afraid. But if it’s in English, they are very shy and can’t ask questions.

For some of the largest groups, such as migrants from Poland, it is starting to be possible to find Icelandic language instruction in their native language (at least, in the capital Reykjavík; see Jónsdóttir et al. 2009). For the Thais, however, in 2008 there were no more than two or three individuals in the entire country who were fluent in both Thai and Icelandic and trained to teach languages. Thai or not, any migrant lacking a useful grasp of English or the Latin alphabet will be at a clear disadvantage for trying to learn Icelandic, especially in a formal classroom.
By now it should be clear that for the average Thai immigrant in Iceland, the idea of mastering the host country’s language to the point of being able to get by in daily life, let alone pass written and oral language exams for citizenship, is understandably daunting. Many Thai women do acquire a high level of proficiency in the language, but others struggle even after many years in residence. It remains to be seen what might cause a migrant to fall into one group rather than the other.

Before getting into the regression analyses, I examine in Table 5-3 the correlations within and between Icelandic and English. This correlation matrix demonstrates the relationship between each of the four skill sets in Icelandic and English. In general, intra-language proficiency is significantly correlated. All of the correlations between Icelandic language skills are significant, though upon closer inspection we see higher correlation coefficients between related skill-pairs (speaking/understanding, reading/writing) and lower coefficients between unrelated pairs (reading/speaking, reading/understanding). The lowest correlations are between Icelandic writing skill and Icelandic speaking and understanding skills. We can surmise that learning to speak and understand Icelandic does not necessarily go along with learning to read and write well, an expected outcome given the lower educational achievement levels (and lack of familiarity with the Latin alphabet) of most migrants in the survey.
Intra-language consistency for English is quite high, with correlation coefficients ranging from .66 to .92 and all being significant at the $p < .001$ level. We see a similar pattern here between pairs of skills as we saw in the Icelandic intra-language correlations, except that the relationships are stronger in the case of English. All coefficients are significant at the $p < .001$ level, but the correlations are quite low between the fluency and literacy pairs ($r = .34-.40$)—almost the same level as the correlations between the same pairs of Icelandic skills.

The N’s for this table vary, but are all at least 100 for each correlation.

I do not include coefficients for Thai language correlations with the other two languages because there is a perfect correlation ($r = 1.00$) between speaking and understanding Thai. Fluency and literacy in Thai do not have any correlation with either Icelandic or English; the highest correlation coefficient is .15 and has no significance at the $p < .10$ level. There is no clear relationship between literacy in Thai and literacy in the other two languages, suggesting that even if a migrant is educated enough in reading and writing Thai, that skill does not necessarily transfer to reading or writing in a wholly different language family. Therefore written communication translated by the Icelandic government into Central Thai may not be equally effective for all of the Thais in Iceland given their diverse educational backgrounds.
Most striking are the correlation coefficients, significant at the $p < .05$ level or below, between English and Icelandic skills. Whatever English skills the respondents had upon arrival, we cannot know; it is nonetheless obvious that current English skills and Icelandic skills go hand in hand. The correlations are especially high and significant ($r = .56-.71, p < .001$) between English literacy and Icelandic literacy (reading and writing), which is to be expected given the shared alphabets and grammar between the two languages.

**What Influences Thai Migrants’ Acquisition of Icelandic Language Skill?**

The next analysis seeks to determine why some Thai migrants speak better Icelandic than others. The hypothesis is that the auspices of migration do make a difference in language outcomes, in that those who migrated via Icelandic-spouse sponsorship will have the highest level of Icelandic proficiency when controlling for other factors.

Each of the four Icelandic language skills is a dichotomous outcome variable, necessitating the use of logistic regression to determine the importance and contributions of each predictor variable. Table 5-4 presents the bivariate (odd-numbered columns) and multivariate (even-numbered columns) odds-ratios for predictors of the four measured Icelandic language skills:
Table 5-4: Determinants of Four Icelandic Language Skills: Bivariate and Multivariate Logistic Regression Odds-Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icelandic Fluency</th>
<th>Icelandic Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Best Predictors</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Sponsorship:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Spouse (Reference)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Family/Spouse</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer in Iceland</td>
<td>2.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Capital:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at Migration</td>
<td>.94*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years in Iceland</td>
<td>1.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-Migration:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are Farmers</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes Thai Well</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Residence Reykjavík</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Residence Reykjavík</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Ethnic Density by Region</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Ties to Iceland:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay until kids graduate</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>3.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language “Boosters”:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Icelandic Classes</td>
<td>1.65**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+ Icelandic Friends</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Living in Iceland</td>
<td>3.43*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand English Well</td>
<td>2.72*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ p<.10,  *p<.05,  ** p<.01,  *** p<.001, N/A = At least one variable is a constant.
speaking, understanding, reading, and writing. While I pull out any of the significant predictors from the bivariate regressions to be used in the multivariate, or “best predictors” models, for theoretical reasons I chose to include the dummy-coded migration sponsorship variable and the three variables that are consistently significant in nearly every study of the determinants of immigrant language skill regardless of bivariate significance\textsuperscript{67}.

\textit{Icelandic Fluency}

Although the data unequivocally suggest that employer-sponsored migrants are more likely to speak Icelandic (see columns 1 and 2), the other results are consistent with the hypothesis posed at the outset in sign only. Indeed, the direction of the association might suggest to some that there is very weak support for the expectation that those who migrated under the auspices of joining Thai relatives or a Thai spouse are less likely to be fluent in any of the four Icelandic language skills than migrants who married Icelandic men (OR = .56 for speaking Icelandic and OR = .88 for understanding Icelandic). Again, this evidence is only suggestive because the estimates for Thai-family sponsored immigrants fail to achieve significance in all but one model.

Long-term ties to Iceland, measured by homeownership and a desire to stay in the country until one’s children graduate from school have stronger impacts on language fluency outcomes. Only the commitment to stay until children graduate has a significant impact on the chances (OR = 3.63, p < .10) of a Thai immigrant speaking Icelandic well, however. In contradiction to another hypothesis, employer-sponsored migrants were

\textsuperscript{67} These three variables are years of education, age at migration, and total years in the destination country.
more likely to be fluent in both speaking and understanding (borderline significant in the case of speaking skill; OR = 5.13, \( p = .06 \)) than those who came under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse.

The number of Icelandic language classes an immigrant takes does have a significant effect on her speaking and understanding skill (OR = 1.65 and 1.88, respectively; \( p < .05 \) for both). The effects, though small, remain unchanged even after controlling for age at migration, years of education, and total years spent in Iceland. There are two possible explanations for these results. First, the employer-sponsored may have employers who made Icelandic lessons a part of the paid work day, reducing the opportunity cost for respondents to enroll in Icelandic class—a phenomenon I observed in my own ethnographic factory experience, though these offerings varied from employer to employer and were not mandated by the government. All work-based Icelandic courses were taught in English, which would not make learning Icelandic any easier if the respondent were not initially skilled in English.

The other explanation is that the employer-sponsored end up in industries that demanded more interaction with Icelanders, even if the language was not necessary for getting hired; Carliner (2000) may be correct in his assertion that if women immigrate for family formation purposes rather than explicitly for labor, they will be less likely to be on the labor market and therefore less immersed in a host-country language environment. I argue that it depends on the nature of the employment—that is, not necessarily whether it is a high skill or even high-income job, but whether the work in itself promotes language learning.
The industry of elder care serves as a primary demonstration of this phenomenon. One-sixth (15.2%) of STMII respondents work in elder care in Iceland, making this field the third largest employer among Thai migrants\textsuperscript{68}. The elderly population of Iceland tends to be the segment of Icelanders who are least proficient in English, thus the workers would be exposed to a saturated Icelandic language environment by sheer virtue of interacting with older Icelanders for hours at a time every day. One Thai woman I interviewed in 2005 confirmed this:

[Learning basic Icelandic] didn’t take long for me, since I was working and living with Icelanders and taking care of the elderly.... But if I only work with Thais, my Icelandic knowledge will get worse. I learn much more working with Icelanders, because otherwise I never would have learned any [Icelandic].

Another woman I interviewed added that it was an environment of immersion, both at work and at home, that contributed to her ability to learn basic Icelandic within just one year:

When I was in [Icelandic] school, there were immigrants learning Icelandic. At work, I was with Icelanders all the time. You know most Icelanders speak English, but they won’t speak English with immigrants. If I really didn’t understand, they would take my hand and put it on the object, saying “\textit{Petta er djú\textsuperscript{s}},” and say it in Icelandic. They wouldn’t just say “This is juice,” in English.... even my husband didn’t speak English with me. Neither did his parents. No one spoke English with me.

At the level of individual variable contributions, an increase in age at migration decreases probabilities of being fluent in Icelandic. The incentives and efficiency of learning languages decrease with age as migrants tend to see fewer benefits to learning a

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\textsuperscript{68} The other two largest employers are factory work (fish work, manufacturing, etc), with nearly a quarter (24.1 percent) of respondents working in those jobs; nearly another quarter (23.1 percent) work as custodians, either for a company or self-employed to clean residences. In an ideal situation, I would have been able to control for the industry in which respondents work; however, the issue of causality makes this approach unwise, since we cannot know whether the respondent obtained their current employment as a result of speaking Icelandic well beforehand, or whether the job itself is responsible for their current language skill. Therefore, I left this variable out of the models.
new language. Years of education and total years in Iceland, also as we might expect, marginally increase the likelihood of migrants being proficient in Icelandic.

At odds with the literature on immigrant “ghettoes” checking host-country language progress (Espenshade and Fu 1997, van Tubergen and Kalmijn 2009), it appears that if a migrant lives in the capital city Reykjavik upon first arrival in the country, she is nearly six times (OR =5.82, \( p < .05 \)) more likely to understand Icelandic well than if she lived in the countryside. Along with the lack of impact by the co-ethnic density variable on Icelandic skill, it would seem that living in the countryside and far away from one’s co-ethnics does not necessarily increase probabilities of being proficient in Icelandic. This may also be an effect of the dramatically reduced availability of Icelandic language classes in the countryside compared to Reykjavik. Icelandic courses taught by a Thai speaker are even more rare. Ethnographically I only discovered two of these courses, both taught in the capital city only.

The number of Icelandic language classes strongly influences speaking and understanding Icelandic, though we must consider that this variable is no doubt influenced by other unmeasured variables. These might include whether employers pay for classes, whether the classes are offered on the job, and whether the respondent has enough financial resources and free time after between work and family duties to enroll in and study for courses outside of the work day. Ethnographically I observed that most

\[ \text{\footnotemark[69]} \]

\[ \text{\footnotemark[70]} \]

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\[ \footnotemark[69] \] There are no “Thai-towns” or areas with a high concentration of Thai residents in Reykjavik—there is one street with a Thai grocery on one side and two Thai restaurants nearby, but even that is surprisingly “dense” for Iceland.

\[ \footnotemark[70] \] Notwithstanding that no data are available to represent these particular variables, the large number of cases with missing data for variables already present discourages including any additional variables in the final model.
employed Thais are working ten to twelve hour days, five to six days a week\textsuperscript{71}. Even the most dedicated student would struggle to find the energy to enroll in demanding language classes outside of work.

**Icelandic Literacy**

In the case of literacy, Icelandic-sponsored migrants are slightly more likely to read and write Icelandic well compared to employer-sponsored migrants, but vastly more likely to do so when compared to Thai-family migrants. Women sponsored by Thai family are one-fifth as likely to be able to read in Icelandic compared to Icelandic-sponsored women (OR\textsuperscript{72} = .22, \(p = .07\)), a logical association given the linguistic environments of the women who lived with an Icelander rather than with Thai family from the beginning.

Interestingly, the number of Icelandic classes remains mostly unimportant for predicting reading and writing skills in Icelandic, despite having such a strong effect on respondents’ Icelandic fluency. Knowing the written language would not be crucial for performing one’s job in eldercare (tending to residents’ hygiene or serving them food, for example), and so it may be that respondents do not prioritize learning to read and write in Icelandic because many of them see diminishing returns for the heavy investment required to become literate in Icelandic compared to becoming verbally fluent.

It is important to consider that spending all day talking with elderly Icelanders might improve a migrant’s Icelandic speaking and listening skills, but it would have little

\textsuperscript{71} 62.8 percent of survey respondents reported working at least 40 hours each week.
\textsuperscript{72} Odds-Ratio.
effect on being able to read the language well unless reading aloud is part of the caretaker’s job. The odds-ratios for those sponsored by employers drop considerably for the literacy variables (reading and writing) once we run the multivariate analyses, compared to those who were sponsored by Icelandic spouses. Years of education and having parents who are farmers have a greater impact on literacy than they do on speaking fluency.\(^{73}\)

Understanding English appears to play the most significant role in determining Icelandic reading and writing ability. Respondents who understand English well are five times more likely to read Icelandic well and seventeen times more likely to write Icelandic well, compared to those who do not understand English well. Of course, we must be cautious in assuming any causation here, given that English and Icelandic are closely related and we have no idea “which came first,” English or Icelandic skill. In any case, the two languages clearly complement each other, unsurprising given the strong correlations between proficiencies in Icelandic and English in Table 5-3.\(^{74}\)

**How Does Icelandic Speaking Proficiency Impact Economic Integration?**

Here I assess the hypotheses that Thai migrants who speak Icelandic well, especially those who were sponsored by Icelandic spouses, are more likely to be

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\(^{73}\) I also test two interaction variables (auspices by years of education and auspices by age at arrival); since neither variable was significant in any analysis I do not include them in the table.

\(^{74}\) In the interest of understanding what made some people better English speakers than others, I also ran bivariate and multivariate logistic regressions to determine English speaking skill (tables not presented here). In the multivariate analyses, educational achievement was more significant (OR = 1.35, \(p < .001\)) for predicting English speaking skill than it was for predicting Icelandic speaking skill; age at migration played a role for English speaking similar to the role for Icelandic speaking (increased age at migration decreased the respondents’ likelihood of English fluency by 10 percent). Both outcomes make sense, given that the older a migrant is upon arrival, as well as the less education she has, the less likely she would have been exposed to English and had the opportunity to become comfortable speaking it.
employed while those who came under other auspices are less likely to be employed. For those Icelandic spouse-sponsored migrants who are employed, I also hypothesized that they would be more likely to have higher incomes than migrants who came under other auspices.\textsuperscript{75} I first present a bivariate logistic regression analysis (Model 1) in Table 5-5 to examine possible determinants of employment among the survey respondents.

Table 5-5: Determinants of Employment among Thai Migrants
Binary Logistic Regression Odds-Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migration Sponsorship:</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Spouse (Reference)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Family/Spouse</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer in Iceland</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Capital:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>1.29**</td>
<td>1.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Previously in Thailand</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to Iceland:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at Migration</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years in Iceland</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Factors:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married or Cohabiting</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children in Iceland Schools</td>
<td>0.34+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Skill:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands English Well</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks Icelandic Well</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>102</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
+ p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

\textsuperscript{75} Due to the extremely high cost of living in Iceland combined with the affordability of childcare, it was rare to find a household (Icelandic or Thai alike) that did not have both spouses working. I did not ask about household income in the survey, only individual income.
Model 2 is composed of best predictors from Model 1’s bivariate regression. I exclude “number of children in Icelandic schools” from the multivariate analysis because it is barely significant at the bivariate level \((p < .10)\) and also reduces the N noticeably.

If tests of significance are ignored, the bivariate results would seem to provide weak evidence that migrants who did not come under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse are about half as likely to be employed compared to those with an Icelandic spouse. The effect of the auspices is magnified once we control for other variables in the multivariate analysis, with both Thai family/spouse-sponsored and employer-sponsored migrants being about one-third as likely to be employed than those who came under Icelandic-spouse sponsorship. This is rather striking and is somewhat consistent with the hypothesis that Icelandic-spouse sponsored women are more likely to be employed than others, no doubt due to the access to additional employment information and resources that their native-born spouse or in-laws may provide. Again, these estimates are merely suggestive because they fail to achieve significance. Future research based on larger samples should re-examine this issue.

One might think that employer-sponsored migrants would be more likely to work, but the fact of employer-sponsored work permits in Iceland is that they are attached to the initial job and cannot easily transfer to other jobs if the employee quits or loses her first job. In this sense, an employer-sponsored migrant is more vulnerable to job loss and unemployment than those who came via marriage to an Icelander, who are rather more dependent on their marriage lasting long enough to obtain a permanent residence permit (three years) than reliant on an employer.
Throughout the bivariate and multivariate analyses, educational attainment is significant at the $p < .01$ level. The likelihood of employment increases with educational attainment before arriving in Iceland. Surprisingly, a history of working in Thailand before coming to Iceland had little effect in predicting current employment. Age at migration and length of residence in Iceland also did not affect employment outcomes, and neither did current marital status nor English language comprehension skill. The odds-ratio for Icelandic speaking skill provides weak support for the hypothesis regarding language and employment. Those who speak Icelandic well are more likely to be employed than those who do not speak Icelandic (OR = 2.42).

The only other variable of note was the number of children in Icelandic schools (OR = .34)—employment is negatively associated with the number of children Icelandic schools. The number of children in school corresponds with an increase in household size (the correlation between the two variables is .60, $p = .000$), increasing the probability that women with larger households and more children to attend to after school hours would remain homemakers rather than enter the workforce.

In the next analysis, I predict income using multinomial logistic regression. As noted, the dependent variable originally had three categories (jobless, low-income earners, and high-income earners), but since I have already addressed determinants of employment vs. unemployment in the previous analysis I exclude the odds-ratios comparing low-income to the jobless in Table 5-6. Instead, I show estimates only for those who are in low-income earners (reference category) vs. high-income earners. Model 1 displays bivariate regression odds-ratios between each independent variable and the relevant categories of the dependent variable, Model 2 displays multivariate odds-
ratios of Model 1’s best predictors (not including speaking Icelandic well, since that is a key variable of interest in the analysis), and Model 3 adds Icelandic speaking skill as a predictor variable.\(^{76}\)

\(^{76}\) I tested for interactions between the auspices of migration and years of education, as well as between hours worked per week and Icelandic speaking skill (in case work prohibited respondents from taking more classes, an important predictor in the previous analysis), but none were significant and I leave them out of the table.
The bivariate odds-ratios for the relationship between migration auspices and employment do not provide evidence for a relationship between the auspices of migration and likelihood of having a high income. As I control for more variables in Models 2 and 3, however, the data provide a weak likelihood of Thai-sponsored migrants having a high income, up to twice as likely compared to Icelandic-sponsored migrants. On the other hand, the likelihood of employer-sponsored migrants having a high income compared to Icelandic-sponsored respondents decreases across models, with the change in odds only being significant at the $p < .10$ level.

It is interesting that in Model 3, with the addition of Icelandic language skill as a predictor variable, employer-sponsored migrants are one-fifth as likely (OR = .22, $p = .08$) to have a high income than those who came via Icelandic-spouse sponsors. When we pair up this result from the results of the employment regression analysis, Icelandic-spouse sponsors are more likely to be employed overall and are far more likely to have high incomes when compared to those sponsored by employers. The hypothesis that Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants are more likely to have higher incomes is partly supported by the data.

In Model 2, I add in the three continuous variables of human capital and exposure to Iceland from the literature. The results are similar to those from the bivariate regressions, with once again years of education being significant ($p < .001$) in predicting the likelihood of respondents having high incomes. In every model, the likelihood of having a high income increases substantially with education. This makes sense ethnographically as well, since I observed that among the relatively few women who had finished high school, vocational school, or even university degrees (very few, in that
case) they were less likely to be working in factories, where pay would generally be lower due to the nature of the work. Due to their higher educational achievement many also spoke better English than those with less education, enabling some of them to obtain jobs that did not necessarily require Icelandic-speaking skill such as in the tourism and service industries. The number of hours worked per week is also significant at the $p < .01$ level, though its impact on income is somewhat low. For every additional hour worked each week, there is a seven percent increase in the odds of having a high income in both Models 2 and 3.

The predictor variable of interest in this analysis, Icelandic speaking skill, has an expected effect in that respondents who speak Icelandic well are four-and-a-half times as likely ($OR = 4.54, p = .03$) to have high incomes compared to those who do not speak Icelandic well. This confirms the hypothesis that being fluent in Icelandic speaking will almost guarantee a migrant's chance at having a better income and being more economically integrated in Icelandic society.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The goals of this chapter have been to describe the Icelandic language abilities of Thai migrants, to examine the incentives and disincentives to learn Icelandic, and to answer two questions involving language and economic integration. First, my survey

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77 While Icelandic literacy would seem to be a good predictor for income, I do not include it because I could count on one hand the number of Thai immigrants who had the Icelandic literacy required for a high-income job. It would have been easier for a Thai migrant to become fluent in English first and to find a job using that language than to find a job requiring strong Icelandic literacy—and in fact, several immigrants did just that, landing a job using their English language ability rather than their Icelandic.
results revealed that on average, less than half of Thai female migrants in Iceland consider themselves able to speak Icelandic well or very well. When examined across migration auspices, there was a weakly significant relationship between the auspices and ability to speak Icelandic, with over two-thirds of migrants who came via employer sponsorship having higher than average Icelandic speaking ability. There was less variation in skill between the different auspices in other areas; average levels of understanding Icelandic were still low for the general Thai female population, with barely over a quarter expressing the ability to read Icelandic well or very well. Only one-sixth claimed that they could write well or very well in Icelandic.

In contrast to the expectation that Icelandic-sponsored migrants are most proficient, the descriptive statistics demonstrate that employer-sponsored migrants consistently rank themselves as having better proficiency in Icelandic. As I have stated before, an explanation for this may be that more employer-sponsored migrants are working in jobs with relatively high levels of exposure to Icelanders such as elder care, at least when compared with factory jobs that employ nearly all immigrants and are socially isolating in that sense.

Next I described the perceptions of Thai migrants and their recognition that learning Icelandic would be beneficial, while also presenting reasons for why the majority of survey respondents had not taken more than three Icelandic language courses. The desire to earn more income by working longer hours rather than attending Icelandic courses topped the list of reasons, followed by the difficulties of learning Icelandic when it is taught almost exclusively in English. These results did not vary a great deal even when cross-tabulated with the auspices of migration, revealing that regardless of one’s
reason for migrating from Thailand to Iceland the logistics of earning more money and
even working overtime took precedence over the commitment to learning Icelandic. This
effect is underlined by the fact that so many of the Thai migrants in Iceland work in low-
wage jobs, where working overtime is far more rewarding in the short-term than the
alternative of taking a language class after work—even if the latter might enhance one’s
job prospects in the long-term.

The data also showed that the perceived barriers for a Thai migrant learning
Icelandic might be conditioned by a lack of familiarity with a Latin alphabet and the
English language in general. English language proficiency was very clearly associated
with Icelandic language proficiency, a result that revealed itself in the correlation matrix
between the two languages. Fluency and literacy skills in both English and Icelandic
were less intra-related with each other but were highly interrelated within each skill set
(for example, there is less strength of association between speaking and writing, but
reading and writing skills are very strongly related).

The first analytical question concerned how the auspices of migration affected
Icelandic proficiency. The data did not support my hypothesis that Icelandic-spouse
sponsored migrants have the best language skills of all three groups. In fact, employer-
sponsored migrants were more likely to speak Icelandic better than those who came
under other auspices, a result that might only be truly explained by unmeasured variables.
These might include whether respondents gained their Icelandic language in their current
job, or whether they possessed sufficient Icelandic skills before getting hired. On the
other hand, the data support the hypothesis that migrants who came as Thai-
family/spouse sponsors would not speak Icelandic as well as those who came to marry an
Icelander. Respondents who came to join Thai family were nearly half as likely to speak Icelandic well as those who came via marriage to an Icelander, which was an expected outcome.

Addressing my second question of how Icelandic speaking skill affects economic integration, I hypothesized that given their predicted higher proficiency in Icelandic speaking skill (which was later not supported by the results), Icelandic-sponsored spouses would be 1) more likely to be employed, and 2) more likely to earn a higher income, relative to respondents under other auspices of migration. The corollaries are that migrants who came under Thai family- and employer-sponsorships, due to their less proficient language skills, would be less likely to be employed and less likely to earn a high income.

The results provide weak evidence for my hypothesis, showing that Icelandic spouses were somewhat more likely to be employed than the Thai family- and employer-sponsored migrants and that the Icelandic-sponsored had a greater likelihood of earning a high income rather than a low income compared to employer-sponsored migrants. In other words, as I stated earlier, if a Thai woman came to be married to an Icelandic man, she would almost certainly be employed at the time of the survey. Employer-sponsored migrants would be nearly one-fifth as likely to earn a high income compared to the Icelandic-sponsored migrant. Icelandic speaking skill also had the expected positive effect on whether a Thai migrant earned a high income rather than a low income, a result which may be due to employment in certain sectors of the economy that may require Icelandic speaking skill and which also pay more.
Indeed, two of the most significant variables in determining income—age at migration and years of education—are already fixed “in stone” at migration\textsuperscript{78}. In this sense, it may be difficult for migrants to improve their chances of earning a high income and thereby become more economically integrated in Icelandic society, even after a number of years in the country (years of residence had almost no effect on income). Nevertheless, in terms of social integration and the institutional “nexus” that the Icelandic language occupies in Iceland, it is still absolutely essential for migrants to gain exposure to the Icelandic language and improve their chances at “belonging” in mainstream Icelandic society.

**Policy Implications**

Regardless of the auspices of migration, an ability to understand English is a strong predictor of Icelandic speaking skill. Given that the majority of Icelandic language classes are currently taught in English or other languages rather than Thai, it seems imperative that the Icelandic government either invests in teaching Thai migrants more English before they enroll in Icelandic class, or invests in hiring teachers who are at least marginally bilingual in Thai and Icelandic and are trained in foreign language instruction methods. Such investments would be well worth their cost, if the intent is to truly assist the integration of all immigrants into Icelandic society—a goal that the

\textsuperscript{78} As I mentioned in Chapter 3, just one migrant reported arriving at a young enough age to spend all of her primary schooling in Iceland. Her Icelandic language skills were very strong, as expected. One other migrant reported spending one year of primary school (at age 15) in Icelandic schools, but her language was not as strong. The rest of the respondents received the entirety of their formal schooling in Thailand.
Icelandic government states explicitly in its “Policy on the Integration of Immigrants” (Ministry of Social Affairs 2007).

Even if the government does not see such expenditures as a priority, it was clear from my fieldwork that there is a high demand in the Thai population for bilingual teachers and even production of a Thai-Icelandic dictionary, which did not exist at the time of fieldwork. Private language instruction companies may benefit from attending to this demand, and they may be able to find bilingual speakers among the second generation of Thai migrants in Iceland. One such private instruction center (Mímir Símenntun) offers one or two Icelandic language classes per term taught in Thai, and to my knowledge they are the only institution that offers such classes. They employ just one bilingual teacher, an Icelandic woman who lived abroad in Thailand and is married to a Thai man). The majority of Thais that I spoke with in Iceland even pressed me to take up a similar job and teach Thais in Iceland both Icelandic and English, despite my lack of perfect fluency in Thai and Icelandic.

