The London School of Economics

Working through oil:

Skill, ethics, and masculinities in the Scottish Oil and Gas Industry

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract:

My thesis centres on the lives of oil and gas workers in North East Scotland, focussing on the specific ways of life which arise around this particular form of work. The research is based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted with oil workers and their families in small coastal towns in Aberdeenshire and the Moray coast.

My interlocutors are broadly split between an older generation who identify closely with forms of masculinity and work ethics which emerged alongside the initial development of the industry in the 'early era'; and a younger generation of workers whose relationships to this form of labour have shifted in line with industry-wide changes and are more firmly rooted in the wider ethical livelihoods and kinship patterns made possible through work in the industry.

The ethnographic material concentrates on material and temporal processes associated with resource production, in combination with intimate personal ethnographies of a number of key interlocutors from varied sections of the industry.

A number of theoretical topics are developed in the thesis - the emergence of ethical attachments to work through processes of developing skills 'in' and 'around' labour; shifting gender ideologies and kinship arrangements which shape and are shaped by changes in the industry; differentiated understandings of agency in relation to windfall wealth and a dominant regional industry.

During my fieldwork the industry was going through a period of intense downturn, with widespread redundancies and work becoming increasingly precarious. This moment of disruption spurred much discussion around the role of the industry in the region, the legacies of other forms of work, and the potential for alternative livelihoods in an area dominated by the oil industry.

These issues take on increasing importance with discussions around the looming end of oil, and the possibilities of securing a just transition away from fossil fuel production.

Contents

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Introduction

John used to be a fisherman. A photograph of the Moonstone, the prawn fishing boat that defined John's world, hangs in the kitchen in its thin blue frame, not quite flush against the wall, but ever-so-slightly overhanging the dining table. The boat is pictured at work, breaking through the foam of a bright blue North Sea wave. Below, on the kitchen dresser, sits a dark wooden frame holding a montage of smaller photographs depicting daily life at sea - seagulls surrounding the vessel as it draws in its catch; another action-shot of the boat returning to harbour; a close-up of a box of teeming pink langoustines, the North Sea prawn around which John's fortune was built; and an adjacent photograph of John at the wheel of the boat, younger looking, plumper, his face and arms tanned to a remarkably similar shade of pink to the prawns in the nets.

I was at the launch of the Moonstone 20-odd years ago. I can still remember the small crowd gathered at the harbour watching John's wife, Sarah, smashing a bottle of champagne on the hull for good luck; and I remember being with his son, my friend, Peter, at the dinner afterwards at the local hotel, much like a wedding, but without dancing or alcohol due to the fishing community's strict Protestantism. I also remember, a week or so later, John beaming with pride whilst showing us around the hulking white vessel, the short trip out to sea, and the sweet acidic scent of diesel oil blowing through the wheelhouse and the cabins. But my strongest childhood recollection of John is, on those rare occasions when he was at home, his stern warnings against a career as a fisherman. "Don't go to sea Connor. It's a terrible life. You're never home." Two decades later, he wonders if his sons didn't overhear, and take to heart, those words of advice intended for me.

His two sons, the heirs to his fishing fortune, rejected a life at sea in favour of a university education. One became a doctor, the other, a lawyer. With no one to take over the family business, John felt his only option was to sell his boat. This was not an easy decision to make. His life revolved around his boat and the vast majority of his time was spent at sea. Fishing was all he had known, and by all accounts he was very good at it. Leaving the world of fishing led to a crisis in John's life. It meant a rereading of his past and a recalculation of the future. He eventually found work on a North Sea oil rig. Oil work provided a degree of solace - it looked and felt much like fishing, but it allowed an escape from complicated questions of the past. However a slump in the price of oil a few years into his new career led to John being made redundant. And so doubts over whether selling the boat was really the right thing to do returned to torment John once again.

My thesis draws on many accounts like that of John's, of lives made and remade in correspondence with the oil and gas industry located in sea and along the shores of North East Scotland. The process John goes through, of building a life around the familiar yet unique qualities of oil work in relation to an already present ethical understanding of the world, is a basic pattern common to the region and to all my interlocutors. Narratives of coming to know and live alongside the rhythms, people, places and technologies of oil are central to my thesis.

At different moments in the development of the industry the kinds of lives made possible or desirable through oil work change. The North Sea oil industry was brought into being in the early 1970s under a particular set of material, historical, and political circumstances. From its inception the industry was American-led, stridently opposed to union activity, focussed on rapid development, and viewed as a clean-break from a collapsing and chaotic industrial sector. This, in turn, led to understandings of oil as an exhilarating new industry, promising national, regional, and personal rejuvenation, and lucrative new careers for those men with enough daring to take up positions on the rigs. These initial impressions of oil, as risky and transformative, continue to shape current understandings of the industry and those who work in it, despite the sweeping transformations which have taken place since those early days.

In this thesis I concentrate on questions of shifting ethical relations, expressions of masculinity, and understandings of labour associated with work in the oil and gas industry. In particular I examine the ways in which these aspects of oil work emerge and develop as the industry transforms over time. To this end my thesis concentrates on two distinct but overlapping generations of oil workers. Firstly, an initial cohort of 'oil men' who came to prominence in the early, post-discovery era, influenced both by the often aggressive working conditions, but also the expectation that this novel industry would prove to be materially and ethically transformative. And secondly, a more recent generation of workers whose markedly different relation to the industry speaks to a normalisation and growing familiarity with the patterns of oil work, and its role as a central organising feature of life.

The related but contrasting forms of masculinity espoused in these two generations reflect changing structures of oil production, booms, busts, and other upheavals which make themselves manifest in the internal and ethical lives of these men. These different conceptualisations of oil labour are relationally constitutive - the much lauded intrigue and promise of oil in the early era still informs current imaginaries of oil; and the continuing importance of oil at the heart of everyday life in the present relies on an accommodation and harnessing of those initial possibilities.

Much of my thesis is concerned with the ways in which ethical attachments to oil work emerge through a combination of reflections on work itself, and the wider lives the patterns of oil work allow for. The experiences of offshore and onshore together shape relation to this work. This speaks to much recent anthropological focus on dissolving the boundaries between economy and household which I discuss below, and in much of the thesis I examine how complex ethical attachments to oil work and life emerge and develop over time. However, in contrast to these carefully tuned alignments of offshore and onshore, work and home, the slump in oil price in 2014 and the subsequent wave of precarity and redundancy which followed led to a rapid unravelling of many of these arrangements. Widespread redundancies and increased precarity at work meant a reconsideration of the role of oil in the region and the value of this work. During my fieldwork the repercussions of the 2014 crash were still keenly felt. The future of the industry was still highly uncertain, and many workers reflected upon the implications of building a life around such a volatile resource.

In this introduction I first discuss how the project emerged through life-long friendships and ongoing

conversations with many men who now work in the oil industry. After discussing the implications and dynamics of this close involvement with my interlocutors and the field, I outline my methodological approach and the process of fieldwork. I begin with this discussion of my relation to the field and methodology because it was through this already existent position in the field that my research commenced. The methodology section thus centres on my peculiar positionality, as an anthropologist undertaking fieldwork 'at home' but simultaneously corresponding to a particular historical and cultural model of those who, like John the fisherman's sons, leave the area in search of a markedly different life elsewhere.

A brief historical note

Although I expand on the history of oil in great detail in the following chapters, it is important to note a number of key moments here in the introduction. Initial deposits of oil were discovered in the UK North Sea in the late 1960s, and production began in earnest with the establishment of the huge Forties field in 1975. The lack of British experience in drilling for oil in deep waters meant a reliance on American expertise and personnel in these early days. The early American influence led to a strictly anti-union political context during these early year. After intense political wrangling over the degree of state involvement in the industry a privatised production regime emerged, with the state largely limited to distribution of drilling licenses. The later 1970s and 1980s, a period of rapid growth, saw the rapid construction of hundreds of rigs and platforms across the North Sea.

This period of intense development and comparatively informal working practices was brought to an abrupt end by the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988. 165 offshore workers were killed when the platform on which they were working exploded. A government inquiry found that a lack of concern for workplace safety protocol was the ultimate cause of the disaster (Cullen 1990). As a result of this a vast system of safety procedure was introduced in the 1990s. This brought about a general formalisation of the industry, differentiating this later period from the ad-hoc early era. This post-Piper Alpha industry also began to be characterised by concerns over rapidly depleting deposits and a looming 'end of oil'.

In the 2010s, prior to my fieldwork, the oil price remained buoyant, and despite the aforementioned underlying worries around the long-term feasibility of North Sea oil the industry appeared relatively stable. However global overproduction of oil led to a glut in supply and a rapid drop in price at the end of 2014. A period of turbulence followed, during which production retracted, new projects were paused, and the industry saw significant numbers of workers made redundant (OGUK 2017). The impact of this downturn was a central feature of my time in the field, characterised by continued redundancies and considerable uncertainty around the immediate future of work in the industry. Much of my fieldwork concentrated on these ongoing disruptions and reconfigurations.

Methodology

I remember spending a Summer afternoon, a few years before beginning research for my PhD, driving around the Aberdeenshire countryside near my hometown with a group of friends. I sat in the back of the car with Aidan who, as per usual, was recounting one of his recent trips to work on an oil platform in the North Sea. He spoke of the intriguing new workmates he had come to know on the latest trip offshore, working on

a project to commission a new platform; the complexity of working with the latest technologies he was charged with installing; and the much higher wages that commissioning work attracted in comparison to standard maintenance or production work. I made a throwaway comment that he was rather lucky that the oil industry was situated so near to where we had grown up allowing him to follow such opportunities, and how different all our lives might have been had it not been so. Aidan seemed slightly taken aback by my comment. He replied that rather than good fortune or merely the existence of the industry nearby it was actually his high level of technical skill and foresight in interpreting patterns in the oil industry which allowed him to find such work and build a successful career.

During the following years, I would have many similar conversations with friends from secondary school, a large proportion of whom left school and found work in the oil industry. Conversations about offshore work were a very common feature of time spent onshore. I found that friends were particularly keen to to share with me, a relative outsider, experiences about their new lives as oil workers, emphasising the strangeness, stresses, and excitement of working in the industry.

My fieldwork began as a continuation of these conversations, and concentrated on the ways in which people were able to build a way of life around working in oil. Common topics of discussion included how they found a way-in to the industry; what their initial experiences off offshore work were like; the ways in which they were able to deal with the long periods of time at sea; and how other aspects of their life fitted alongside their working patterns.

My main field-site spanned the smaller towns and villages of the North East Coast, between Banff in Aberdeenshire and Cullen in Moray. The choice of field-site was initially based on my personal connection to the town of Banff in which I grew up. The contacts and connections available to me made it an obvious starting point, and I decided to focus on rekindling and strengthening relationships with a group of men whom I either knew from growing up in the area, or were introduced to me by those already existing contacts. But as soon as I began to move beyond my immediate friendship network I realised that all of the small towns along the Moray Coast were home to significant populations of oil workers and their families.

With many of these initial interlocutors I was already in regular contact, and carrying out ethnographic fieldwork meant paying greater attention to, recording and writing down conversations which were already taking place in the flow of our daily lives. Many other interlocutors were introduced to me through this initial group; I was put in contact with fathers, brothers, friends, workmates, and partners of these men. In addition, as I resettled in Scotland with my own family for the purpose of fieldwork, I also developed new relationships through meeting neighbours, chance encounters in local pubs, and in meeting other new parents at the baby-and-parent clubs that my wife and I attended after the birth of our son. The ubiquity of oil work in the area meant that almost every social encounter meant making new connections to people involved in the oil industry.

In many ways my 'role' during fieldwork (and indeed prior to commencing research) was as a witness to the experiences and situations my interlocutors encountered offshore. The most common interaction with

interlocutors would first start as an informal encounter, whether a chance meeting in a social context or having been put in touch directly via another contact. This would usually lead to a general conversation about their work offshore, and often we would arrange an interview at a later date in their home or mine.

Many of my interlocutors were familiar with the idea of 'interviewing' as a research method, and in certain instances it was almost expected that in my role as a researcher I should carry out interviews. Indeed Jenny Hockey (2002) makes the point that interviews are an oft ignored facet of ethnographic research in Britain, and a reappraisal of the particularity and value of interviewing is need. As Hockey also notes, certain kinds of dialogue seem to only emerge in the course of an interview - certain topics spoken about over a drink in a pub, or in an initial encounter are pondered on, and brought to the interview as a considered reflection, dwelled upon and offered as an abstract reflection on work in the industry.

The erratic rhythm of oil work also shaped the ways in which I encountered and engaged with interlocutors. With some interlocutors it took quite some time before we were able to 'meet for a chat' - the 2/3 weeks at home passed rapidly, and I would have to wait until their next period of time onshore before meeting them again. This meant keeping records of where and when my interlocutors were offshore, and timing my approach accordingly.

With the vast majority of my interlocutors the 'interview' was seen as an expected feature of our interaction, particular both to my role as a researcher, but also to my uncertain insider/outsider status, discussed below. But relationships with interlocutors would never begin or end with an interview. As already mentioned, many of my interlocutors were already close to me prior to entering the field, and those who were not were usually met through extensions of pre-existing relationships. An interview often acted to solidify relationships and would be followed by weeks or months of more informal contact in-person, through WhatsApp messages, or on the phone.

I would very often receive early-morning or late-night phone calls from interlocutors I knew to be offshore. A phone number proceeded by the '01224' Aberdeen city dialling-code usually signalled a call from the office onboard a rig or platform, channelled through the Aberdeen company HQ. Interlocutors would call and speak in tired, hushed tones, offloading whatever was on their mind - what they'd been doing on the shift; problems with family onshore; or topics unconnected to their work. These calls would often take place on slow night-shifts when they were waiting for a piece of equipment to be delivered, or another team to complete a job in order that they could begin their work. These conversations would be long, rambling interactions which would touch on a huge range of topics, and, in relation my point on interviewing, gave a specific kind of insight into oil work, different from that garnered through other forms of interaction.

Through these friendship networks I was able to pay particular attention to the situation of younger people growing up in the area and consider the ways in which they might be drawn to, *or* make a dedicated choice to work in the oil industry rather than other forms of work. This question, related to Aidan's above refusal to see his choice of career as following a 'path' but rather as based on a strong sense of agentive and skilful decision-making about work, forms a central theme of the thesis - the extent to which individual agency can

be expressed in relation to construction of valued ways of life around oil work; or whether the trends and shifts in such a dominant industry foreclose on the ability to meaningfully take control of one's labour and life as a whole. These discussions also feed directly into local conceptualisations of appropriate masculinity, with the ability to express individual agency and skill in relation to labour-practices and how one is able to manage work being core to dominant understandings of what it means to be a successful man. The association of oil with temporal impermanence gave these discussions of relative agency or dependency added urgency, especially in the context of the major instability in the industry which was taking place during my time in the field.

In addition to these discussions of attachment to work and constructions of gender, I was also aware of very clear local stereotypes of particular types of men who are imagined to be the epitome of *the* oil worker. These "oil men" are imagined as young single offshore workers, who work in dangerous conditions as general labourers on rigs offshore, drink heavily on their return to shore, and are engaged in specific types of conspicuous consumption, generating large debts through the purchase of expensive goods such as cars, watches, houses. The stories of these men were commonly used as moral exemplars for how *not* to manage wealth derived from oil. As well as being a locally-acknowledged discursive model of 'oil men', they do also appear in written accounts - for example Tabitha Lasley's recent work *Sea State* (2021) very evocatively describes encounters with such men, in Lasley's case in the form of romantic relationships, who largely align with those local characterisations of 'oil men'.