Unsurprisingly, the number of Icelandic classes that each migrant takes has a significant effect on Icelandic speaking outcomes; again, the Icelandic government must continue to consistently subsidize Icelandic language courses for all, but especially for those whose employers and unions do not want or cannot afford to provide courses for their employees on the job. Iceland requires 150 hours of language instruction in order to obtain a permanent residency permit (the equivalent of a “green card” in the United States) and passage of an Icelandic language exam in order to obtain citizenship; without making access to language classes more accessible to all groups, such linguistic requirements will serve as gatekeepers rather than bridges to integration.
In conclusion, the auspices of migration do have an effect on the host-country language skills of Thai immigrants in Iceland and on employment and income. The evidence for the latter is equivocal given the tests of significance. The direction of the effect is similar to what we expected at the beginning of the chapter, with advantages of language and income falling more to those who migrate for marriage to Icelanders rather than those who are sponsored by Thai relatives or employers. More important than the auspices of migration were levels of educational attainment in the home country and English language proficiency, with both influencing Icelandic language proficiency. While little can be done to improve the educational attainment of Thai migrants upon arrival (save prioritizing immigrants who are better-educated overall, a policy that many countries have enacted and would substantially affect the in-flow of Thai migrants to Iceland), it is still possible to increase both English and Icelandic language proficiencies for the Thais in Iceland through better, more equitable access to language classes and targeted teaching using bilingual instruction.
Appendix to Chapter 5

It is difficult to overemphasize the magnitude of difference between the Thai and Icelandic languages. The Thai language reflects the strict hierarchy of Thai society; with at least four different sets of vocabulary or codes speakers must choose from based on their status relative to the other party. If we consider the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf 1964) where language and its grammatical structure shapes our subjective realities, it is not a stretch to assume that the Thai reality is markedly different from that of the Icelanders when it comes to perceiving social and economic hierarchies. While Pálsson (1989) argues that the famously egalitarian Icelanders actually do judge each other’s social status based on the grammatical-correctness of their Icelandic, the language itself does not demand different sets of vocabulary and tones to be used to reflect both one’s own social status relative to one’s audience. For example, Icelanders think nothing of addressing teachers and politicians by first name, a practice that could literally cause someone to be arrested in Thailand.

Grammatically, Thai maintains simplicity in its lack of inflection. There are no changes in the morphology of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs; conjugation of verbs does not exist, and there are no genders, tenses, plural forms, or articles that would change the endings of what are almost exclusively monosyllabic words (Higbie and Thinsan 2003). In comparison, Icelandic grammar is far more complicated than that of Thai. The Icelandic alphabet is essentially Latin, making it relatively easy for most Europeans to at least try to read Icelandic without much introduction. This is not the case for many Thai migrants who had little exposure to English orthography in Thailand, and
in a few cases are barely literate in their own country’s language. Icelandic words also tend to be multisyllabic and there are no tones to reflect different meanings, in contrast with Thai where tones are phonemic. For the average Thai migrant learning Icelandic, pronunciation and the shift from meaning determined by tone to meaning determined by grammar is a barrier to speaking Icelandic well.

One of the other difficult aspects of the Icelandic language for native Thai speakers to learn are the beygingar, or declensions. For every noun, pronoun, and adjective in Icelandic there are four cases—nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive—which determine how a word ends or “declines” in both singular and plural forms. The cases must also correctly agree with articles and one of three possible genders. The verbs and prepositions control which of these 16 word endings ought to be used in each sentence, but verbs must also conjugate to reflect tense, strength of declension, and voice.

A very basic side-by-side comparison of the difference between languages follows in Table 5-7, using the English word “dog” as an example. Note that the Thai word for “dog” (maa)—and there is only one word, in any form—is located in the lefthand column; the eight forms of the same word in English (nominative and genitive

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79 Several Thai women expressed insecurity in their abilities to read and write in “official” Thai. A few declined to participate in my survey, with one woman saying frankly, “I’m too stupid!” I reassured her that she wouldn’t have to write anything if she wasn’t comfortable doing so, but she would not be persuaded. She kept repeating (in Thai) that “this kind of thing is for people with a lot of education, not like me.”

80 Thais regularly shortened Icelandic compound words to one or two syllables, adding their own “tone” to make the words pronounceable. One of many examples of such “Thai-ification” is the shortening of Hafnarfjörður (a four-syllable town near Reykjavík) to “Hap-naa,” with a falling tone on the final syllable. Another is the place name Hlemmur, shortened to just “Lemm.”
cases) and the sixteen forms of the word in Icelandic (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive cases) are to the right.

Table 5-7:  Sample Thai, English, and Icelandic Noun Declensions with Singular, Plural, and Definite Article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maa</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>+ Article</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>+ Article</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dog</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dog's</td>
<td>the dog's</td>
<td>dogs'</td>
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<td>hundi</td>
<td>hundinum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hund</td>
<td>hundinn</td>
<td>hundar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hunds</td>
<td>hundsins</td>
<td>hundum</td>
<td>hunda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6

Gender Roles in Thai Migrant Households

Two Households, Two Marriages

A friendly Thai female voice greeted me from the speaker next to the apartment complex door, followed by the buzzing sound of someone letting me in. The woman’s Icelandic husband, around the same age as she, held a baby and greeted me with a half-wave from inside the doorway to their apartment. It was a Saturday afternoon and the whole family was at home. A toddler ambled around his mother’s knees while she held the door open for me, chatting about the terrible weather and inviting me in to the small, toy-cluttered apartment.

The woman welcomed me to sit down at the kitchen table as she poured some coffee. As we got to know each other she told me about her college education from Thailand and her desire to get a job in Iceland suited to her training. She had a bachelor’s degree but Icelandic employers would not recognize her education, and so she worked full-time for a commercial cleaning company as a janitor\(^{81}\). Her husband, also working full-time, minded the two children and went back to doing the laundry after briefly introducing himself. During the informal interview, which lasted around an hour, the

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\(^{81}\) The Icelandic Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave is relatively generous in comparison with its American counterpart. If both parents are active in the labor market before the birth of the child, the father receives three months, the mother receives three months, and both parents receive six additional months together. This adds up to nine months of parental leave for each child, paid at 80% of each parent’s average salary for 12 months preceding the birth of the child (Jónsdóttir 2008). The current system has been in place since 2000, though not all parents take advantage of the benefit equally. Many of the Thai women I met had either not lived or worked in the country long enough in order to use the child leave, or many continued working shortly after childbirth as they would have in Thailand. The Icelandic childcare system is well-developed with local women, including Thai immigrants, employed as dayminders (dagmamma). Local communities subsidize this informal childcare as long as the child is under care from four to seven hours per day.
woman attended briefly to the baby but otherwise the husband handled the children’s needs and seemed quite accustomed to doing so.

The couple had originally met online in a chat room, getting to know one another in broken English first before meeting in person. The woman stated that she hadn’t been looking specifically for a husband since she had a decent job in Thailand, but that they had just “hit it off” and she came to Iceland to meet him and eventually get married. She always spoke respectfully of her husband in contrast with some other Thai women I had interviewed, many of whom felt free to list off both Thai and Icelandic husbands’ habitual drinking and womanizing. This woman’s husband stopped by the table now and then to chat a little in Icelandic, but there was no evidence that he was “checking” on our conversation as some husbands had done during other home visits. In fact their household might have been indistinguishable from those of their Icelandic neighbors except for the fact that they regularly ate Thai food for dinner and the woman spoke to their children in Thai rather than Icelandic.

A visit to a different Thai woman’s home, however, presented a reality poles apart from the first scenario. As part of the process of recruiting survey participants, I cold-called randomly-selected people from a list provided by the Icelandic government and hoped they would be willing to meet with me. I called one woman whose national identity number told me that she was in her early 50s; the government database also included the identity number of her household head, an Icelandic man whose birthdate preceded hers by several decades.

Once I introduced myself as an ethnically half-Thai, half-Icelandic student from America, the woman became very friendly on the phone and invited me to come and talk
with her in person. I drove to her address a few minutes away in town; she greeted me with a smile at the door of her single-family home and began chatting almost non-stop from the moment I walked in. She handed me a pair of fuzzy house slippers to wear, since in both Icelandic and Thai homes “outdoor” shoes should be removed at the door, and welcomed me to a casual sitting area off the kitchen. Her elderly husband greeted me without a smile and sat down in a chair across from us. His eyes flitted closed every few minutes; he did not seem to care much for our conversation.

The woman and I sat on a couch while she talked extensively in Thai about her life in Iceland, extending back 16 years and several husbands. Before I even pulled out the survey for her to fill out, she reached for several photo albums on the shelf behind us and gave me a thorough visual history of her life since leaving Thailand—she wanted to tell her story. At the same time, whenever she came across pictures of her current husband, she was very purposeful about stating loudly, in Icelandic, how handsome he was and brushing her fingers over his picture and making sure he saw her gesture. She also served him while he sat there watching us, getting him any drinks or food he requested or gestured towards.

During our initial phone conversation the woman had asked her husband for permission for me to come over, but for most of my two-hour visit the man sat in a rocking chair completely silent (perhaps sleeping). It was not until the last 20 minutes or so that he became more alert and began to ask me question after question, his suspicion rising with each answer that he found unsatisfactory. I had given the woman a letter of informed consent in Thai, and he wanted to see the equivalent in Icelandic or English.
handed one to him, but he just shook his head and told us that we should stop speaking in Thai and only speak in Icelandic now.

Icelandic being neither of our native tongues, we switched in and out of Thai and spoke carefully about the weather. The woman quietly passed her incomplete survey to me, telling me in Thai that he was “like this” and that I should probably leave. She avoided my eyes and apologized, saying that she might still be “able” to do the survey if she could only be sure her husband wouldn’t find out about it. For his part, he continued to ask me questions in an angry tone about who I was and what I was doing, and generally seemed to want me to leave. I didn’t want to cause more trouble for her, so I packed up my things and made my way to the door, asking if she would be attending one of the Thai community festivals (songkran, or the water festival) the following week that all the Thais I knew had been talking about. She hadn’t heard of it, and said that “The man here doesn’t go anywhere, so I can’t go out either,” and continuing by quietly saying she’d rather not be with him but that “I have to wait until he dies.”

Introduction

The latter case illustrates the stereotypical image of a “mail-order” marriage where an elderly, Western man expects unquestioning obedience and servitude from his more traditional, significantly younger non-Western bride. In fact, this may be the very reason he sought out a bride from a background so different from his own, especially in comparison with the local marriage “market” in a highly egalitarian nation such as
Iceland\textsuperscript{82}. Through my ethnographic work I discovered several relationships resembling the one described, each with its own variation of the man exerting influence, power, or just plain neglect over a woman in a vulnerable position. The director of the Women’s Shelter in Reykjavík described, during an interview, men who were serial “sponsors” of visas for women from Thailand or the Philippines\textsuperscript{83}. Such a man, the director said, might marry a woman from Asia before abusing her for up to (but not quite) three years. At that point he could divorce her, basically forcing her to leave Iceland or to live there illegally while he married a new woman and perpetuated the same pattern of abuse.

The first story reveals, however, that such stereotypical relationships may exist but are not necessarily the norm in marriages between Icelanders and Thais. Such apparently egalitarian partnerships were common among the households I visited, especially when the marriage was mixed (perhaps less so in co-ethnic marriages between a Thai man and Thai woman). Today’s matchmaking websites and chat rooms allow individuals from different countries to meet on more level ground (Constable 2003), rather than a woman advertising herself in a mail-order catalog of some kind while the other person browses through and chooses potential partners at his leisure. Ethnographically there was not much evidence that Icelandic men desired more “traditional” wives or that Thai women were motivated solely by the desire for a visa to a developed country. Such motives may have existed under the surface with some marriages, but more often it seemed that the two parties happened to meet online or

\textsuperscript{82} Bjarnason and Hjálmsdóttir state that in many ways, “…Iceland can be considered the global vanguard of gender equality” (2008:50), especially when considering the high level of women’s participation in the labor market, women’s university enrollment, and the lack of support for essentialist gender roles (Leiknisdóttir 2005) when compared with other industrialized countries.

\textsuperscript{83} I examine the “mail-order bride” phenomenon in more detail in Chapter 2 of the dissertation.
through mutual acquaintances, a finding echoed by Tosakul’s ethnographic work in the sending region of Northeast Thailand (2010; also see Esara 2009).

There is no doubt a vast range of possible Thai-Icelandic relationship scenarios, with each marriage or partnership illustrating its own way of negotiating gender roles, division of labor, and authority in the household. Some arrangements may be functional and agreeable to both parties while others lead to discord, exploitation, and abuse in the more extreme cases. This chapter aims to explore the range of partnered Thai migrant women’s relationships in Iceland, relying on participant-observation data as well as survey responses to questions about chore responsibility and areas of decision-making. Specifically, I draw on ethnographic and survey data to answer the following questions: What is the position of Thai migrant women in the domestic household sphere? Is the division of labor more or less traditionally gendered compared to what it might be in their home country? How do the auspices of migration affect the position of women in their households in Iceland vis-à-vis decision-making with their husbands? I will answer these questions by focusing on the household division of labor and decision-making.

With these questions in mind I propose the following hypotheses: first, women who came under the auspices of Icelandic-spouse sponsorship will have a more egalitarian division of labor in their households, as evidenced by their husbands participating in more traditionally feminine chores compared to the husbands of women who came under other auspices. This assumes a type of “ideological hypergamy” on the part of women who marry Icelanders because they believe they will be treated better.

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84 This builds on Constable’s (2005) idea of “global hypergamy,” except that I am adding the feature of women marrying into societies where women’s rights and egalitarianism in the home are more value and respected than in their sending countries.
in Iceland as exogamous wives than they would be in endogamous marriages\textsuperscript{85}. Conversely, my second hypothesis is that women who came under the auspices of family reunification with a Thai spouse or family member will have more sex-segregated division of labor in their households. In other words, wives will report doing more traditionally feminine chores and husbands doing more traditionally masculine chores due to less influence of egalitarian ideals and more traditionally Thai roles in endogamous pairings.

In terms of authority and influence in the household, my third hypothesis is that marriage migrants will share more household decisions with their husbands than those who came by other means for the same reasons given above. Finally, women who came via employer sponsorship may be the least dependent on their husbands of all three groups. Participation in the work force is often one of the most important aspects of gender role and decision-making authority analyses in the literature. Women who work outside of the home and have their own source of income tend to be less dependent on spouses and family members and more empowered demand more equal recognition and treatment.

All four of these hypotheses contribute to the overall direction of the dissertation, which is to investigate the degree of Thai female migrants’ integration in Icelandic society. Iceland is decidedly more egalitarian in its approach to gender roles compared with Thai society, and as a result Thai women have much to gain from exposure to and

\textsuperscript{85} One can easily argue that perhaps it is the men who expect a type of “ideological hypogamy” in their marriage to non-Western women, and indeed this is the case in some marriages that I encountered. However, based on my ethnographic pilot study in 2005, I formed my hypotheses on the observation that women married to Icelandic men were for the most part respected and valued just as much as they would be if they happened to be Icelandic rather than Thai wives. This observation basically goes against the stereotype of men wanting submissive women.
assimilation with Icelandic society. The assumption in the dissertation is that exposure to Icelandic society and ideology is greater for Thai women sponsored by Icelandic husbands rather than sponsorship by a co-ethnic spouse, family member, or an employer.

**Conceptual Background**

The academic study of gender roles, especially that of women’s roles relative to men in the public and private spheres, reaches back to the foundation of modern social science for both anthropologists (Mead 1935, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974) and sociologists (Linton 1936). Anthropologists and qualitative sociologists in particular have done much to integrate the “big picture” of gender as a key driver behind research questions rather than simply reducing it to a dichotomous variable (Donato et al 2006). Sociology took up the cause with great fervor in the 1980s and especially 1990s. West and Zimmerman (1987) authored a landmark paper on the relationship between gender as biologically-ascertained identity and gender as socially-constructed activity, particularly within the context of household division of labor. Their assertion that essentially “gender is as gender does” illuminates the present study.

While they did not look specifically at immigrants, West and Zimmerman (1987) might have nonetheless argued that Thai women in Iceland assume responsibility for the least desirable chores because that is how women from their home culture maintain their own sense of being a woman. These women are able to “do” gender on their own terms, in their own households, in a way that is familiar to them even if some Westerners may see it as oppressive and not “their” way of doing gender.
Hochshild (1989, 1997) and later Presser (2003) elucidated the phenomenon of women taking on the “second shift” of domestic labor after their initial workday outside the home was completed, even in the most egalitarian-meaning of marriages. Certainly, even in decidedly egalitarian Scandinavian countries such as Iceland, native Icelandic and Thai migrant women alike are still obliged to take on a second shift. Interestingly, many Thai migrants told me that their “second shift” was nothing like it would have been if they had remained in Thailand, namely because their mostly Icelandic husbands were “used” to taking up additional chores and contributing more than a minimal amount of their labor to the household.

Blair and Lichter (1991) focused on the underlying causes of gender-segregated housework in American households, specifically examining the role of limited time resources, decision-making authority, and gender ideologies in predicting the degree of chore segregation by gender as opposed to equality in a given household. It is from Blair and Lichter that I develop the model of decision-making authority in Thai migrant households. Additionally Twiggs et al. (1999) identify certain time-use factors, several of which I investigate in this chapter, to predict the level of involvement of men and women in certain gendered chores. These factors include the number of school-age children and hours of work per week as limiting the amount of time one spouse can spend on housework (Becker 1981, Presland and Antill 1987) as well as “normative” explanations drawing on educational achievement, power as measured by income, and gender ideologies within the household that help affirm each spouse’s identity as a man or a woman (Fenstermaker Berk 1985).
Since the 1980s social scientists of all stripes have established a significant body of literature on the specific impact of gender in international migration processes with anthropologists and sociologists at the front of the line (Morokvasic 1984, Simon and Brettell 1986, Grasmuck and Pessar 1991, Chant 1992, Wolf 1992, Chang 2000, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Espiritu 1999, Mahler 1999, Menjivar 1999, Parrenas 2001, Pessar and Mahler 2006), extending the study of gender roles in the household to an examination of traditional roles and power being transferred and often transformed in the process of international migration. The majority of these studies tend to focus on roles within co-ethnic households where both spouses emigrate from the country of origin, often at different times, and establish new households in the destination country (Roopnarine et al. 2009, Hyman et al. 2008, Boehm 2008, Pessar 1999, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). The adjustments that spouses must make in such situations, especially when originating from a more “traditional,” gender-divided society and moving to a more egalitarian, Western-style society are worthy of study, particularly in the case of women who find themselves questioning traditional household power structures and not wanting to get “stuck” with the least desirable and often most time-bound household chores. Some women are empowered to challenge the “old way” of doing things, especially in a new environment. Others choose or are constrained to uphold patriarchal ways from their home cultures, depending on individual circumstances and conditions of migration (Pessar 1999).

Certainly, these types of changes occur even in cases of domestic migration, as women move from rural to urban areas and take up wage labor in order to provide for themselves or for their families at home (Singhanetra-Renard and Prabhudhanitisarn
1992, Mills 1999). Additionally, another shift in the locus of household power can occur when women remain at home to take care of the household while their husbands migrate to work far away for months or even years at a time (Mckenzie and Menjivar 2011, Yabiku et al 2010, Boehm 2008, Mahler 2001). In these cases, women must often take over responsibilities and decisions that had once belonged exclusively to the realm of their husbands, sometimes (but not always) earning a degree of independence and empowerment without actually leaving home themselves—at least until the migrating husbands return home.

Few studies exist, however, on gender roles within households where one spouse is an immigrant and the other is native-born (Remennick 2009). In other words, one person is generally settled and comfortable on his or her home turf and the other has been transplanted into a foreign environment with total dependence on the sponsoring spouse and very little local support. Imagine landing in a country with zero comprehension of the language and society, with one’s only contact being someone previously unmet in person and only having exchanged e-mails and photos with online. The contact is waiting in the airport arrivals hall with a sign in his hand, the potential migrant’s name written on the front and a car outside waiting to take her to his home.

Miscommunications abound in even the most optimistic scenario. One Icelandic novelist even took to constructing a fictional story about a Thai-Icelandic couple (Jónsdóttir 2000), though it is mostly light-hearted and humorous in nature rather than alluding to abuse and exploitation that can occur in some relationships.

Reports on the “mail-order bride” phenomenon abound, of course, but these studies typically focus what can be done to better regulate or even completely stop the
industry of foreign brides, emphasizing advocacy and human rights issues rather than investigating what actually goes on within the household of cross-border marriages (Del Vecchio 2007-2008, Kojima 2001, Simons 1999). Advocacy has its place, to be sure, but not all cross-border marriages between relatively unequal parties are suspicious and require intervention.

Rather, to better inform both immigration policy formation and to increase accurate representation in the popular press, cross-border marriages deserve to be triangulated using ethnographic methods hand-in-hand with traditional surveys. There are few other ways to understand the nature of such relationships, as surveys alone do not illuminate the rich detail that participant-observation brings. The research questions directing this chapter therefore do not seek to fix what is wrong with international marriage migration, though the problems are admittedly many. Rather, the goal is to understand how the process of migrating internationally to form a union affects the division of labor and decision-making power balance in a cross-cultural marriage.

Again, my hypotheses are that Thai women sponsored by Icelandic husbands will have less sex-segregation of chores in their households when compared to those who came under other auspices due to a type of “ideological hypergamy.” This term assumes that women are not necessarily marrying exogamously for purely romantic or financial reasons, but also because they believe their Western husbands will believe in and adhere to more egalitarian ideals than men from their home countries might. I hypothesize that Icelandic marriage-migrants will share more decisions with their husband when compared with those who came under other auspices for the same reasons, because the marriages exist in a more egalitarian space due to their cultural and geographic location.
Finally, women who came to Iceland dependent on an employer’s sponsorship will have
the least-traditional division of labor and household decision-making vis-à-vis their
current partners when compared to migrants sponsored by a spouse or family member.
By virtue of migrating under the auspices of employment rather than an interpersonal
relationship, employer-sponsored women have a built-in source of wages and therefore
negotiating power regardless of their domestic situation.

Data and Methods

Dependent Variables

Participation in Household Chores

Scholars have used a variety of approaches to measure the division of labor in
American households, focusing on men’s and women’s task-specific participation in
certain chores (Greenstein 2009, Coltrane 2000, Twiggs et al 1999, Greenstein 1996,
scale with “5” meaning the husband always does the chore and “1” meaning the wife
always does the chore. “3” would mean that both husband and wife share the chore
equally. The authors consider a particular chore to be male “sex-typed” (a chore that men
tend to do more often than women, on average) if 75 percent or more of those
contributing to the task are men, and the same for female “sex-typed” chores. Note that
this 75 percent does not mean that the men are fully responsible for the chore; they may
have earned a 3 or 4 on the Likert-scale question but they are still counted as “helping”
with the chore.
There were several options for constructing a dependent variable from my survey that was similar to that of Twiggs et. al. (1999). I often witnessed husbands “pitching in” to help their wives with washing the dishes and doing laundry rather than sitting back and assuming she would do these more “feminine” chores. This did not mean that the husbands did the dishes and laundry all the time, but they appeared to be significantly involved with complementing their wives’ efforts in these chores. These patterns stood out to me because typically, Thai women would be solely responsible for such “women’s work” in endogamous marriages. Thus, it seemed most realistic to measure a household’s division of labor based on how much each gender participated in the chores typically “assigned” to the opposite gender, in order to demonstrate how willing the respondent’s spouse or partner was to do his share of the housework.

In other words, expecting Icelandic husbands to pick up the majority of domestic household tasks in order to qualify as a truly egalitarian household would have been unrealistic. Therefore, in contrast with the level of housework done by Thai men in the migrants’ homeland, it is sufficient to measure Icelandic men’s participation in traditionally feminine chores and Thai women’s participation in traditionally masculine housework to understand how egalitarian each household they are, rather than assigning a dichotomous measure of egalitarian vs. non-egalitarian.

In my survey I provided a chart of ten common household chores (cooking, dishwashing, child care, etc.) with five possible responses for each chore. In the original question there were ten “chores” listed; in the regression analysis I remove “Yardwork” and “Child care” because the number of respondents to both of these questions only totaled 52 and 57,
• “You,”
• “Spouse/Partner,”
• “Both,”
• “Others,” and
• “Not Applicable.”

Respondents were instructed to indicate who usually carried out each of the ten tasks in the household\textsuperscript{87}.

Following Twiggs et al. (1999) I sex-type a household task as “masculine” if at least 75 percent of those participating in the task are men. I do the same if at least 75 percent of those participating in the task are women. Respondents could choose from themselves, their spouse, both, or others as possible answers to this question. Using this procedure I identified five “feminine” chores and three “masculine” chores, and I count up the number that each spouse participates in and divide by the total (five or three), then multiply by 100 to create the dependent variable, a percentage, in each chore analysis.

Limitations of the dependent variables throughout this chapter are complete reliance on one-sided self-reporting where the wife may inflate her own “chore effort” and underreport her husband’s participation. The results may have been quite different if I had also surveyed the husbands in the same households but the practicalities of fieldwork and survey distribution did not allow for this approach. I obtained survey data from a small number (valid N < 15) of male migrants in Iceland in response to the same questions asked of the women; I refer to this data anecdotally. It would have been useful respectively, lowering my valid sample size significantly. This may be due to the fact that proper “yards” are a rarity in volcanic Iceland and especially in Reykjavík, where the majority of residents live in apartment complexes and other block housing. Also, I removed “Child care” because not all couples surveyed have children in the home. This was either due to being married for a short period of time or adult children living outside the home or country.

\textsuperscript{87} A previous question asked whether the respondent was in a cohabiting relationship with a significant other, directing him or her to skip the question if single.
to obtain a baseline measure of Thai men’s participation in household tasks in the sending country, but the limitations of the study precluded research in Thailand. Instead, I draw on studies that describe and discuss gendered division of labor in mostly rural, northeastern Thailand (Xu et al. 2011, Angeles and Sunanta 2009, Esara 2004, Coyle and Kwong 2000, De Jong 2000, Keyes 1987) as well as qualitative participant-observation data among Thai male migrants in Iceland.

**Decision-Making Authority**

Ethnographically, if an Icelandic husband was willing to participate in or even be responsible for “women’s work,” the household was far more egalitarian in a way that was not evident in households with more highly sex-segregated or traditional chore roles. In the latter households, I observed men talking “down” to their wives, or as someone less equal to themselves. The women generally had to defer to their husbands even in decisions such as talking with me or participating in my survey. In other words, I observed a relationship between the way chores were divided and the way that Icelandic husbands and Thai wives (and even co-ethnic couples) treated each other in many mixed-ethnicity household. There was a clear association between women who had to do more of the “unpleasant,” typically feminine chores and women who had less power to make decisions in the household, both of which were determined by the influence of the husband in the household. I observed this more often, as in the case of the opening
vignette, among households with a greater age differential between the partners\textsuperscript{88}. Unfortunately, I did not ask about the age of respondent’s spouses in the survey.