However, in an effort to gain a more subtle understanding of how people relate to oil work in complex and differentiated ways, rather than simply recreating the exaggerated image of 'the oil worker' my ethnography attempts to unpick this stereotype. But further than this, the thesis seeks to also illuminate the factors and processes that created particular environments and working conditions conducive to certain forms of masculinity - masculinities which came to be seen as both desirable and necessary in order to "make it" as a successful oil worker. And, in addition to this, I pay close attention to the transformations these understandings of what it means to be 'an oil man' have gone through over time, the environmental factors which contributed to these changes, and the implications for wider understandings of the affordances of the industry. For example conceptualisations of labour, especially in regard to expression of skill and risk-taking have shifted markedly from highly individualised understandings of oil workers as, as one interlocutor put it, 'supermen', to understandings of labour in terms more explicitly focussed on the relationality of work in the industry and the ways in which it allows for aspired-for models of household reproduction. However, these transformations from one reading of working masculinity to another are not neat or complete, and earlier models of 'oil men' still inform how oil workers view themselves and others.

Returning to my methodological considerations, and specifically to my choice of fieldsite, then, the small towns of Aberdeenshire and Moray were, in the first instance, a practical and seemingly obvious place to go in order to continue these conversations. I knew I would be able to expand my pre-existent network through informal and formal conversations and connections with these oil workers. But there were also more theoretical considerations which informed my choice of location. Firstly, the decision to focus on the smaller settlements away from the 'home' of oil in Aberdeen was swayed by a desire to understand and contextualise

the life-courses of my friends that I had grown up alongside and the dynamics which made working in oil a likely path for them to follow. My concern about developing a more complex picture of attachments to oil work, beyond the stereotype of 'the oil man', helped in deciding where to locate myself during my time in the field.

These stereotypical 'oil men' are usually associated with Aberdeen city itself, a transitional space for most workers, as it is neither completely a place of home nor work. Many of the heightened views of 'oil men' as hedonistic and lavish spenders stem from practices which take place in the city, but these only form a narrow and limited range of experience. While some of my interlocutors did use Aberdeen as a transitional space in which to mark their return to shore with nights out with colleagues these were brief moments in their onshore lives. And indeed most of my interlocutors returned straight home to complex family lives on return to shore, largely bypassing Aberdeen altogether. I therefore decided to locate myself outside Aberdeen, in the small coastal towns, in order to understand how working in the industry related to these other aspects of life – especially to family and kinship networks, to those who don't work in the oil industry, and to older generations who also reside in the locality - aspects which largely go unremarked upon in the stereotypical accounts. Aberdeen city still played an important role, however, as many of my interlocutors worked or spent time with friends in the city, or temporarily relocated to or from Aberdeen and the smaller towns, and so spending time in people's homes or in pubs in the city was a regular feature of fieldwork.

Nevertheless, by situating my fieldwork outside of the self-proclaimed 'home' of oil in Scotland, Aberdeen, I was able to trace the longer situated histories from which the current experience of my interlocutors emerged. This is partly to do with the way in which Aberdeen, often also referred to as 'the oil capital', acts as a specific kind of 'home' to the industry. It concentrates businesses, workshops, and administrative aspects of the industry, and important sites like the harbour and heliport from which many of the journeys to and from the North Sea platforms are made. And although many offshore workers also choose to make the city their home, a considerable number also seek to maintain regional ties and live throughout the wider North East of Scotland, commuting to Aberdeen as they make their way offshore. It is important to note that many workers involved in the Scottish oil industry who do not have regional ties, or are not British citizens. Indeed many platforms and rigs are made up of very diverse workforces.

The choice of fieldsite therefore reflected my research interests on the regional impact of the oil industry. The decision to situate the oil industry in the North East of Scotland made possible new forms of livelihood and new constellations of gender, technology, and relationality. By situating this new industry in a largely rural area, bypassing the key industrial zones of Central Scotland and Dundee, an attempt was made to found a new industry which broke with the labour politics of the past. As I set out at length in chapter 1, the industry drew on particular ethical and political understandings of work which were present in the fishing communities of the North East. These conceptualisations of work aligned closely with the views of the American oil companies who established the industry in Scotland. Therefore, my choice of fieldsite was informed by my desire to trace the legacies of these initial decisions into the current moment.

In an attempt to understand the complexity of building a life around oil work, my ethnographic approach

tended to concentrate on individual narratives. I traced out the personal histories of each person in great detail, and how their hopes for what a career in oil might bring intersected with local notions of successful masculinity, changes in the fortunes of the industry, and predictions of which new technologies might promise greater future stability. Taking inspiration from a range of ethnographies in which powerful individual biographies form the central focus (e.g. Mintz 1974, Tsing 1993) but also mindful of more specific anthropological arguments defending a focus on individuality in the field (Crapanzano 2004; Rapport 1997; see also Dryring, Mattingly and Louw 2018) I commenced fieldwork with a notion that I would concentrate on developing an in-depth ethnographic picture of a limited number of accounts of oil work. This spoke to the strong relationships I already had with a number of key interlocutors, which I built-upon during fieldwork. But it also allowed me to think through the differentiated approaches to oil work that exist within the industry. By focussing on individual accounts of oil I was able to examine the tension between those who view this form of work as unique and transformative, and others who see it as a good but not fundamentally unique form of industrial work.

Although I had initially considered finding a role as an entry-level offshore worker, a number of events meant I changed the way in which I approached research. Firstly, just as I began the PhD research in 2015 the repercussions of the significant drop in oil prices in 2014 were becoming increasingly visible. Once easy to find jobs rapidly became highly sought after for workers who had been made unemployed. However, this moment of turbulence in the industry also offered a chance to investigate the wider context and ethical framings which made working in the industry meaningful. The ways through which work and life combined in times when the oil price was high and jobs plentiful began to unravel and come under scrutiny during this moment of crisis. My friends' reflections on these issues, the ways in which working in the oil industry became the basis for a particularly valued way of life, and the strain of the downturn on these conceptualisations became the focus of my study.

Another reason I decided to focus specifically on the topic of work in the oil industry as part of life as a whole, and emphasise the onshore lives and activities of my interlocutors, is that my own positionality became more pronounced and relevant the further my research progressed. I found that in conversation I often became a person who people could compare their own life plans to. I also found that I was understood as a member of a larger cohort of people from this area who tended to move away from the area as opposed to those who stayed and sought a livelihood. My very presence in these towns was sometimes seen as odd, my being there as somehow out of place, and I found that I was identified variously in the eyes of acquaintances as a 'city person', as coming from a university, or it was quite often immediately assumed that I was from Edinburgh (which I'm not). My accent and manner of speaking, which relies less on the cadences of the local Doric dialect marked me out as being less firmly rooted here than my peers, and even when explaining to those who didn't know me that I had in fact grown up in Aberdeenshire, for some a certain reluctance to believe this persisted.

Of course my return to the place of my upbringing fits into a history of anthropologists carrying out ethnography 'at home'. Kirin Narayan's reflections on carrying out anthropology at 'home', as a 'native' anthropologist (1993) still provides valuable insight into the complex implications of defining oneself as

being from the field-site. A claim of being an 'insider anthropologist can be quickly upset through consideration of a vast array of differentiating factors - class, age, gender etc.

But in my case a more precise differentiation appears to be important. In the North East of Scotland there exists a long historical and cultural distinction between those who remain 'at home' and make a life for themselves, and those who travel to build a life elsewhere. This tension is present in the classic North East novels of Nan Shepherd (1928) and Lewis Grassic Gibbon (1946), in which the central characters weigh up the implications of leaving behind rural life for new beginnings in the city.

The significance of these frequent movements away from the area were made apparent on an afternoon walk with Frank near the end of fieldwork. Having taken great interest in the ancient graveyard in the village near his house, Frank took me to see some bones which had surfaced as a result of a recent storm. The graveyard contained headstones spanning from the 16th to the 20th century. And although the styles of stone and inscription had changed somewhat over the years, a constant theme was a division between those who stayed and made a living from the land or the sea; and those who made their lives elsewhere. Centuries of farmers and fishers sat alongside the graves of army officers, famous ship captains, and doctors and lawyers who had made their fortune in Edinburgh or London.

Rather than my being just one individual who happened to have left the area, a more concrete distinction appears to exist between those who stay and make a life, and those who are part of another way of life elsewhere. If there is a 'regional identity' to speak of in the North East, it is less explicit than in other parts of Scotland, and so self-categorisation proceeds through underlining what one is *not,* often drawing distinctions between those considered 'insiders' or 'outsiders' to the the area. Those who knew me well often defined themselves against my own life experiences, not necessarily critically, but as centred on the idea of themselves as practical people who worked with their hands and bodies, as opposed to having gone to university, lived in a big city or worked in an office. Again, these kinds of conversations have continued from long before I began the research for this PhD, and I often find myself as a sounding board or witness to the experiences friends are going through at work offshore. But the systemic nature of the differences between myself and these childhood friends became more apparent as I began to prepare for fieldwork. I will return to exploring the processes whereby this subtle and nuanced, oftentimes difficult to define, regional identity and its connection to working in the oil industry came at various points throughout this dissertation.

Overview of Interlocutors

Here I present a brief overview of key interlocutors that guided my time in the field and shaped my learning about the varied ways in which oil work formed a central organising feature of life. These 'key' interlocutors refer to people I got to know well, and had sustained and regular contact with during my time in the field. In some cases I was able to trace their progress through the downturn as it unfolded and partially resolved. In addition to this, I was also able to contextualise their relationship to oil over time, in relation to a career history, and how these work interactions were deeply interwoven with projects of kinship and social obligation. Again, this list speaks to my initial attempt to single out a set number of 'key' interlocutors and trace their relationship to oil over the course of fieldwork.

Aidan - Already mentioned above, Aidan is one of my core interlocutors, and a close childhood friend. In his late 20s at the time of the research, Aidan's career had centred on the oil and gas industry since leaving secondary school and enrolling in an offshore electrician apprenticeship scheme. Having worked predominantly in offshore positions from his teenage years, Aidan embodies many key qualities of current day 'oil men' - a kind of revised version of the ethics and masculinities of the first phase of oil workers. During the 2014 downturn in price Aidan lost his once stable offshore position and, after a period of unemployment, returned to the industry on precarious but well-paid short-term contracts and a style of 'hopping' between lucrative jobs.

Ben - Ben is my other core interlocutor, and also a close childhood friend of myself and of Aidan. Whereas Aidan's approach to the industry is reflective of his integration into the institution of the rig, Ben had a more tangential introduction to the industry through a number of entry-level jobs in onshore oil-related workshops in Aberdeen. Ben eventually secured a more permanent and well paid position in his company, and then moved to work in their offshore operations. Ben's approach to work in the industry contrasts sharply with that of Aidan's - whereas Aidan imagines success outwith the industry and in fleeting and risky opportunities, Ben considers slow and steady progress the path to success in oil. These distinct standpoints form the basis of chapter 3.

Eddie - While Aidan and Ben represent two expressions of current approaches to oil work, a number of older interlocutors form part of an older generation, with a distinct ethics and masculinity associated with the 'early phase' of oil production in the 1970s and 1980s. Eddie, Ben's father, forms part of this cohort, and his story is central to chapter 2. After finding work in the pipe-laying branch of the oil industry, of huge importance in the 1980s as some of the large fields began to produce, Eddie eventually formed his own small welding company. The growth of this company, and the way in which his career brings together key oil technologies and global sites of production speaks to the shift in importance of the Scottish oil industry - the relative inexperience of UK oil producers in deep waters meant a reliance on American expertise, and with this expertise came a whole host of management personnel, techniques, and ethics, which would direct the future form of the industry. Eddie's story marks an important moment in the development of the industry where local expertise begins to emerge and situates the UK as a key global oil producer.

Mick - Mick is also part of the initial cohort of oil workers. His work as a driller, often considered the most dangerous and intense branch of oil operations speaks to the immediate physical danger and abrupt workplace relations which dominated in the early era. His understanding of oil work and the appropriate deportment of oil workers would be recognisable even to many not directly involved in the industry - immediate physical danger; hard manual labour; and aggressive, 'macho' personalities are seen as central features in local conceptualisations of oil work.

John - John the fisherman, whose story opens this introduction, could also be thought of as part of the older generation in that he is of a similar age to Eddie and Mick. However he is much more of a 'newcomer' to the

oil industry, having only found work there after a decades-long career as a prawn fisherman. His experience of oil speaks more to the way in which the somewhat diverse materialities, ethics and affordances of the oil industry often allow for expression of varied imaginaries of work. The tensions involved in leaving fishing were somewhat alleviated through his new-found work offshore. John's experience also speaks to the transition which occurred as the new oil industry replaced the once dominant fishing industry as the major employer in North East Scotland.

Sarah - John's wife Sarah provided many important insights into the temporal dynamics of oil (and fishing) work, and how the unique rhythms of these kinds of work are adapted to by those who remain onshore. Alongside reflections on importance of fishing and oil work to her husband and other men, Sarah and I also discussed the ways in which she built a life and career for herself in correspondence with the work of her husband. Patterns of household formation in relation to work in the oil industry are discussed in chapter 4.

Craig and Martha - While John and Sarah give a valuable perspective on how the older generation of workers formed households and relation of oil to other industries, Craig and Martha offer insights into how the current generation of oil workers and their families manage to form a balance between a desired-for family life and a demanding career in oil. Craig works in the control room of a large oil producing vessel, essentially managing the buoyancy and ballast of the ship in the water. His earlier career as an officer in the Merchant Navy meant that the boisterous and sometimes aggressive atmosphere offshore sat uneasily with him. Craig and I often met up in his time onshore and alongside complaints about the difficulties in relating to co-workers, he also often shared with me the difficulty and tension of spending such long periods away from his family. Martha, Craig's wife, was beginning to return to work now that their young son was at primary school. Both Martha and Craig spoke about the possibility of Craig leaving offshore work entirely, but knowledge that this would entail a severe drop in household income meant that Craig remained in his role offshore.

Daniel and Jenny - Daniel and Jenny are another couple trying to find a balance between the pressures of oil work and supporting a family. They found a rhythm whereby Jenny would carry out her work as a carer for the local council over the two weeks Daniel was at home, during which time he would run the household and look after their children. When Daniel was offshore, working as a pipeline drilling technician, Jenny would take over household and childcare work. This neat arrangement came to an abrupt end when Daniel was made redundant in the wake of the downturn. After this experience they made a decision to reject any future offers of work in the oil industry as the unsettling effects of being made redundant were felt to be too destructive.

Steve - Steve also lost his long-term job as a deckhand on an oil support vessel during the downturn. Unlike Daniel and Jenny, however, Steve attempted to 'wait-out' the slump in oil price and hoped for the return of oil work before too long. Relying on the work of his partner Ellen, and on money saved during boom periods, Steve did eventually find work again, but with less favourable conditions than prior to the 2014 slump. Steve's account speaks to the dominance of oil in the region, the lack of comparable alternative forms of work, and the sense of powerlessness that many oil workers feel.

Frank - Although Frank doesn't have a young family like some of the above interlocutors, his reflections on work similarly centre on how one might strike a balance between fulfilling work and home lives. Frank's main work as a ship's officer piloting large oil tankers around the world eventually led to a coveted management position in the headquarters of the company in Aberdeen. During our conversations Frank would question whether he should leave the well-paid but dull supervisory work and return to his officer-role on the oil ships which gave him such joy. The correspondence between spaces and ethics of home and work central to Frank's understanding of his career form part of the focus of chapter 5.

Chris - In contrast to the above interlocutors who all have significant experience in the industry, another cohort of interlocutors are those younger men very new to oil. I met Chris, who happens to be a distant relation of Aidan, two days before he departed on his first ever trip offshore. Enrolled on an apprenticeship mechanic scheme, Chris had completed various college courses before beginning the offshore element of his training. On his trips home Chris would recount to me the fears and excitement of his new life on the rig, and the ways in which he attempted to ingratiate himself with superiors and make a name for himself as a skilled and useful co-worker. The way in which he comes to 'know' oil, and learn about the appropriate expressions of masculinity, skill, and sociality offshore form part of chapter 3.

Jake and Pat - Jake, a dive support technician, and Pat, a deep-water diver, work in the same sub-section of the industry and provide further perspective on how younger workers find a place for themselves in the industry. Diving is a key sub-branch of the industry, providing vital services for the infrastructures which connect platforms. The highly dangerous working practices associated with diving mean that although it sits somewhat outside the mainstream platform work, it gives added perspective on the transition from the 'early era' of oil work to the safety focussed post-Piper Alpha situation.