The original survey question asked about 14 different decision-making items, with the same responses to the question of “Who usually makes the final decision?” as were offered to the question about division of labor. The topical categories are similar in concept to that developed by Parrado et al. (2005), though I did not include any questions regarding sexual relationship power in the original survey question due to the sensitive and mostly extraneous nature of that topic relative to my own research questions.

In order to create a dependent variable to measure decision-making authority in the household, I first attempted to create a scale of responsibility vs. participation across the different areas of decision-making. This was meant to be in parallel with the dependent variable for measuring sex-segregation of chores (Twiggs, et al. 1999). The problem with this approach is that measuring household decisions is quite different from measuring whether men and women are more or less willing to do chores that are not traditionally assigned to their gender.

Using a sex-segregation measure similar to that used for division of labor, however, presents at least two problems when applied to decision-making. One is that the definition of “traditional” masculine- vs. feminine-type decisions is far less clear than it is with regards to household chores; while it may be generalizable across many cultures to say that washing clothes tends to be “women’s work,” the same cannot be said about

\textsuperscript{88} Pyke and Adams (2010) observe that a marriage involving a younger woman and a much older man in itself does not necessarily mean that the household would be male-dominated. However, when the age differential is combined with differences in race, class, occupation, and educational achievement between husband and wife, the situation is more likely to be one of unbalanced power sharing that benefits the man in the household. This would seem to be the case, at least anecdotally, in marriages between Icelandic men and Thai women as well.
deciding on remittances to one’s family, when to visit the doctor, or who decides to purchase an expensive new flat screen TV for the household.

Therefore, even though both measures count up the number of items that a woman claims responsibility for, the content being measured is not the same. A higher total on one outcome variable has a very different meaning from a higher total on the other. It makes more sense to measure, at least given the data available on decision-making, the number of decisions shared by each couple as a sign of egalitarianism and mutual respect in a household rather than how sex-segregated the decisions appear to be. More practically, dichotomizing the data into shared vs. non-shared chores was necessary simply because so few respondents reported husbands being solely responsible for a number of decisions. This would have been problematic for carrying out the regression analyses.

In order to preserve the N as much as possible in an already limited sample, I chose to exclude seven categories with the lowest response-rates: these initially included decisions about the location of one’s house, when and where to go on vacation, and how to discipline children. In my initial descriptive results I include frequencies for the other four variables (i.e. time with Thais, having children, helping family, and language at home) but exclude them from the regression analyses later in the chapter.

In creating the dependent variable I next dichotomized the seven remaining categories of household decision-making, with “0” assigned to areas where there was no sharing of decision-making authority and “1” assigned to chores where decisions were jointly shared between husband and wife. I used these initial seven outcomes as seven dependent variables for individual bivariate regressions with each decision category
regressed on each independent variable.

Next, I went through these seven dichotomized variables and excluded any cases that lacked responses for at least five of the seven categories. Totaling the number of “1” responses for each decision, I then divided the total number of decisions shared by the total number of decisions for which the respondent provided a response—varying between five and seven—before multiplying the result by 100. This value became the main dependent variable for the decision-making analysis, basically a measure of the percentage of household chores shared by both husband and wife in each household.

Independent Variables

Analyses of Participation in Household Chores and Decision-Making Authority

In keeping with the central research question of the dissertation, the most important predictor is the auspices of migration. It is crucial to consider the role that a migrant’s sponsorship plays in determining various aspects of social and economic integration, including the division of labor in one’s household and shared decision-making in one’s marriage in light of mainstream social and cultural norms in the destination country.

In addition to the auspices of migration as the key predictor variable, the model includes three variables to explain household and family factors. These include, as a measure of exposure to public schooling and the gender-ideological influence of a community of Icelandic parents/families, whether the respondent has children living in Iceland. The model also considers whether the respondent lives in the greater metropolitan area of Reykjavik, another measure of mainstream Icelandic cultural
influence since respondents living in outlying towns and fishing villages may be exposed to a more traditional, less egalitarian way of life. One example would be if a woman is married to an Icelandic fisherman who is away at sea for long periods of time, expecting his wife to stay home with the children and keep house. This was a common scenario that I encountered ethnographically. Along with these dichotomous family variables I include a measure of household size including the respondent, which is one of the variables with the least amount of deviation. All respondents had an average of 3.4 members in their household, with ethnographic confirmation that Thai immigrants do not live in large, multi-member households with extended family as first expected.

In order to account for a woman’s degree of financial independence from her husband, I include a dichotomous variable indicating participation in the formal labor market. Indeed, participation in the labor market applies to a vast majority of all respondents at 84.1 percent, with only a small amount of variation across categories. In addition to participation in the formal work force, ethnographic observation revealed that many Thai migrants earn a supplemental income from side jobs such as making and selling Thai desserts, collecting and recycling cans for cash redemption, and catching and cooking fish and bird eggs from the Icelandic countryside, all evidently excellent ways of maintaining one’s co-ethnic social network as well as maintaining a separate economic trajectory from one’s spouse. Thus, I include participation in the informal labor market as a signal of entrepreneurial initiative and the drive to succeed independently of one’s

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89 Women described how they would sell these items to friends and relatives for a small amount, mostly to give themselves something to do in their free time but also to bring in supplementary income. Thai women are known for conducting small, informal businesses to earn additional income for themselves in Thailand (Muecke 1982, Muecke 1984, Mills 1999, Angeles and Sunanta 2009) and it was not surprising to see similarly enterprising behavior in Iceland.
spouse. I also include a dummy variable indicating how many hours the respondent reported working each week to control for time availability to do household chores, since I expect women who work part-time or not at all to participate in more chores overall compared to those who are working full-time.

The final two categories of independent variables boil down to influences from a migrant’s current environment. The first group includes Icelandic spoken language fluency, Icelandic peer influence, and citizenship, which requires three to seven years of continuous residence and language fluency in itself. Each of these variables is meant to measure exposure to mainstream Icelandic society, particularly more egalitarian views of women, in contrast with influences from the migrant’s background in Thailand.

The last group of variables is meant to measure more conservative attitudes towards gender roles with increased age, an agricultural (farming) background, and membership in the Buddhist Association of Iceland. It is assumed that migrants will have less conservative ideas about gender roles and power in the household if they have more education in general. This is especially relevant since women’s education in Thai society tends to be deemphasized compared to that of men (Singhanetra-Renard and Prabhudhanitisarn 1992). Additionally, if a migrant’s mother was employed outside the home rather than being strictly a homemaker or mae baan in Thai, she is assumed to have modeled the contribution of her own income to the household rather than depending strictly on her husband’s income.
Results

What is the division of labor in Thai migrant households?

In Table 6-1, the values of each household task or chore in the columns are cross-tabulated with the respondent’s report of who was “most” responsible for completing that chore in the rows. Using laundry as an example, nearly three-quarters of the female respondents reported being solely responsible for the task in the first row. In the second row an additional 22.8 percent report that the respondent shared the task with her spouse, bringing the total up to 97.5 percent of female respondents participating in laundry duty. Just 2.5 percent reported that their husbands alone were responsible for laundry in the third row, indicating that among households with Thai-migrant wives, laundry was mostly a “woman’s” chore and not the man’s.

In fact, cooking, cleaning, dishwashing, grocery-shopping, and laundry are all clearly female sex-segregated in the homes of the respondents. The respondents report their male partners as participating a great deal in grocery-shopping (74.7 percent), with very few men reported as being wholly responsible for the grocery shopping (5.1 percent). Even so, only 22.8 percent of women are entirely responsible for groceries. On the other hand, bill paying, home maintenance, and car maintenance are all strongly male sex-typed with car maintenance having the most “total” male responsibility. Nearly three-quarters of respondents report that their husbands are completely responsible for car maintenance. It remains to be seen whether the auspices of migration or other variables

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90 This may be due to the fact that grocery-shopping is a chore that takes place outside the home and has to occur at certain times and places—in other words, it is not as time-flexible as, say, laundry or washing the dishes. It also usually involves (in Iceland, at least) using a vehicle and carrying heavy loads, a task that is more oriented towards shared labor than one person dominating. When my own husband and I went grocery shopping, we often saw Thai-Icelandic couples shopping together in stores, perhaps even more so than co-ethnic Icelandic couples.
such as length of time in the country, or age or education affect the degree of gendered chore segregation and the level of egalitarianism in each migrant/native household as hypothesized.

Table 6-1: Division of Labor in Cohabiting/Married Thai Migrant Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Household Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman Only %</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both %</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man Only %</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others %</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, Table 6-2 reveals that financial decisions such as remitting to Thailand and personal spending and time-related decisions such as working outside the home and spending time with other Thai people are squarely in the jurisdiction of the respondent alone. These types of decisions did not fall to her spouse or even to the couple as a shared decision. Suksomboon (2008) confirms that especially in the case of remittances, Thai wives living in the Netherlands with Dutch husbands reported marital tension over money and gifts sent home to Thailand. Husbands were often opposed to the increasing size and frequency of such gifts, leaving the wives little choice than to exclude the

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91 The Thai wife saw the remittances as absolutely necessary to her family’s well-being and her role as a “dutiful daughter,” while the Dutch husband did not understand why the Thai government couldn’t take better care of its citizens (using the Dutch welfare state as a model) instead of relying on remittances sent from daughters living abroad.
Table 6-2: Distribution of Decision-Making Authority in Cohabit ing/Married Thai Migrant Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Decision-Making</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Finances</th>
<th>Social Life</th>
<th>Family and Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Decision-Maker</td>
<td>Trips to Thailand</td>
<td>Remitting to Thailand</td>
<td>Large Purchases</td>
<td>Personal Spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman Only</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man Only</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

husband from such dealings and take over the remittance decision-making herself.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Thai wives report that their Icelandic husbands have much more say about spending large sums of money such as on trips to Thailand, making large household purchases, and even visits to the doctor or dentist.92

92 Also, when the results in Table 6-1 report that a slight majority of Thai wives do all of the cooking (54.3 percent) and other time-inflexible chores in their households, it would seem to have a more negative impact on a woman’s free time and ability to do what she pleases—whereas in Table 6-2, if the vast majority (72.8 percent) of the wives report bearing sole responsibility for their own spending habits, this is likely a positive outcome for those women and reflects a degree of empowerment and authority that they might not exercise in a relationship at home in Thailand.
It is revealing that in Table 6-2, no single decision is reported to be made exclusively by husbands. Large purchases is the only decision that comes close, with 28.6 percent of respondents saying their spouse alone makes the decision. Yet nearly two-thirds report sharing that decision with their spouse. While this initial portrait is certainly rough, it reveals a relatively high degree of both egalitarianism and women’s empowerment among respondents’ households in Iceland. This result is surprising, especially considering the stereotype that Western men “mail-order” non-Western women from abroad out of a desire for a more traditional, passive partner\(^9^3\).

I present descriptive statistics for the dependent variables in Table 6-3 below. While it must be remembered that the sample size for employer-sponsored is very small, we can see from the descriptive values that this category of migrant stands out the strongest in terms of having the “least” traditional division of labor and decision-making power. Women in this category report that their husbands do 73.3 percent of the five traditionally feminine chores, an extra chore or more relative to those who came under other auspices whose husbands only do about half of the traditionally feminine chores. Women who were sponsored by Icelandic men also have the most traditional division of labor overall because the women in this category participate the least (17.8 percent) in traditionally masculine chores. Their decision-making power, however, nearly matches that of women who were sponsored by Thai family.

\(^9^3\) As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, while this stereotype certainly still applies to some of the marriages I witnessed between Thai women and their Icelandic husbands, there were just as many more-equitable relationships with partners being roughly the same age and appearing to share similar views of how housework should be divided. It should also be repeated that while many newer couples “met” online, in the earlier days of immigration from Thailand to Iceland marriages were arranged by mutual friends or relatives acting as relationship “brokers.” I explored a less benevolent example of this process in Chapter 2.
Table 6-3: Means and Percentages for Dependent Variables According to Auspices of Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>All Women in Sample (N=73)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse/Fiance (N=42)</th>
<th>Thai Family (N=23)</th>
<th>Employer (N=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men’s participation in traditionally feminine household chores (percent out of 5 total)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s participation in traditionally masculine chores (percent out of 3 total)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decisions (percent out of 7 total)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next table, Table 6-4, illustrates the frequency by percentage of household chore responsibility cross-tabulated with the three auspices of migration. This table further explore the idea that sex-segregation of chores is affected to some degree by a migrant’s auspice of migration\(^{94}\). Some patterns that stand out from Table 6-4, similar to those observed in Table 6-3, are that despite the limitations of their small sample size, women who migrated under the auspices of employer-sponsorship have lower rates of being solely responsible for the five traditionally feminine chores. They also report higher rates of both men and women sharing chores compared to those reported by women under the auspices of an Icelandic or Thai spouse/family.

\(^{94}\) Initially I had included a fifth column (on the far right of the table) with tests of significance—ANOVA (F-tests) for the continuous variables and chi-square or Fisher’s exact test (if cells had values less than five, which many did) for the categorical variables. Unfortunately, due to the presence of many cells containing zeroes, the results were nearly all non-significant and were of little meaningful use as included in the table. Instead of these tests of significance I use bivariate regressions for each chore and decision in Table 6-8 to examine their relationships with independent variables.
## Table 6-4: Frequencies of household chore responsibility by migration auspices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel A: Cooking</th>
<th>Total (1)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse (2)</th>
<th>Thai Family (3)</th>
<th>Employer (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel B: Dishwashing</th>
<th>(N=75)</th>
<th>(N=43)</th>
<th>(N=23)</th>
<th>(N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel C: Cleaning</th>
<th>(N=74)</th>
<th>(N=43)</th>
<th>(N=23)</th>
<th>(N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel D: Groceries</th>
<th>(N=73)</th>
<th>(N=41)</th>
<th>(N=23)</th>
<th>(N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel E: Laundry</th>
<th>(N=73)</th>
<th>(N=42)</th>
<th>(N=22)</th>
<th>(N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6-4 demonstrates that Thai women respondents indeed benefit to some extent from the egalitarian ideology of their Icelandic host society, in that men are more willing to help them with traditionally feminine household chores. Thai women have also benefited in that this same “egalitarian” environment of Iceland has not led to Thai women sharing or taking over the burden of traditionally masculine chores, particularly in the case of women married to Icelandic husbands. Respondents reported 83.3 percent of Icelandic husbands having sole responsibility for fixing the car themselves, compared to 61 and 66.7 percent, respectively, of the other two auspices. The highest percentage of wives’ being solely responsible for a traditionally masculine chore is still low at 14.3

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95 It may be, of course, that the men do not want help from their wives in paying bills because they see it as their area of control or dominance in the marriage.
percent (Bill-paying)\textsuperscript{96}, for those who came to Iceland under the auspices of a co-ethnic Thai spouse or family member. Survey respondents had no responsibility for maintaining the house, and above all the car, with zero wives reporting that they had responsibility for the latter and a minority reporting sharing the tasks of house and car maintenance with their husbands. Thai-family sponsored wives reported “Others,” such as mechanics, as most responsible for car repair.

Qualitative interviews with employer-sponsored women revealed, in general, that those women were most likely to have been continuously employed throughout their stay in Iceland due to complete reliance on their employer to stay in the country, compared with women who migrated as dependents of spouses or family. A woman who migrates under the sponsorship of an employer is almost guaranteed to be working full-time, if not overtime, right away—and even if she ended up meeting someone and getting married after living for some time in Iceland, she would have already established a pattern of working and having less time to do household chores than a stay-at-home-wife might have done from the beginning (Kitcharoen 2007). In the latter case, common among women who migrated for family formation or reunification, several women told me that while their husbands welcomed them to their new homes there would be weeks and months at first when the women could not find a suitable job outside the home—they became housewives and did all of the traditionally feminine chores while their husbands

\textsuperscript{96} This number makes little sense when viewed in the cultural context that Thai women tend to be in charge of paying bills and managing the household economy even if they are not the primary breadwinners in the family (Esara 2004, Phananiramai 1996, Muecke 1984)—perhaps due to living in a foreign country where navigating banks and credit card statements might be more of a struggle, or simply because their husbands would prefer to control the bank accounts, Thai women are less involved in paying bills.
were working, and many continued to take on the “second shift” even after they became employed full-time.

Indeed, while many Thai women migrate internationally via marriage to a *farang* (foreign white man), often explicitly to get away from restrictive gender role expectations in their home culture, the same women may want to find a man who will fulfill her own gendered expectations of household labor and “responsibility” that men in Thailand might not have done (Esara 2009). This might include a husband being a sole breadwinner and also being responsible for traditionally masculine chores.

In my fieldwork I regularly encountered women who were glad to have partners who helped so much with “women’s” chores. A few, though, expressed a desire for their husbands to earn a higher income and have nicer material possessions, even if it meant he was not at home as much to help with childcare and taking care of chores. It should be said that these individuals were rare and generally limited to those who had arrived recently in the country, disappointed that their husbands were not as rich as they had hoped or imagined.

**How do auspices of migration affect divisions of labor in Thai-Icelandic households?**

*Traditionally Feminine Chores*

I hypothesized that women who came to Iceland under the auspices of Icelandic-spouse sponsorship would have less sex-segregated division of labor in their households compared to women who migrated by other means, and also that women who migrated to join Thai family members or spouses would have more traditional, sex-segregated divisions of labor in their households.
First we examine the bivariate logistic regression results (odds-ratios) on the left side of Table 6-5 below. These are the results of regressing a dichotomous categorical variable for each traditionally feminine chore on individual predictor variables in order to determine whether a chore might be done by someone other than the wife acting alone. The purpose of this is to assess how non-traditional the division of labor might be in each household\(^7\).

One observation is that across the board of five chores in Table 6-5 and in contradiction with the hypothesis above, migrants who came to Iceland under the auspices of Thai family sponsorship have much in common with those who were sponsored by an Icelandic spouse. The odds-ratios for Thai family are quite similar to those of the Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants. In other words, the odds of a Thai woman not being solely responsible for all five “feminine” chores is about the same for any family-reunification migrant, regardless of whether she migrated to be with an Icelandic or Thai person.

However, for those migrants who arrived under the auspices of an employer in Iceland, the odds of the woman not being solely responsible for the feminine chores (in other words, that her household is more likely to be egalitarian, with husbands either participating or being responsible for “women’s work”) is two to five times more likely than for those who came as marriage migrants. The odds-ratio is even significant \((p < .05)\) for one chore—cooking, where employer-sponsored women are 5.91 times more likely to not be entirely responsible for preparing meals. When we examine the auspices

\(^7\) Table 6-6 will examine the same concept of non-traditionality by analyzing the number of masculine chores taken care of by women.
Table 6-5: Regressions of Participation in Traditionally Feminine Chores on Selected Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migration Sponsorship:</th>
<th>Cooking</th>
<th>Dishes</th>
<th>Cleaning</th>
<th>Groceries</th>
<th>Laundry</th>
<th>Bivariate</th>
<th>Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Spouse (reference)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Family/Spouse</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer in Iceland</td>
<td>5.91*</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>25.77*</td>
<td>23.34*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family/Residence:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married (vs. cohabiting)</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>-8.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>-2.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Iceland</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-9.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in Reykjavik</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-2.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed (formal)</td>
<td>4.50*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>29.56**</td>
<td>27.93*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side job (informal)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>4.84*</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Hours:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero (not working at all)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work (&lt;35 hours/week)</td>
<td>7.43*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>29.74*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>28.66*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icelandic influence:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total years lived in Iceland</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.92+</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks Icelandic well</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>3.73*</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has at least one Icelandic friend</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>-5.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Citizen</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-3.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Age</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.14*</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Farmers</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>-3.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Was/Is Employed</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>3.94+</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Buddhist Association</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>3.74+</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>14.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Observations: 75 75 75 73 75 63

+ p<.10, *p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001
“N/A” denotes the presence of cells with a value of zero
of migration as a whole we see that the relationship between the variable itself and the chore of cooking remains significant at the \( p < .10 \) level. This finding is intriguing because cooking is one of the most demanding and time-inflexible of all household chores, and the fact that the burden of this chore falls less on employer-sponsored women than on other migrants speaks to the empowerment that a woman might gain from not being dependent on a spouse or family member for migration status.

Other relationships between chores and independent variables of interest are that women who speak Icelandic well have husbands who are 3.73 times more likely to not leave the chores of dishes entirely to his wife \( (p < .05) \); that employment generally improves the odds that a woman won’t have to do all of the “women’s work,” with the exception of grocery-shopping; and that both the migrant’s mother’s participation in the labor force and the migrant’s membership in the Thai Buddhist Association in Iceland triple odds that she will not be solely responsible for certain chores (laundry and cleaning, respectively).

Regarding the percentage of traditionally feminine chores in which men participate, whether as fully responsible or sharing responsibility with a wife, we next examine the column of bivariate regression coefficients. Once again, while the dummy-coded auspices of migration may not have an impressive effect on the outcome, employer-sponsored migrants report their husbands participating in 25 percent more traditionally-feminine chores compared to Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants (significant at \( p < .05 \)). Other bivariate items of significance include, not surprisingly, formal employment—that is, women who participate in the formal labor market report their husbands participating in nearly 30 percent more traditionally-feminine chores at
home compared to those who are not working in the labor market \( (p < .01) \). This relationship is almost identical to the one between the dummy-coded variable for work hours (unemployed, part-time, and full-time work) and the same dependent variable, with again women who work in any capacity reporting nearly 30 percent more chores being done by their husbands compared to those who do not work, and no apparent advantage in chore-completion for those who work full-time vs. part-time.

In the multivariate “Best Predictors” column of Table 6-5 I include just two of the variables that were significant in the bivariate regressions—the auspices of migration and formal employment. I do not include the dummy-coded variable for Work Hours because it is highly correlated with the dichotomous variable for formal employment. The results are similar to those of the bivariate regressions, again with employer-sponsored and work-force participating women reporting over 20 percent more feminine-chore participation from men at home. While having assistance with one or two chores (20 percent of five chores total) may not seem like much of an improvement over zero chores, it must be considered that due to cultural norms alone many of these women may not have even considered asking a co-ethnic husband at home in Thailand to help with household tasks, even if the woman herself was working full- or part-time and came home to the “second shift.”

**Traditionally Masculine Chores**

Our attention turns now to the analyses of traditionally masculine chores in Table 6-6: bill paying, car repair, and house repair being the only “masculine” chores in the analyses. At first glance we see that while none of the parameter estimates are
### Table 6-6: Regressions of Participation in Traditionally Masculine Chores on Selected Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migration Sponsorship:</th>
<th>Bivariate Odds-Ratios of Traditionally Masculine Chores in Which Women Participate (Dichotomous Outcome)</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients of Traditionally Masculine Chores In Which Women Participate (% Outcome)</th>
<th>Bivariates Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Spouse (reference)</td>
<td>--  --  --</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Family/Spouse</td>
<td>1.04  2.67  1.35</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer in Iceland</td>
<td>3.34  2.50  1.30</td>
<td>13.27+</td>
<td>12.89+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family/Residence:</th>
<th>Bill Paying</th>
<th>Car Repair</th>
<th>House Repair</th>
<th>Bivariates</th>
<th>Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married (vs. cohabiting)</td>
<td>2.50 .33+ 3.80</td>
<td>-13.07+ -11.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>1.18 1.35 .91</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Icelandic Schools</td>
<td>3.33* 1.38 3.00</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in Reykjavik</td>
<td>1.08 1.37 2.65+</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment:</th>
<th>Bill Paying</th>
<th>Car Repair</th>
<th>House Repair</th>
<th>Bivariates</th>
<th>Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed (formal)</td>
<td>2.21 .66 .52</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side job (informal)</td>
<td>1.72 1.47 1.55</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Hours:</th>
<th>Bill Paying</th>
<th>Car Repair</th>
<th>House Repair</th>
<th>Bivariates</th>
<th>Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero (reference)</td>
<td>--  --  --</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work (&lt;35 hours/week)</td>
<td>1.50 .54 .58</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>2.33 1.15 .88</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icelandic influence:</th>
<th>Bill Paying</th>
<th>Car Repair</th>
<th>House Repair</th>
<th>Bivariates</th>
<th>Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total years lived in Iceland</td>
<td>1.00 1.03 1.05</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks Icelandic well</td>
<td>3.45* 1.00 1.11</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has at least one Icelandic friend</td>
<td>.52 .55 .25+</td>
<td>-12.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Citizen</td>
<td>2.88* 1.87 1.61</td>
<td>11.46* 9.69+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Bill Paying</th>
<th>Car Repair</th>
<th>House Repair</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Age</td>
<td>.94* 1.01 1.02</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>1.08 .98 .99</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Farmers</td>
<td>1.89 1.53 .95</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Was/Is Employed</td>
<td>3.04* 1.22 .97</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Buddhist Association</td>
<td>.76 .91 4.83</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>75 74 73</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ p<.10,  *p<.05,  **p<.01,  ***p<.001
significant, there is weak evidence that women sponsored by employers (and to a lesser
degree Thai family) are more likely to participate in traditionally masculine chores than
women who were sponsored by Icelandic spouses. This is especially the case in the
example of bill-paying (OR = 3.34), suggesting that women who came to Iceland without
depending on an Icelandic husband for their sponsorship are more involved with
household finances when sharing duties with a spouse.

Also, of all the bivariate logistic regression odds-ratios on the left side of Table 6-
6, the results suggest that only bill-paying is significant ($p < .05$) in the relationship
between several independent variables and the dichotomous outcome variable. These
independent variables include children in Icelandic schools (OR = 3.33), speaking
Icelandic well (OR = 3.45), Icelandic citizenship (OR = 2.88), current age (OR = .94),
and mother’s employment (OR = 3.04). All but one of these significant odds-ratios are
greater than one, denoting that the odds of a woman participating in masculine chores are
two to three times greater in the case of four predictors.

In terms of the auspices of migration, it appears that the chore of car maintenance
faces the greatest change in odds though lacking significance, with movement from the
reference category, Icelandic-spouse sponsorship, to the other categories. The odds are
over two-and-a-half times greater for both Thai-family sponsored and employer-
sponsored women to report that they participate in car repair. Women who married
Icelandic husbands to migrate are least likely to participate in car maintenance, preferring
to leave this job almost entirely to their husbands or someone else (e.g. a mechanic).
Indeed, if we look back to Table 6-1 we see that no women report having sole
responsibility for car repair (the lowest value across the board of both feminine and
masculine chores), and just 18.2 percent of women report sharing this chore with their husbands. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents report their husbands being solely responsible for car repair, by far the highest percentage of husband-responsibility on any one chore feminine or masculine. It almost seems as if car maintenance is completely and truly “man’s work,” something that a Thai woman would prefer to not help out with at all. This is the case even if her husband might be doing more than his share of the “women’s work” in the household.

The unstandardized coefficients of bivariate and multivariate regression on the right side of Table 6-6 tells us that when predicting a percentage of traditionally masculine chores in which women participate, women who were sponsored by an employer do 13 percent more masculine chores than those who were sponsored by an Icelandic spouse ($p < .10$). Women who are Icelandic citizens participate in nearly ten percent more masculine chores compared to those who are not citizens ($p < .10$).

Additionally, if the woman reported having children in Iceland (OR = 3.33)$^{98}$, speaking Icelandic well (OR = 3.45), being an Icelandic citizen (OR = 2.88), or if her mother was employed in Thailand (OR = 3.04), then the odds of the woman participating in taking care of the bills increases by a factor of two to three. The first three of these independent variables are markers of the respondent’s involvement and comfort with Icelandic society and the fourth, mother’s employment, serves as a model of engagement with household finances (mother’s employment). The odds of having his wife participate in bill-paying decrease just slightly (OR = .94) with each increase of his wife’s age by

---

$^{98}$ 70 out of 98 respondents (71.4 percent) reported having children in Iceland, and 41 of those 70 respondents (58.6 percent of all with children) reported working full-time jobs. An additional 17 reported working part-time jobs, bringing the total percent of women with children in Iceland who work at least part-time up to 82.9 percent.
one year—however, while this value is significant ($p < .05$), it is too small of an effect to discuss in-depth.

**Summary of Division of Labor**

While Icelandic society may encourage a high degree of egalitarianism and chore-sharing in the household overall, the data do not support my first two hypotheses. Instead, the data provide weak support that women’s method of migration does affect the outcomes of traditional vs. progressive chore responsibility but not in the expected direction. Employer-sponsored women, albeit a very small group in this study ($N = 9$), as well as women who are currently employed on the labor market, are most likely to have a reduced burden of traditionally feminine chores. Those who came as dependents of a non-economic entity (spouse or family, regardless of the ethnicity of the sponsor) and who may have no income themselves end up with slightly more traditional divisions of “women’s work” in the household. The data do not indicate, however, that women who migrated as dependents of a male Icelandic spouse are constrained to doing all of the housework the majority of the time, as they might have been expected to do at home in Thailand (Esara 2004, Coyle and Kwong 2000).

**How do the auspices of migration affect decision-sharing in the household?**

In addition to the specific divisions of labor in Thai migrant households, I hypothesized that women who married an Icelander to migrate would share more decisions with their husbands compared to those who migrated via other means. In a similar manner to Table 6-5’s chore responsibility frequency, Table 6.7 presents cross-
tabulated data between the auspices of migration and 11 of the 14 total possible decision-making categories. As mentioned earlier, 11 decisions are included in the table for descriptive purposes but only seven are used to calculate the dependent variable index for the regression analyses to follow.

The frequencies in Table 6-7 do not contain as much variation between auspices and the division of household decision-making, compared with the division of labor. Overall, women with Icelandic husbands as migration sponsors reported the highest number of decisions for which their husbands were completely responsible. Even then, however, the panel with the highest percentage of husband-controlled decisions was that of large purchases (Panel C) at just over one-third. This is still not as high as the percentage of Icelandic-spouse couples sharing large-purchase decisions (57.1 percent), though it is noticeably higher than that of Icelandic-spouse sponsored women being completely in charge of large-purchase decisions (only 7.1 percent). The latter is clearly the lowest percentage of women’s sole decision-making authority across all decisions and auspices, indicating a slight shift in the locus of authority when it comes to controlling large sums of money in Icelandic-Thai households.
Table 6-7: Frequencies of household decision-making power by migration auspices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total 1 (N=73)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse 2 (N=41)</th>
<th>Thai Family 3 (N=23)</th>
<th>Employer 4 (N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel A: Trips to Thailand</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel B: Remitting to Thailand</strong></td>
<td>(N=73)</td>
<td>(N=41)</td>
<td>(N=23)</td>
<td>(N=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel C: Large Purchases</strong></td>
<td>(N=71)</td>
<td>(N=41)</td>
<td>(N=22)</td>
<td>(N=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel D: Personal Spending</strong></td>
<td>(N=75)</td>
<td>(N=43)</td>
<td>(N=23)</td>
<td>(N=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel E: Work Outside Home</strong></td>
<td>(N=66)</td>
<td>(N=39)</td>
<td>(N=20)</td>
<td>(N=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel F: Receiving Guests</strong></td>
<td>(N=69)</td>
<td>(N=40)</td>
<td>(N=21)</td>
<td>(N=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

99 Bolded items appear in the regression analyses in Table 6.8.
### Panel G: Time with Thais (N=59) (N=31) (N=21) (N=4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Percent (N=59)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse Percent (N=31)</th>
<th>Thai Family Percent (N=21)</th>
<th>Employer Percent (N=4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Panel H: Having Children (N=62) (N=36) (N=20) (N=6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Percent (N=62)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse Percent (N=36)</th>
<th>Thai Family Percent (N=20)</th>
<th>Employer Percent (N=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Panel I: Helping Family (N=65) (N=37) (N=21) (N=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Percent (N=65)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse Percent (N=37)</th>
<th>Thai Family Percent (N=21)</th>
<th>Employer Percent (N=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Panel J: Language at Home (N=58) (N=31) (N=21) (N=6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Percent (N=58)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse Percent (N=31)</th>
<th>Thai Family Percent (N=21)</th>
<th>Employer Percent (N=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Panel K: Medical Visits (N=70) (N=39) (N=22) (N=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Percent (N=70)</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse Percent (N=39)</th>
<th>Thai Family Percent (N=22)</th>
<th>Employer Percent (N=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following the same structure as the earlier two tables on divisions of labor, Table 6-8 lays out the results for the analyses of household decision-making authority. First we see the odds-ratios for the bivariate regressions of individual decision-making categories (seven in all) on each of the independent variables. Outcomes in this section are dichotomized, as before, except that the outcome is coded “0” for households reporting no sharing of decisions while those who do share decisions receive a “1.” Again, categories are collapsed from four categories down to two to better reflect the gist of the research question, which seeks the degree of egalitarianism across different realms of decision-making rather than how many decisions a wife or husband is making independent of her or his spouse.

Due to a dearth of significant parameter estimates, we must look to the bottom of the table at the group of background variables. With each year of increase in the respondent’s age, she is slightly less likely to share decisions with her husband. Cross-tabulating age and the four original options for each decision (respondent, spouse, both, and others) reveals that generally, as the age of respondents increases, the women report making more decisions for themselves and not sharing decisions with husbands. Again, these odds-ratios are small (ranging from .92-.93)

---

100 These cross-tabulations are not included here in order to preserve space.
### Table 6-8: Regression Values of Shared Authority in Household Decision-Making on Selected Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migration Sponsorship:</th>
<th>Trips Home</th>
<th>Remit Home</th>
<th>Large Expense</th>
<th>Personal Expense</th>
<th>Work Outside Home</th>
<th>Having Guests</th>
<th>Medical Visits</th>
<th>Bivariates</th>
<th>Best Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Spouse (reference)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Family/Spouse</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>-.58</td>
<td>-.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer in Iceland</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>12.51</td>
<td>12.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family/Residence:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.62+</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Iceland</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in Reykjavik</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed (formal)</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side job (informal)</td>
<td>.37+</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>-2.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Hours:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero (reference)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work (&lt;35 hours/week)</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic influence:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total years lived in Iceland</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.86*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>- .43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks Icelandic well</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has at least one Icelandic friend</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic Citizen</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.37+</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>-2.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Age</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.92**</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>-1.03**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Farmers</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Was/Is Employed</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>-.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Buddhist Association</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.31+</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>-25.07**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ p<.10,  *p<.05,  ** p<.01,  *** p<.001
but all are significant at the \( p < .05 \) and even \( p < .01 \) level and remain significant when we enter the variable of age into the OLS regressions. It may be assumed that since the average age of arrival for Thai women in Iceland is 28.7 years (standard deviation = 7.7), relatively young by Thai standards, that as a woman dwells for longer periods of time in Iceland and becomes more integrated into Icelandic society, she may become more confident in making decisions on her own rather than in conjunction with her partner. Age also confers its own status in Thai culture, providing women with a source of confidence and authority in their own ethnic community (Muecke 1984) that I witnessed in several “elder-honoring” ceremonies at various Thai festivals.

It is important to remember that a seeming lack of egalitarianism, represented here by shared decision-making, does not necessarily point to a lack of women’s empowerment in the household. It may in fact reveal that Thai women migrants are independent within their own marriages, to the point where they consult very little with their husbands when it comes to making decisions. This would apply especially to co-ethnic husbands, whom the women themselves may have sponsored to come to Iceland rather than the other way around.

What is perhaps the most intriguing odds-ratio of the group, which also carries over into the OLS regressions on the far right side of Table 6-8, is the role of the respondent’s membership in the Buddhist Association of Iceland (Búddistafélagið á Íslandi). In the last row of the table it is clear that women who report being members of the Buddhist Association are less likely to share any of the seven decisions with their husbands than women who are not members of the Association. These odds-ratios reveal a large, significant effect \( (p < .05) \) for both the decisions to remit \( (\text{OR} = .25) \) and to visit a
doctor or dentist (OR = .22). Both odds-ratios demonstrate that Buddhist-Association members are nearly four times less likely to share these two decisions with their husbands, compared with non-members. Initially we might wonder whether card-carrying Buddhists in Iceland who adhere so strongly to their religious and cultural backgrounds are more likely to allow their husbands to dominate decision-making in the household. Upon closer examination of the data using cross-tabulations, however, we see that in fact Buddhist Association members are not giving much power to their husbands—Thai or Icelandic—at all. Rather, they are reserving more of a right to make decisions on their own, especially when it comes to remittances and medical visits.

When we move to the right side of Table 6.8, to the OLS regressions with percentages of decisions shared as the outcome variable, we see that for every increase in year of age there is a significant ($p < .01$) effect of decreasing decision-sharing by 1 percent. Additionally, with membership in the Thai Buddhist Association there is a significant decrease of over 25 percent in shared decisions for members, remaining at over 21 percent in the multivariate best predictors model. To be clear, Thai wives who are members of the Buddhist Association of Thailand report sharing at least 20 percent fewer decisions with their husbands than those who are not members even when controlling for age and auspice of migration.

Ethnographically, this relationship between Buddhist membership and decreased egalitarianism, so to speak, can be interpreted in light of the fact that attending the Buddhist temple, or even just donating money to the Association and attending festivals held by the temple, brings Thai women into a well-established migrant community. Some of the most frank and advice-giving discussions I heard between Thai women
during my time in Iceland took place within the walls of the Thai Buddhist temple. Women confessed to fears of being reported to the Icelandic child protective services if they used corporal punishment on their children; women worried that their husbands drank too much, or that the husbands worked too hard to be home enough with the family; women didn’t know how to get a visa for their relative to visit Iceland or how to send money home; women listened to and consoled one another while sitting modestly on the carpeted floor of the temple, bouncing babies on their knees and gossiping. Keeping in mind the strength of this religious and cultural community, perhaps it makes sense that women who participate actively in the Buddhist Association have the social resources to discuss and reach their own conclusions about household matters, assisted by their peers and co-ethnic friends rather than their husbands with whom they may not be able to communicate clearly\textsuperscript{101}.

To be sure, my participant-observation rarely showed that women avoided discussing things with their husbands because they were afraid of being overpowered or abused—rather, it seemed quite clear that the husbands were somewhat irrelevant in comparison with the more robust fellowship that each woman shared with her Thai migrant sisters in Iceland. It seemed that often the women talked with their husbands \textit{after} coming to a conclusion with their peers, not before—and that in the majority of the cases, Icelandic husbands in particular were just sitting in the back of the temple or Thai festivals (if they attended), sometimes smiling and walking next to their wives but never

\textsuperscript{101} Women who were married to other Thai men did not seem to go to the temple with their husbands; in general, the population of Thais going to temple on a regular basis appeared to be dominated by women. Occasionally an Icelandic husband would go to temple with his wife but did not seem to understand a great deal of what was going on, particularly the more gossip-laden conversations. Few Thai couples attended together, in my observation.
fully understanding her world and the conversations she shared with her co-ethnic friends and relatives.

The data and ethnographic evidence provide little grounding for my fourth and final hypothesis, which posited that women migrating under the auspices of marriage to an Icelandic husband would share more decisions with their spouse than those who came by other means. My initial assumption was that Icelandic men, by sheer virtue of having been raised in a far more egalitarian culture and society than the Thai women had been, would end up sharing more household decisions with their wives. The data show that in fact, it is women who report being in charge of the majority of household decisions, with some sharing more decisions than others (notably, those who were sponsored by employers shared the most) but the majority making decisions mostly on their own. It is intriguing that Thai women in Iceland report themselves as having just as much authority in the household as their husbands, if not more.

Qualitatively, there were several open-ended survey questions that provide a more in-depth glimpse of Thai migrant’s perceptions of household authority. After the series of questions about gender roles, one question asked, “If there is anything in your life that you could change, what would it be?” Out of the 98 who were asked the question, 57 responded and nearly one-third of them (18) expressed contentment with their lives—that is, that given the chance to change something, they wouldn’t want to change anything at all. About a quarter answered that generally they were satisfied with their personal lives in Iceland but that they wished for more money (26.3 percent),

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102 The non-response for this question was quite high, as it was for many of the “write-in” questions—as I discussed earlier in Chapter 5, this may be due to the fact that many women did not feel confident enough in their Thai writing ability to attempt to answer a long, written-out survey question.
usually in combination with wanting to start their own business or continue their education (10 percent), buy a house in Thailand (3.5 percent) or to move back to Thailand entirely (12.3 percent).

A handful of respondents to the open-ended question did express regrets over having gotten married to Icelandic men at all and wished they could get a divorce or otherwise be single. Two respondents voiced frustrations with their husband, though they did not mention regretting marriage as a whole—one simply said, “I wish that my husband would stop smoking and not drink so much,” a complaint that I heard now and then during participant-observation. Most of the time, however, Thai women praised their Icelandic husbands for not being alcoholics or womanizers (*jao choo*) as their boyfriends or former husbands in Thailand had been, and voiced satisfaction with how much their Icelandic husbands respected them as wives.

Directly contradicting a perhaps feminist assumption that women generally would rather share more decision-making authority with their husbands, two respondents stated that they actually did not want to have so much power in the household with regard to their Icelandic husbands and families. One woman said, “I want my husband to be the head of the household,” implying that she made too many of the decisions and that her husband was not enough of a “leader,” perhaps economically as well as in terms of domestic authority. Another respondent stated, “I want to stop saying ‘mamma ræður’ [‘Mom decides’] to my child and husband all the time,” distinctly writing out the Icelandic phrase in the survey to emphasize that it was a foreign idea to her. These women were in the minority, however—most women that I came into contact with were
either content with their domestic power situations or wanted more influence than they presently had with their spouses, not less.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The first questions for this chapter were primarily descriptive, focusing on the division of labor and distribution of decision-making authority for Thai migrants in Iceland. The division of labor in Thai migrant’ households in Iceland depends to some extent on whether they were sponsored by a spouse or family member, Icelandic or otherwise, versus being sponsored by an employer. This finding does not support the hypothesis that Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants would have less sex-segregated divisions of labor. In fact, households were more egalitarian or “progressive” in terms of women doing fewer traditionally-feminine chores and men doing fewer traditionally-masculine chores if the wife was initially sponsored by an employer, indicating that sex-segregation of labor is related to the auspices of migration but not in the manner anticipated. The explanation may be as simple as the fact that dual-career households simply must share the housework more equally unless domestic help is available, and the fact that childcare is affordable enough in Iceland that a “stay-at-home” parent is not often necessary in order to save money on daycare.

103 The sample size for this group was very small (N=9), making it admittedly difficult to come to any reliable conclusions based on statistical analyses alone. However, during my time conducting workplace surveys for the University of Iceland with Thai women in several factories, I did have the chance to talk informally with many women who had been sponsored by employers and were not dependent on husbands to remain in Iceland. Several mentioned that they had obtained Icelandic citizenship “on their own” and that while many had Icelandic boyfriends or fiancés, they felt less pressure to get married because doing so wasn’t necessary for them to stay in the country.
Evaluating the hypothesis on decision-making authority, which asserted that again women who came under the auspices of marriage to an Icelander would have more egalitarian sharing of household decision-making than those who came by other means, the data revealed that women across categories share much of the decision-making authority in their households. Specifically, it is again the employer-sponsored women who share the highest percentage of decisions and therefore have the most “egalitarian” households by this measure. Other households actually seem to be slightly less egalitarian in the sense of sharing, but not in terms of male dominance; the decision-making area where men had the most unilateral control was that of large purchases, where husbands had sole authority in 29.6 percent of households. In every other decision, women under all auspices reported having more decision-making authority than the men alone—as always, we must consider the inherent bias of a one-sided survey that did not ask the men for their own opinions. In any case, the wives did not seem to be reporting themselves as victims in any way, nor did they want to be seen that way by an outside researcher like myself.

Stories of abused immigrant wives abound in popular media representations of marriages between Western men and non-Western women, and such situations certainly do exist for some Thai women in Iceland as I described in Chapter 2. Ethnographic and survey data among this population show, however, that while the wives of Icelandic men have less egalitarian divisions of labor than migrants who were sponsored by an employer, such inequality in the home is tolerable and maybe even expected, given the respondents’ cultural backgrounds.
The majority of respondents in this study seemed mostly content with the divisions of labor and distribution of household decision-making authority, and do not live in fear of abuse or exploitation from their partners. Most report being able to exercise their own will and decision-making skills with regards to how they spend their time and financial resources; this observation from mere frequencies and regressions alone substantiates my informal interviews and participant-observation throughout the study period, though of course one should argue that the most vulnerable population would not have been visible or able to participate in research if they were truly controlled by their husbands and not allowed to leave the home or interact with “strangers.” This is a recognized weakness of the study. The only glimpse available into this hidden population was described in Chapter 2, indicating that there are a number of women from Asia who are victims of serial abusers due to having few other options for immigration to Iceland.

**Policy Implications**

The results of this study suggest that while there is not anything particularly oppressive about the average cross-border marriage in Iceland, there is more to be gained on the women’s part from being sponsored by an employer rather than by a family member or spouse of any ethnicity. As I described earlier in Chapter 2, Iceland

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104 One woman confided that she had been married to a man who would not allow her to leave the house, or to work, or to do anything for herself; she stayed with him for the minimum number of years required to obtain the permanent resident permit, and then she divorced him. She remained single ever since, bringing both of her children from Thailand eventually and obtaining jobs for them once they reached working age. The woman had her own business on the side of her formal work and spoke English and Icelandic rather well, in addition to several dialects of Thai. She did not plan to marry again.

105 More specific countries of origin were not available.
essentially stopped issuing work permits to non-European Economic Area citizens and obligated women from Thailand and other non-European countries to look increasingly to marriage as a way to enter Iceland legally. By association, marriage connotes dependency on an individual rather than on an employer for one’s migration status.

In contrast, employer sponsorship provides more empowerment to women in their own households if they decide to partner with someone at all\textsuperscript{106}—a choice that remains relatively free to them if their employer continues to sponsor them. Employment for Thai migrant women, both from the beginning of their stay and later on during their tenure in Iceland, also plays an important role in establishing a more egalitarian division of labor and sharing of household decision-making authority in the long run. The Icelandic state would benefit from allowing potential Thai migrants to arrive under the auspices of an employer rather than by exploiting a personal connection, with a possible route to permanent residency and citizenship all via the employer rather than through marriage. Fewer resources would need to be deployed to “check in” on marriage-related migrants, and women struggling with or being abused in severely unbalanced marriages would require fewer social services. Such a step would help insure that migrant women have their own economic resources and be able to choose a spouse at their own pace and leisure, if so desired, while also being better-positioned to negotiate their preferred distribution of labor and patterns of decision-making.

\textsuperscript{106} It may be that women who are sponsored by employers are, by the very nature of their migration method and lack of dependence on a relational sponsor, already “empowered” to some extent before they even arrive in Iceland. This is something that we cannot know due to the limitations of the data, but would be a worthy line of inquiry in future research on the auspices of migration.
Chapter 7

Reciprocity as a Reflection of Integration

“Water of the Heart”

Standing at the disassembly line in the fish factory, the Thai woman at the work station next to mine reached for two more decapitated fish from the never-ending pile of haddock crawling past on our assigned conveyor belt. Grasping their tails with a latex-gloved hand, she tossed one onto my cutting board while dropping the other on her own before reaching under the counter to warm her chilled hands—she had filled a spare latex glove with warm water during our last coffee break and stored it carefully under her work area so she wouldn’t get in trouble. It was in the best interest of the company that our hands remained cold while handling the fish, since any extra warmth would cause the fish to decay more quickly on its journey from the north Atlantic, through our hands and into styrofoam packed with ice, and finally into cargo planes that delivered the goods to supermarkets in the UK, Spain, and New England.

My neighbor caught my eye and nodded at the warm water “balloon,” glancing around for the supervisor before offering it to me. I accepted gratefully, as I’d only been working a few days at the factory and hadn’t adjusted to the constant chill of the cutting floor and the near-freezing temperature of the fish. Coffee and lunch breaks were just fifteen minutes long and several hours apart, barely enough time to revive our hands before plunging back into the cold flesh of cod and haddock.

Our fingers temporarily warmed, we continued to work with our long, slender fillet knives to remove the translucent bones and larger bloodworms from the fish. The woman had been telling me a story about how difficult it was to talk with her Icelandic
husband at times, and how she often grew frustrated at his insistence that their household be divided into items or consumables that were either “his” and “hers.” For example, she told me that once she had tried to share her husband’s ice cream one evening, but that he became irritated and told her that she should get her own—that it was “his” ice cream, even when she tried to defend herself by saying that they were married and should at least be able to share a bowl of ice cream!

My neighbor laughed off the ice-cream story but continued to talk about other items her husband had been possessive about, such as other food items or even blankets on the bed—and that there was always a clear line of what belonged to whom, an idea that bothered her. She stated that in general, she had observed Icelanders not having much of what Thais called *naam jai*, or “water of the heart” (generally meaning a person’s perceived generosity to others), and that even when she wanted to bring food to her in-laws’ house she would have to call them first and schedule an appointment, rather than just drop by spontaneously as she would have done comfortably with other Thai people.

Another Thai woman on the disassembly line joined our conversation at this point, stating that she didn’t understand why Icelanders disliked it when Thai people sent so much money home to their families in Thailand. The second woman stated that her husband didn’t understand the notion of *buun kuun*, or reciprocity for a favor already done, and that Icelanders just weren’t as aware of the needs of other people as Thai people were. She described how her own children, born and raised in Iceland and both in their mid-teens, were “closed people, like Icelanders… not open like Thais,” and that she didn’t like how much they valued their own privacy so much.
At the same time, the second woman mentioned that she avoided going to the Thai Buddhist temple in Reykjavík very often (as in, once every few years) because she disliked how much the “regulars” there would gossip about everyone else, and that they were always trying to figure out who was up to what with whom, how much money everyone in the community had, and what was being done with that money. It seemed that the openness of the Thai community that the women in the factory spoke so highly of contrasted sharply with what they saw as “oversharing” or gossiping, causing them not to want to attend the temple or be overly involved with the Thai community beyond a certain point—when instead they would rather spend time with their Icelandic families and refrain from gossip and over-involvement in each other’s lives. During an interview completed during my pilot study among Thai migrants in Iceland (2005), one woman summed up her frustrations in a few sentences:

There are three things about Thai people that cannot be thrown away, no matter where they live in the world. One is gossiping, especially about money and status. Second is gambling. And third is fighting with each other, especially due to gossip.

In a separate interview but in response to the same question, another woman confirmed what the first woman said, adding that the gossip behaviors of Thai women changed between Thailand and Iceland—instead of talking about one’s husband’s money, as they would in Thailand, in Iceland they discussed how much money each individual woman had:

If someone has a problem with her boyfriend, her husband, she wants someone to listen to her talk about it. But then the person she told starts to talk with everyone else about it, and it’s not the other people’s business. People who don’t even know the original person! In Thailand, people talk about how that person has a rich husband, that person has a poor husband. But here, they don’t talk about that...
since the husbands are all Icelandic [and therefore roughly the same status]. Now they talk about which immigrants have money, and who doesn’t have money.

Ethnographically, it became clear that Thai migrants faced different consequences depending on who they asked for help. If a migrant asked a fellow Thai person for help, the friend might help her at first and then gossip to others about that woman’s lack of resources or her marital problems. This might lead the woman, in turn, to isolate herself from her co-ethnic migrants in the future. It might also encourage her to seek help from Icelandic contacts. On the other hand, if a woman feels comfortable enough to ask an Icelandic friend or extended family member for help, the Icelander might find her request awkward for cultural reasons, declining to help in any way. Ironically, this removes an incentive from the migrant to integrate more fully with her host society.

Obviously, not every migrant encounters only one type of these reactions; the vast majority of those that I met experienced positive receptions from both Thais and Icelanders, even more so when interactions involved children. Some, however, find it much easier to reciprocate and make friends across ethnic boundaries while others live in Iceland for decades and still struggle to expand their social networks to include Icelanders.

**Introduction**

In recent years, social scientists studying reciprocity have explored differences between minority and majority populations in Western countries, testing a common perception that Westerners are more “individualistic” while non-Westerners or even minorities in Western societies are more “collectivist” or family/community-oriented
These studies focus mostly on intergenerational exchange, comparing levels of reciprocity between parents and children of minority groups to those among the majority group (Komter and Schans 2008, Lee et al. 1998, Kajitcibasi 1996), as well as on the role of felt obligations within immigrant 1.5 and 2nd generation groups (Lee et al. 2009, Miller et al. 2011). Additionally, numerous studies examine transnational giving and receiving practices, including obligations to remit between migrants and their families still in the home country (Philpott 1968, Menjivar et al. 1998, Sana and Massey 2005, Piotrowski 2006, Duany 2010).

Such studies, however, are problematic in terms of assessing a minority group’s integration with the majority or host society because they assume that each ethnic group only gives and receive within its own social boundaries (Komter and Schans 2008). Few studies, if any, have explored interethnic reciprocity between immigrant minority and majority groups or the roles of gossip and trust in help exchanges. There are certainly no studies available on the interactions between Icelanders and immigrant groups. The topic of reciprocity among Icelanders themselves is not covered well in the literature (Rice 2007).

Given the arguably central role of reciprocity in establishing and maintaining mutually dependent relationships in any society, I propose that if our goal is to assess immigrant integration, we must examine the extent to which migrants engage in reciprocal relationships with individuals who are members of the host society as compared to reciprocity within their own co-ethnic migrant group. The ability of visible minorities to overcome social and cultural distance (Alba and Nee 2003:31, Sullivan
1996) from the majority population provides significant momentum towards structural assimilation or integration (Shibutani and Kwan 1965). The central research questions concern the impact of migrant auspices, or sponsorship, on outcomes of reciprocity, followed by related questions regarding discrimination, gossip, and trust:

1) What types of help do Thai migrants exchange locally with both Thai and Icelandic family members and with Thai and Icelandic friends?

2) How are ethnic-based exchanges associated with each of the three auspices of migration?

3) How do Thai migrants’ experiences with discrimination influence their exchanges?