Jim - Coming to oil work after a very varied career as a soldier, a nurse, and a construction labourer among other things, Jim found work as a general offshore labourer through a friend. Finding he enjoyed the work and the time off associated with offshore work he was devastated to be made redundant after only a few months. In the wake of his redundancy Jim applied for a huge range of short-term offshore projects, and eventually found a new way of working in the industry, like Aidan, hopping from project to project. Out of all my interlocutors Jim was best prepared for periods of downturn in the industry, and alongside his approach of finding short-term, irregular work, he also founded a small construction business during his time onshore which he viewed as an insurance against long-term stagnancy in the oil industry.

Of course in addition to the interlocutors mentioned above, I engaged with a whole range of other people in the area in less direct or sustained ways - Ben and Aidan's friends on nights out in Aberdeen; oil men I met with occasionally in the pub; friends in the area not working in oil who 'set the scene' and provided either information about other forms of everyday life, offered opinions on oil work and ethics. These other encounters provided context within which the lives of my key interlocutors made sense.

Masculinities, consent, labour ethics

The Scottish oil industry can be thought of in many ways as a prototype of, or experiment in, new neoliberal economics and labour processes (Brotherstone 2012, Christophers 2020, Harvie 1995). Oil emerged in a period in time when many other more established industries were going through processes of deindustrialisation and closure. And, as discussed at length in the following chapter, this new industry marked a departure from industrial relations and politics of the past. The emphasis on anti-union politics, private enterprise, and individualised relationships to work were key to oil, especially in the early era.

Nevertheless, the allure of this new form of work lay in a pairing of new possibilities made available through oil, yet extensions of recognisable and desired masculine work. I discuss these dynamics of continuity and divergence at length in chapter 1 and 2. Alongside this divergence in opinion on what kind of work this is, whether it constitutes a continuation of, or split with the past, the industry still does respond to general trends in industry and labour relations. For example processes of deskilling, automation, surveillance are all prevalent in the industry.

A key argument in the thesis places this idea of the relative exceptionality of Scottish oil work as a form of labour in conversation with anthropological discussions around expression of skill, acquisition of knowledge about work, and the role of risk in relation to agency - Day et al (1999), Dunn (2004)**,** Marschand 2010, Prentice (2012), Walsh 2003,. It builds upon these anthropological investigations to argue that workers develop not only skills at work, but skills 'around' work, generating complex understandings of the elements required to 'make it' as an oil worker. This consists of a range of skills situated both within and outside the place of work - specific demeanours and attitudes, technological practices and competencies, but also the ability to read the dynamics of the industry and seek out paths of opportunity outside the standard parameters of industrial work.

By situating 'skill' as both related to, but more expansive than, the ability to engage in formal work practices, this furthers anthropological concern with challenging strict delineation of economic and non-economic activity (Bear et al 2015; Mollona, 2009; Narotzky and Besnier 2014). And drawing on anthropological studies of the materialities of resource production (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; Smith Rolston 2013) I examine the interplay between imaginations of, and expressions of labour and the conditions of resource production.

My focus on the emergence of ethical selves through labour (in its widest sense) then brings a focus on interwoven work practices, social relations, domestic arrangements, and cultural aspirations. This can help us move beyond some of the more conceptual concerns of the anthropology of ethics literature to focus on the emergence and shaping of ethical selves through everyday interactions and practices.

Although skills 'around' work have been a prominent feature of UK oil work since the founding of the industry in the early 1970s, what these set of 'skills' consist of changes as the industry transforms. The Piper Alpha incident, in which a platform explosion in 1988 killed 167 men proved to be a turning point, with the

open-endedness, informality and autonomy of the industry changing as sweeping safety regulations and more intervening management practices were introduced to prevent a similar accident occurring again (Collinson 1999, Woolfson et al 1996). With these new regulations came significant change in the way work was imagined and performed, with resultant implications for the way workers imagined themselves and their lives in relation to the industry. With the establishment of highly complex safety procedures and workplace monitoring practices it was felt that many of the qualities which underlined oil work as being conducive to certain forms of respected masculinity were being eroded. A 'before and after' characterisation of the work and workers emerged, with a nostalgia for the 'good old days' prior to the introduction of the aforementioned systemic safety procedures. An idealised and desired masculinity based on an image of working men as independent, infallible, daring, and uncomplaining which had characterised the early years of the industry now became both a stereotype which no longer corresponded as closely to reality but still acted to inform the definition of ideal work.

In chapters 2 and 3, I examine the ways in which elements of work in the sector have changed since the initial period after oil extraction began. I concentrate on the effect of the introduction of extensive safety and training procedures which were introduced in the wake of Piper Alpha and argue that these two distinct eras of oil work – before and after the disaster – engendered distinctive forms of masculinity. A clear shift in the expectations and allowances that working in oil bring to local conceptualisations of masculinity took place, and seemingly brought oil work more in-line with other forms of industrial work, with the unrestrained environment and behaviours of the early days disappearing somewhat.

In chapter 3, I bring these discussions and dialogues into the present and consider the role of these "older" models of masculinity in informing decision-making and patterns of life in the current era. While clearly evident that the idealised qualities which gave oil work such allure in the early days of the industry are still important touchstones in regard to how to manage oneself and one's work as a man, they also serve to outline the parameters of acceptable and appropriate behaviour. Whereas once very explicit displays of force, abrasiveness or even violence may have been seen as underscoring the extreme and unique nature of oil work and the men who carried it out, now these incidents/characterisations often serve as a tool for navigating the boundaries of respectability and control, with the ability to temper and contain (rather than simply embody) these forces as being perceived as indicative of successful masculinity.

Processes of acknowledging acceptable or respected gender identities in relation to work are common in a wide variety of anthropological contexts (Freeman 1998, Kalb 1997, Osella and Osella 2003, Zonabend 1993). Here I make the argument that these shifting notions of gender acceptability act in combination with other features of oil work to form a pervasive mode of moulding worker identity, foreclosing on alternative models of labour through a variety of material and ethical attachments to oil work in its current form. At the heart of these processes are the powerful and shifting conceptualisations of oil worker masculinity. The exact constitution of the boundaries of oil masculinities was a constant source of conversation and debate among my interlocutors. Where for some the values associated with those older masculinities remained key to their approach to working in the industry, others viewed these as unrefined or reckless. However some see the tempered and qualified masculinities more commonplace in current discourse as being too amenable to the

interests of the companies and management, and thus are rejected as holding false promise. For these men the noticeable changes in attitudes and behaviours of oil workers from one generation to the next emphasises the notion that the industry is essentially different from what it once had been, and thus tricks and loopholes, based on knowledge shared through friendship networks, are key to 'real' success. Without these the companies have too much leverage over workers, and unlike the early days in which large pay-packets could be attained through any job in the industry, the current context means one must think outside the standard career paths on offer from the companies in order to achieve success. Again, developing skills 'around' work. In discarding the brusque demeanour of the earlier generations of workers these younger workers are seen as having also lost the ability to stand up for themselves at work and secure the high wages they are entitled to as compensation for hard work.

These tricks and loopholes, although substantively about gaining access to hidden opportunity in the industry are also means of displaying risk-taking behaviour and agency. At the beginning of this introduction, I mentioned Aidan who rejected the notion that his ability to secure work in the industry was simply down to luck. For Aidan, and many others, the skill required to read and interpret the fortunes and patterns of the industry add an extra layer of personal ability that goes beyond the technical qualifications to carry out certain jobs. In the face of an industry which can often feel impenetrable, all-powerful, and vast in scale, these moments in which one can carve out a path for oneself are important in retaining a sense of personal power. However the degree to which these decisions are actually successful, or are in fact delusions and seen by those more cautious workers as foolhardy and unnecessary are a common topic of debate among my interlocutors. Again, the effects of the 2014 oil price slump which were making themselves felt as I conducted fieldwork sharpened these debates, and alongside the fact that some of these plans came to fruition or failure during this time, the ability to express agency or not was revealed as the nature of the dependencies to this work became starkly clear.

In other industries, or in other times, these nuances and difficulties of how to manage ones career in relation to an often intimidating industry have been mediated by collective worker action or union representation - e.g. the shipyards along the Clyde were a bastion of union activism and collective action, as were many of the Scottish coalfields (Cameron 2010, Macdonald 2009). As I discuss in chapter 1 however, not only did the American led development of the industry reject attempts at unionisation from the outset, but the oil companies and government of the time purposively attempted to find a population which would align with the anti-union politics of the American majors. The communities of the North East fit this bill, their imaginaries of work drawing on the complex individualist ideologies of the fishing industry, and so the oil industry was consciously situated in and around Aberdeen, rather than in other coastal cities which may have had more inclination towards, and experience of collective worker action. Again, the legacies of these foundational decisions reaches directly into the present, and so very few of my interlocutors were involved in any kind of union activity - in fact for most the idea of unionisation wasn't even a consideration, with disputes largely being dealt with on an individual basis with managers.

Central to all of these processes of work and identity is the unique historical backdrop of oil in the UK, specifically the moment during which decisions were made about how extraction of oil from the North Sea

would be organised, and how the relationships between the state, the oil companies, and the work-force would be arranged. I discuss this history in-depth in chapter one, and outline how the rush to extract after discovery of North Sea oil deposits in the late 1960s was shaped by the UK's extremely difficult financial position at the time (Brotherstone 2012, Harvie 1995). In dire need of capital, as well as a secure energy source, North Sea oil was seen as a perfect remedy to the problems the nation faced, and rather than developing a long-term strategy for the exploitation of this new resource, the ethos was to extract as much and as quickly as possible. In order to do this the UK government took a distinctly non-interventionist approach, and issued licenses to mainly US oil companies who were then seen as the pre-eminent experts in deep-water oil production. The US majors were left to establish the industry as they saw fit, and did so largely along the lines of the industry in the Southern states along the Gulf of Mexico, putting into place a labour process which was explicitly anti-union, with little in the way of employment rights, ad-hoc hiring and firing processes, and couched in individualist, hyper-masculine language focussed on risk taking as a way of expressing one's worth.

The labour government of the late 1970s did try and nationalise the industry by buying back licenses and establishing a national oil company, the 'British National Oil Corporation' (BNOC) in 1976. However the task proved too great, and with the election of Margaret Thatcher this process was scrapped and BNOC, which became 'Britoil' was privatised and was eventually bought by BP. This process and its implications are further explored in chapter one, but the important point here is that the structure, ethics, and power dynamics of the industry at its inception proved to be very durable, and these founding ethics, of company autonomy and worker fragmentation, although subject to change over time have strongly guided the development of the industry. And although I go on to discuss a range of topics in the thesis - e.g. changes in masculinity; re-conceptualisations of the role of work in one's life as a whole; interconnections between the lifecourse and technology - I feel it important to underline the idea that the manifestation of these processes are embedded in a *specific* historical and material context, and are not just self-determining narratives about abstract forces of 'neoliberalism', 'crises of masculinity' or 'automation'. Rather, the thesis attempts to examine how the complex histories which circulate in the region manifest in actual individual subjectivities in the present.

This history of oil in the UK is important, not only because of the lasting influence of these early decisions into the present, but also because it sets out a relationship to oil that is markedly distinct from other contexts. Discovery of oil wealth is generally followed by development of policies which seek to recognise and protect this resource, and retain state control. As mentioned above the UK kept state involvement to a minimum and drew heavily on the expertise of the American oil majors to establish the industry.

One effect of this is the relative invisibility of oil in the public sphere in the UK. Outside high public interest in the wake of the discovery of oil in UK waters, the production of the first barrels, or at moments of crisis, oil has played a subdued role in the discourse of the nation. The material location of oil, under the seabed, far from land, adds to this lack of familiarity, and without the material presence of infrastructures outside the spaces directly related to production, oil remains relatively invisible. Actual oil, as liquid hydrocarbon, is rarely seen, even by those working on the rigs, with the exception of the drilling teams. This physical

distancing leads to a political forgetting (Brotherstone 2012), and, as I discuss later in chapter one, much of this 'forgetting' was purposeful and attempted to protect the interests of the oil companies.

The distancing and relative invisibility of oil at a UK level also plays out on a personal scale. Work on the platforms and rigs involves highly diverse processes and skills, and some of the workers relate more to their base trade rather than 'oil work' in the abstract - for example electricians or mechanics may, in some instances identify firstly on the basis of these skills, rather than as being a generic offshore worker. (The drilling teams are perhaps those workers who most identify as being part of an exclusively oil-related job.) And so there exists a highly diverse division of labour in the industry which, alongside more specific anti-union policies and practices, discourages the emergence of a unified 'oil worker' identity.

The oil industry has also only spanned two or three generations of workers, and so doesn't have as coherent an identity that other forms of work which have existed for many generations might. Although multiple generations of a family may work in oil, and it is common for new workers to find work in the industry through older friends and relatives, the affective qualities of what it means to work in the industry tend not to be an explicit topic of conversation with those outside the industry. New workers are introduced to the nuances and details of the industry as they begin work, and for many this isolated period at the beginning of their career is experienced as a process of gradually familiarising oneself with a work practice and way of life that had hitherto been very unknown. These factors, the diversity, relative novelty, and distancing of knowledge about the industry mean that a commonly/communally transmitted vocational ethics, as would have existed in the fishing industry, isn't present here, and rather each new worker comes to terms and familiarises themselves with the industry on a more individual basis.

This distancing from the knowledge of oil, and the retention of a sense of mystery around what the work actually consists of is a key component of its allure, and is central to the ways in which notions of masculinity are associated with the development of specific embodied knowledges. Building on anthropological studies which emphasise the interwoven processes of skill-acquisition and development of particular embodied subjectivities (Marschand 2010, Prentice 2012, Smith Rolston 2014, Venkatesan 2010) I argue that in the context of the Scottish oil industry, a unique ethical connection to oil work is formed through learning to become an oil worker which establishes oil work as a superior and categorically different form of work (Parry 2018, Aho 2018). The difficulty and effort which must be expended in order to know how to approach work in the industry and how to embody the appropriate aspects of masculinity associated with being an oil worker exemplify the exclusivity of this form of working subjectivity and expanded notion of skill. The specificities of ethical connection to oil work can generate a sense of constraint, in that the perceived superiority of oil work devalues other forms of employment. This sense of 'stuckness' to oil's specificities becomes especially acute in times of downturn as we see below.

Social thickness, Social thinness

In many ways my thesis is an extended reflection on some of the ideas around "social thickness/thinness" associated with different modes of resource production proposed by James Ferguson (2005 & 2006).

Ferguson compares and contrasts the social 'thickness' which surrounds regimes of production associated with mining, with the 'social thinness' he observes around systems of oil production. Social 'thickness', according to Ferguson amounts to a generally wide-reaching social involvement around industry - specifically, in the case of the Zambian copper mining industry research by Ferguson this amounts to powerful unions, relatively stable work, company-provided housing, state-led industrial development. Ferguson refers to the Angolan oil industry to exemplify socially 'thin' industrial production - this is defined by a generally insular and inward-looking industry which seeks to isolate itself from local conditions. This is marked by features such as a reliance on predominantly foreign workers; short-term contracts; small, highly-skilled workforces; securitised production and living areas; and in many cases the utilisation of private security firms to maintain this degree of remove and isolation.

And indeed offshore oil production provides *the* prime model of socially thin production - the distance from land, the isolation of rigs and platforms, and the strong reliance on foreign management and elite labour mean that the equipment and infrastructures associated with the industry, and indeed the oil itself never 'land' in the 'home' country - in Ferguson's example, oil situated in Angolan waters never actually returns to Angolan land - the production and transportation of the oil, aided by the use of floating production vessels, all takes place offshore.

This drive towards effortless and unhindered production of oil is the focus of much of Hannah Appel's research (2012 & 2019). Appel draws on Tsing's (2004) work to interrogate the ends to which oil companies go to smooth over difference in production contexts to replicate conditions in varied extraction sites, conditions conducive to generation of surplus capital with minimal 'social' interference. In other words, a model of production aspiring to social thinness - with as little responsibility to interact with local conditions, actors, and restrictions as possible.