4) What roles do the fear of gossip play in migrants’ exchanges within their own ethnic group? If migrants express a lack of trust in Icelanders, how did this lack of trust come about and is it expressed in their exchanges with Icelanders?

This chapter is equally informed by theories related to both reciprocity and migrant assimilation, which I lay out below. I specifically examine reciprocity among Thai migrants within both their own co-ethnic community and with native Icelanders as a reflection of social isolation or integration in their host society, and include a discussion of the role of discrimination, gossip, and trust in either encouraging or discouraging closer ties between migrants and natives.
Conceptual Background

The formal study of reciprocity constitutes one of the building blocks of anthropology, stretching back to Malinowski’s ethnography of the *kula* ritual among the Trobriand Islanders (1922). Mauss (1967 [1923]) emphasizes the importance of the gift, or “total prestations” in societies both Western and non-Western. He argues that expectation of return is inextricable from the concept of gift-giving and that there are no “pure gifts” in the sense that Malinowski describes. Humans are universally obligated to give, receive, and repay in order to preserve status and “face” (see also Lévi-Strauss 1957), most extravagantly in the form of the Northwest Native American potlatch or what Mauss called the “monster child of the gift system” (1967 [1923]:41).

Ethnographically among the Thais in Iceland, there was a similar strong sense of felt obligation to “pay back” those who help you with gifts (often food) or services. Waiting too long to do so is likely to bring shame on oneself or to “lose face.” This became most evident in the planning of Thai religious and cultural festivals, where both the Buddhist temple and the Thai-Icelandic Association called on those they had helped in the past to ensure there would be enough performers and volunteers to keep the festivals on track. While the majority of the volunteers at the festival were Thai, there were always a few Icelanders, usually the same people at each event, who also pitched in to help things function smoothly. Most of the Icelanders present had to be there because they were connected in some way to a Thai person at the festival, either by marriage or a legal relationship.

Sahlins’ (1974) continuum of types of reciprocity is helpful for understanding the role that reciprocity can play in measuring immigrant integration in a host society. At
one end is the self-centered extreme of negative reciprocity, or trying to get something for nothing. I witnessed very few examples of this attitude among the Thai migrants in Iceland, most likely because migrants’ lives were so interconnected with one another that any member of such a small community would be censured for adopting such behavior.

At the other end of Sahlins’ spectrum lies generalized reciprocity, characterized by gifts or services without consideration for one’s own immediate self-interest. One setting in which generalized reciprocity could take place would be between kin and also more loosely-connected friends, as in the example of the Thai festival participants earlier. No one kept track of “hours” volunteered to keep the festival on track, but most expressed awareness of how much each person had contributed and how over time, some people “owed” more time than others.

Finally, balanced reciprocity falls between these two extremes, defined by giving and receiving with relative equivalence and expectation of a timely return. While this practice of giving and receiving was not common among migrants in Iceland, it was observed perhaps the most often in the exchange of food. At any social gathering, including coffee breaks and lunches at the factory, very few individuals chose to get a “free ride” by consuming what everyone else brought to the table on a daily basis without contributing their own culinary creations on a regular basis. I observed similar behaviors among some of the immigrant groups present at the factory, including Thai, Filipino, and Vietnamese workers. These reciprocal habits were noticeably absent among and between the Polish and Icelandic employees.

Sahlins reminds us that, in fact, the type of reciprocity often defines the social unit in itself rather than the other way around. This is true even though every relationship
carries an expectation of return in some form or another, however implicit (Moerman 1969). It is for these reasons I examine the types of exchange between both family and friends among Thai migrants in Iceland, since I observed different types of help being exchanged among Thai and to some extent Icelandic relatives of migrants during my pilot study in 2005. Reciprocal exchanges in and of themselves are capable of transforming the social unit from one where Thais and Icelanders function in wholly separate spheres to one where they overlap with each other and share resources, a portrait of social integration.

Despite the abundance of social science theory and research regarding reciprocity during the last century, outside of Sahlins there has emerged no single, authoritative definition of the term, especially in relation to the concept of exchange. And yet, if one were to go out on the street in any country and ask any random person about the proper response to being given a gift, she would most likely understand what you were asking. A common answer might be that depending on the circumstances, one “ought” to return the gesture in some form or another, at some time or another. This is a reflection of Mauss’ “spiritual mechanisms” (1967 [1923]:5) that compels us to reciprocate a gift with another gift regardless of the motives involved. We cannot know what the person on the street would actually do, in practice, but our interaction with her would at least provide an awareness of an ideology of reciprocity.

Giving and receiving is an essential component of human social interaction. It is these patterns of exchange and their normative tendencies (Gouldner 1960) that make up what Mauss called the “moral cement” of society or what Putnam refers to as social “glue” (2000). Reciprocity underpins the foundations of human relationships, including
families, communities, nations, and even the world at large. It is the nature of the reciprocity, for example between immigrant minority groups and the majority of their host society, as I argue here, that determines whether those relationships have beneficial, harmful, or neutral impacts on society as a whole.

Shibutani and Kwan (1965) posit that in addition to Gordon’s (1964) seven variables of assimilation, there must also be some measure of interaction between the majority and minority. There needs to be some assessment of how people from such different groups relate to each other across social boundaries, especially within the crucible of sharing resources in a single environment. As Alba and Nee (2003:32) state regarding Shibutani and Kwan’s conclusions, the majority and minority “are bound by mutual interdependencies” or reciprocities, one might say, by virtue of sharing space with one another. The social exchanges between Thais and Icelanders exhibit observable levels of both discrimination and trust, and by hypothesized association, levels of closeness between the groups and integration into the host society (Dinesen 2010).

Examples of the relationship between reciprocity and immigrant integration in Iceland first became apparent during the pilot study in 2005. I asked participants to tell me about who they would ask for help, if necessary. One woman stated that she only asked Thai friends in Iceland for money because if she asked her Icelandic friends, they would be “too selfish” and not give it to her. Another woman responded that if she only needed a little bit of money, first she would go to the bank and ask for a loan, saying that the bank would help her as long as she had an income. If she needed money on a regular basis for several months in a row, however, she would ask her Thai siblings living in Iceland:
People here, Icelanders, they don’t help their siblings… they’re afraid to get in trouble not like Thai people. If you are Thai and your siblings here need anything, even if you don’t have much money, you can give them five hundred or 1,000 krónur [five or ten USD, at the time]… but Icelanders won’t do it. Some people come to where I work and ask for help, a donation, and I help them…. If someone who is Thai dies here, and there is a big need for the funeral, then Thai people help each other. They give things to each other, like food, to help each other through it.

Some interviewees were more positive about their involvement with Icelanders than they were about with Thais. One woman described her isolation from most Thai people, stating that she preferred the company and assistance of Icelanders in general far more than that of her co-ethnics in Iceland: “If I need something, I ask Icelanders and not Thai people. Icelanders are very good at helping, and they have good hearts and never say no when someone asks them for help.” She did not express having experienced much discrimination from Icelanders, something that seemed to affect how much she trusted them. All of her interactions with Icelanders had been positive whereas she was more afraid of gossip taking place among Thais and therefore avoided them. Such interactions, prompted me to include survey questions and predictor variables concerning the role of discrimination and fear of gossip. The former is rooted in studies of trust and reciprocity between people of different ethnic backgrounds (Roder 2011, Bornhorst et. al. 2010, Fershtman and Gneezy 2001). The latter is a theme that has come up in other migration studies, but which deserves more attention given the normative power it exerts over migrants in a small community (Galasinska 2010).

In addressing the research questions, among the Thais in Iceland I expect the auspices of migration to have a significant effect on outcomes of reciprocity. Women who come to Iceland via marriage generally have more ties to their host society, as well
as more opportunities to learn the language and become familiar with its ways. Those who come for labor or family reunification with other Thais will have fewer ties in general to the host society outside of their workplace, affecting immigrants’ motives and abilities to integrate successfully into their host society without significant outreach effort on their own part.

More specifically I expect that Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants will be the most “integrated” in terms of having ever engaged reciprocally with Icelanders, while Thai-family sponsored migrants will have the lowest reported prevalence of interethnic exchanges. I also expect migrants with employer-based sponsorship to have a low prevalence of exchange with Icelanders due to their isolation in generally low-skill, high-migrant occupancy jobs. Generally, I argue that migrants who report a greater number of experiences with discrimination will be less likely to exchange help with Icelanders, while those who report fearing gossip among their fellow Thais will be more likely to isolate from their co-ethnics and exchange more often with Icelanders. I observed that individuals who were anxious about negative gossip among members of the Thai community in Iceland were far less likely to attend communal activities, such as attending temple or going to large-scale cultural festivals.

Finally, I expect that migrants who are generally comfortable with trusting Icelanders will be more likely to exchange with Icelanders while those who do not trust Icelanders are likely to be isolated within their own Thai reciprocity exchanges. As stated by Alba and Nee (2003:59), “Such fundamental aspects of interaction as whether one individual extends even a modicum of trust toward another person casually encountered are determined by social boundaries.” One might argue that trust is not only
determined, but also defined by social boundaries. There is a direct relationship between levels of trust and the degree to which social boundaries can be overcome as migrants approach integration or “social cohesion” (Putnam 2000) based on reciprocity with members of their host societies.

Data and Methods

Dependent Variables

Help exchange networks

In order to construct an outcome variable of reciprocity, I drew upon four survey questions concerned with respondents’ histories of help both given and received among different groups. The first question asked, “In Iceland, have you ever given help to someone (whether they asked you or not)?” If the respondent answers “Yes,” the respondent then indicates whom they have helped and what type of help they have given on the provided table. The nine types of help include:

- “Translation,”
- “Financial help,”
- “Legal help,”
- “Moving,”
- “Lending a car,”
- “Childcare,”
- “Temporary housing,”
- “Icelandic phone calls,” and
- “Other.”

The seven groups of people with whom one could exchange help include:

- “Thai family,”

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See Appendix B, “Quantitative Survey (English Version).”
• “Thai friend, ”
• “Thai temple, ”
• “Icelandic family, ”
• “Icelandic friend, ”
• “Other immigrant family, ” and
• “Other immigrant friend.”

For the logistic regression analyses I chose to only include the responses marked in the Thai family, Thai friend, Icelandic family, and Icelandic friend columns, in order to directly compare degrees of integration in the host society in comparison to isolation within one’s own ethnic group.

The third survey question repeated the first question, except that instead of asking about instances of giving, it asked about whether the respondent had “ever received help from someone (whether you asked them or not)” and presented the same nine categories of help as before. It also presents the same list of potential help-exchange groups as before but with three additional groups\(^\text{108}\). Again, as with the earlier question, in the regression analyses I chose to include only data from the categories of Thai family, Thai friend, Icelandic family, and Icelandic friend in order to maintain the focus on integration

\(^{108}\) The three additions include the consul Kjartan Borg, Alþjóðahús/Fjölmenningarsetur [immigrant resource centers], and government social services. I originally included this question on the survey due to material that emerged during the 2005 pilot study. At that time, I asked participants if they had ever asked the Intercultural Centre (an immigrant resource center funded by the city) for help—their answers were conditioned by fears of gossip, which led to the construction of another survey question regarding gossip:

[At the Intercultural Centre,] people are afraid of gossip if they go there for help. Maybe they don’t want the Thai translator on staff to know about their lives; they don’t trust that person since she’s Thai, too. People only go there if they don’t speak Icelandic, to get help. If they have a problem going to the doctor or something, and don’t speak English or Icelandic, they need help from them. Or if they are married to an Icelander and have kids who are in the schools, and have to go to the school meetings (with the teacher). Then they need a translator so that both parents can understand the teacher. Or if people come here and want to bring two or three children from Thailand, and perhaps they have divorced from their Icelandic husband and need legal help. They might not know how to ask the state for help.
compared to isolation. The total number of women who responded to all four of these questions is 109.

In order to get a basic understanding of the types of help exchangers, I first classified individuals according to whether they had ever given help to anyone at all, regardless of the variety of help they had given. I also calculated the percentage of the 109 respondents who responded that they had ever given help to any of the seven groups. I completed similar calculations for how many respondents ever received help from anyone, and then specifically who had received help from the ten possible groups.

Next, as mentioned earlier, I initially followed the example set by Komter and Schans (2008) in their study of immigrant reciprocity compared to that of the Dutch in the Netherlands and created a reciprocity index that would reflect whether Thais in Iceland were generally high exchangers, receivers, givers, and low exchangers. The difference between Komter and Schans’ and my study is that I am comparing reciprocity both within and across ethnic categories instead of reciprocity within a single ethnic category.

I created dichotomous outcome variables rather than using a scale\textsuperscript{109}, counting “1” when a respondent reported ever having given or received help of any kind with a particular group and counting “0” if the respondent never gave or received help with a group. I collapsed the four initial groups of interest, Thai family, Thai friends, Icelandic

\textsuperscript{109} My first attempt at constructing a dependent variable for reciprocity was to use a scale or index. In running frequencies for these indexes, however, I discovered that the data was skewed heavily towards zero. The majority reported helping or receiving help within just one or two categories, with only a handful of respondents reporting that they had exchanged help across a large number of categories. Given that the survey question did not ask about the number of times or frequencies of help given, simply the variety of help given, it became clear that such indexes would not be useful in explaining the volume of help exchanged among ethnic groups in the study population.
family, and Icelandic friends, into four more meaningful categories to use as dichotomous outcomes variables. First I counted those respondents who had only ever exchanged help with fellow Thais, labeled the “Exchanged with Thais only” group. Next I created a category for people who did not report exchanging help with any group, Thai or Icelandic, which constitutes the “Isolated from All” group\(^{110}\).

Finally, I calculated two outcome variables to represent respondents who had reported ever exchanging help with Icelanders, demonstrating a degree of social integration with the host society, as well as those who had ever reported exchanging help with Thais and thus demonstrating integration within their own ethnic group. The former is labeled “Ever Exchanged with Any Icelanders” and the latter is “Ever Exchanged with Any Thais.” There is of course some overlap between these two groups, since possibly the “most integrated” respondents would likely have exchanged help with members of both their own society and their host society, neither favoring nor ignoring either group.

In this chapter I do not consider whether respondents exchanged help with family as opposed to friends. Instead I simply note the ethnicity of the person with whom each respondent exchanged help. The ethnography bore out that the categories of “family” versus “friend” are blurred for many Thai respondents, as even kin terms do not accurately reflect whether someone is related by blood, marriage, or simply a very close

\(^{110}\) An example of a migrant who might fit into this group is someone I met during the 2005 pilot study, describing her interactions with both Thais and Icelanders:

Thai people gossip so much, especially about money and comparing houses, goods, etc. It’s very bad on birthdays, since people compare gifts and get bitter if someone didn’t bring them a nice gift. On the other hand, some Icelanders are good, but some are not nice at all. Most are not generous at all with their money if someone else needs it. If I need help with money, I don’t ask anyone—Thai or Icelandic. I ask the bank.
friend\textsuperscript{111}. Thus I report the frequency of help given to the family and friend categories later in Table 7-1 but I do not use them in the regression analyses.

**Independent Variables**

*Analyses of Help Exchange Networks*

As the primary variable of interest I include the auspices of migration, which include whether a woman came to Iceland to marry an Icelander, to join a Thai spouse or family member, or via sponsorship by an Icelandic employer. Other independent variables include a measure of discrimination, levels of comfort with trusting Thais and Icelanders, fears of gossip among the Thai community, and whether or not respondents have at least one Icelandic friend and at least one Thai friend.

The discrimination variable is rooted in a survey question that asked respondents whether or not, and how often, they had experienced fifteen unique forms of bias based on the respondents’ ethnicity\textsuperscript{112}. I totaled the number of discrimination experiences that respondents reported having and created a scale variable ranging from 0 to 15 to include as a predictor variable in the logistic regression analyses (see appendix to this chapter for table). Since this study is basically cross-sectional in design, I cannot assume that experiences with discrimination came first and led to a change in attitudes or trust levels.

\textsuperscript{111} For example, if one Thai person uses the word *Pii* before the nickname of another Thai person, the first person could be either a younger sibling or just a younger, close friend of the person he or she is addressing. *Pii* is a word used to denote respect for an elder, regardless of whether that person is actually related. The word for “grandmother” (*Yai*) is also transferable to anyone of grandmotherly age, as most Thai people would never think of simply addressing an elderly person by their first name. Calling someone by first name is something that Icelanders do almost as a rule, unless that elderly person is actually one’s blood relative. The notion of who is “family” among Thais is therefore fundamentally different from who is considered “family” (*frændi* or *frænka*) among Icelanders, and participants reported a great deal of cultural misunderstanding based on the different types of kin terms.

\textsuperscript{112} This table is located in the appendix to this chapter.
by Thai migrants. On the contrary, it may be that individual attitudes towards people were set long before they arrived in Iceland and their perception of discrimination was already highly attuned as a result. In other words, it is the nature of this data and study at large that we cannot assume causation, only the existence of relationships between variables.

I also include a measure of co-ethnic (Thai) density by region in Iceland in order to control for the number of Thai women that live in proximity to each respondent. A Thai woman might live in a town with only one or two other Thai women, while others live in a city with hundreds of other Thais with whom one might exchange help. Since a disproportionate number of Thais live in the Reykjavík I could not use a raw population count in the regression model. Instead I constructed this predictor by taking a natural log of the count of Thai adults living in geographic proximity to each respondent, based on census data for each of nine regions of Iceland available in late 2007. The resulting range, rounded to integers, is from 1 to 6 with 1 assigned to individuals living in towns with only one or two other Thai migrants. I assigned the value of 6 to respondents living in the Reykjavík Metropolitan Area, where the number of Thai adults was 572 in 2007.

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113 These include the capital region, the Reykjanes peninsula, West Iceland, the West Fjords, Western North Iceland, Eastern North Iceland, East Iceland, South Iceland, and the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar).

114 In earlier chapters I use a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent lives in Reykjavík or outside the city limits; here I chose to use a logged “density” variable because I wanted to explore more of the nuance in villages that were extremely isolated with only a few Thai residents (the handful living in the isolated Westman Islands or Vestmannaeyjar are one example) compared with those larger towns with 60 or more individuals who have their own defined community. Ethnographically I observed a qualitative difference in the closeness of Thais living in isolated towns compared to those larger towns that were not as dense as Reykjavík, but which were nevertheless more of a “hub” for Thai cultural activity in that region (e.g. a town with a Thai grocery store or restaurant). It should be noted, however, that the dichotomous Reykjavík-residence variable and the density variable are very highly correlated (Pearson’s $r = .826, p < .001$) and in effect may be interchangeable.
The variable indicating membership in the Thai Buddhist Association in Iceland is another indicator of whether respondents are aware of the greater Thai community. It is also a measure of opportunities for exchange within that ethnic community, since by the very nature of being contributing members respondents donate money to the Thai temple and thereby assist their own community\textsuperscript{115}.

Other predictors are related to respondents’ background, such as their age at arrival to measure exposure and time to develop relationships with Icelanders, educational achievement to assess its impact on being bold and informed enough to reach out from one’s “home” group, Icelandic language skill which may in itself be correlated with the outcomes of exchange, how many years they have lived in Iceland again for exposure and the time to make friendships, and what kind of job they currently hold since one’s co-workers often determine one’s social space for the majority of the day and might condition factory workers’ interactions with each other.

**Results**

I first report descriptive results regarding the types of help with which migrants are involved, providing an overview table of types of help given and received before diving in to the more detailed exchanges within four specific groups. Then I move on to another descriptive section regarding the function of the auspices of migration in help

\textsuperscript{115} While the only Thai temple in the country is located in Reykjavík, Thais who live in all corners of Iceland donate to the Thai Buddhist Association directly via mail. There are sometimes festivals hosted by the Thai temple in more remote regions of the country, such as the northern town of Akureyri, but typically migrants who live outside of Reykjavík do not have the chance to attend temple regularly. Additionally, since all citizens of Iceland must allocate a small portion of their annual income tax to a religious institution or the University of Iceland, many Thais told me that they had requested to direct this annual tax payment to the Buddhist temple rather than to the mainstream Lutheran church.
exchange patterns, followed by several regression analyses predicting whether a migrant will be socially isolated, integrated within her own social group only, or branching out to not only make connections with other Thais but also with the surrounding Icelandic society.

**What types of help do Thai migrants exchange with the four groups of interest?**

For a broad overview of the variety of types of help given and received across groups, Table 7-1 illustrates that 85.3 percent of the 109 respondents to the question reported ever giving help to anyone. Similarly, 79.8 percent of respondents said that they had ever received help. Both panels provide a further breakdown of the various groups included in the initial survey question, though the only real value of interest outside of the four groups that I examine further is that of giving help to the Thai temple with 34.9 percent reporting having done so. By far, the vast majority of the reported exchanges take place with either fellow Thais or Icelandic family or friends, and not with other migrant groups or with institutions for Thais and migrants in general.

**Table 7-1: Frequencies of help given and received across groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel A: Ever gave help (to whom)</th>
<th>Percentage of total (N=109)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To anyone</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai family</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai friends</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic family</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic friends</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other migrant family</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other migrant friends</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai temple</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Panel B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever received help (from whom)</th>
<th>Percentage of total (N=109)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From anyone</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai family</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai friends</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic family</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic friends</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other migrant family</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other migrant friends</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai temple</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consul</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant Service Center</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Social Service</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining Table 7-2, we see the same results from Table 7-1 narrowed down to provide only frequencies for each of the main four groups of interest in the chapter: Thai family, Thai friends, Icelandic family, and Icelandic friends. The first row contains frequencies (italicized) for percentages of the total number of respondents who answered the reciprocity questions, while the percentages that fall underneath this header row (vertically oriented, by columns) are percentages of the total percentage at the top.

Panel A for “Thai friend” in Table 7-2 shows that 70.6 percent of the original 109 respondents (or 77 individuals) reported ever giving help to a Thai friend. Just under half of those 77 individuals (48.1 percent) provided help in the form of translation or interpreting. Nearly 60 percent of the 77 respondents provided financial help to a Thai friend. It is interesting to note here that in Panel A, while 85.3 percent of respondents reported ever giving help, by far the majority of help given was to Thai friends (70.6 percent), with nearly half as many respondents (33.0 percent) reporting giving help to Icelandic family members. Again in Panel A, 42.2 percent of respondents reported helping Thai family members, which is around 10 percent more than those who said they
helped Icelandic family. The giving networks heavily favor Thai friends in Iceland above all other groups.

One must take into consideration that not all respondents will have Icelandic family members, just as not every respondent is expected to have Thai friends, Thai family, or Icelandic friends. However, if a migrant was sponsored initially by an Icelandic spouse, the ethnography tells us that most of these women will be connected to the family of the man who sponsored her, even if only temporarily. One positive example came from an interview during the 2005 pilot study:

After one year or so here, I had my first child, and I thought I should stay. My husband was good, and I had a child. My husband was good with everything. And his family was really good, his parents and siblings. I’m an immigrant, and if I married an immigrant and something bad happens, I would be alone. I would have no family. If I was an Icelandic woman marrying an Icelandic man, I would have all my family here with me. So then I wouldn’t be scared. So I wanted to see if I, being Thai... have you heard, daughter-in-law and the son are together, but there will be problems between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the same house?... I was afraid that would happen. I have many friends who are married to Germans, since so many Germans want to have Asian wives. So I was scared, since German mothers and Asian daughters-in-law fight a lot. I was scared it would be like that here. But I wanted to see, give it a chance. It turned out that everyone was okay. They love children so much, they love kids with black hair.

The diversity of types of help given is also important to examine, with both financial help and childcare as the most popular types of help given. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported giving both of these types of help. Incidentally, nearly half of the people (47.8 percent) who reported giving help to Thai family members gave that help in the form of moving and childcare, with financial help taking third place with Thai family. Among Thai friends, the most popular type of help given was financial help (nearly 60 percent), but among both Icelandic family and friends the highest-reported type of help
given was childcare (77.8 and 44.2 percent, respectively) with all other types of help reported at significantly lower rates. It would seem that when Thais give help to others, the majority of their help is given to Thai friends in the form of money, with minimal help given to Icelandic family or friends except for in the case of childcare.

The top row of Panel B reveals an even more striking portrait of the exchange networks compared with Panel A. The group distributions are very similar to those in Panel A, with over half of the 109 respondents (56.9 percent) reporting having received help at least once from Thai friends, but the percent of respondents reporting having received help from Thai family drops to a very low 28.4 percent. This percentage is lower even than the number of those reporting receiving help from Icelandic family and friends (31.2 and 37.6 percent, respectively). These results indicate that while nearly half of respondents reported giving help to Thai family in Iceland, less than one-third reported receiving help from their Thai families and are instead more likely receive help from their Icelandic friends and family. This points up a resource differential, perhaps, in that a respondent’s Thai family members are more likely to need help, while her Icelandic family and friends are more likely to have the resources to be able to provide help when needed.

It is interesting that among both Thai family and Icelandic family, the most common type of help reported was again childcare (over 40 percent), while among those reporting receiving help from Thai friends two-thirds said they received translation or interpreting help, far above any other type of help. The most common type of help received from Icelandic friends was moving help, followed again by translation/interpreting. Childcare is the only type of help from the list of nine that does
not require any particular assets (such as a house or car) or specialized knowledge (such as language or familiarity with Icelandic laws). Childcare is therefore the “easiest” type of help to give, assuming that both parties have children and can easily exchange help with each other across ethnic groups.

The reported types of help given reflect the general flow of resources in certain directions between ethnic groups; Icelanders, in general, would most likely not turn to Thai migrant contacts for financial help, legal help, or temporary housing since Icelanders have access to social services and wider networks of kin and friends than most Thai migrants. What is more interesting is that when we examine Panel B, Thai respondents did not report receiving much financial help from Icelandic family members, either. Less than 3 percent reported receiving financial help from Icelandic family, with less than 10 percent receiving help from Icelandic friends. The greatest proportion of help received is once again from Thai friends above all other groups, a result that matches with ethnographic data. Overall, the Thai immigrants living in Iceland move for the most part in co-ethnic friendship circles or in inter-ethnic family circles. The avenues of reciprocity reflect these circles in terms of what is exchanged with whom.

Table 7-2 thus provides us with a helpful overall portrait of the nine types of help that survey respondents have both given and received with four particular groups in Iceland. While I do not examine these measures below, they are helpful for Panel C refers to the same data used in Panels A and B, but here I collapsed responses into two

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116 It is also the only type of help listed that could be applied to several of the other categories as well (financial assistance, transportation, cooking), depending on the respondent’s support network. However, the intention in the survey question was for the respondent to mark “Childcare” for any type of help ever given or received related to childcare, even if it overlapped with other categories.

117 The table is not restricted to migrants who are known to have Icelandic family or friends, though nearly all respondents reported having at least one Icelandic contact of one kind or another.
separate outcomes: respondents who reported ever exchanging help with an Icelandic family member or friend, and respondents who reported ever exchanging help with a Thai family member or friend. The table includes one duplicated row in both panels, “No one (isolated from everyone),” in order to understanding the help that migrants are involved in both within and across ethnic groups.