While Ferguson's models of socially thin and socially thick production are mutually distinct, he goes on to explain that the features associated with oil production are extended beyond this industry to become an ideal in others too - socially thin production models are aspired to, not only in the industry Ferguson holds up as his key example of social thickness, mining, but as a general model for all sorts of industry. This then allows for a great degree of dynamism in Ferguson's model - while the material conditions of a particular industry may inspire or encourage certain socio-political arrangements, they are not determined by material conditions.

Elena Shever's work (2008 & 2012) provides a thorough examination of the way in which this situation of deeply intertwined social and industrial ties can be transformed over time *within* one particular industry. Shever charts the development of the Argentinian oil industry from its early days in which kinship and nationalistic ideology formed the core of personal attachments to this new national endeavour. A key national industry, the Argentinian oil industry eventually succumbed to global neoliberal trends, and Shever explains how processes of privatisation relied upon continuations of the kinship and patriotic ideologies which made this form of work so enticing in the early years. By framing the newly privatised industry in patriotic and familial terminology, privatisation was able to take place in a relatively uncontested fashion. Ethical

attachments associated with the industry helped to mask large scale structural changes which were taking place, and were ultimately detrimental to the workers.

These interventions in the anthropology of resource extraction and industry as a starting point for my own research - from Ferguson's suggestion that different industries, at different times, encourage or discourage certain forms of social entanglement; through Shever's work which underscores the ability for industries to shift between degrees of embeddedness, to Appel and her examination of the ways in which oil companies aim to sharply contain social claims which may impact upon the 'smoothness' of production.
My contribution builds on and develops the above approaches to the anthropological study of oil. In the broadest sense I aim to understand how workers understand and manage to develop attachment to work in a generally 'socially thin' industrial model. Whereas Shever outlines the process of change from a socially thick industrial model to a socially thin one, highlighting continuations, overlaps, and tensions, my work seeks to understand how oil workers comprehend their work in a situation which has taken, from its foundation, a privatised and individualised approach to work and industry. Nevertheless, the industry goes through changes which alter and inflect this 'thinness' with differentiated qualities.

I also expand on Appel (and Tsing's) investigations into the making 'smooth' of capitalism - and the processes whereby uniformity and generality is striven for. In order to construct an industry which was able to enforce its own operational ethics in order to generate profit, a conducive environment and workforce was sought and found in the North East. I go into this process in greater depth in chapter 1 and 2. But the important point here is that firstly, the parameters of what may or may not constitute social claims on the industry shifts over time - despite the fact a 'match' was found in the North East for the base of the industry, this doesn't mean those relationships between community and company remain static. New dependencies, attachments, and tensions emerge and recede over.

Secondly, the aforementioned authors propose some kind of distinction between industries in which social ties, claims, and connections are dense, and those industries which seek to isolate themselves as far as possible from this embeddedness. However an often overlooked aspect is the sense that despite concerted efforts to insulate companies from ties of whatever form, those involved in these industries nevertheless become attached to this work, other workers, and to communities which, however apparently amorphous, nevertheless coalesce.

The idea of oil 'communities' in the UK might not hold a place in popular imagination in the way that coal mining, fishing, steel, or factory communities have done. In multiple and complex ways a 'petro-silence' (MacDermott Hughes 2017: 5) exists around the oil industry in the UK. Oil workers are often depicted as individuals, and something of an anomaly in a national context of general deindustrialisation. I discuss the implications of this in chapter 2. And the physical distance and isolation of the rigs and platforms, as well as the lack of large scale infrastructure adjacent to population centres emphasises this sense of atomised and independent workers, as I discuss in chapter 5.

Thinking back to Ferguson's proposition of socially thick and socially thin models of resource extraction then, my thesis uncovers the means through which workers, their families, and communities interact with, shape, and are shaped by an industry which tries to constrain attempts at forming responsive and demanding communities. This begs the question, then, of how and if workers understand their work collectively when attempts to do so are regularly foreclosed upon. This brings me to the next section on how my research interacts with anthropological understandings of class.

Anthropologies of class

In his seminal work *Carbon Democracy* (2013) Timothy Mitchell argues that our current political settlement depends on cheap and readily available oil, and that this encourages a certain kind of democratic dynamic, distinct from previous industrial eras. One of his main points is that the materiality of oil production, reliant on small groups of labourers with diverse and advanced skills, contrasts with the larger, more homogenous workforces associated with coal mining. The more condensed workforces of oil make for a more pliable management-worker relationship, and this limits the ability of labour to assert itself.

In reading classic anthropological and sociological accounts of industrial labour and class formation, this differentiated experience, of shifting material experiences of labour and resultant labour dynamics, was at the forefront of my mind. Even prior to beginning fieldwork it was clear that oil workers I already knew had meaningfully different experiences of work, that there was no generic 'oil worker' based in a particular expression of work. This isn't a situation where a core of 'basic' labour exists - a relatively small labour force, compared with other industries, carries out a range of very diverse tasks. There doesn't exist a core mass of labour performing by-and-large the same daily work tasks, unlike, for example, mining or some factory work. In the offshore oil industry a highly differentiated workforce perform tasks ranging from Health and Safety administration, to chemical analysis, to drilling operations, to ballast and buoyancy monitoring. Many interlocutors identified more closely with their 'home' trade and fellow workers in this regard - it may be that they imagined themselves as electricians, mechanics, or as associated with the maritime side of the industry or closer to shipping workers.

Although interlocutors came from a wide range of oil industry related jobs they by and large were involved in either basic level manual jobs, middle-management roles, or specialised technical roles. Most were either currently employed in, or had worked their way up from entry-level jobs. Some dividing lines could be drawn - between those with formal educational qualifications and those without; between those with working experiences prior to working in the industry and those without; or generations of older workers compared to younger workers. I engage with all these potential boundaries later in the thesis. But it is important to note here again that the complexity of the industry and the diversity of roles, career trajectories, and knowledge bases means that these divisions shift and take on greater or lesser importance in certain situations. They are not fixed identifying markers, and are not consistently recognised as lines of fracture within the workforce.

Therefore rather than developing understandings of themselves as oil workers based on shared working practices, instead the total experience of working in the industry formed the basis for a more general

recognition of common experience. A crane operator and a weld inspector may not have a great deal of mutual ground in terms of their daily working activities, but the common experience of being on the rig, being away from home, struggling to secure work through moments of instability allow for more general points of shared understanding.

This aspect of oil work thus meant taking a methodological approach which aimed to understand work as one part of broader conceptualisations of life as a whole. I discuss this in greater depth in later in this introduction. But it is important to note here that this quality of oil work also has implications for how class might be understood in this context. Various aspects of oil work intersect to make the emergence of explicit class identities unlikely and undesired. The thesis as a whole makes this argument - an amalgamation of historical choices, material conditions, ethical and masculine norms, and more direct forms of management intervention all coalesce to dispel normative forms of class identification.

The moment in which fieldwork took place, in the aftermath of the drop in oil price and subsequent precarity, opened up intimate discussions around the relationships between workers and their work. The fragility of their connection to the industry, and the reliance of the complex lives they had built around this work became painfully clear. This is a common theme of anthropological takes on perceptions of class - at moments of crisis class positionality becomes painfully clear - e.g McCall Howard (2012), Mollona (2009b), Carrier and Kalb (2015). Crisis makes apparent class conditions which might otherwise be disguised, lessened, or ignored.

Recent anthropological considerations of class (Mollona 2009b:xiv; Kalb in Carrier and Kalb 2015:3) warn against anthropological and sociological accounts of labour which present a 'death' of class. An apparent disappearance of industrial work fuels voices which argue for the idea that class is now an irrelevant framework. However this rush to dismiss the continuing importance of work usually reflects a failure to acknowledge that industrial manual labour is still the most common form of work globally, even if this may have shifted from away previous centres of industrial labour in the West to new rapidly industrialising regions (Mollona 2009b, Parry 2018). Or this dismissal of the importance of class may reflect a failure to recognise that even when recognisable models of industrial labour recede, forms of highly stratified work, generating stark class boundaries are still a centre feature of contemporary life (e.g. Mollona 2009, Tsing 2009). This then requires an openness to ideas of class which can encompass highly diverse experiences and expressions of labour which nevertheless share some common structural tensions.

I find Penny McCall Howard's (2012) intervention in this conversation particularly insightful. In anthropological accounts of labour and class, skill and personal situation is often foregrounded at the expense of a focus on structural factors. This leads to a situation whereby anthropological accounts of work tend to *either* emphasise personal agency, expression of skill, creative responses etc, *or* accounts of labour which foreground links to global structural forces which constrain the experience of work. Kalb (in Carrier and Kalb 2015:3-11) makes a similar point, about the tendency of anthropology to veer between accounts of work which emphasise or mask structural limitations. McCall Howard carefully argues that both aspects

must be a part of any anthropology of work - class as a connection to wider processes, but not deterministic; and skill and creativity as vital, but ultimately shaped by whether structural conditions allow for such expressions. Class, then, is essentially about the control one is able to exert over one's labour and the way in which one builds a life around a form of work.

My thesis discusses in detail attempts and struggles of workers to control their work and shape their lives in ways that they see as meaningful. The interactions and disagreements between Ben and Aidan in chapter 3, for example, are clearly about the ways in which this might done, and the veracity of claims to control over one's work and life. But conceptualisations of work here tend to focus on individual ability to express and maintain this control, rather than understandings which emphasise common endeavour or shared positionality. While interlocutors were keen to present their own reflections on the fallout from the oil price drop, they generally rejected accounts of this period which emphasised collectivity. And in offering thoughts as to how these difficult times might be navigated, proposals which emphasised individual paths to success were very clearly the most dominant.

In the thesis then, I attend to a number of issues related to class. Firstly, class emerges through the totality of experiences of work. While classic academic accounts of class understandably focussed on shop-floor processes and relationships, numerous anthropologists have convincingly argued that class identities must be understand in terms of expansive connection to other aspects of life outside the workplace (Bear et al. 2015; Harvey & Krohn-Hansen 2018; Narotsky 2017; Narotsky and Besnier 2014; Prentice 2012). This understanding of class is at the heart of my approach - the thesis traces connections between, for example, familial discourses around work; through to gendered understandings of skill; to relations with superiors in the workplace; to the aspired for lives that work is understood to allow for. Secondly, I take serious the idea that we need to challenge accounts which propose a disappearance or irrelevance of class. If we take McCall Howard's (2012) proposition that class is about control of the means to make a livelihood for oneself, then this tension is central to all discussions I had in the field.

Finally, rather than my discussions around class being dismissive of the structural, or overlooking wider economies which make livelihoods possible or not, I want to understand how the combination of structural conditions with personal, kinship, ethical, and material concerns give these class dynamics an even stronger power. These forces are powerful because they are diffuse and expansive. Complexities are not mere details, but rather lie behind the question of why the conditions of work in the oil industry remain obstinate.

Gender, work, value

Another core argument of my thesis is that as oil worker masculinities shifted over time from being centred on expressions of risk-taking behaviour and competence/infallibility at work to become more explicitly linked to the wider affordances and relationalities made possible through oil work, the livelihoods associated with oil work act as a means of disciplining labour and foreclosing on alternative ways of imagining work within the industry. In doing so, my thesis builds on anthropological studies on changing masculinities and workplace ethics, specifically work that is concerned with the interrelation between gendered understandings

of labour and transformative shifts in industry (Goddard 2017, Kalb 2017, Kideckel 2008, Tsing 2009).

In concert with my below thoughts on the role of 'ethics' in the thesis, I use the idea of 'masculinities' as a tool to group together shifting and complex attempts at becoming particular kinds of men in relation to work in the industry. The struggle here was in attempting to build a model which recognised simultaneously the constant shift and reassessment of forms of masculinity, but which did so in a way that also appreciated the ongoing influence of earlier conversations. How can we allow for both change and continuity in studies of masculinity?

I found Wentzell's idea of 'composite masculinities' very useful in this regard. In her work on how Mexican men dealing with erectile dysfunction incorporate medical intervention into ideals of machismo Wentzell explains (2013:26) that the 'composite masculinities' she encountered during fieldwork were "contingent and fluid constellations of elements that men weave together into masculine selfhoods."

My work aims at something similar - rather than take as given and unchanging the stereotypes or ethical codes that seem to define masculinity in the context of North Sea oil workers, I focus on the shifting nature of these identities, the way in which they interact with a whole host of factor, the way they change, and most importantly the contradictions and challenges they present to men as they work out how to be the kind of men they are expected to be.

As with my above thoughts on 'ethics', here dominant trends in kinds of masculinities can be identified, but these are always contested, complex, and undergo lesser and greater forms of change. At a number of key moments the key features of these masculinities undergo significant change, but again, earlier eras, earlier forms of imagining masculinity bleed into the future in unexpected but nevertheless deeply felt ways.

Wentzell (2017:163) also states her aim to "demonstrate how men coordinate changing sets of elements into attempts to be particular kinds of men, through a range of narrative, embodied, and interpersonal practices." Again, this range of elements of masculinity, the coming together of diverse influence in unexpected ways is a helpful approach to challenge earlier theorists of masculinity who may have relied too much on the idea of solid models of aspired-to masculinity. Introducing a more holistic approach to studying the ways in which men imagine themselves as men means we can uncover the ways in which these processes take place both in relation to other workers, to families, to the shifts of the industry, or to wider structural changes which shape certain masculinities in relation to others.

A number of seismic shifts in local conceptualisations of what it means to be a successful man are analysed in the thesis - the move away from more consciously intertwined gender relations and blurring of spaces of work and home of the fisheries which formed the predominant industry prior to oil; through to what might be thought of as the 'hyper-masculinity' of the early days of oil; and the changes to models of masculinity as the industry formalised in the period following the Piper Alpha disaster. The first half of the thesis (chapter 1, 2, 3) outlines and analyses the linkages between embodied masculinities and a range of factors specific to the Scottish oil industry – including personal relationships to technologies and infrastructures; speculation and

'readings' of the fortunes of the industry; and the translation of wealth gained through oil work into personal ambitions and specific ideals of ethical personhood.

As I discuss in chapter two, the early years of the oil industry in the UK and the appearance of new offshore jobs with what were then largely US companies brought with them an expansion of the possibilities and parameters of masculinity. Often, this was experienced as a kind of 'liberation' from a static or predictable pre-oil life and work patterns. Oil work was understood both as a dramatic break with the perceived 'ordinariness' of life at that moment, but also as providing the means through which men could realise a 'fuller' version of themselves by expanding already existing models of masculinity through various facets of this new form of work - e.g high wages, exciting new technologies, hard manual labour. Dramatically new in some ways, yet familiar too.

Comparing the traditional gender and work relations which had characterised the early fishing industry in the area with the significantly different situation in the initial years of the oil industry, it becomes apparent that an important historical shift has taken place. Gender relations centred around work in the fisheries had once characterised these communities as a place of alterity, with the prominent and relatively powerful role of women in the daily business of fishing often becoming a point of both hilarity and exoticism in the eyes of the rest of Britain (Nadel Klein 2003). Although much of the fishing work was strictly carried out by men, women were still central to its daily operations. Indeed, the houses of fisher-people were recognised as workplaces as much as homes. These distinct characteristics began to disappear as the fisheries became more industrialised and less kin-centred, and prior to the development of the oil industry gender relations in the area largely came to reflect those in the rest of the UK.

As I discuss in detail in Chapter 2, the development of the oil industry led to a very different gender and work regime, one more segregated than the 'standard' arrangement experienced immediately prior to oil. The concentration of work life on the offshore oil rig resulted in a clearer identification of the onshore space of 'home' as a work-free space, at least one free of masculine, wage earning types of work. This exaggerated work/home division thus shaped, and was shaped by, a heightened form of masculinity. One might see this as a combination of already existing normative ideals of what it meant to be a man and the infamous working practices and demeanour of the American riggers who had come to Scotland to establish the industry. Other factors also came together to demarcate this work as something radically new, notably, the high wages, previously unfamiliar complex technologies, and often gruelling working hours. Although these features of work, and especially male work, were clearly novel, many of my interlocutors who had experienced this shift first-hand did not consider them wholly unfamiliar. Rather, they were seen to have offered an expansion of the possibilities of existing normative models of work and masculinity.