**How are ethnic-based exchanges associated with the auspices of migration?**

Table 7-3 presents cross-tabulations for the auspices of migration and help ever exchanged (given or received) as well as frequencies for the dependent variables in this chapter. Panel A presents results by ethnicity and Panel B presents results by type of

**Table 7-3: Means & Percentages of Dependent Variables by Auspices of Migration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help Ever Exchanged With:</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Icelandic Spouse (N=49)</th>
<th>Thai Family/Spouse (N=32)</th>
<th>Employer (N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel A: Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais only (isolated in ethnic group)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic only</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Thais &amp; Icelanders</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one (isolated from everyone)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel B: Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family only</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends only</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both friends &amp; family</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one (isolated from everyone)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel C: Non-Exclusive Categories</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever exchanged with any Icelanders</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever exchanged with any Thais</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
relationship. Panel C refers to the same data used in Panels A and B, but here I collapsed responses into two separate outcomes: respondents who reported ever exchanging help with an Icelandic family member or friend, and respondents who reported ever exchanging help with a Thai family member or friend. The table includes one duplicated row in both panels, “No one (isolated from everyone),” in order to preserve symmetry in the table. The 7.3 percent of respondents who fall into this category are isolated from both ethnic and relationship groups but make up a single dependent variable as presented in the far-left column of Table 7-4 later in the chapter.

Returning to Panel A of Table 7-3, we see the percentage of respondents who fall into the “Thais only (isolated in ethnic group)” category. Although over 40 percent of both Thai family- and employer-sponsored respondents report having never exchanged help with Icelanders, less than one-fifth (18.4 percent) of those whose migration was sponsored by an Icelandic spouse report being isolated within their own ethnic group’s reciprocity networks.

The majority of respondents report having exchanged help at least once with both Thais and Icelanders (55.2 percent). More interestingly, the majority of Icelandic-sponsored migrants (63.3 percent) fall into this category of cross-ethnic help exchange, suggesting that being married to an Icelander as a way to migrate to Iceland is likely to decrease one’s chances of being limited to Thai-only reciprocity networks. Not surprisingly, the highest percentage of respondents isolated within Icelandic-only help

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118 In Table 7-3 we see from the “N” column that the number of respondents has dropped to 96 from an earlier total of 109, as this is the number of Thai women who answered all of the reciprocity questions in the survey (both giving and receiving) as well as the auspices of migration questions. Survey non-response therefore caused a loss of 13 cases, and this number will decrease more when entering additional predictor variables into the regression analyses ahead.
networks are those who came to Iceland under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse (12.2 percent). Just 6.3 percent of Thai-sponsored migrants reported having no help contact at all with fellow Thais, while no respondents sponsored by employers reported being involved in Icelandic-only networks.

We next examine Panel B, where there is little variation between groups. Similar to the pattern observed in Panel A, the majority of respondents in all groups (between 50-60 percent) reported being involved in mixed reciprocity networks, having given or received help with both friends and family members at least once. It is notable that fewer than ten percent of each group are isolated in family-only networks. In contrast, around 28 to 33 percent of each group reported being involved in friends-only networks.

A key point to keep in mind regarding the frequencies in Panel B is that not every respondent has family in Iceland, therefore limiting the possibilities for individuals to exchange help with family members. For this reason I do not attempt to predict any of the outcome variables in Panel B using regression analyses. This is a weakness of the original survey question, since nearly every migrant can be expected to have friends of some kind but cannot be expected to have relatives in Iceland. Nevertheless, Thai migrants in Iceland are generally not isolated within networks limited to family members and employer-sponsored migrants have perhaps the most diverse “relationship”-networks of the three possible auspices. Exceptions to the latter may occur when migrants are sequestered in the bottom segment of the labor market and surrounded by other immigrants all day, never engaging with Icelandic society outside the factory walls. These patterns stand in contrast with migrant behavior in other destination countries, where perhaps there is both greater likelihood of being immersed in a community of
“blood” relatives who migrated in connection with each other, as well as greater incentive for “rounding the wagons” and staying isolated within one’s closest family rather than branching out.

We finish the discussion of Table 7-3 with Panel C since it contains two outcome variables that appear in the regression analyses to follow. Rather than examining reciprocity exchanges based on isolation or inclusion with each group in turn, here I simply collapsed the same data into two groups: did the migrant report ever giving or receiving help with an Icelander, regardless of relationship category? Did the migrant report ever exchanging help with a Thai person, also regardless of relationship category? These outcomes are meant to be more inclusive than the earlier outcomes in Panel A in order to better capture the idea of integration with Icelanders as well as with fellow co-ethnic Thai migrants.

Fully three-quarters (75.5 percent) of migrants under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse report having ever exchanged help with an Icelandic family member or friend, around twenty-five percent higher than individuals in the other two auspices. While it is clear that having migrated in order to marry an Icelander is associated with high rates of reciprocity with Icelanders, it is important to note that at least 50 percent of all Thai migrants in Iceland report having exchanged help specifically with an Icelander. This is clearly an immigrant group that is not highly isolated within its own networks, even while a large percentage (between 80 to 90 percent) report having exchanged help with their co-ethnics at least once\textsuperscript{119}.

\textsuperscript{119} The survey did not ask about frequency of help exchanges, only the types of help exchanged at least once.
We turn now to Table 7-4 for logistic regression models predicting each migrant’s type of reciprocity network. Specifically, I examine four dichotomous measures: 1) being isolated from anyone and everyone, 2) being isolated within a Thai-only network, 3) having ever exchanged with any type of Icelander, and 4) having ever exchanged with any type of fellow Thai. The odd-numbered columns present bivariate-only models. The even-numbered columns are multivariate models that include only the significant or theoretically important “best-predictors” based on the initial bivariate regressions.

In terms of the relationship between auspices of migration and each of the four outcomes, the strongest associations are evident for “exchanged with Thais only” (columns 3 and 4) and “ever exchanged with any Icelanders” (columns 5 and 6). The odds-ratios in column 3 are already quite high, but they become even higher and, more importantly, significant at the $p < .05$ level when they are included in the multivariate best-predictor model (column 4). Migrants sponsored by Thai family/spouse are four-and-a-half times more likely than Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants (OR = 4.48) to be isolated in a Thai-only exchange network when compared with those sponsored by Icelandic-sponsored migrants. Even more striking, migrants sponsored by employers are nearly seven times (OR = 6.78) more likely to be isolated in co-ethnic networks compared to those under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse.

120 The exception here is that in the odd columns I do not include “Married to Icelander” in the multivariate model because it is a variable that has an extremely high correlation to the auspices of migration dummy variable. The vast majority of immigrants who came to Iceland to get married to an Icelander are still married to an Icelander, so I do not include this in the multivariate (though it is interesting to see how high it is in the bivariate analyses).
Table 7-4: Logistic Regression Odds-Ratios Predicting Whether Respondent has Ever Exchanged Help with Four Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auspices:</th>
<th>Isolated from All</th>
<th>Exchanged with Thais Only</th>
<th>Ever Exchanged with Any Icelanders</th>
<th>Ever Exchanged with Any Thais</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bivars (1)</td>
<td>Best Predict (2)</td>
<td>Bivars (3)</td>
<td>Best Predict (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic spouse (reference)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai family/spouse</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>4.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears and Perceptions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination Experience (0-15)</td>
<td>.77+</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.10+</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable Trusting Thais</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable Trusting Icelanders</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Gossip among Thais</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Influences:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one Icelandic friend</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one Thai relative in Ice</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Buddhist Association</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>6.40*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ethnic density by region (1-6)</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>2.80**</td>
<td>2.45*</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks Icelandic well</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at Migration</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Cohabitng (vs. not)</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married to Icelander (vs. not)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>.08**</td>
<td>8.12*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total years in Iceland</td>
<td>.82*</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works in Low-Skill Job</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>8.59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.91+</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
“N/A” denotes the presence of cells with a constant value
Conversely, when predicting whether a respondent has ever exchanged help with an Icelander, it is clear even from the bivariate regressions (column 5) that migrants who came to Iceland via a Thai relative or spouse, as well as those who came in association with an employer, are both about two-thirds less likely to have exchanged help with an Icelandic family member or friend compared to those who migrated to be with an Icelandic spouse (OR = .32 and .37, respectively).\footnote{There is no multivariate model for the prediction of exchanging help with Icelanders (Column 6) because other than the auspices of migration none of the bivariate predictors were significant.}

Intuitive as it may be, it is important to point out that coming to Iceland under the auspices of marriage to an Icelander significantly decreases a Thai migrant's odds of being isolated in her own co-ethnic reciprocity network and significantly increases her odds of integrating by virtue of asking for or receiving help from members of her host society.

**How does a Thai migrant’s experience with discrimination influence exchanges?**

When we examine the role that a migrant’s reported experience with discrimination plays in the odds of being more isolated or integrated with certain reciprocity networks, the relationship is weaker than expected. In column 1, the odds of being isolated from reciprocity with anyone decreases with each discrimination (OR = .77, \( p < .10 \)), but the value is barely significant and is not significant in the multivariate analysis (column 2). Columns 3 and 4 demonstrate that when predicting a migrant’s membership in a Thai-only exchange network, there is no increase in the odds of being ethnically isolated (10 percent in both the bivariate and multivariate analysis) with each
additional type of discrimination experience. There is a negligible change in odds-ratios when predicting whether a migrant has ever exchanged help with an Icelander based on discrimination experience (column 5), though we must remember that due to the cross-sectional nature of the study it is impossible to assume causality in one direction. It could very well be that it was initial exchanges between Thais and Icelanders that led to discrimination experiences, or the other way around.

In general, however, the earlier interpretation is consistent with the ethnographic data. That is, during interviews Thais often spoke of strangers treating them poorly when encountering each other in public, but that when it came to relationships with Icelandic family and friends Thais did not hold the behavior of random Icelanders against their close contacts. In fact, many Thais who were sponsored by Icelandic spouses spoke highly of their Icelandic family, stating that their mothers-in-law in particular were very kind to them and brought them under their wing after marrying their sons. One woman in particular described the relationship she had with Icelandic friends, despite not being treated well while riding the bus or walking down the street:

I’ve been here for many years, and I wanted to know how Icelanders were and how Thai people were. Icelanders are better; they don’t antagonize me. If I have a problem, they will listen to me and not tell everyone else. And they teach me a lot, since I’m an immigrant. With Icelandic friends I learn a lot more about what I should and shouldn’t do. They tell me about what’s okay to do or not. I wanted to know these things here. Most Icelanders are very good people. There are a few people who don’t like immigrants. When immigrants such as Asians get on the bus or go somewhere in public, if someone says something mean, I just smile in response.
What roles do gossip and trust play in migrants’ exchanges with different groups?

When predicting whether a migrant is isolated from any reciprocal exchanges (columns 1 and 2), a migrant expressing fear of gossip among Thai people as an inhibitor to asking for help decreases her odds of being isolated (OR = .06, \( P < .05 \)) compared to those who do not fear gossip, significant in both the bivariate and best-predictors models. This is a curious result since one would think fear of gossip within a community would increase rather than decrease the odds of social isolation. However, fear of gossip is in itself conditioned by being immersion in a community. Thai women living in isolated areas of Iceland with few co-ethnic migrants nearby wouldn’t necessarily have any gossip to be afraid of. Also, it may be the case that while migrants who fear gossip in the community would like to be more isolated, Thai cultural norms of reciprocity demand that they continue to participate in exchanges with their fellow co-ethnics. Since the dependent variable here is dichotomous (measuring whether a migrant has either given or received any kind of help, even once), it is impossible to measure the volume or frequency of exchanges between groups.

The odds-ratios become more complicated in predicting whether migrants are limited to Thai-only exchange networks (columns 3 and 4). There is a drop in odds-ratios from the bivariate (OR = 1.04, not significant) to the best-predictors model (OR = .83), an indication that when controlling for other variables such as co-ethnic density by region, a migrant is slightly less likely to be in such an isolated network.

On the other hand, the results from the model predicting exchange with Icelanders (column 5) reveal a non-significant increase in the odds of a migrant exchanging with
Icelanders when she reports a fear of gossip (OR = 1.54 in the bivariate) compared to those who do not fear gossip. These results match up to some extent with expectations, since migrants who are afraid of gossip in their own ethnic community would be more likely to seek and provide help among other groups—presumably Icelanders, a result which both the survey and qualitative data bear out.

Rather surprisingly, in predicting whether a migrant has ever exchanged with other Thai people (column 7) there is slight evidence that those reporting a fear of gossip are more than three times as likely (OR = 3.14) to have exchanged with Thais (column 7). An example of one interviewee from 2005 who disliked the amount of gossip among Thais and ended up spending more time with Icelanders as a result follows:

Mostly I spend time with Icelandic people. I have many more Icelandic friends than Thai. I don’t know many Thai people here.... I don’t like gossiping with them or about them. Icelanders are better.... if we have time, I go with Icelanders to eat cakes and coffee. With Thais, we will make food together, but Thai people here like to gossip behind someone’s back. I don’t like gossip. I don’t like to listen to it and I don’t like to take part in it. When I go to the Thai people’s house and we cook, they want me to talk behind someone’s back.

[Icelanders] don’t gossip. I talk about what I’m doing, that’s it. It’s easy to live with Icelanders.... If someone has an issue with me, I sit down with them and talk. At work, if I did something wrong, like I get someone orange juice instead of water, then we talk about it. Like once they asked me to get medicine for someone and maybe I got the wrong one, which is dangerous. But they don’t talk behind my back for that, since they know I don’t understand. They don’t say something bad or yell at me for being stupid. They just say, “No, let me show you how it’s done.” They calm me down if I get scared that I’ve done something very wrong. They tell me not to worry about it because everyone knows I have a hard time understanding sometimes.

While none of the models that include levels of trust in both Thais and Icelanders produce significant odds-ratios, it is interesting to note that in column 1, migrants who report feeling generally comfortable trusting Thai people are 64 percent more likely to be
isolated from all reciprocity exchanges (OR = 1.64), while those who report being comfortable trusting Icelanders are two-thirds less likely to be isolated from such exchanges (OR = .33). Neither value is significant so I did not include either value in the best-predictors (multivariate) analysis, but it is not surprising that those who trust Icelanders more might have a greater odds of being more integrated than those reporting higher levels of trust with Thais. There is a similar pattern, though not as strong, in column 3. Those reporting trusting Thais were 38 percent more likely to be isolated in Thai-only exchange networks, while those who trusted Icelanders were 9 percent less likely to be isolated in such networks.

In column 5, however, the odds-ratios switch places in predicting whether respondents are involved with any kind of exchanges with Icelanders. Those who report being comfortable with trusting Thais are 36 percent less likely to exchange at all with Icelanders (OR = .64) while those who report trusting Icelanders are nearly 70 percent (OR = 1.69) more likely to engage with Icelandic help networks. Again, none of these odds-ratios are significant but it is important to note the direction of influence of each trust variable. Generally, when respondents report trusting Thais, they are more likely to be either isolated from everyone or to exchange with Thais or Thai-only networks. Those reporting trust in Icelanders are generally less likely to be isolated overall but also less likely to engage with Thai help networks, and are more likely to have given help to or received help from Icelandic friends or family members. The ethnographic data cited above confirms these results.
Other Variables of Note

Three other variables of interest in both the bivariate and multivariate analyses predicting types of reciprocity networks are membership in the Buddhist Association of Iceland, co-ethnic density by region, and the respondent’s employment in a low-skill job. The data generate weak support that members of the Buddhist Association were less than half as likely to not engage with help networks of any kind (column 1, OR = .47), a result that is intuitive given that professed membership in a religious community would logically decrease the odds of an individual being isolated from support networks.

The only odds-ratios that are significant for the Buddhist variable are in columns 7 and 8 (in both models, $p < .05$), where in the bivariate model (column 7) we see that individuals reporting membership in the Buddhist Association are more than six times as likely to have ever exchanged with other Thais in their community (OR = 6.40, $p < .05$). The odds-ratio drops slightly to 5.13 ($p < .10$) in the best-predictors model (column 8), demonstrating that along with the other high odds-ratio variables in the same model (being under the auspices of Thai family and working in a low-skill job), the odds are very high indeed for having ever exchanged help with another Thai person in Iceland. Members of the Buddhist Association are around 30 percent less likely to be isolated in Thai-only networks (column 3, OR = .72) and, interestingly, around 70 percent more likely to have ever exchanged with Icelanders (column 5, OR = 1.71). While neither value is significant, taking all of the results into account for the Buddhist Association variable we can conclude that those Thai migrants who are involved with their ethnicity’s religious community are less likely to be isolated in general, even within their own ethnic
group’s help networks, and their odds are higher for being integrated in non-exclusive help networks with fellow Thais as well as Icelanders.

In Table 7-5 we see that with each increase in the scale of ethnic density, respondents are half as likely to be isolated from any kind of help networks (OR = .53 in the bivariate model, OR = .55 in the best-predictors model). This is an expected result given that with more Thai people living in proximity, migrants would have a greater chance of encountering each other and supporting each other in help networks. The effect is not as strong for being involved with Icelandic help networks, however, since in column 5 we see that as migrants report living in regions with a higher density of co-ethnics, their odds of being involved with Icelandic networks decreases by over 20 percent (OR = .73 in bivariate, OR = .76 in multivariate). This result is most likely because they are, once again, exposed to a greater number of co-ethnics and perhaps have less need to ask for help from someone outside of their ethnic group.

In fact, looking at the models for predicting being involved in Thai-only networks, it is clear that living in a region with high co-ethnic density is significantly associated with one’s help network being limited to one’s co-ethnics. In the bivariate model (column 3), for each increase in the level of co-ethnic density in a respondent’s region, she is 2.8 times more likely (OR = 2.80, \( p < .01 \)) to be in a Thai-only network, lacking all reciprocal engagement with Icelanders. The effect grows stronger in the best-predictors analysis, with the odds-ratio growing to 3.7 times for each increase in the measure of regional co-ethnic density (\( p < .05 \)). It should be noted that while there is a 35 percent increase in odds of a respondent being involved with Thais in general (column
7) if she lives in a region with more Thai people in proximity, the effect is not significant and not nearly as strong as predicting her odds of being in a closed ethnic help network.

It can be inferred from the ethnic-density results that generally, Thai migrants living in the larger metropolitan areas of Iceland are more likely to be closed off from asking for help from Icelanders and would prefer to seek help from members of their own community. Those who live in areas with very few Thais (specifically 60 or fewer Thais, with most towns outside of Reykjavík and Akureyri having even fewer Thais in residence) are more likely to engage in reciprocity with Icelanders because they may not be able to find the same level of support and resources within their own local Thai community.

Respondents living in the remote West Fjords region of Iceland reported a similar phenomenon during ethnographic interviews, stating that when they first moved to such isolated areas, they were generally the only Thai person for hundreds of kilometers in any direction and had absolutely no access to Thai food, speakers of their own language, Thai satellite television, or anything else from their home culture. They report having to learn Icelandic very quickly in order to make friends, and having to adapt to the local cuisine and church communities (having their own children confirmed in the Lutheran church, since the only Buddhist temple in Iceland was in the capital city Reykjavík). One woman stated that she had always lived in the remote fishing town where her husband was a fishing boat captain, and that fifteen years ago when she arrived there hadn’t been any other Thai people in her town. She brought several of her family members there from Thailand to live near her, but otherwise she had been totally isolated for the first few
years. The woman told me that when the first Thai restaurant opened in her town it was a momentous occasion, both because it meant there were more Thai people in her town and also because she could finally buy large, 10 or 20 kilogram bags of Thai jasmine rice in town without having to drive nine hours to Reykjavík.

The final variable of note is that of the respondent working in a low-skill job. The odds-ratios in columns 7 and 8 demonstrate that women who work in factory, care and cleaning sectors are nearly nine times as likely to have exchanged help with Thais compared with those who work in more skilled jobs (OR = 8.59, \( p < .05 \)), dropping to six times as likely in the best-predictors model (OR = 6.16) but remaining significant at the \( p < .10 \) level. Also, while non-significant, it is noteworthy that respondents who work in low-skill jobs are twice as likely (OR = 2.35) as those who work in more skilled positions to be isolated in Thai-only exchange networks. It is clear from this variable alone that while respondents working in generally low-skill, low-wage jobs in Iceland are less likely to be socially isolated overall, they are far more likely to be isolated in networks of co-ethnics and to have exchanged with Thais in general. Most importantly for measuring integration via reciprocity, this group is also less likely to have ever exchanged with Icelanders.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

**Research questions and hypotheses**

The four research questions of this chapter concern the types of help exchanged within Thai migrant groups and with native Icelanders, in addition to the relationship
between exchanges and the auspices of migration. I also inquired about experiences with both discrimination and gossip as factors in determining the likelihood of a migrants’ participation in several types of exchange networks. These include being in total isolation, exchanging help only with other Thai migrants, ever exchanging help with Icelanders, and ever exchanging help with other Thais.

In terms of the types of help exchanged between respondents and the four groups of interest, it was clear that exchanges with co-ethnic Thai friends were the most common type of exchange, with translation and financial help at the top of the list. Exchanges with Thai family came a distant second, with childcare being the most popular means of giving and receiving help within this co-ethnic family network. Overall, the most likely receivers of help from Thai migrants tended to be Thai family members, whereas the most likely providers of help to Thai migrants tended to be Icelandic family members. It must be remembered that this distinction can only be applied to respondents who had either type of family member in Iceland. A more equitable balance existed in the flow of help exchanges to and from Thai friends, indicating that nearly every respondent to the survey has at least one local Thai friend with whom to exchange help.

I hypothesized that with regards to the relationship between types of help exchanged and the auspices of migration, migrants who arrived under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse were more likely to exchange help with Icelanders and less likely to be isolated within co-ethnic Thai help networks. This hypothesis was supported, with Thai-family sponsored migrants being over four times more likely and employer-sponsored migrants being nearly seven times more likely than those who migrated to be with an
Icelandic spouse to be limited in their exchanges. It is clear that coming to Iceland in order to marry an Icelander, as opposed to join Thai family or be sponsored by an employer, greatly increases the chances of a migrant being involved in reciprocal exchanges with people outside of her immediate ethnic group.

In predicting whether experiences with discrimination would have any effect on migrants’ reciprocity the data do not provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis; that is, it is unclear whether experiences with discrimination have any significant impact on outcomes of integration in terms of reciprocal help exchanges with any group. The only noticeable association was that of a slight increase in the odds of a migrant being isolated in a Thai-only help network with discrimination. It would appear from these results that experience with discrimination is not enough to prevent Thai migrants from engaging in help networks outside of their own ethnic group, a conclusion similar to that reached by Dinisen in his study on immigrants in Denmark (2010). This is perhaps because the types of discrimination experienced were not powerful enough to dissuade migrants from dealing with Icelanders at large, or because the relationships that migrants have with close Icelandic friends and family outweigh any negative experiences with discrimination with relative strangers in Icelandic society.

Finally, we see mixed results with regards to the hypotheses predicting effects of both gossip among Thais and trust in both Thais and Icelanders. Migrants who expressed hesitation in asking for help from Thai people due to negative gossip experiences were actually less likely to be isolated overall. In other words, they were not loners despite negative experiences in their small co-ethnic community, a surprising result at the $p < .05$
level. In contrast, when predicting how likely Thai migrants were to engage in help networks with Icelanders, the odds-ratio were not significant. Nonetheless there was a noticeable increase in the likelihood of migrants to have ever exchanged help with Icelanders compared to those who did not express an inhibiting fear of gossip among their co-ethnics. The null hypothesis could not be rejected, most likely due to the small sample size, but it is important to note that there is a relationship of some kind (the directionality is unclear) between fear of gossip among Thais and the likelihood of participating in Icelandic help networks.

**Policy Implications**

Overall, the analyses of this chapter demonstrate that the auspices of migration do have an impact on some integration outcomes as measured by instances of reciprocal exchanges with both co-ethnics and inter-ethnic groups. Reciprocal friendships among fellow Thais are most common, a result likely impacted by the relatively low number of close relatives that each migrant has when compared with the number of potential friends of the same ethnicity. Thai migrants who came to Iceland to marry an Icelander, however, have the greatest odds of engaging in reciprocal exchanges across ethnic boundaries when compared to those who migrated to be with Thai family or spouses, and in particular when compared to those whose migration was sponsored by an employer.

The reduction of social and cultural distance (Alba and Nee 2003, Sullivan 1996) between migrants and the residents of their host country, the slow overlapping of social networks, and an increase in expectation of having similar norms of reciprocity all point
to an increasing opportunity for integration or social cohesion (Putnam 2000) on the part of the Thai migrants in Iceland. It is only with the “moral cement” (Mauss 1967 [1923]) of reciprocity that migrants and native Icelanders can become more dependent on each other and take the long view of return for exchanges, as Sahlin described (1974). Governments cannot legislate trust, but they can encourage and educate all groups to lean more on each other and to not isolate themselves socially or even spatially. In this manner groups can become deeply woven into the same social fabric, accepting that the other group is “here to stay” rather than perceiving them as a temporary inconvenience existing outside of one’s daily reality.
Appendix to Chapter 7

Table 7-5: Frequencies of Discrimination Experience as a Thai Migrant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Discrimination</th>
<th>Reported Frequency (Collapsed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being hired for a job</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being treated fairly in a job</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being treated fairly by the police</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being treated fairly when looking to rent a home</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being treated fairly by my Icelandic teachers</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being welcomed by my Icelandic neighbors</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being treated by Icelandans with equal respect</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being treated with equal customer service</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelanders treat me as if I am less intelligent</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelanders treat me as if I am a dishonest person</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelanders act as if they are scared of me</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelanders act if I am “below” them in status</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelanders have called me names or harassed me</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel unwelcome in public places in Iceland</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more at risk for a violent attack</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 80 percent of respondents reported having never experienced three particular areas of discrimination. These three areas include unfair treatment by three groups: the police (86.9 percent), potential landlords (80.2 percent), and Icelandic teachers (86.7 percent). The results indicate that Thai migrants feel relatively well respected by Icelanders representing institutions or who are in positions of authority. In contrast, the three most common areas of discrimination reported by respondents came not from institutions or authorities but from ordinary Icelanders. Over half reported not being treated by Icelanders with equal respect (56.8 percent) or Icelanders acting as if the respondent is below them in status (56.2 percent), while nearly two-thirds (64.5 percent) reported Icelanders treating them as if they were less intelligent.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

Iceland’s geographic isolation in the North Atlantic and its identity as a relatively homogeneous nation make Iceland an ideal location for the study of international migration. The phenomenon of foreigners moving to Iceland from regions as distant as Asia is relatively new compared to the rest of Europe, having only begun in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Specifically, this study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the integration of Thai women who migrated to Iceland in one of three ways: to form a family with an Icelandic man, to reunite with Thai family already living in Iceland, or to obtain a job via employer sponsorship. These three means are termed the “auspices of migration.” The main objective of this dissertation was to examine how these auspices of migration affect host country language skills and economic integration, the power and influence of Thai women in homes shared with Icelandic men, and reciprocal exchange networks between Thais and Icelanders.

Traditional social science theories that explain both the reasons for and maintenance of international migration streams apply to the population of Thais in Iceland, but rarely address the differences between migrating for labor and migrating for “love”. The literature is especially thin on empirical analyses of women migrating internationally to marry exogamously. Some studies discuss immigrants to Western countries going back home to secure a bride and bring her to his new country. Others focus on mail-order marriages among men and women who have different, often
mismatched reasons for deciding to form a union. Few quantitative studies compare marriage to labor migration, revealing a significant gap in the literature considering the volume of individuals moving from less developed to more-developed countries for reasons of family formation or reunification. This study attempts to address that gap in the literature using several methods of data collection to present a holistic portrait of the Thai community of Iceland, focusing on the success of their linguistic, economic, cultural, and social integration.

The data for this study came from a multitude of sources, beginning with in-depth interviews conducted with Thai migrant women in Iceland in 2005. I used the material from these interviews to begin constructing a quantitative survey that I would administer two years later. Upon returning to Iceland for 22 months of fieldwork in 2007-2008, I spent nearly three months employed in a fish-processing factory staffed mostly, as is the case with many Icelandic fish factories, by immigrants from Poland, the Philippines, and Thailand. There I engaged in participant-observation for five hours a day and carried out semi-structured interviews while cleaning fish, as well as regularly attending Thai religious and cultural festivals and taking part in informal gatherings in people’s homes. Throughout this time I gathered qualitative data in order to supplement what I had already learned in 2005, simultaneously adding to and editing the survey to be administered in the latter half of the dissertation fieldwork.
Research Questions and Summary of Results

The research questions in Chapter 5 are concerned with Thai migrants’ general levels of proficiency in Icelandic, incentives and deterrents to learning Icelandic, the influence of the auspices of migration on Icelandic language proficiency, and the effect of Icelandic spoken fluency on migrants’ economic integration. I hypothesized that generally, women who migrated in order to marry Icelandic men would have better Icelandic speaking abilities, and as a result, better economic outcomes than those who came via other means. Logistic regression analyses demonstrated that the data did not support the hypotheses, since migrants sponsored by employers appeared to have better Icelandic proficiency than those who came to marry Icelandic men. This result was the opposite of my expected outcome. Migrants who came as dependents of Thai family already in Iceland had the lowest Icelandic-speaking ability, an unsurprising result given that they are more likely to be isolated in co-ethnic households where Icelandic is not spoken on a daily basis.

Additionally, the results showed that while migrants who came under the auspices of Icelandic spouses were more likely to be employed compared to either of the other two groups, it was the employer-sponsored migrants who were more likely to report a higher income. For all groups, the number of Icelandic classes taken by each migrant increased her level of speaking fluency, though the influence of educational achievement before arrival in Iceland as well as current English speaking ability both had strong effects on language fluency as well.
The research questions in Chapter 6 concern the position of Thai women in the private spheres of their homes, and in particular the impact of the auspices of migration on both gender roles and household decision-making. I hypothesized that Thai women who migrated to marry an Icelandic husband would report a more egalitarian distribution of labor and decision-making in their households than those who came by other means. For example, those who came as spouses were hypothesized to have Icelandic husbands who more readily took part in more traditionally-feminine chores such as doing laundry, washing dishes, and cooking meals. Those women who came to join Thai family or under employer sponsorship would have more traditional divisions of labor and decision-making power than those who came to marry an Icelander.

In keeping with Chapter 5, the results did not support the hypotheses. Women sponsored by Icelandic husbands did not in fact have the highest odds of belonging to more egalitarian households. On the contrary, women sponsored by employers had more “progressive” households than those who came by other means, with less-traditional divisions of labor and more equitable distribution of decision-making power. If we assume that a more egalitarian household falls into line with dominant Icelandic gender ideologies and that a more traditional household conforms to what Thai women are accustomed to in their home country, we might deduce that women who come to Iceland under the auspices of employment are more likely to integrate with the values and norms of their host society because they are not constrained to sharing a household with a male partner immediately upon arrival. They are therefore more free to negotiate the terms of household labor and decisions because they are not dependent on a relationship or
marriage surviving in order to legally remain in Iceland, as spouse-dependent women are for the first three years of residence in Iceland.

Chapter 7 examines the function of reciprocity both in Thai migrants’ integration with their host society and in isolation within their co-ethnic Thai community. Research questions for this chapter concerned the relationship between reciprocal help exchanges and the auspices of migration in addition to the impact of discrimination and gossip on participation in exchange networks. I hypothesized that Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants would be more likely than those who came to Iceland by other means to be involved (and therefore integrated) with Icelandic help networks and less likely to be isolated within their own Thai communities. I also hypothesized that migrants’ experiences with discrimination would have a negative effect on their reported instances of help exchanged with Icelanders, and that migrants expressing fear of gossip among the Thai community will be less likely to be isolated within that community.

The descriptive results showed that Thai migrants exchange help with their Thai friends in Iceland far more than with individuals from any other group (including Thai family, Icelandic family, and Icelandic friends), and that the most common types of help exchanged include translation from Thai into Icelandic and financial help. The next most common group with whom Thai women exchanged help was Thai family, with Icelandic friends and family in last place. However, results from the regression analyses support the hypothesis that Icelandic-spouse sponsored migrants do have a higher level of involvement in cross-ethnic exchanges when compared to those who came to Iceland
under other auspices. Migrants sponsored by employers, on the other hand, are far more likely to be limited to Thais-only in their exchange networks.

Discrimination did not seem to play as important of a role in determining reciprocity outcomes as anticipated. This result implies that either discrimination against Thai people is not a major issue in Iceland or that the types of discrimination migrants reported experiencing, generally from people in authority or on the street, not their close friends or family members, had little effect on migrants’ willingness to exchange help with Icelanders. Finally, respondents who reported being afraid of gossip among their fellow Thais reported being engaged in more cross-ethnic exchanges with Icelanders, as expected. Surprisingly, the fear of gossip did not seem to restrict those migrants’ activities with their fellow Thais, perhaps because the community is very small and migrants cannot afford to be socially isolated from co-ethnics in such a foreign setting.

**Policy Implications**

Icelandic labor and migration policies constrain migrants’ choices in reaching Iceland. Such policies also condition the incentives and disincentives to integration that migrants encounter upon arrival. I present an overview of these policies in Chapter 2, highlighting the need for Iceland to more carefully examine visa applications for women coming to Iceland for marriage. Additionally, the Icelandic government might offer a work-permit lottery or quota for countries outside of the European Economic Area, in order to both meet the demand both of its domestic employers looking for immigrant labor and the demand of the migrants wishing to come to Iceland to work.
The Icelandic government must also offer a more diverse range of Icelandic language classes given that residents are required to be fluent in Icelandic before becoming naturalized citizens. This means training and hiring individuals who are fluent in both Thai and Icelandic, perhaps members of the second generation of immigrants once they are old enough. These individuals must be mobile enough to provide instruction even in the remotest fishing villages of Iceland and trained to offer instruction beyond the same basic course that Thai migrants in the countryside quickly exhaust. The current practice of employers paying language instructors to teach employees during lunch or after hours is a good beginning, but employers should not have to carry all of the burden. The state needs to provide such a service if it truly believes in the integration of all migrants.

Admittedly, little can or should be done to “check” on marriage-sponsored migration households once the migrant has successfully entered the country. It is always the couple’s responsibility rather than the state’s to work out a household division of labor and power-sharing scheme. However, the results from Chapter 6 and evidence for an increase in marriage-based migrations to Iceland in recent years (see Chapter 2) point to the potential value of classes for migrants, taught in their own languages, about their rights as new residents. Such a class, perhaps presented by a fellow co-ethnic fluent in both Icelandic and Thai language and culture, could also provide tools for self-advocacy to be used if the women’s marriages ever became threatening. It is unclear to what degree migrants from Thailand are currently informed about their rights as residents (not citizens) of Iceland. The need for this was revealed during the fieldwork by some women
who feared leaving abusive marriages because they didn’t want to lose their residency permits. This is a fear that they no longer should have given the new Laws on Foreigners passed in 2002, for example.

Finally, it may be difficult to imagine using official policies to increase the likelihood of reciprocal exchanges between Thai migrants and their host society. Such social shifts often can only be encouraged and take place at grass-roots level rather than from the top-down, though Icelandic society is small enough and the Icelandic government active enough that such an intervention is not entirely outside the realm of possibility. However, continuing to raise awareness of the values of a multicultural society, as many agencies in Iceland already do, is a powerful tool. Also, while women who migrated under the auspices of an Icelandic spouse may encounter a “ready-made” Icelandic help network upon arrival, not all Thai individuals arriving in the country experience the same treatment. Simply creating spaces for people of all groups in Iceland to become comfortable in each other’s presence would be a welcome opportunity. Perhaps that process is already ongoing, and simply needs more time for it to evolve naturally. Nonetheless, from Chapter 7 we can conclude that members of Icelandic society on all sides need to both give and receive help from each other when possible, thereby increasing their commitments to each other and integrating all residents into their shared society.
Study Limitations

This project revealed several challenges of studying isolated populations, even in countries with national registries. Despite the convenience of obtaining a complete sampling frame of Thais in Iceland from the National Registry, there was a lag in the system due to migrants’ delayed notification of address changes to the Registry. As a result, verifying the names and addresses took longer than expected and required triangulation of data both online and on the ground. Such factors increased the opportunity for non-response and missing data, an issue when conducting regression analyses and attempting to establish causal relationships with directional effects. Initial chi-square and F-tests also presented a challenge mainly due to the low number of employer-sponsored migrants. Nevertheless, the study provides an in-depth look at a relatively “hidden” population, drawing on mixed methods with an emphasis on rich ethnographic data. It lays a strong empirical foundation for studies of immigrant groups in Iceland and similarly remote, smaller-scale communities typically constrained to qualitative-only approaches.

Future Research

Future directions regarding the phenomenon of international migration to Iceland should focus on the efficacy of the Icelandic government’s stated Policy on the Integration of Immigrants, particularly the ability of migrants to acquire functional Icelandic skills and to become upwardly mobile, moving themselves out of the bottom sector of labor in Iceland and increasing the educational achievement of the 1.5 and 2nd
generations. It has been shown in Iceland that the children of immigrants, particularly those from non-European countries with low levels of English mastery, are at much greater risk of dropping out of primary or secondary education when compared to native Icelanders (Siengboon 2005). Due to the relatively recent time of arrival of migrants in Iceland compared to the rest of Europe and the fact that no one had studied Thai migrants in particular, it seemed prurient to focus on the first generation in order to gather baseline data on this population. Future research should focus more on the integration of the second generation, since I anticipate that outcomes of the children of migrants married to Icelanders will differ significantly from those who came to Iceland for work or to join a Thai family member.

**Postscript on the 2008 Economic Crisis in Iceland**

One cannot ignore the impact of the recent economic recession in Iceland on the situation of immigrants in the country. Since the recession hit at the end of 2008, just as I was finishing my data collection, I decided to add one extra question to the end of my last survey printing to try and capture at least some of the attitudes in immediate reaction to the crisis. 22 people responded to this final question, with nearly half expressing concern about losing their job due to the country’s economic instability. Over three-quarters stated that it was more difficult to send remittances back home to Thailand, and over 80 percent expressed that even when they were able to send money home it wasn’t worth as much in Thai Baht. Only nine percent expressed a desire to leave Iceland and move

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122 At the end of 2007, before the economic crisis began, 100 Icelandic krónur were worth about 40 Thai baht. Two months after the 2008 crisis began the Icelandic currency temporarily entered free-fall, and
back to Thailand as a result of the crisis; additionally, only nine percent expressed that the crisis was causing marital stress and discord in their families.

Again, this question was only a very brief snapshot of how the crisis affected the Thai population, but it is revealing that economic stress was high but marital stress and the desire to leave the country and return to Thailand was relatively low. A quick glance at the Statistics Iceland website in November 2011, three years after administering the survey for this study, reveals that the numbers of Thai people living in Iceland has actually increased every year since the time of this study, from a population of 963 in January 2007 to a total of 1,097 in January 2011. Thais in Iceland, while still a very small portion of the country’s general population, have put down roots in their adopted country and appear committed to staying.

100 ISK was equivalent to just 23 Thai baht—a decrease in value of nearly 43 percent.
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Appendix A

Qualitative Interview Schedule

1. Where did you grow up in Thailand?
2. How long have you lived in Iceland?
3. What did you know about Iceland before you came here?
4. Did you know anyone who left Thailand to move to another country before you did? Who are they, and where did they go?
5. What made you leave Thailand?
6. Did you work in Thailand before you came here? What was your job?
7. When you first came to Iceland, what kind of visa did you have? Tourist, work, spouse?
8. Who obtained your visa(s) for you?
9. Is your visa different now? (Or do you have an Icelandic passport now?)
10. How did you feel when you left Thailand?
11. How did you feel about Iceland when you first arrived?
12. How do you feel about Iceland now? (Why have your feelings changed?)
13. Where did you live when you first came here? Where do you live now?
14. How old were you when you first came to Iceland?
15. Do you work here? If so, where do you work?
16. Are you married? How did you meet your husband, if he is Icelandic?
17. Do you have children? Where do they live?
18. Do your children attend school in Iceland?
19. Do you have relatives? If so, where are they?
20. How many times have you gone back to Thailand since you came here? Does your family go with you, or do you go alone?
22. Do you keep up with national news from Thailand?
23. Do you vote in Thailand? Do you vote in Iceland?
24. Do you send money to Thailand? How often? How much? To whom?
25. Do you decide how the money sent home should be spent?
26. If you are Buddhist, do you attend the temple here? Why or why not?
27. What do you do for fun in Iceland?
28. What kind of food do you like best? Does your family like this food, too? Do you eat this food every day?
29. Do you watch Thai satellite TV or Thai video tapes? If so, how often?
30. Who are your five closest friends?
31. Who are your three closest friends in Iceland?
32. How many Thai people do you know in Iceland?
33. How do you feel around Thai people in Iceland?
34. How do you feel around people who are not Thai in Iceland?
35. Do you have any friends who are not Thai? Where are they from? What language do you speak with them?
36. What languages do you speak? With your spouse and children? At work? With friends?
37. How do you feel about learning Icelandic?
38. If you need help with translating something, like in a hospital, who do you ask?
39. If you need legal help, who do you ask?
40. If you need help with money, who do you ask?
41. If you need help with your children, who do you ask?
42. How do you feel you have been treated here in Iceland?
43. Have you ever felt lonely here? Can you talk about this?
44. Do you want to live here in Iceland for the rest of your life?
45. Is there anything I did not ask, that you would like to tell me about?
Appendix B

Quantitative Survey (English Version)

Survey of Thai Migrant Integration in Iceland

2008

Jóhanna Gísladóttir Bissat, MA
PhD Student in Anthropology and Demography
Population Research Institute
The Pennsylvania State University, USA
jgy105@psu.edu
GSM: 820-4755
DIRECTIONS:

Please answer each question on the survey because all of the questions are very important for the project.

Please try to finish the survey quickly and place it in the mailbox within one week.

Good luck, and thank you for participating!
Module A: INDIVIDUAL AND HOUSEHOLD BACKGROUND

The following questions ask for some basic information about you and your household.

1. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other: ______________________

2. What is your age? ______________

3. What is the name of your hometown in Thailand?
   __________________________

4. What is the highest education level that you have reached?
   - No education
   - Primary education (up to grade 6)
   - Secondary education (up to grade 9)
   - Secondary education (up to grade 12)
   - Vocational education
   - University education (BA, BS)  ________ ______________
   - Graduate degree (MA, MS, PhD)  City / Country
   - Other: ______________________
5. Do you (or your family) currently own or rent a house in Iceland?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- Rent
- Own

→ Do you rent house(s) to other people?
  - Yes
  - No

6. What is your current postal code? ________________

7. Please list the members of your household, **not** including yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to You (not name, but title—husband, daughter, etc)</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in Iceland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>d</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>e</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. What is your current relationship status?

- In a relationship, but not living together
- Registered cohabitation (*sambúð*)
- Living together (not married, not in a *sambúð*)
- Married
- Divorced—*Please skip to question # 10*
- Widowed—*Please skip to question # 10*
- Single (no significant other of any kind)—*Please skip to question # 10*
9. What is the ethnicity of your current partner or spouse ("significant other")?

- [ ] Thai
- [ ] Icelandic
- [ ] Other: _______________________________________________________

10. Have you changed any part of your name since you came to Iceland?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No—please go to question # 12

11. Why did you change your name?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- [ ] a. I got married and my spouse wanted me to change it
- [ ] b. I got married and I wanted to change it
- [ ] c. The government required me to change it
- [ ] d. I changed it when I applied for an Icelandic passport

12. Which of the following do you have in your own home?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- [ ] a. TV
- [ ] b. Stereo/CD player
- [ ] c. DVD/VCD player
- [ ] d. Computer
- [ ] e. Internet connection
- [ ] f. Satellite TV
- [ ] g. Car or motorcycle
- [ ] h. Subscription to Morgunblaðið or DV (Icelandic newspapers)
13. Do you have a valid Icelandic driver’s license?

☐ 1. Yes
☐ 2. No
☐ 88 I don’t know

14. How often do you take the city bus (strætó)?

☐ 1. Nearly every day
☐ 2. Once or twice a week
☐ 3. Once or twice a month
☐ 4. Once or twice a year
☐ 5. I never take the city bus
The following questions ask about your language skills.

15. Please answer each of the following questions about your **Icelandic** language skills with an “X” in the correct box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a How well do you <em>speak</em> Icelandic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b How well do you <em>understand</em> Icelandic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c How well do you <em>read</em> Icelandic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d How well do you <em>write</em> Icelandic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Please answer each of the following questions about your **English** language skills with an “X” in the correct box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a How well do you <em>speak</em> English?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b How well do you <em>understand</em> English?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c How well do you <em>read</em> English?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d How well do you <em>write</em> English?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Please answer each of the following questions about your **Thai** language skills with an “X” in the correct box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a How well do you <em>speak</em> Thai?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b How well do you <em>understand</em> Thai?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c How well do you <em>read</em> Thai?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d How well do you <em>write</em> Thai?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. What other languages are you familiar with (at least ngu ngu, plaa plaa)?—Please mark all that apply

- Isaan
- Khmein
- Vietnamese
- Polish
- Other: _______________

19. How many Icelandic language courses have you taken in Iceland?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more — Please skip to question # 21

20. Why haven’t you taken more Icelandic language courses in Iceland?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- I am satisfied with my current level of Icelandic knowledge
- I don’t know how to find more Icelandic courses
- I would rather work more than learn more Icelandic
- I need a teacher who can teach using the Thai language, not just English
- There is no one to watch my children while I am in class
- I prefer to learn English instead of Icelandic
- Other: ___________________________________________

21. Do you feel that it is important for you to speak good Icelandic?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- A little bit important
- Not important at all
The following questions ask about the language you use with your children in Iceland

22. If you have children in Iceland, how often do you speak Thai to them?

- I do not have any children in Iceland—Please skip to question # 24
- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

23. What language do your children in Iceland speak to you?

- Always Icelandic
- Mostly Icelandic, but some basic Thai (ngu ngu, plaa plaa)
- Equally Icelandic and Thai
- Mostly Thai, but some basic Icelandic
- Always Thai

The following questions ask about your children, parents, and siblings in order to better understand your family background.

24. This question asks about the number of children you have and whether or not they are currently in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>How many are in school now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A How many living children do you have, total?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B How many of your children live in Thailand?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C How many of your children live in Iceland?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25. Are your parents both alive?

☐ 1. Yes, they are both alive
☐ 2. No, they have both passed away
☐ 3. No, my father passed away
☐ 4. No, my mother passed away
☐ 5. I don’t know

26. What is (or was, if they are deceased) the status of your parents’ relationship?

☐ 1. They are married and living together
☐ 2. They are married and living in separate houses
☐ 3. They are a couple, but not married, and they live together
☐ 4. They are a couple, but not married, and they are living in separate houses
☐ 5. They are divorced
☐ 6. They are completely split up

☐ a. Father remarried
☐ b. Mother remarried
☐ 8. I don’t know

27. Are (or were) one or both of your parents farmers?

☐ 1. No, neither of my parents are/were farmers—Please skip to question # 30
☐ 2. Yes, one of them is/was a farmer
☐ 3. Yes, they are/were both farmers

28. How many rai of land do/did they work on? _____________________

29. Are/were your parents renting or owning their land?

☐ 1. Rent
☐ 2. Own
☐ 3. I don’t know
30. What is the main job that your father does (or did) for a living in Thailand?

- Farming
- Factory worker
- Factory manager
- Street-cart vendor
- Retail shop/grocery
- Bar/entertainment
- Hotel/restaurant
- Teaching
- Office worker
- Office manager
- Government job
- Working at home
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Other: ________________________________

31. What is the main job that your mother does (or did) for a living in Thailand?

- Farming
- Factory worker
- Factory manager
- Street-cart vendor
- Retail shop/grocery
- Bar/entertainment
- Hotel/restaurant
- Teaching
- Office worker
- Office manager
- Government job
- Working at home
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Housewife
- Other: ________________________________
The following questions ask about your siblings. This is to understand the role of migration in your family.

32. How many total living brothers and sisters do you have (not including you)?  
_______

33. Please fill in the following chart about ALL of your siblings, 1 sibling for each row. (If they are deceased, please mark the last known information before they passed away.) Please use an X to mark each answer, except for the question about **Location**—for that one, please WRITE (not just X) the answer neatly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living?</th>
<th>Age (compared to you)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>** Location **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Module B: MIGRATION HISTORY

The following questions ask about your previous experiences with migration, both within and outside of Thailand.

34. What is the name of the city or town, and country where you lived before you moved to Iceland for the first time?

__________________________ _____________________ _______
City/Town Name                    Country Name

35. What year did you first come to Iceland, to live here? _______________________

36. What is the name of the town where you first lived in Iceland?

_______________________________________________________________

37. The following questions ask about the different places you have lived in your life, and how long you lived in each place. Please write your answer in the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a  How many years have you lived in Iceland, in total?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b  How many years did you live in your hometown in Thailand?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c  Have you ever lived in another town in Thailand, away from home? If</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes, please write the town name here:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d  Please write here the names of any other countries where you have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lived:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The following questions ask about the first time you moved to Iceland [TO LIVE HERE](#) (for an extended period of time, not just vacation).

38. Why did you move to Iceland, the first time?—Please mark **all** that apply to you, and please write the number 1 next to the most important reason, 2 for the second most important reason, 3 for the third… etc.

- _ To be with my Thai family/relatives
- _ To work
- _ To study
- _ To be with my boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse/fiancé

→ What ethnicity was this person?  → Are you still with this same person today?

- ☑ 1 Thai
- ☑ 2 Icelandic
- ☑ 99 Other: _____________

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
39. Please mark below (with an \( \times \)) to show which family members came to Iceland before, with, and after you, and who you would like to bring to Iceland in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family member</th>
<th>People living in Iceland BEFORE I arrived</th>
<th>People who traveled to Iceland WITH me</th>
<th>People who came to Iceland AFTER me</th>
<th>I want to bring these people to Iceland in the FUTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Daughter(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Son(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Older sister(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Older brother(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Younger sister(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Younger brother(s)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Aunt(s)/Uncle(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Niece(s)/Nephew(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other relative(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
40. Who was involved in making the decision that you should move to Iceland the first time?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- a. Myself
- b. My employer (at the time)
- c. My boyfriend/girlfriend (at the time)
- d. My spouse (at the time)
- e. My mother
- f. My father
- g. My son
- h. My daughter
- i. My older brother
- j. My older sister
- k. My younger brother
- l. My younger sister
- m. Someone in my extended family
- n. My friend

41. How much information did you have about life in Iceland before you moved here for the first time?

- 1. I had a great deal of information about life in Iceland
- 2. I had some information about life in Iceland
- 3. I had very little information about life in Iceland
- 4. I had no information about life in Iceland—please skip to question # 44

42. From where did you get this information about Iceland, before coming? (Mark all that apply to you).

- a. I found it myself
- b. Parents
- c. Spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend
- d. Children
- e. Siblings
- f. Cousins
- g. Aunts/uncles
- h. Friends
- i. Other: ____________________________________________________________
43. Thinking about your very first arrival to Iceland, how accurate was your previous information about Iceland, compared to the reality?

- [ ] Completely accurate
- [ ] Mostly accurate
- [ ] Somewhat accurate
- [ ] Mostly inaccurate
- [ ] Completely inaccurate

44. Please mention three things that surprised you after you first arrived in Iceland (in other words, they were not what you were expecting).

1) ________________________________________________________
2) ________________________________________________________
3) ________________________________________________________

45. When you first came to Iceland, how did you cover the expenses of the move (e.g. plane ticket, shipping costs, etc)?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- [ ] My employer in Iceland paid for the move
- [ ] My Icelandic spouse/girlfriend/boyfriend (faen) paid for the move
- [ ] My Thai family (in Thailand) paid for the move
- [ ] My Thai family (in Iceland) paid for the move
- [ ] I paid for the move with my own money
- [ ] I borrowed money for the move
- [ ] Other: ________________________________________________________
46. Who did you live with (your first time living in Iceland)?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- Lived alone
- Employer housing
- Mother
- Father
- Significant other
- Brother/sister
- Grandparent
- Aunt/uncle
- Cousin
- Stepfather/stepmother
- Friend
- Other:_________________

47. What kind of permit/visa did you have when you first entered Iceland (at the airport)? Please mark all that apply to you.

- D-Visa, in order to get temporary residence permit (dvalarleyfi)
- Europe passport (not Icelandic)
- Europe residence visa (not Icelandic)
- Tourist visa to Europe (Schengen)
- Au Pair visa
- Student residence permit
- Temporary work permit (atvinnuleyfi) from my employer, or “red card”
- Icelandic passport/citizenship
- I had no permit when I entered Iceland
- I don’t know

48. Who sponsored you for a permit/visa to come to Iceland the first time?

- I did not need a sponsor
- My boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancé at the time
- My spouse at the time
- My family member (parent, sister, etc)
- My friend at the time
- My employer at the time
49. What kind of permit/visa do you have now?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- a. Temporary residence permit (dvalarleyfi)
- b. Permanent residence permit (búsetuleyfi), or “green card”
- c. European passport (not Icelandic)
- d. European residence visa (not Icelandic)
- e. Tourist visa to enter Europe (Schengen)
- f. Au Pair visa
- g. Student work permit
- h. Temporary work permit (atvinnuleyfi) from my employer, or “red card”
- i. Permanent work permit
- j. Icelandic passport/citizenship
- k. I had no permit when I entered Iceland
- l. I don’t know

50. Have you ever moved away from Iceland since you first arrived (not including vacation)?

- 1. No—Please skip to question # 56
- 2. Yes

The following questions ask about the SECOND TIME that you moved to Iceland to live.