In an apparent inversion of the process whereby fisherwomen had been cast as larger-than-life comedic figures who challenged the script on what 'respectable womanhood' was supposed to look like in Victorian Britain, the discourses around oil workers spoke of men who were somehow greater than the contemporary parameters of masculinity allowed for. A stereotype emerged, of men who not only embodied various characteristics of contemporary masculinity but often overstepped these understandings, at times exceeding

the boundaries of respectability and local notions of powerful yet controlled expressions of successful manhood and becoming figures of fun. These stories about what working in oil entails, and the kind of men it produces, are key to my thesis. Acting as both useful guides for appropriateness and respectability in relation to oil work, they do materialise in the actions and attitudes of certain people, but more frequently and more importantly they are used as a method of marking out the boundaries of how one should carry oneself as a man working in oil.

To my interlocutors, types of work and livelihoods made possible through oil have thus felt at once exceptional and familiar. For some, oil represents a comforting remnant of once-widespread now-rare industrial labour through which a 'traditional' masculinity encompassing elements of physical strength, risk taking, and clearly gendered work roles can be expressed. Working in oil is viewed as a historical hang-over, mirroring other forms of industrial work which have now disappeared or are in various ways devalued. This recognition of oil work as a similar (albeit superior) form of work to others, as being of-a-type with other forms of industrial work, leads to an imagining of working life as following specific trajectories – from apprenticeship, working one's way up through the company, and gradually gaining skill and experience, to perhaps moving to managerial or specialist positions or to lucrative positions working in oil outside the North Sea. The value of this kind of work lies partly in its recognisability, a model of manual work and life which generations before may have engaged in, and thus with strong narratives around how to approach and manage a career, as well as pre-existing models regarding how to use wealth gained to build a particular form of life.

For others the industry remains an anomaly, a kind of chance happening that has brought with it a way of life hitherto unimaginable in this region. The larger-than-life characters who live and work on the rigs, the huge scale and complexity of the infrastructures which allow for production, the high renumeration and many other factors align to suggest that rather than just being a superior form of manual labour, oil work is in fact something categorically different from other forms of work nearby. Alongside this view of oil work as exceptional goes an approach to working in the industry which is opportunity seeking, understands that work in the industry may be temporary, and as not responding to the usual patterns of step-by-step progression through a career. The unusual conditions of work, the shifts-patterns, the technologies, and the very immediate global span of the industry become highly valued aspects of the work, and come to be seen as being irreplaceable through other forms of work. The wealth gained through this work is seen as transformative, and as having a windfall character, different from that of income gained through other 'standard' forms of employment. Narratives of the exceptional character of the work, and the exceptional characters who undertake this work are prevalent and so the aforementioned stereotypes of *the* oil worker emerge.

These two positions, while exemplified explicitly in the narratives of various interlocutors at certain times, are generally extreme positions. In fact, even those who take the view that the industry is more of a continuation rather than a break from the past still experience this work as, in some sense, unique. It has remained a viable and consistent source of employment as other industries have gone into decline or disappeared altogether. And so these factors which suggest the unique nature of oil work (whether because of

material qualities specific to the work itself or because of the wider context in which this industry is situated) come together to underline this as a particularly valued and sought-after form of work. In addition to this, due to the dominance of oil work in the region, and because other forms of work which might be available in the area lack so many of the qualities associated with oil work (staggered shift patterns, high wages, prestige of working with 'new' technologies, etc.), these other forms of work come to be seen as less than 'work', and only oil work is able to offer the whole constellation around which worthwhile lives have been built. Other forms of work which don't allow for the unique qualities of oil work - the affective elements of the work itself, combined with the context and rhythm of work, and the onshore life which this allows - are devalued and either viewed as juvenile or emasculating, or simply not well paid enough to sustain lifestyles which had been built up around the high wages of oil. 'To work' then comes to mean to work in oil.

These questions around the value and meanings of working in oil became particularly charged during the downturn in oil-price and subsequent precarity in the industry which was making itself manifest during my fieldwork. For most, the future of their work became greatly uncertain, and the prospect of losing one's job led to a questioning and reassessment of why this type of work mattered so much. For many who had previously understood that they just happened to be working in oil but could have just as easily found work elsewhere the downturn served to make clear that this was not the case, that their work and life were held together by the specific qualities and affordances that working in oil involved, and it was only once these strands began to unravel during the downturn that this became obvious. Others, particularly those who had experienced more than one period of downturn in the industry came to see the boom and bust pattern as a regular cycle which had to be prepared for, and thus had made plans either for leaving the industry altogether, or to approach the idea of a 'career' in a certain way which viewed short-term agency work as the norm, matching the increasingly staccato rhythm of employment in oil with a similarly loose idea of what a career might look like. In this way the downturn was a period in which the opposing views of oil work as either being a standard (albeit particularly good) form of work, or as being anomalous and temporary were blurred.

Examinations of resource production which underscore the attempts to construct environments conducive to the 'unhindered' generation of capital such as Appel (2019), Ferguson (2005), Tsing (2004) emphasise attempts to disembed production processes from local contexts. The arguments I make below show how in the case of North Sea oil, the particularities of the 'local context' were sought out as a conduit to efficient production. The second half of the thesis traces this decision into the present.

A note on 'ethics'

In writing about the multiple and overlapping ways in which those involved in the oil industry experience attachment to this form of work I often use the idea of ethics. The 'ethical turn' in anthropology opened up varied and wide ranging discussions about the ways in which people understand appropriateness in culturally inflected ways (Dyring et al. 2018; Keane 2016; Robbins 2018; Wentzner 2018; Zigon 2018). Many of these influential anthropological texts tend to place ethics in a slightly removed discursive realm - the

philosophical or theological underpinnings to these approaches means that the rootedness and production of ethics in, for example, work practices or domestic life tends to be overlooked.

In referring to ethics in my discussion of the positioning of oil workers in relation to others, I use the term in as a practical tool for analysing a variety of notions, practices, or judgements. As interlocutors attempt to make sense of their work and life they offer personal theorisations about the behaviour of others, about the nature of responsibility, or about the means to which the wealth generated by oil work should be put.

My understanding and use of 'ethics' here concentrates on discussions and analyses of the appropriateness of behaviour. As can be seen throughout the thesis much of the wrangling about careers in the oil industry focussed on discussions about whether the way one had approached this work was appropriate in relation to others. Questions of whether or not opportunities had been successfully seized, whether one had 'read' the trends of the industry in the right way or not, or whether a sense of success or regret emanated from considerations of one's career. This relies upon subtle and difficult to grasp codes which suggest the right way in which to approach situations. And these ethical codes, already contested and constantly debated, also go through processes of change over time.

Nevertheless I still find the idea of 'ethics' as a practical tool for navigating questions of appropriateness a useful starting point for approaching the kinds of topics my interlocutors were keen to speak about. This kind of quotidian notion of ethics, is present in some of the contributions to the 'Ordinary Ethics' collection edited by Lambek (2010). For example Charles Stafford (2010) in his chapter on punishment and ethical judgement in China uses the term to describe the kind of philosophising and rumination undertaken by ordinary people. It is in this spirit that I use the term, as a tool for collating and considering the everyday analyses that people make of themselves and others.

This is also related to the particular moment during which I undertook fieldwork, a moment of upheaval and change. Zigon's (2007) work on the dynamism of ethical reflection in moments of crisis has been as useful framework with which to think through the concerns of interlocutors. Zigon raises the question of whether ethical problems emerge during moments of crisis, or whether they simply become more prominent discursively, but are in fact a constant presence. In the case of my fieldwork, the implicit ethical arrangements associated with oil work suddenly became open to question - the central problem of whether this work could act as a stable base for the connected ways of life it made possible when it is subject to such erratic patterns became an open and widespread topic of reflection.

But I hope to show that rather than this suggesting a sudden emergence of ethical quandaries in moments of turmoil, in actual fact these debates relate to the unravelling of ethical attachments which have coalesced over long periods of time. The appropriate demeanour of how oil workers should approach their work is a complex, fluid and contested set of ethical stances built up over time, and is subject to these epochal shifts - from the early days of UK oil; to the post-Piper Alpha era; to the recent focus on safety regimes; and the contemporary moment of uncertainty. Each era shifts uneasily to the next, bringing with it certain legacies, and leaving others behind. These ethical attachments are built up through a huge range of interactions - with

other workers, with family, with tools, and in relation to impressions of the future of the industry. They are subject to constant critique and more widespread periodic shifts. Nevertheless, there are some features relating to the way in which this work is approached which are more constant, and can be read as a loose set of ethical propositions. It is in this sense that I use the term ethics throughout the thesis.

Familiarity, Mobilities, Stuckness

The physical distancing of oil work, and the movements to and from spaces of home and work are another vitally important ethical aspect in defining oil work as particularly highly valued. The distant location of these places of work and the long and costly journeys to and from the platforms lie behind the long shift patterns, with the standard shift-rotation being two to three weeks of work on a platform, followed by two to three weeks of rest at home. The twelve-hour standard shifts when offshore make the platforms very much a space of work, while the long periods of rest at home mean the onshore realm becomes defined as a space of non-work, and this physical and temporal separation of home and work comes to be very highly valued by many oil workers.

The necessity of having to regularly move for work, and the different political, ethical and gendered inflections and implications of these movements come to make mobility a central tenet of the forms of masculinity which circulate around oil work. Ethical models of self, work, family, and time, all depend on the regular and constant movements between different places that oil work necessitates, and movement and mobility themselves come to signify successful personhood. As discussed in chapter 4, during the early era of the industry partners of oil workers reported deep unhappiness at the unsettling experience of the constant departures and returns necessitated by oil. However as these features of oil have become familiar and have been 'accommodated' into local notions of a 'good life,' so these regular separations and reunions come to be a highly valued aspect of oil work.

Leaving home for work, whether at sea, elsewhere in Scotland or Britain, or to the reaches of the Empire, has always been part of life in these parts, and I discuss this pattern alongside the more everyday journeys in chapter five. Seafaring, either out to fish, or to travel further afield has always been a common feature of how people here think of work. The journeys to the platforms undertaken by my interlocutors are, as mentioned above, both something very new and unfamiliar, but also a continuation of processes which have deep historical precedent.

The fallout from the 2014 downturn, however, meant that for many of my interlocutors these carefully choreographed movements between the offshore and onshore worlds came to an abrupt stop. A stagnancy and sense of 'stuckness' took hold. The complex and intimate relationalities which oil work allowed for now became ungraspable as this work disappeared, albeit temporarily. The volatilities of oil, its propensity to go through periods of downturn, but also to boom, mean that waiting out the slump became an obvious choice for many. Despite the widespread self-reflections and discussion of the meaning of work in this industry which the slump encouraged, the expectation that things would 'return to normal' before too long foreclosed

on any radically alternative vision of work in the industry. I return to these discussions at the end of the thesis.

Chapter Outlines:

Chapter one - This historical chapter focuses on the foundation of the UK Oil industry in the 1970s and considers the intense political deliberations between government and oil companies around how this industry should be established. Much of this history is 'forgotten', wilfully or otherwise, and this process of forgetting tells its own story about the political and economic transformations which UK oil was central to. The initial decisions made around how the UK oil industry was to operate had long term impacts lasting into the present, and I pick up on strands of this legacy in later chapters.

Chapter two - This chapter focusses on the transition into oil from the viewpoint of two interlocutors, Eddie and Mick, who worked in the industry during this period. Alongside discussion of the emergence of 'the oil man' as a kind of new moral exemplar, it also considers how these new individualist masculinities jarred with other, very different notions of gender relation which had been present in the area - most notably in the traditional fisheries. This chapter concentrates on the emergence of a particular ethics of oil work which, although transformed, continues to inform current-day experiences of work in the industry.

Chapter three - This chapter brings these conversations around work and masculinity in the oil industry up to the present day, and considers the divergence in approach to working in oil between two friends, Aidan and Ben. Where Ben takes an approach to work which imagines a path to 'success' through an incremental career progression, and a subsequent 'development' of his family life, Aidan imagines success as occurring 'outside' the industry, opportunities take the form of opaque knowledge which must be discovered through personal connections and risk-taking behaviour. In this chapter I also develop arguments around the various kinds of 'skills' needed in order to 'make-it' in the industry.

Chapter four - Here I consider the features particular to 'oil families' and the changes family dynamics have undergone over the decades. Focussing on the 'balance' between working and family life that interlocutors often spoke about, this chapter looks firstly at the ways in which these constellations of work and home life have changed in combination with changes in the industry and associated shifts in models of masculinity. It also considers the way in which complex attachments to oil work act as a diffuse control on labour.

Chapter five - In this final chapter I consider the interplay between the mobilities of oil work, ideas of 'connectedness', and the impact of the 2014 downturn. The complex relation between offshore and onshore worlds and the 'fine-tuning' which takes place in order to strike an appropriate balance between the two was upended by the disruptions of the downturn. This moment generated much reflection on the ways in which projects of self, family, and place rely upon work in the industry. I also discuss ideas of disconnection and 'stuckness', and think through the ways in which the particular volatilities of oil encourage certain ways of imagining relation to the industry.

1. Foundations of oil - "The North Sea is not a Socialist sea"[1]

In this chapter I outline the early history of the oil industry in the UK North Sea, the events and discussions which occurred after the discovery of oil in the British region of the North Sea in 1969, and the rush to establish an industry and production in the mid-1970s. The foundation of the oil industry in the UK took place in a manner distinct from other oil producing regions, with effects which resonate with and strongly influence my interlocutors in the present day. I highlight a number of themes which emerge during this initial period of the industry - the role of government and corporate forces in defining how oil would be produced; attempts to match ethical frameworks already present in the North East of Scotland with the working practices and approach of the American-led oil industry; and alternating prominence and invisibility of oil in political and cultural fields in Britain.

Although this is predominantly a history of how environments, practices, and ethics seen as being conducive to the efficient generation of capital are reproduced in a new context, the initial relationship between the UK and oil was wider than simply one of production challenges and windfall wealth. The establishing of the UK oil industry was a crucial element in heralding-in a new era of post-industrial economic strategy, and acted both as a symbolic example of a 'new' post-industrial era explicitly breaking with the union-government antagonisms of the 1970s. Oil tied into already unravelling economic and political trends in Britain, and it also bankrolled the monumental changes which took place during the Thatcher administration, albeit quietly and with little public recognition. This pattern, of deep yet intangible influence seems to mirror the experience of oil at a regional and personal level, as I discuss in later chapters in the thesis.

Indeed the historical events discussed in this chapter, despite their fundamental importance for the future of the industry, featured very little, if at all, in conversations with interlocutors. Only Eddie and Mick, who were present during some of the 'early era' spoke about some of the main features of that time - e.g. the British National Oil Corporation (BNOC), the prevalence of industrial action in the wider economy. In no other conversations with interlocutors did the intense deliberations of this period feature. When I did occasionally bring it up, often in relation to the different situation of oil in Norway, most interlocutors would explain the differences between the national contexts in terms of present day politics, or refuse to consider the reasons behind the difference. Some interlocutors were aware of the presence of many American oil personnel in the early era of oil, but this largely centred on individual stories of risky behaviour - the lack of safety protocol, or the use of drugs and alcohol offshore in the 1970s. Alongside this awareness of an initial 'era' associated with American workers, some interlocutors expressed a sense that although they were still well paid currently, the 'genuine' era of lucrative and exciting oil work had occurred at some point in the distant past - often referred to as 'the good old days'. Many of these 'personalisations' of the history of oil, in the form of exemplary figures or outlandish stories, continue to shape industry ethics as I explain in following chapters.

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[1] Margaret Thatcher (1977) speech to Conservative Party Conference. Longer quote - "[…] the North Sea is not a Socialist sea. Its oil is not Socialist oil. It was found by private enterprise, it was drilled by private enterprise, and it is being brought ashore by private enterprise."

The Piper Alpha disaster, however, is one historical moment of which all interlocutors were aware. Partly this is due to its ubiquity in any safety information provided in training sessions - it is given as *the* example of what can go wrong if safety protocols are not strictly followed. However, despite the pivotal importance of this event, not only for the introduction of thorough safety procedure but for oil labour relations generally, the event was usually spoken about in terms presented during training - as a terrible incident explaining the need for safety regulations.

Despite the overwhelming focus of day-to-day offshore procedures on safety-related paperwork and permissions, these were rarely directly connected to the Piper Alpha incident. And certainly the rapid and widespread formalisation which occurred in the wake of the disaster was not considered.

The lack of awareness or discussion of these foundational histories, however, isn't entirely surprising. As I argue below and in the following chapter, a key feature of this period was a widespread political and cultural invisibility and rapid 'forgetting' of oil. With little public recognition, the proceeds from North Sea oil funded huge transformations in political and economic life in the UK during the 1970s and '80s, most notably allowing for the state-led closure of other large industries around the country. Simultaneously, the new oil industry was actively encouraged to part ways with the collective industrial politics which characterised state-industry relations at that time. In an industry which, from its very beginning opposed the idea of collective relations, and rather espoused and supported a new wave of individualist politics, it follows that collective memory of the struggles of the early days of oil would be lacking.

Newlands and Brehme (2007) explain in their article on the "Historiography of North Sea oil" that there tend to be four distinct periods which histories of the British oil industry refer to: 1)The 'establishment' phase covering the period after discovery of oil in the Montrose field in late 1969, up to 1975, including major policy decisions about how the industry would operate; 2) the period from 1976 to 1985 describing the 'fast-growth' years during which the large production fields and platforms began to operate and the revenues from oil had most impact on the British economy; 3) the 'retrenchment' years of 1986-1995 which covers a period of general decline in the fortunes of the industry, and also includes the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988 which proved to be a turning point in various ways; and 4) 1996 to the present during which the industry enters a period of 'maturity', experiencing 'peak oil', numerous drops in oil price, and the emergence of debates around how oil production in the North Sea might eventually come to an end. In this chapter I mainly deal with the events Newlands and Brehme would categorise as taking place in the first and second phases of the industry - 'establishment' and 'fast growth'. In chapter two I continue to discuss the impact of the 'fast growth' era and also consider the impact of the Piper Alpha disaster. The remaining chapters of the thesis consider how work is understood in an industry considered to be on a trajectory of gradual decline, i.e. in a period of 'maturity'.

A period of intense deliberation between state, finance and corporate actors over how best to form a British oil industry followed the discovery of oil in the North Sea in the late 1960s. These negotiations ultimately led to a model of production based on low government involvement, strict anti-union practices, and very rapid extraction. In this chapter I begin to underline the importance of those early decisions and the lasting impact

that this initial set-up had on the future development of the oil industry in North East Scotland, and in later ethnographic chapters the impact of these early decisions on conceptualisations of work in the present becomes clear.

In this chapter I outline the general context into which oil was brought - how it related to contemporary discourses on "industry" and the impact of the development of the oil industry on the UK economy as a whole. In the next chapter I focus more explicitly on the changes brought about in the North East of Scotland, and also look at how, as I begin to suggest at the end of this chapter, the industry once seen as a break from previous models of industry then came to reflect wider trends in British industry and labour relations more generally, particularly in the years following the Piper Alpha incident. However the early contestations around how to manage this new industry, and the sense that it was part of a new era in British industrial history, do have clear implications for how oil work in the present in imagined.

In a broad sense, North Sea oil allowed for a reorientation in the way that global capitalism is imagined. It allowed Margaret Thatcher a decade of oil-enriched public finances, and supported her influential policies of rapid privatisation and reconceptualisation of work as an individual endeavour. Acting as an economic sleight of hand, oil made these policies appear somehow economically sound in their own right, rather than reliant upon the windfall wealth generated by the new North Sea industry. This has obvious resonances with Coronil's argument on the illusionary and spectacle-inducing power of oil in Venezuela (Coronil: 1997). But for the purposes of my thesis, and arguments in later chapters, the important point here is that oil, at various levels, pivots between either appearing as a sharp break with previous history, or as repeating and accentuating already existing forms of production and reproduction.

North Sea oil arrived at a time when British industry was going through a period of serious upheaval, and the UK economy, in the mid to late 1970s, was under severe pressure.
The moment described in this chapter is still one of uncertainty, flux, and visibility, before giving way to an extended period, described in the next chapter, during which the idea of Britain as heavily reliant on its own oil becomes an established yet largely unrecognised feature of the British economy.

Initial Negotiations
"The discovery of North Sea oil in 1969 was […] not accidental" (Woolfson et al 1996:15). With numerous oil industry nationalisations in the Middle East, the oil majors and the UK and US governments were keen to find non-OPEC sources of oil. A number of alternative sources were discovered at around the same time - Alaska in 1968, UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) and Norway in 1969. These all presented difficult conditions and highly expensive production sites, but were viewed as being more stable sources of oil. The Yom Kippur war in 1973 and subsequent leap in oil prices appeared to confirm their worries about energy security, and amplified the need to produce non-OPEC oil as quickly as possible (ibid:15-17). This meant licenses to North Sea oilfields were distributed rapidly, with no attempt at controlling the rate of oil depletion[2], and the

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2 Frederick Erroll, Minister of Power under Heath later admitted arranging license distribution as quickly as possible. "I rushed these through before the general election… I was afraid that a socialist government would get in and refuse licenses to private enterprise." (Harvie 1995:85)

rush to establish non-OPEC sources of oil also meant developing alternative oil industries which were non-nationalised and could be accessed and controlled through government-company relations.

From the very outset the question of how to manage a new oil industry focussed on the balance between encouraging rapid production in order to appease the oil companies and remedy the precarious state of the UK economy; and attempting to build a sustainable model of extraction in order that the income from oil revenues would have a long-term impact. William Keegan (1985:25) summarises crux of the debates around the 'depletion policy' of UKCS oil:

> "The potential boost to government revenues and the balance of payments pointed to a
> policy for exploration, development and depletion that would effect self-sufficiency as
> early as possible. Any attempt to produce more that was needed for self-sufficiency would
> be open to the charge that the economic and security benefits of the North Sea for future
> generations were being threatened - simply because they implied that the oil would be
> used up too fast. On the other hand […] there would be dangers if the Government were
> too cautious in its depletion policy because 'oil companies will not engage in exploration
> and development without the incentive of future production.'[3]"

A governmental white paper, *The Challenge of North Sea oil* (1978), the outcome of an inter-departmental inquiry in Whitehall on "The Benefits of North Sea Oil", highlights the potential benefits of the windfall wealth, and stresses need to invest these revenues in a dedicated fund, concentrating on the development of post-oil energy and power sources[4]. The treasury, however, were reluctant to segregate specific income streams, believing revenues should be channelled firstly to the treasury and then redistributed. (Keegan 1985:26). The creation of an oil fund did seem to be a popular policy for political parties and the general public. Manifestos of all the political parties in the 1974 election contained a proposal for an oil fund. However a meeting of the Labour Cabinet in 1978 decided there shouldn't be a fund, largely due to pressure from multinationals who threatened to leave the North Sea were an oil fund created (Harvie 1995: 209-210).

The rapid rate of depletion and relative autonomy of the operating companies was challenged by the establishment of a national oil company - the British National Oil Company (BNOC) officially came into existence on 1st January 1976 and its main function was to gain experience and expertise in order that the government could assess the cost claims of the majors, and therefore tax them accordingly (Harvie 1995:201). BNOC was immediately targeted by Thatcher - It was privatised in 1982 and became 'Britoil,' before being bought by BP in 1988 (Woolfson et al 1996:35; Harvie 1995:290).

Developing an oil industry in the UK would require huge capital investment which neither the UK government nor the City of London banks could provide at the time. UK-US company and government collaboration was the only solution if an oil industry were to be developed rapidly (Woolfson et al 1996:17).

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[3] Keegan cites Hall and Atkinson (1983) 'Oil and the British Economy'

[4]See Hansard for HoC discussion - https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1978/mar/21/north-sea-oil
And a further debate https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1979/jul/06/north-sea-oil
Both of which discuss the white paper on sustainability of the industry

With BP and Shell being the two most important British industrial concerns, very close relationships existed between these companies and the British establishment. From the 1950s on, there was a flow of senior staff between the two majors, the Bank of England, various merchant banks, and the UK Treasury. These intimate relations between state, finance and oil companies were also present in the US, and the North Sea project forged close relationships between UK and US government and capital (ibid:19).

The discovery and development of North Sea oil took place in one of the most turbulent periods for the British economy. Edward Heath's Prime Ministership in the early 1970s, was a time of widespread strike action in the face of attempts to reduce public sector pay. As mentioned above the 1973 Yom Kippur war led to a spike in the price of oil, and because North Sea oil hadn't been fully developed yet, the cost of importing oil added strain to the economy. 1976 saw the Sterling Crisis and resulted in the UK seeking a vast loan from the International Monetary Fund[5]; and the 1978/79 'Winter of Discontent' involved widespread strike action and resulted in election of Margaret Thatcher. The discovery of oil in this economic context appeared very timely indeed, but the desire to access this source of wealth as quickly as possible in order that the Treasury be able to remedy some of the above issues meant that much control was ceded to the oil companies, with the government only really acting to grant licenses for drilling and exploration, and receiving tax per barrel of oil produced.

As mentioned above, various factors meant the UK oil industry commenced with notable speed, and relied heavily on US oil majors for technology, capital and experience. I cover this topic in greater depth in the next chapter, but it it important to note here that the lack of UK government control over the oil industry meant an almost wholesale transplanting of the US production regime to the North Sea platforms. The US oil majors brought deep-sea extraction technologies that they had developed in the Gulf of Mexico, but, importantly, they also imported management structures and industrial relation practices (Woolfson et al 1996:22). The majors were ferociously anti-union, and used various measures to ensure a lack of unionisation amongst the North Sea workers - requirement of full ballots, propagation of anti-union literature, favourable treatment of non-unionised sections of the workforce, 'blacklisting' (Harvie 1995:153). As I discuss below, this model of industrial relations jarred with the high-profile activity of British trades unions at that time, and from the very beginnings of the industry it was cast in reaction to the legacy of trade unionism, including in the regions which were selected for the development of the oil industry.

Pre-oil economies and the Shadow of Industry
Dundee initially seemed like the obvious choice for the onshore hub of the North Sea oil industry. The existing infrastructures from the earlier textile industry; high unemployment; proximity to the oil-fields and to ship-building expertise made Dundee the prime candidate. The wide, deep port which would have once harboured the ships connected to the jute industry, with adjacent unused warehouses and factories, was much more suited to the construction, repair and servicing of the large rigs and platforms needed for oil than the restricted and narrow harbour in Aberdeen which had predominantly served the fishing fleets (Harvie

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[5] Keegan 1895:23-24 - "What the Harold Wilson/James Callaghan administration of 1974-9 tried to do was to borrow its way through the first oil crisis on the security of all those North Sea oil flows that were to come." The UK government had also tried to access loans from Saudi Arabia and Shah of Iran

1995:164, Brotherstone 2012:79[6]). Dundee was also much closer to the finance and political hub of Edinburgh, and the industrial region around Glasgow and the Clyde, the shipbuilding legacies of which seemed like an obvious foundation for an industrial transition to oil. It also appeared that oil might be able to rejuvenate the shipyards on the Clyde which had been not only struggling to win new commissions, but had also been at the centre of much of the industrial conflict which characterised union-government relations in the 1970s.[7]

It was ultimately felt that the history of radical politics that had long existed in Dundee may pose a threat to the stability of the oil industry, and so Aberdeen was chosen as a site instead (Harvie 1995:164, Brotherstone 2012:79)[8]. Aberdeen also had a complex history of trade unionism, however much less so than Dundee. Furthermore, the smaller towns and villages of the North East, which had once relied heavily on the fishing industry, still closely identified with fishing heritage and its associated moral and religious ideals of self-determination and individualism (Webster 2013). Moore argues that even those who were not directly involved in the fishing industry were still connected to the wider ethics which emerged from the industry "exemplified by the resistance of many to accepting social welfare benefits and opposition to trade unions," (Moore 1982:78).

Prior to the arrival of oil the economic situation in Aberdeen and the North East is somewhat open to debate, and accounts range from characterising the region as either rather prosperous, removed from the troubles that afflicted other, more industrialised areas of Scotland; or as being in a slow but noticeable decline due to the fading away of once strong local industries.

The Gaskin report of 1969, a government-sponsored study of the economy of the NE did not mention the oil industry at all. But it gave important context to help understand why oil was so positively received -
> "There was a lack of well-paid jobs which contributed to the highest rate of emigration of
> any area of Britain at the time - although the consequence of people leaving the north-east to look for
> better jobs elsewhere was that the official unemployment rate was actually lower than the Scottish

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[6] Brotherstone expands on this (2012:79) - Shortly before oil was discovered "[Aberdeen] was seen as remote and parochial, liable to cede to the more central Dundee its status as Scotland's third city after industrial Glasgow and Edinburgh, the administrative capital. In 1969 a report on economic prospects by an Aberdeen University economist sought remedies for the problems of urban decline that made no mention of offshore energy. That year the oil was discovered, and, though the city was slow to respond and was by no means certain to become the industry's onshore 'capital', its advantages - certainly when compared to Dundee - included an airport with space for development and a reputation for relatively untroubled industrial relations."

[7] Interestingly, the 'work-in' which took place at UCS and saved it from closure brought Clydeside workers into confrontation with Edward Heath's conservative administration, from which many of the ministers would also be part of the Thatcher cabinet. Cameron (2010:242) notes that American oil majors did try working on the Clyde - Marathon oil bought John Brown shipbuilders, but the directors were very wary of the renowned radical politics of the Clyde shipbuilders, and sold John Brown in 1979. In addition the Clyde shipyards were too narrow and shallow for the large new rigs, and more open yards in Ardersier and Nigg won contracts. The construction of rigs and platforms did mostly take place in these coastal areas near Inverness, while the production and servicing industry built up around Aberdeen and the North East.

[8] There were actually early signs that Aberdeen would be the base of oil in the UK: "The first survey ship to dock in Aberdeen harbour arrived in 1964 and, in 1965, Shell became the first oil company to set up a permanent office in the city when they located to Market Street. Five years later, British Petroleum (BP) discovered oil in the Forties Field around 100 miles north-east of Aberdeen" (MacDonald 2009:76).

average. […] The shortage of jobs, especially well paid ones, was in turn attributable to the stagnation or decline of many of the traditional industries in the North East, including fishing, agriculture, granite, textiles, shipbuilding and papermaking." (Quoted in Newlands and Brehme 2007:84).

Harvie submits that the area was comparatively buoyant, claiming that in "1976 [Aberdeen] was prosperous. Unemployment was low, and a local capitalism survived - more than in the rest of Scotland." (Harvie 1995:164). But Newlands and Brehme (2007:89) in their review of accounts of this period conclude that "the argument that the Aberdeen economy was doing reasonably well prior to the arrival of oil [was] very much a minority view." It appears that the 'decline' being described in the North East at this time is of a rather different quality to that of the heavy industrial areas of Glasgow and Dundee. Rather than drastic plant closures or industrial collapse, the stagnancy which Newlands and Brehme identify is slow and continuous, resulting from the gradual closure of small local industries, and, as the aforementioned Gaskin report notes, with large numbers of people leaving the region due to lack of work, the high rate of emigration masked the extent of unemployment.