51. How long have you ever lived away from Iceland, since you first moved here (not including vacations)?

- 1. 1 – 3 months
- 2. 4 – 12 months
- 3. 1 – 3 years
- 4. 4 – 5 years
- 5. 5+ years
52. When you left Iceland, where did you go to live?

________________________________________  _______________________

City/town                                      Country

53. What year did you move back to Iceland, after leaving Iceland the first time? ____

54. Who sponsored you for a permit/visa to come to Iceland, the second time?

☐ 1 I did not need a sponsor
☐ 2 My boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancé at the time
☐ 3 My spouse at the time
☐ 99 Other: ___________________________________________________

☐ 4 My family member (parent, sister, etc)
☐ 5 My friend at the time
☐ 6 My employer at the time

55. Who was involved in making the decision that you should come back to Iceland, most recently?—Please mark all that apply to you.

☐ a Myself
☐ b My employer (at the time)
☐ c My boyfriend/girlfriend (at the time)
☐ d My spouse (at the time)
☐ e My mother
☐ f My father
☐ g My son

☐ h My daughter
☐ i My older brother
☐ j My older sister
☐ k My younger brother
☐ l My younger sister
☐ m Someone in my extended family
☐ n My friend
The following questions ask about how long you want to live in Iceland, and how much you miss living in Thailand.

56. Considering how you feel today, how likely are you to move back to Thailand permanently in the next five years?

- [ ] Very likely
- [ ] Somewhat likely
- [ ] Neither likely nor unlikely
- [ ] Somewhat unlikely
- [ ] Very unlikely

57. How long do you intend to live in Iceland?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- [ ] Until I have the opportunity to move to another foreign country
- [ ] Until I have earned enough money to live well in Thailand
- [ ] Until my children finish school in Iceland and we can move to Thailand
- [ ] Until I (or my significant other) retire(s) and we can move to Thailand
- [ ] Until my family in Thailand needs me to move back to Thailand
- [ ] Until I don’t enjoy living in Iceland anymore
- [ ] I never intend to move away from Iceland

58. Are you an Icelandic citizen?

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes—Please skip to question # 61
59. How interested are you in becoming an Icelandic citizen?

○₁ Very interested—Please skip to question # 61
○₂ Somewhat interested
○₃ Neither interested nor uninterested
○₄ Somewhat uninterested
○₅ Very uninterested

60. What are some of the reasons that you might not want to become an Icelandic citizen?—Please mark all that apply to you.

○ₐ I am unsure about the requirements for becoming a citizen
○₉ I do not want to fulfill the language requirement
○₁₀ I do not want to be permanently attached to Iceland
○₁₁ I am considering moving back to Thailand

61. How much do you miss living in Thailand?

○₁ I miss living in Thailand very much, all the time
○₂ I miss living in Thailand sometimes, but not always
○₃ I miss living in Thailand a little bit, now and then
○₄ I do not miss living in Thailand at all
The following questions ask about how you might talk with other people about moving from Thailand to Iceland.

62. Imagine that someone you know in Thailand is interested in moving to Iceland. What are three things about Iceland that you would tell them, to help them make a decision? Please write them below.

1) ________________________________________________________
2) ________________________________________________________
3) ________________________________________________________

63. Have you tried to “convince” anyone to move from Thailand to Iceland?

☐ 1. No
☐ 2. Yes
Module C: TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The following questions ask about how connected you are to both Thailand and Iceland.

64. When you talk about “home,” what place are you thinking of?
   - Iceland
   - Thailand
   - Both Iceland and Thailand
   - I don’t have any place that feels like “home” to me

65. In the last five years (since living in Iceland), how many times have you visited Thailand?
   - Never—Please skip to question # 67
   - One time
   - Two times
   - Three times
   - Four times
   - Five or more times

66. How long was your last trip to Thailand?

__________________________________________________________________________

Weeks                                      Months
67. How would you describe your housing/land situation in Thailand?—*Please mark only one*

- I own housing/land in Thailand, which I acquired before moving away from Thailand
- I own housing/land in Thailand, purchased with money from working in Iceland
- I do not own housing/land in Thailand, but I am saving money to buy it later
- I do not own housing/land in Thailand, and I do not plan on buying anything there for now

68. How do you keep in touch with people in Thailand?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- Telephone
- “Skype” or other computer-phone
- Chat (MSN, AIM, Gmail, etc)
- E-mail
- Blog or other website
- Writing a letter in the post
- Sending money
- I never keep in touch with people in Thailand
- Other: ________________________________

69. How often do you communicate with people in Thailand?

- Nearly every day
- Once or twice a week
- Once or twice a month
- Once or twice a year
- I never communicate with people in Thailand
70. In what way do you keep up with news and events in Thailand?—*Please mark all that apply*

- I do not keep up with any news from Thailand
- Satellite TV direct from Thailand
- Internet news from Thailand
- Thai newspaper or magazine
- Icelandic TV or newspaper
- Call, write, or chat directly with people in Thailand
- Other: ____________________________________________________________

71. When you lived in Thailand, did you ever vote in any elections?

- No
- Yes

72. In which countries are you eligible to vote?

- Thailand
- Iceland
- I am not eligible to vote in any country—*Please skip to question # 74*

73. Since living in Iceland, in which elections have you voted?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- Icelandic Municipal (city)
- Icelandic Parliamentary (Alþing)
- Elections in Thailand
- I have not voted in any elections
**Module D: SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND NETWORKS**

*The following questions ask about what kinds of activities you do in your leisure time, and with whom you do those activities, in order to understand your social environment.*

74. Please use an X to show who you do these activities with, or to show that you never do this activity. Your accuracy will be very helpful for the study.—Please mark all that apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>I do this alone</th>
<th>With Thais</th>
<th>With Icelanders</th>
<th>With other immigrants</th>
<th>I never do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Cook and eat food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Sing karaoke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Play slot machines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Listen to Thai music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Listen to non-Thai music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Go out to live concerts and plays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Go out at night (dancing, etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>Go swimming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Read Icelandic magazines/books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>Read Thai magazines/books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>Drink alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>Take a trip within Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>I do this alone</td>
<td>With Thais</td>
<td>With Icelanders</td>
<td>With other immigrants</td>
<td>I never do this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>Go camping or hiking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iska</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>Go fishing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>Gather bird eggs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>Go to a coffee restaurant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>Go to a Thai restaurant</td>
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<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>Go to a non-Thai restaurant</td>
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<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>Go shopping</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>Go to Thai temple</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>Go to Icelandic church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>Play card games</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>Surf the Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>Play computer or video games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>Go to the cinema (movie theater)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td>Watch Thai TV/videos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>æ</td>
<td>Watch Icelandic TV/videos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ð</td>
<td>Watch American/British TV/videos</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following questions ask about your involvement with both religious and social associations in the Thai community of Iceland.

75. Are you a member of the Buddhist Association in Iceland (Búddistafélagið)?

- [ ] 1. No
- [ ] 2. Yes
- [ ] 88. I don’t know

76. How would you describe your religious beliefs?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- [ ] a. Thai Buddhist
- [ ] b. Christian
- [ ] c. Muslim
- [ ] d. Atheist
- [ ] 99. Other: _____________________________________________________

77. Are you a member of the Thai-Icelandic Association (Tælenskt-Íslenskt Félagið)?

- [ ] 1. No
- [ ] 2. Yes
- [ ] 88. I don’t know
78. This question asks about how often you participate in certain activities. Please mark one X on each line, to show how often you do each activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Nearly every day</th>
<th>1-2 times per week</th>
<th>1-2 times per month</th>
<th>1-2 times per year</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Watched Thai movies before Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Watch Thai movies now in Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Attended Thai festivals before Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Attend Thai festivals now in Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e Attend Icelandic public festivals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f Played cards before coming to Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g Play cards now in Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h Eat Thai food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i Ate farang food before Iceland</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j Eat farang food now in Iceland</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k Play slot machines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l Went to temple before Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m Go to temple now in Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n Go to Icelandic church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Drank alcohol before Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p Drink alcohol now in Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q Kept up with Thai news before Iceland</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r Keep up with Thai news now in Iceland</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following questions ask about your opinion of gossip.

79. Since you came to Iceland, has gossip among the Thai community ever discouraged you from spending more time with Thai people here?

☐ 1. Never
☐ 2. Sometimes
☐ 3. Often
☐ 4. All the time

80. Since you came to Iceland, has gossip among the Thai community ever prevented you from asking for help from a Thai person when you needed something? (For example, asking for financial or medical help.)

☐ 1. Never
☐ 2. Sometimes
☐ 3. Often
☐ 4. All the time
The following questions ask about what kind of connections you have as a Thai immigrant living in Iceland.

81. As a Thai immigrant, how do you feel about making new friends in Iceland, compared to making new friends when you lived in Thailand?

☐ 1. It is much easier to make new friends in Iceland than in Thailand
☐ 2. It is somewhat easier to make new friends in Iceland than in Thailand
☐ 3. It is neither easier nor harder to make new friends in Iceland than in Thailand
☐ 4. It is somewhat harder to make new friends in Iceland than in Thailand
☐ 5. It is much harder to make new friends in Iceland than in Thailand

82. Which countries do your friends in Iceland come from? Please mark below with an X on each line, to show approximately how many of your friends are from each country listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1-3 friends</th>
<th>4-10 friends</th>
<th>More than 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Philippines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Vietnam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following questions ask about whether you have given or received help while living in Iceland. This is to understand how people are connected in Iceland.

83. In Iceland, have you ever given help to someone (whether they asked you or not)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No—Please skip to question # 85

84. Please make an **X** showing the kind of help you have given in Iceland, and the people to whom you gave that specific type of help. Please mark as many boxes as apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thai family</th>
<th>Thai friend</th>
<th>Thai temple</th>
<th>Icelandic family</th>
<th>Icelandic friend</th>
<th>Other immigrant family</th>
<th>Other immigrant friend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Translate/Interpret</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Financial help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Legal help</td>
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<td>d</td>
<td>Moving</td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Lending a car</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Temporary housing</td>
<td></td>
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<td>h</td>
<td>Icelandic phone calls</td>
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<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Other:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
85. In Iceland, have you ever **received** help from someone (whether you asked them or not)?

   - Yes
   - No—**Please skip to question # 87**

86. Please make an **X** showing the kind of **help** you have **received** in Iceland, and the **people** from whom you received that specific type of help. Please mark as many boxes as apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thai family</th>
<th>Thai friend</th>
<th>Thai temple</th>
<th>Icelandic family</th>
<th>Icelandic friend</th>
<th>Other immigrant family</th>
<th>Other immigrant friend</th>
<th>Kjartan Borg (consul)</th>
<th>Alþjóðahús/ Fjölmenn- ingarsetur</th>
<th>Government social services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Translate/Interpret</td>
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<td>b</td>
<td>Financial help</td>
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<td>c</td>
<td>Legal help</td>
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<td>e</td>
<td>Borrow a car</td>
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<td>Childcare</td>
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<td>g</td>
<td>Temporary housing</td>
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<td>h</td>
<td>Icelandic phone calls</td>
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<td>i</td>
<td>Other:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
87. Have you heard of Alþjóðahús (the Intercultural Centre in Reykjavík) or Fjölmenningarsetur (Multi-Cultural Center in Ísafjörður)?

☐ 1. No—Please skip to question # 90
☐ 2. Yes

88. Have you personally gone to Alþjóðahús or Fjölmenningarsetur to ask for help?

☐ 1. No
☐ 2. Yes—Please skip to question # 90

89. Why haven’t you gone to Alþjóðahús or Fjölmenningarsetur to ask for help?—Please mark all that apply.

☐ a. I don’t know what kind of services they offer
☐ b. I am ashamed/afraid of asking them for help
☐ c. I don’t speak the language well enough to ask for help
☐ d. I don’t need their help
The following questions ask about how comfortable you feel trusting different groups of people in Iceland—Thai people, Icelandic people, and other immigrants.

90. How comfortable do you feel with trusting Thai people in Iceland (for example, to pay back money, to not gossip about your personal matters, to take care of your children)?

1. Very comfortable
2. Somewhat comfortable
3. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
4. Somewhat uncomfortable
5. Very uncomfortable

91. How comfortable do you feel with trusting Icelandic people in Iceland (for example, to pay back money, to not gossip about your personal matters, to take care of your children)?

1. Very comfortable
2. Somewhat comfortable
3. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
4. Somewhat uncomfortable
5. Very uncomfortable

92. How comfortable do you feel with trusting other immigrants (not Thai) in Iceland (for example, to pay back money, to not gossip about your personal matters, to take care of your children)?

1. Very comfortable
2. Somewhat comfortable
3. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
4. Somewhat uncomfortable
5. Very uncomfortable
Module E: WORK AND REMITTANCES

The following questions ask about your employment activity before and after moving to Iceland, as well as some details about your workplace.

93. What was the main job you had before you came to Iceland?

- Farming
- Factory worker
- Factory manager
- Street-cart vendor
- Retail shop/grocery
- Bar/entertainment
- Hotel/restaurant
- Teaching
- Office worker
- Office manager
- Government job
- Massage/spa
- Student—Please skip to question # 98
- Housewife—Please skip to question # 98
- Unemployed—Please skip to question # 98
- Retired—Please skip to question # 98
- Other: ______________________________________________________

94. Was your previous job (from the previous question) in Thailand?

- No—which country was this? ________________________________
- Yes—Please skip to question # 96

95. What was the main job you had in Thailand, before moving abroad?

- Farming
- Factory worker
- Factory manager
- Street-cart vendor
- Retail shop/grocery
- Bar/entertainment
- Hotel/restaurant
- Teaching
- Office worker
- Office manager
- Government job
- Massage/spa
- Student—Please skip to question # 99
- Housewife—Please skip to question # 99
- Unemployed—Please skip to question # 99
- Retired—Please skip to question # 99
- Other: ______________________________________________________
96. What kind of income did you have at your job in Thailand, relative to most people in Thailand?

- 1. Very high income
- 2. Somewhat high income
- 3. Average income
- 4. Somewhat lower income
- 5. Very low income

97. How much did you expect your income to change, when you moved away from Thailand?

- 1. Much higher
- 2. A little higher
- 3. No change
- 4. A little lower
- 5. Much lower
- 88. I had no idea

98. How much did your income actually change, when you came to Iceland?

- 1. Much higher
- 2. A little higher
- 3. No change
- 4. A little lower
- 5. Much lower
99. What is your main job in Iceland, right now?

- Farming
- Factory worker (unskilled)
- Factory machine operator/driver (skilled)
- Care worker (retirement home, hospital)
- Doctor or nurse
- Janitorial work

Are you self-employed?

- No
- Yes

Other: ______________________________________________________

100. About how many hours per week do you work at this job (with overtime)? _____

101. How did you hear about your current job in Iceland?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- My significant other
- Thai friend
- Thai acquaintance
- Thai family member
- Icelandic friend
- Icelandic acquaintance
- Icelandic family member
- Another immigrant friend
- Another immigrant acquaintance
- Another immigrant family member
- Alþjóðahús or Fjölmenningarsetur
- Employment agency
- I found this job by myself
- Other: _____________________
102. What kind of income do you have at your job here in Iceland, relative to most people you know NOW, in Iceland?

- 1. Very high income
- 2. Somewhat high income
- 3. Average income
- 4. Somewhat lower income
- 5. Very low income

103. Are you currently interested in finding a new job?

- 1. No—please skip to question # 104
- 2. Maybe
- 3. Yes

104. Why are you interested in finding a different job?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- a. I want better wages/salary
- b. I dislike my boss
- c. I dislike my co-workers
- d. I dislike the company itself
- e. My union does not help me
- f. I want to try something new
- g. I am not using my education
- h. I want to move up to a higher working status (manager, foreman, etc)
- z. Other: ______________________

105. What is your current level of income (per month) for your main, full-time job, right now?

- 1. Less than 100,000 kronur
- 2. 101,000 – 150,000 kronur
- 3. 151,000 – 200,000 kronur
- 4. 201,000 – 250,000 kronur
- 5. 251,000 – 300,000 kronur
- 6. More than 300,000 kronur
106. Are you working at a management/supervisor level at your present job?

☑️ 1. No—Please go to question # 108
☑️ 2. Yes

107. In your workplace, what is the ethnicity of the people who work under you?

☑️ 1. No one works under me
☑️ 2. They are all Icelanders
☑️ 3. Most of them are Icelandic
☑️ 4. About half of them are Icelandic
☑️ 5. Most of them are foreigners
☑️ 6. They are all foreigners

108. In your workplace, what is the ethnicity of the people who work over you?

☑️ 1. No one works over me (I have no boss/manager)
☑️ 2. They are all Icelanders
☑️ 3. Most of them are Icelandic
☑️ 4. About half of them are Icelandic
☑️ 5. Most of them are foreigners
☑️ 6. They are all foreigners

109. In your workplace, what is the ethnicity of the people who work at your same level?

☑️ 1. No one works at the same level that I do
☑️ 2. They are all Icelanders, except for me
☑️ 3. Most of them are Icelandic
☑️ 4. About half of them are Icelandic
☑️ 5. Most of them are foreigners
☑️ 6. They are all foreigners
110. At your current job, how many of the workers (total) are from Thailand?

☐ 1. All of them  
☐ 2. Most of them  
☐ 3. About half of them  
☐ 4. Less than half of them  
☐ 5. None of them are from Thailand

111. Please mark any of the following jobs which you do on the side (not main income):

☐ a. Collecting bottles and cans for recycling  
☐ b. Sometimes people buy fish from me  
   ➔ Do you catch the fish yourself?  
      ☐ 1. No 
      ☐ 2. Yes  
☐ c. Selling other kinds of food  
☐ d. Janitorial work (maid)  
☐ e. Putting bait on fishing lines  
☐ f. I don’t do any jobs on the side  
☐ z. Other: ___________________________________________

The following questions ask about your union activities.

112. Have you ever been a member of a union?

☐ 1. No—Please skip to question # 116  
☐ 2. Yes  
☐ 88 I don’t know

113. Have you ever asked your union for help?

☐ 1. No—Please skip to question # 114  
☐ 2. Yes
114. What did you ask your union to help you with?—Please mark all that apply to you, and then skip to question #116.

- Paying for language classes
- Arguing for missed wages
- Signing a contract
- Dealing with harassment
- Finding a new job
- Getting a translator/interpreter

115. Why haven’t you asked your union for help? —Please mark all that apply to you.

- I don’t know very much about my union
- Afraid of asking them for help
- Language problems
- No need for their help

The following questions ask about your income, and some details about sending money to Thailand.

116. When you receive a paycheck in Iceland, what do you do with the leftover money?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- I put money in a bank account in Iceland
- I buy stocks in a bank in Iceland
- I put my money in a shares group here in Iceland
- I keep my money here with me in Iceland, but not in a bank
- I send money to Thailand
- I send money somewhere else in the world (not Iceland, not Thailand)
117. How often do you send money to people in Thailand?

☐ 1. Once or twice a month
☐ 2. Once or twice a year
☐ 3. Once every few years
☐ 4. I never send money to my family in Thailand—Please skip to question # 120

118. To whom do you send money in Thailand?—Please mark all that apply to you.

☐ a. Husband
☐ b. Wife
☐ c. Mother
☐ d. Father
☐ e. Older brother
☐ f. Older sister
☐ g. Younger brother
☐ h. Younger sister
☐ i. Married children
☐ j. Unmarried children
☐ k. Grandparents
☐ l. Friends (not family)
☐ m. Other: ______________

119. What is your money used for in Thailand?—Please mark all that apply to you.

☐ a. To pay for someone's schooling
☐ b. To build a house for myself
☐ c. To help build a house for someone in my family
☐ d. To help feed my family
☐ e. To help pay for medical bills in my family
☐ f. To buy nice things for people in my family, like a TV or car
☐ g. I have no idea what my money is used for in Thailand.

The following questions ask about owning your own business.

120. Have you ever owned a business in Iceland?

☐ 1. No—Please skip to question # 124
☐ 2. Yes
121. What kind of business(es) have you owned?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- [ ] a. Thai restaurant
- [ ] b. Thai grocery store (food)
- [ ] c. Thai goods (gifts, magazines, etc)
- [ ] d. Thai video business
- [ ] e. Bar/dance club
- [ ] f. Karaoke bar
- [ ] g. Spa/ massage parlor
- [ ] h. Import business
- [ ] zz. Other: ________________________________

122. What is/was the ownership situation of your business(es)?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- [ ] a. I own/ed my own business, by myself
- [ ] b. I own/ed a business with a Thai friend
- [ ] c. I own/ed a business with an Icelandic friend
- [ ] d. I own/ed a business with a Thai family member
- [ ] e. I own/ed a business with an Icelandic family member
- [ ] f. I own/ed a business with my significant other (not married)

123. Where did you get the capital to start your business(es)?—*Please mark all that apply to you.*

- [ ] a. I borrowed the money from the bank in Iceland
- [ ] b. I earned the money before I came to Iceland
- [ ] c. I earned the money from working in Iceland
- [ ] d. My friend loaned me money to start the business
- [ ] e. My family member loaned me money to start the business
- [ ] f. My significant other gave me money to start the business (not married)
- [ ] zz. Other: __________________________________________
**Module F: CONTEXT OF RECEPTION**

*The following questions ask about the way people act towards you as a Thai immigrant in Iceland.*

124. Please mark an **X** in the following boxes (one per line) to describe how often **you** have felt mistreated as a Thai immigrant, since moving to Iceland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience as a Thai Immigrant</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a</strong> Not being hired for a job</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b</strong> Not being treated fairly in a job</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>c</strong> Not being treated fairly by the police</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>d</strong> Not being treated fairly when looking to rent a home</td>
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<td><strong>e</strong> Not being treated fairly by my Icelandic teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>f</strong> Not being welcomed by my Icelandic neighbors</td>
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<td><strong>g</strong> Not being treated by Icelanders with the same respect that they give to other Icelanders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>h</strong> Not being treated with the same level of service (restaurant, shop, etc) that Icelanders receive</td>
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<td><strong>i</strong> Icelanders treat me as if I am less intelligent</td>
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<td><strong>j</strong> Icelanders treat me as if I am a dishonest person</td>
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<td><strong>k</strong> Icelanders act as if they are scared of me</td>
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<td><strong>l</strong> Icelanders act is if I am “below” them in status</td>
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<td><strong>m</strong> Icelanders have called me names or harassed me</td>
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<td><strong>n</strong> I feel unwelcome in public places in Iceland</td>
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<td><strong>o</strong> I feel more at risk for a violent attack</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
125. Have you heard about other Thai immigrants being mistreated in the ways mentioned above?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

126. How do you react to mistreatment from someone in Iceland, as a Thai immigrant?—Please mark all that apply to you.

- I have never been mistreated as a Thai immigrant
- I feel stressed
- I directly confront the person
- I ignore the person
- I report the person’s behavior (to your boss, union, or the police)
- I talk with Thai people about it
- I talk with Icelandic people about it
- I talk with other immigrants about it

127. In general, how do you think MOST Icelanders feel about having immigrants in Iceland?—Please mark only one.

- Icelanders are very welcoming towards immigrants
- Icelanders are somewhat welcoming towards immigrants
- Icelanders are neither welcoming nor unwelcoming towards immigrants
- Icelanders are somewhat unwelcoming towards immigrants
- Icelanders are very unwelcoming towards immigrants
Module G: HOUSEHOLD DECISIONS

The following questions ask about the way housework and decisions are taken care of in your household.

128. Do you live in the same household with your spouse or significant other?

- Yes
- No—Please skip to question #131

129. On the following chart, please use an X to show who usually does each task in your household:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Spouse/Partner</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
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<td>b</td>
<td>Wash dishes</td>
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<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Child care</td>
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<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Cleaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Grocery shopping</td>
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<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Paying the bills</td>
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<td>g</td>
<td>House maintenance</td>
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<td>h</td>
<td>Car maintenance</td>
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<td>i</td>
<td>Yard work</td>
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<td>j</td>
<td>Laundry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
130. On the following chart, please use an X to show who **usually** makes the final decision (who has the most power) about the following situations in your household:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Spouse/Partner</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Going to Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>b Making a big purchase (car, computer, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>c Going to a doctor or the dentist</td>
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<tr>
<td>d Buying your own things (clothes, shoes, CDs, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>e Having guests come to your home</td>
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<td>f Where you will live</td>
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<td>g How much time you spend with Thai people</td>
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<td>h When and where to take vacation</td>
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<tr>
<td>i Sending money home to Thailand</td>
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<td>j Whether or not you will work outside the home</td>
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<td>k Whether or not you will have kids</td>
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<td>l How to discipline the children</td>
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<tr>
<td>m Which language to speak at home</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>n Helping other family members who are in need</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

131. If you could change anything about your life right now, what would you change?

______________________________________________________________________
132. How has the economic crisis in Iceland affected you?—Please mark all that apply to you.

   a. I already lost my job in Iceland.
   b. I am worried about losing my job in Iceland.
   c. I am planning to move back to Thailand now.
   d. It's more difficult to send money to Thailand now.
   e. If I can send money home, it's not worth as much as it used to be.
   f. It makes my marriage/relationship more stressed.
   g. Other: ____________________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________________________

133. Is there anything else that you would like to say about being a Thai immigrant in Iceland?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
THIS MARKS THE END OF THE SURVEY

Thank you for your time and energy in participating in this survey.
Your contribution is very much appreciated! 😊
VITA

Jóhanna Gísladóttir Bissat

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND
2012  PhD Anthropology and Demography, The Pennsylvania State University
2005  MA Anthropology, The Pennsylvania State University
2000  BA English, Seattle Pacific University

PUBLICATIONS
Bissat, Jóhanna Gísladóttir

SELECTED AWARDS
2009  Conference Travel Grant, Research and Graduate Studies Office
2008  Conference Travel Grant, Research and Graduate Studies Office
2007  Hill Foundation Fellowship Award for Dissertation Research
2006  National Science Foundation, Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant
2006  American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship, Dissertation Fieldwork
2005  American-Scandinavian Foundation Grant, Pre-Dissertation Fieldwork

SELECTED FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE
2007-2008   Director, ethnographic research, survey development and survey administration for dissertation project (March 2007-December 2008)
2008  Research assistant/interpreter, survey of Thai, Icelandic, and English-speaking populations on the Attitudes of Immigrants Towards Living in Iceland project, University of Iceland (February-December)
2006  Research assistant, survey of grocery stores in low-income Philadelphia neighborhoods for National Institutes of Environmental Health Science (R21), The Pennsylvania State University (June-December)
2006  Business ethnographer, survey and participant-observation for SmartRevenue, anthropological market research company (February-March)
2005  Director, ethnographic research of Thai migrants in Reykjavík Iceland for pilot study of dissertation project (August)
2005  Team member, National Science Foundation field methods school in rural Zambia for cultural anthropology PhD Students. (July-August)

SELECTED TEACHING EXPERIENCE
2010-Present  Social Studies Teacher, Woodinville High School, Northshore School District, WA
2003-2006  Graduate Teaching Assistant, Intellectual Background of Archaeology, Comparative Social Organization, and Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, The Pennsylvania State University
2002-2003  English and Social Studies Teacher, Woodinville High School, Northshore School District, WA