Robert Moore (1982:4) concurs, and explains that "In the small towns heavy unemployment is measured in the hundreds. This has to be contrasted with the chronic unemployment of many thousands and the industrial dereliction of the populous Midlands [of England]."[9] Regardless of the extent of relative rates of unemployment and decline, the decision to locate the industry in the North East was viewed in a very positive light:

> "The dominant viewpoint sees the oil industry as the saviour of areas of northern Scotland, which, in the 1970s, were blighted by lack of jobs and by depopulation. It emphasises the technological challenge of exploring for oil in very difficult physical conditions. It sees the overcoming of that challenge as a great triumph and the oil companies and oil workers as modern industrial heroes" (Newlands and Brehme 2007:81).[10][11]

Moore's study, which examined the 'social impacts' of oil on the Aberdeenshire town of Peterhead, an oil-service port, underlines the relative isolation and self-expressed difference of the costal communities of the North East from the rest of Scotland. This relates to the aforementioned ethical frameworks derived from fishing and farming, which emphasised notions of self-sufficiency and independence, and were seen as being

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[9] Cameron's (2010:240) point on the massive declines in shipbuilding and steel manufacture in Glasgow contrasts with this.

[10] In addition Newlands and Brehme (2007:84) cite George Rosie's 'Cromarty: the Scramble for Oil' - "The oil industry is probably the best thing to happen to Scotland, and especially Northern Scotland, for many years. A depressed region is suddenly revitalised, given new hope. Among the ills it will help to eradicate are unemployment and low wages in an area where these have for too long been accepted as facts of life."

[11] Very generally, Shetland and Orkney were much better at appreciating the implications of oil wealth, and thus bargained with the oil companies in a way that the local government in Aberdeen did not. "Low levels of unemployment in both Orkney and Shetland at the time meant that neither had the same pressing need for new jobs that Aberdeen for example had." (Newlands and Brehme 2007:91) These reasons seem to mirror the Norwegian context, in that comparatively better economic situation meant they were able to dictate the 'rate of depletion' and conditions of the industry from the outset.

qualities aligned with the labour relations of the oil companies and conducive to the efficient operation of the industry.

> "Peterhead has a distinct and isolated physical existence at the end of a difficult road at the eastern-most extremity of mainland Scotland.[…] The inhabitants underline their feeling of belonging to this community by reference to a common history and to a recent past when the fortunes of everyone depended upon the fishing industry. Peterheadians also refer to the qualities of independence and individualism derived from fishing and characteristic of the whole population. These qualities are exemplified by the resistance of many to accept social welfare benefits and opposition to trade unions." (Moore 1982:78).

These ethics acted as markers of differentiation and underlined the way in which communities in the North East thought of themselves as somehow separate, and although it isn't difficult to give examples of the ways in which national and global connections flowed through Peterhead, with European-wide fishing routes; a number of international companies with manufacturing sites in the North East; the clear impact of Westminster policies on daily life etc, nevertheless the important point is that discourses which present local/distant dichotomies are prevalent, and these distinctions are often voiced in terms of local versus outside morality and ethics. (Moore 1982:79-80)[12].

These factors, according to Moore, led to Peterheadians, and North East Scottish people in general, to think of themselves 'more as a commodity than a community,'(Harvie 1995:165-166, Moore 1982:167). This appears to foreshadow the idealised individualist conceptualisation of oil work in Britain then and now. Cameron (2010:328) makes this perhaps obvious but nonetheless important point that "[a] clear element of Mrs Thatcher's outlook on government was to exorcise the failures of the past, especially the monuments to the interventionist state, and release individual power."

This decision, to look to the relatively placid industrial history of Aberdeen as a key positive factor in deciding to site the onshore base of the oil industry had implications for British industry as a whole, and was based on much more that competing industrial histories of Scottish regions. Indeed, oil was being developed at a moment in which the industrial relations of Britain were going through a period of significant transformation, and the process of developing North Sea oil was wrapped in symbolism, as a new industry separate from the tensions of the traditional manufacturing sectors. It also provided the material income with which the process of dismantling British industries, and the trade unions, could be furthered. In other words oil both functioned as a marker of a new form of non-unionised industrial relations, and also provided the means with which to dismantle the already existing industrial fabric of Britain.

Industrial output in the UK generally had been unstable or on the wane for much of the twentieth century and Macdonald (2009:36) notes that:

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[12] Speaking about the nominally non-partisan nature of politics in Peterhead Moore (1982:83) asks "Why then was there no Labour Party in Peterhead? Quite simply because there was no base for such a party. One such base would have been industrial; but the main industry was and is not unionised (fishing) and nurtures strong free-enterprise anti-union sentiments."

"Scotland contributed to this [UK-wide] trend but decline was slower and the
proportionate share of heavy industry within manufacturing remained higher for
much of the century […] In the 1970s and beyond, Scotland 'remained more committed to
traditional industries, agriculture and fishing, coalmining, textiles, shipbuilding and heavy
engineering than the rest of the UK.'" (Macdonald 2009:36 quoting N. Buxton (1985))

Nevertheless, there were still sharp declines in Scottish steel manufacture, coal mining, and shipbuilding in
the post-war era (Cameron 2010:240) and in the early 1970s these declines were paired with turbulent
industrial politics. As the Heath government pushed for public sector pay restraint in the early 1970s, strikes
were relatively common, and large-scale miners strikes took place in 1972 and 1974.

"The 1972 strike was part of a wider crisis of industrial relations, larger in scale than
anything since the 1920s. At every turn the government seemed to be assailed by strikes
and an inability to assert its authority. The feeling grew that the trades unions had grown in
confidence to such an extent that they threatened the legitimacy of the
government." (Cameron 2010:294).

So into this backdrop, of general industrial decline and animosity between unions, industry, and the state, the
emergence of oil and the arrangement of the industry along strictly anti-union lines along with the election of
Thatcher and many ministers who had served under Heath[13], made oil an 'ideal' industry, full of the promise
of wealth and technological development, but free from the antagonistic union politics which had been so
apparent in the 1970s.

William Keegan (1985:17) relates these trends of decline in industrial activity to the emergence of oil and
underlines the late 1970s and early 1980s as a key moment in industrial transformation and relations to oil.
During this period Britain shifted from importing a substantial amount of oil to become an oil exporting
nation, and a simultaneous shift took place from mere stagnancy in manufacturing output to clear decline:
"During the years 1979-81 gross domestic product […] fell by 4 per cent in volume and manufacturing
output by 20 per cent."

Indeed Keegan (1985:20-21) is able to show that the general trend of decline in manufacturing and industry
which had been taking place in Britain immediately prior to the discovery of oil continued on even after
North Sea oil revenues began to flow to the Treasury. These revenues were being used to mask the
deterioration in industrial manufacturing, and were spent on a huge increase in imports for public
consumption.

"The subsequent deterioration was quite startling. Although the rising contribution
from the North Sea meant that the Government could continually publish figures
showing a balance of payments surplus on current account, the manufacturing trade

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[13] Cameron goes on to make the point that 'revenge' (for the embarrassments of the Heath years by the NUM) was a
driving factor in the anti-union politics of the Thatcher administration - Thatcher was a minister under Heath

balance was eroded so fast that by 1983 Britain had become a net importer of

manufactured goods", (1985:20-21)

with imports of manufactured goods up 40% between 1980 and 1984.

But even more than this, the development of North Sea oil came to be understood as necessitating industrial decline, in a vague exposition of the "Dutch Disease" theory:

"The argument that British industry somehow had to contract because of the North Sea windfall was expressed sometimes in terms of output and sometimes in terms of the balance of payments, although these were related. In each case the analysis was curiously static, on the lines 'More of one thing means less of another.' Often there was a confusion between the 'relative effect' and the 'absolute effect'"(Keegan 1985:32).

So again, not only the symbolic emergence of a new industry, the qualities of which challenged the unionised model of work, but also a popular theory which suggested that these two models of industry could not exist simultaneously, and that in order to allow North Sea oil its full potential, the rest of the industrial economy may have to fall by the wayside.

Forgetting

The scale of the North Sea oil industry appears to be under-appreciated in various ways - politically, culturally, materially - and this lack of recognition appears often to have clear political motives. The idea that the contributions and impact of oil are generally invisible is an important point that feeds into later arguments in the thesis about how individual workers come to understand their relationship to work in an industry which can feel 'distant' in various ways. But for the purposes of this chapter, the under-recognition at play in the establishment of the oil industry counterintuitively underscores the important shifts which have taken place as a result of the establishment of oil in Britain. The huge importance of the industry, but the lack of public acknowledgement speaks to a form of 'wilful blindness' (Bovensiepen and Pelkmans 2020) or 'strategic ignorance' (McGoey 2019).

A defining factor of this formative stage of the British oil industry was the constant under-reporting of reserve estimates by both the oil majors and the government. The oil majors were worried that reporting finds of large oil fields would result in the government tightening their grip on the emerging industry, or even form the basis for a move towards nationalisation of the industry (Harvie 1995:89).

The various UK governments of the 1960s and 1970s were also wary of over emphasising the importance of the oil reserves. Professor Gavin McCrone, a government economist based at the Scottish Office, was commissioned to write a report outlining the extent of the oil reserves and how feasible an independent Scotland would be were it to have access to these oil revenues (McCrone:1974). McCrone concluded that the SNP's estimates of reserves were only wrong in that they were far too low, and that the revenues which would result from oil would make an independent Scotland one of the wealthiest countries in Europe. He also stressed that knowledge of this would lend considerable support to the Scottish Nationalist movement.

The report was therefore kept confidential until a Freedom of Information request unearthed it in 2005 (Brotherstone 2012:76.)

Oil also played a central role in the emergence of the SNP who began to carry out in-depth research into the extent of the oil reserves. Businesses and journalist begin to go to the SNP directly, rather than the UK government, for information regarding oil (Harvie 1995:121-122). Direct discussions between the SNP and the Norwegian government took place, focussing on the development of a Norwegian-style, state-led oil industry in Scotland (Harvie 1995:123).

The Labour government took this rise in Scottish Nationalism seriously and offered Scotland a devolution referendum in 1979, which would grant Scotland its own parliament.[14] Oil, however, seemed to play a somewhat minor role in these debates around devolution. Harvie argues that by provoking a more general debate on the UK constitution, attention was drawn away from a discussion about oil rights. (ibid:188). Brotherstone (2012:82) adds to this by putting forward the argument that despite the lack of a dedicated Norwegian-style 'oil fund', the threat of Scottish independence and resultant devolution actually meant that the Scottish government was able to fend-off many of the worst effects of the destruction of British industry.

Despite the contestations of the early period of the industry discussed in this chapter, once the form of the industry was settled and the privately-directed dynamic of the industry well established, it essentially disappeared from view in mainstream British discourse.
Brotherstone draws our attention to the role of oil in the public imagination and the change from the 'discovery years':

> "Participants still knew they were engaged in a vital economic enterprise, but it was one now largely concealed from public debate. The strategy to which its revenues had been committed [neoliberalism] was very different from the optimistic social perspectives of the discovery years." (Brotherstone 2012:78).

This resonates with some of the points I make later in the thesis, for example in regard to the way in which oil work takes on a 'baseline' or naturalised quality, seeming to form the very definition of what it means "to work", with this understanding only being questioned in times of upheaval or crisis.

But in order to understand why this 'forgetting' is significant it is important to underline the scale of North Sea oil at its peak in the mid-1980s:

> "the simple result of the production of North Sea oil on the balance of payments was, by the mid-1980s, very impressive. The gross value of North Sea output was some 5 per cent of the country's GDP, contributing over £20billion a year to the balance of payments. Exports of oil accounted for one-fifth of Britain's total exports. At 2.5 million or 2.6 million barrels a day, the UK was ranked among the biggest of the OPEC group. By January 1985 the UK was producing the equivalent of more that one-fifth of total OPEC output." (Keegan 1985:43)

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[14] The result of the referendum was in favour of devolution, but the government disallowed the result because of low-turnout. This led to the SNP calling for a 'vote of no confidence' in Callaghan, and the subsequent general election was won by Margaret Thatcher.

Despite oil forming such a crucial segment of the British economy, Brotherstone (2012:71) makes the important observation that in the accounts of the time, and in recollections afterwards in the form of memoirs, Conservative politicians hardly ever mention North Sea oil. The journalist Andrew Marr surmises that Thatcher's amnesia could stem from her embarrassment that a crucial industry, dependent on the entrepreneurial spirit she espoused as her own, was something for which she 'could take absolutely no credit', (Marr 2007 Quoted in Brotherstone (2012:71)), or in Brotherstone's understanding, the notion of such a vast 'natural' wealth jarred with the narrative of 'success through hard work' that Thatcher tried to promote. Cameron (2010:293) also points out the lack of histories of oil in political accounts of the time: "Despite the economic and political importance of North Sea oil it scarcely figures in the published accounts which form the high political memory of the period."

One of the few ministers to mention British oil in his memoirs, Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer under Thatcher hints at the importance and good-timing of North Sea oil. Brotherstone (2012:70) draws on Lawson's memoirs to explain that for Conservatives in the UK the discovery of oil was imagined as part of the emergence from an embarrassing era of post-imperial decline, epitomised by the Suez crisis, and cumulating in the application by the UK to the IMF for a loan. According to Lawson "offshore oil arrived when it was of 'unprecedented value and strategic importance.'" Lawson's mention of the importance of oil, rare among conservative ministers again underlines the problematic basis of the core idea of Thatcherism, that Neo-liberal values were adopted because they somehow chimed with 'human nature'. The omitting of North Sea oil from the story of neoliberal change in Britain makes invisible the reliance on this windfall wealth to bolster radical economic policies. Again, this has obvious overlaps with Fernando Coronil's (1997) work, in that while oil in Venezuela provided a medium through which the power and magic of the state could be channelled, here oil is used to naturalise and quietly bolster the UK-style neoliberal policies being introduced at the time.

Christopher Harvie notes that this absence of discussion of oil also features in the cultural/literary output of Britain. The only two major pieces of work which placed the politics and wranglings of oil at their centre were Bill Forsyth's 1983 film 'Local Hero', and the John McGrath play "The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil." Harvie scans other literature at the time for mention of the developments in the North Sea, but finds only fleeting reference, concluding that "The impact on *British* intellectual consciousness was practically zero" (1996:160) which leads him to pose the question "How could something that big be so boring?"

Harvie speculates that outside the political willing that oil wealth remain unrecognised, this invisibility was partly due to the technical language of oil. "A sequence of technological innovations had been carried through which outdid the loom and mules and jennies of the industrial revolution which the kids learned about in school."(1996:159-160). And Brotherstone (2012:80) suggests that the physical remove of the infrastructures of oil, mostly at sea, and those which touch land do so outside areas of high population, plays a role in its invisibility.

> "North Sea oil and gas production is hidden from view. There are no oil communities as
> there were coalmining ones. Oil is produced, as very often are the facilities for its

production, far from public view. The oil, unlike coal, remains underground, delivered largely unseen until pumped into vehicles, heating systems or whatever."

Brotherstone makes two interesting points. Firstly on the question of whether 'oil communities' exist. A shared understanding of oil and approach to work in the industry certainly does exist. And although this may be in a form markedly different from the obviously closely linked fishing communities which preceded oil (or to other industrial communities), the ethical, kinship, and friendship networks which are at the centre of my research testify to that.

Secondly, Brotherstone's idea that the materiality of oil, a largely 'unseen' resource, may impact upon political and social interactions speaks clearly to anthropological insights into the importance of 'resource materialities.' (Mitchell 2013; Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; Weszkalnys 2015). While in the case of North Sea oil both the material opacity of the oil itself and the remoteness (Saxer and Anderson 2019) from sites of power and historical industry make this process of wilful forgetting viable, this is accentuated by the decisions to site the industry in the North East. This decision kept oil at a distance from mainstream political power (formal political power in Edinburgh and London; and popular political power in vibrant industrial areas). But it also situated the core sites of production in an area with a local ethics suited to individualist understandings of labour, again assuaging the possibility of collective political movements coalescing around the resource.

This is an important point that Moore (1982:78) also writes about in relation to the development of oil in Peterhead. "Peterhead has a distinct and isolated physical existence at the end of a difficult road at the eastern-most extremity of mainland Scotland." He explains further (Moore 1982:7)

> "Peterhead is a very small speck on the map and it has a tiny population. Its interests feature not at all in the policies of the major corporations who pursue profits world-wide. The interests of Peterhead are also very slight in the consideration of the state which sees itself as pursuing national regeneration through oil exploitation."

I will return to this point in chapter 5 where I discuss the differentiated mobilities of oil. But important here is the idea that in consciously situating oil outside of areas which were highly-populated and therefore likely with a population well-versed in radical industrial relations, the contribution of North Sea oil to the transformations of the latter half of the 20th century was largely overlooked.

Another factor in this distancing and the willingness of government to allow great autonomy to the oil companies was the lack of Scottish corporate involvement in the industry. Macdonald (2009:79) notes that in the early days of oil it was mainly American and UK-US consortia which operated in UKCS, but the UK's contribution rose to more than 70% by 1980. However, Scottish companies made up only 20%.

> "Two years after the discovery of the Forties Field, *all* the rigs constructed to exploit the UK's resources had been constructed outwith Britain. Even by the mid 1980s, while the oil from the UKCS was piped ashore in Scotland, only 16 per cent of that oil was refined in Scotland and 40 per cent in the UK. […] by the mid 1990s, Scottish industry had

contributed less than 30 per cent to the development of its own oil and gas reserves.

There was very little that was Scottish about Scotland's oil."

Newlands and Brehme (2007:95) claim that "[i]n many ways, the oil industry has become part of the 'old' or 'established' economy. […] in terms of the social impact of oil, the disruptive effects - both good and bad - experienced by local communities are in general fading memories of older generations." They also propose that only in environmental issues and decommissioning are there 'live controversies about the way forward.' The controversies and conversations around how oil should be managed which were key to the 'discovery' period largely fell away as it became clear that the form of extraction and model of industry were settled and unlikely to change.

Cameron supports this point, adding to the idea that the exceptional period of oil has long passed, and it is now another regular sector of the British economy

"The peak of its [oil's] influence came in the decade from June 1975, when the first oil from the North Sea was brought ashore in the UK. A decade of vast investment, huge construction projects and a new form of work in a hostile environment was altered in late 1985 when the oil price fell […] Although the impact of the oil industry made Aberdeen a distinctive corner of the Scottish economy, the post-1985 settling down of activity and the difficulties experienced after the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988 have diminished its predominance and in the increasing contribution of the service sector it has begun to return to the wider Scottish pattern." (Cameron 2010:252-254 Cites Newlands 'The Oil Economy').

I consider this particular dynamic in the next chapter, where I discuss the changes that the industry went through in the wake of the Piper Alpha disaster, the introduction of sweeping new safety regimes and management practices, and the impact on how those working in the industry experienced and reflect on that time and the resultant changes in masculinities. And while I largely agree that the oil industry which once seemed to form a distinct break with the industrial legacy of Britain eventually came to resonate with the qualities of many other post-industrial forms of manual labour, the impact and narratives which emerged in this initial pre-Piper Alpha period still heavily influence the ways in which oil work is imagined and experienced.

Although most of my interlocutors were aware of some of the history of the oil industry, especially the events around Piper Alpha, and a general sense that it formed a turning point in the industry after which the qualities of oil work somehow shifted, the foundational period covered in this chapter was seemingly unknown to those I met in the field. Despite this I attempt to show, in the rest of the thesis, the constraints and possibilities that the decisions taken in this period allowed for.

In summary, I have shown how the establishment of the oil industry not only attempted to recreate a specific set of conditions seemingly conducive to the efficient generation of capital, but that the way in which the

industry was managed and developed also responded to the political turbulence and industrial upheaval that was taking place at the time. Ewen Cameron (2010:255) summarises this period neatly:

> "This was a new industry without the history of sectional interests and identities based on craft and skill which were present in the shipyards or the engineering industry. Many of the corporations involved were from the USA and had little tradition of workers' representation. Even among UK companies there may have been a determination to exploit the novelty of the industry as an opportunity to create a non-union culture as a contrast with onshore industrial relations strife."

2. Early oil work - fishers and 'supermen'

Despite having been close friends with Ben since our time at nursery school together, the work of his father, Eddie, had always been a mystery to me. Most of our fathers worked locally, in jobs familiar to us - in offices, as builders, as healthcare workers, or fishermen. I still recall a conversation in the playground at primary school about what our fathers did, and the sense of curiosity around the fact that Ben's father was working in America. On questioning Ben what it was his that father was doing there, the rather unexpected reply of *'something to do with radiators'* stemmed any further inquiry. The idea of a plumber installing central heating systems seemed to jar with our ideas about the exoticism of life in the USA. The absence of his father for much of our childhood further prevented us from finding out any more about this work with 'radiators' and so we left it at that.

It was only two decades later, after talking with Ben about his own work in the oil industry, and asking him if he might have any contacts that he could put me in touch with, that he suggested I speak with his father - *"He used to own his own oil company before he retired, welding and laying pipelines."* Ben gave me Eddie's telephone number, and the next morning I walked to his house, nearby to my childhood home, keen to find out about his work which had been unknown to me for so many years. Eddie invited me into his kitchen and over the course of the following three hours he told me about his career, and talked in great depth about the pipe testing equipment and technology he had built a career and business around.

His work, from the first oil job in the early 1980s to his retirement in 2005 had all centred on the inspection of oil pipeline welds - the work relied on various X-ray and radiographic techniques, and the most basic process involved wrapping newly welded pipes in film, and running a small radioactive source inside which would show up, on the film, any abnormalities or hazardous fractures in the weld. I quickly realised that the 'radiators' we had imagined him working with as children had actually been a garbled version of 'radiation', describing the tools at the centre of his work. His long absences during our childhood, and the unfamiliarity with this work had ensured that this had remained a mystery for all this time.

At the beginning of our conversation, yet to find out about what Eddie's work actually comprised of and uncertain as to how to begin, I asked about how he had first found out about work in the oil industry. Eddie recalled:

> *"You used to see in the Press and Journal [the major regional newspaper] all these adverts advertising for the oil industry and the phenomenal salaries in comparison to what we were getting. And we'd think, these must be supermen, you know?"*

Eddie was primarily taken aback by the high salaries on offer to workers in the oil industry which vastly overshadowed those available to other workers in the area at the time. But his description of 'supermen' speaks to a broader reimagining of work and masculinity sparked by the advent of oil in Scotland in the

1970s. The appearance of oil industry jobs offered not only large pay-packets, but also a swathe of new, unfamiliar technologies, and the promise of an industry which appeared to be central to the future of Britain. Alongside this new industry came a host of new workers, displaying notably brusque, 'macho' demeanours which signalled to Eddie that entering into the oil industry entailed entering into a new way of life. In this chapter I consider how the appearance of these new 'oil men' signalled a new potential future for men like Eddie. In combination with the complex new technologies of oil, new ethical understandings of labour, and integration into global oil networks, the advent of oil recast the possibilities of life for men in North East Scotland.

In the previous chapter I showed how the choice of an onshore base for the new UK oil industry was made in such a way as to form a clear break with antagonistic industrial histories elsewhere in the UK. The aim was to situate the industry in a region whose ethical frameworks would 'match' with those of the global oil industry. This chapter then examines the ways in which this decision played out on the ground and was experienced by workers new to the industry, who, it was assumed, would readily come to embody a particular work ethic as a result of local experiences and understandings of labour. The utilisation of 'difference', in this case an ethical relationship to labour different from other regions of Scotland, was mobilised as a means to more effective generation of capital (Tsing 2009). In turn a new type of worker identity emerges, clearly distinct but also related in important ways to previous understandings of working masculinity.

These newly emerging oil masculinities, seemed to arrive most notably in the figure of the Texan oil-workers tasked with overseeing the establishment of the new industry. Of course, these American workers also lived in the imagination of local people and Scottish oil workers as stereotypes in their own right. Nevertheless the exemplar of the ruthless and rugged American oil workers, stereotyped or not, fed directly in to the imagination of what oil men might be. And this contrasted with but also complemented other ways of imagining oneself as a man which existed prior to the oil industry.

In this chapter I focus on the experiences of Eddie, mentioned above, and Mick, another interlocutor who was also part of the first wave of Scottish oil workers. I discuss the ways in which a process of reckoning took place where these models of manhood came to be woven into a new understanding of the acceptable parameters of how one should present oneself and interact with others at work. Over time, a set of ethical positionings specific to the Scottish oil context emerge, and a specific 'moral exemplar' or 'figure of labour' (Tsing 2009) unique to the region and the early pre-Piper Alpha period emerges. These exemplary figures reflect a set of affective qualities against which one's own way of being could be measured. In the early manifestation of this oil work masculinity the most prominent features are a commitment to physically demanding and risky work, combined with a high level of skill and ability in working with complex technologies and infrastructures.

I show that oil work as a sphere of heightened and exaggerated masculinity needs to be seen in relation to the very different gender relations associated with the traditional fisheries, one of the dominant industries which existed in the region prior to the development of oil. Although fishing work had also been distinctly

gendered, it was understood to be a form of activity which was deeply embedded in the relationality of fishing communities, with a lack of clear distinction between spaces of work and home. The establishment of the oil industry, I argue, has inverted this understanding and established a constellation of work and gender relations which aligns to sharply gendered (and segregated) activities and spaces.

The historical moment described in this chapter relates to the 'making smooth' of capitalism and the integration of this new form of work into already existing social worlds. Ferguson (2005), Tsing (2004) and Appel (2012 & 2019) all write about similar attempts to escape the limitations of social, cultural or geographic particularity which might inhibit the operations of capitalism. Here I examine the early era of oil to think through the ways in which companies attempted to make a break with previous models of industrial development and establish a new industry which would align more closely with company ideals. However this process was never complete, and in attempting to generate a new state-company-worker settlement new forms of social attachment to work develop. These may still largely align with the desires of oil companies, but they nevertheless represent unpredictable amalgamations of worker imagination, interaction with technology, and embedding of work in community life.

In my discussion of the emergence of new masculinities during this era I discuss how the technologies of oil production opened up possibilities to express gender in hitherto unimaginable ways. I need to qualify this to some extent in that I don't wish to present a technologically deterministic account of this process, but rather an expansive and fluid set of social relations which include relations with technology and the material specificities of oil. In this sense I follow Smith Rolston's (2014) discussion of technology and gender which emphasises the multiplicity of meanings which can be associated with the material infrastructures and tools of resource extraction. The particular tools and technologies which appeared with the development of oil didn't necessitate specific new gender relations or imaginations of masculinity. But their integration into already existing models of gender and politics, alongside the wrangling which aimed to create a particular kind of oil industry, meant that these technologies came to stand for a particular set of social possibilities. In essence, I want to present an account of these developments which appreciates the materiality of oil production but does not give it undue explanatory power outside of the sets of social relations which make oil production possible.

Another important point to note here, also mentioned earlier in the introduction, is that unlike other resource or manufacturing industries, oil work doesn't centre around one particular work practice or one form of generalised labour. Rather the oil industry brings together a highly diverse set of material interventions, labour processes, and forms of work which elide generalisation. This has implications, not wholly unintended, for the formation of industry-wide sense of class identification. I discuss this above, but it is important here to note the emergence of ideas of a generalised 'oil worker' which comes to bridge this lack of shared work practice. Mutual identification centres on recognition of shared experience in a wider sense, based on more general notions of competent working masculinity or shared experiences of 'being offshore'.

Interestingly, the establishment of the oil industry in the UK in the late 1970s countered the general trend towards deindustrialisation and devaluing of manual labour taking place in the UK, and in many other

industrialised societies at the time. Walker and Roberts (2018) examine the impact of deindustrialisation in a range of contexts and the impact of these processes on understandings of masculinity, notably the difficulty men have in retaining a sense of agency and potency when the core feature of employment has disappeared or been recast in strongly negative terms (see also Keskula 2018 and Kideckel 2008). Manual work in the context of North Sea oil countered this apparent trend. Rather than a stripping away of industrial jobs and leading to a reimagination of masculinity in the wake of reduced economic prospects, the new industry unexpectedly allowed for the extension, strengthening and reconfiguration of already existing regimes of masculinity. The 'socio-technical' qualities of the UK oil industry (Bray 2007; Wajcman 2002), in particular the combination of physically demanding and dangerous manual labour with complex new technologies and vast infrastructures, became the central elements of the valorisation of this form of work. The fact that the industry was being established against the backdrop of highly politicised and antagonistic deindustrialization processes (outlined in the previous chapter) made oil work appear all the more exceptional in the eyes of those involved.

The particular understandings and approaches to work that emerged in this 'early' and 'fast growth' period of the UK oil industry (Newlands and Brehme 2007) have been highly influential in shaping understandings of the UK oil experience. As I discuss in the next chapter, the oil industry went through significant changes in the period immediately following this 'early' era - namely around safety and general industrial relations in the wake of the Piper Alpha disaster. However, despite these changes, the models of oil work forged in this initial phase continue to shape how many workers imagine their work and navigate the industry. Similarly, the affective qualities and models of masculinity established in this era still heavily influence the approach of many young workers, but, as we see in the next chapter, this process occurs in complex ways due to the significant changes which have taken place in the industry over time.

Fishing Communities

The traditional fisheries which had existed long before the discovery and development of oil presented a way of life which had been considered 'outside the norm' in various ways due to the particular constellation of gender relations and working practices that had formed around the fishing industry (Nadel-Klein 2003). Despite the significant transformation of the fisheries and fishing communities, many aspects which had marked out the geographic region around the North East coast as unique regained a degree of importance in the period when an onshore site for the oil industry was sought out. In this section I draw on ethnographic material from my field-site to exemplify and discuss the ethics and forms of sociality particular to the fisheries.

Becky lived in the house next to us in Cullen's Seatown, our houses divided by a small alleyway known to locals as 'Reekie's Raw', describing the way in which the gable walls channelled the smoke from the chimneys of the nearby houses down the alley, producing a woody 'reek' (smell). On the side of her house nearest to us was a small garden, known as a kale-yard. One of the few houses in Seatown to have a garden, visitors often commented on the impressive blooms of lilies and fuchsias that burst over the waist-high wall

in Summer. Hidden among the flowers were stalks of bushy green kale, an important ingredient in the broths that Becky would make and share with us every week during our time there.

On warmer days Becky would open the door to the garage at the back of her house, and sit on the old sofa tucked inside. In her nineties, and with failing eyesight, Becky would hear people walking past and strike up conversation. Being such a familiar face in Cullen meant a constant stream of passersby stopping to talk with her. We spent many an afternoon sitting with Becky outside the garage, hearing stories about changes in the village since she moved there from neighbouring Portsoy in 1946. Becky described herself and her family as 'fisherfowk' (fisherfolk). Her husband Bildy, who passed away in the late 1990s, had been a fisherman, as had Becky's own father. In the early days of her father's fishing career she had also gone out to sea with him, in their two-person rowing boat to catch mackerel on baited lines.

The maze of streets and alleys in Seatown are unnamed, the whole area simply known as Seatown, but Becky had committed to memory the location of each of the 240-odd houses, and the histories of the families who had once lived in each one. The white cottage opposite our own had once been the childhood home of an oil man I met in the Three Kings Pub, who told me the story of falling through a loose panel on an oil rig into the sea 30 feet below. Our own house had once been the residence of a man known as 'Blind Frank' who, as Becky recalled, spent much of his time, as I did, in the back-yard chopping kindling with an axe, despite his inability to see. The house a few doors up the street now occupied by Stuart the builder, another Three Kings regular, had once belonged to Mr Mustard, a cobbler who would make the leather boots for the fishermen in a lean-to workshop attached to the front of the house.

Becky also described in detail the changes to her own home - she shared her memories of her in-laws who slept in bun-an'-bed (recessed beds) in what was now the informal sitting-room. The 'sa't staines' (salt-stones) which formed the lower part of the outer walls of her house had been quarried further up the coast at Hopeman, and were built into the wall to repel the damp sea air. She also told me how builders who were replacing a downstairs shower-room had discovered sand and seashells beneath the floorboards, and that the owners of the house near the harbour which had once been a ship chandlers had even discovered that the sea would flow under the floorboards of the porch at high-tide. These small discoveries chime with Becky's understanding that most of the houses in Seatown had been built by fisher-families directly onto the sand, without foundations, adjacent to the sea on which they worked, and the beach where they would keep their boats.

These remnants of fishing life form a material reminder of the ways in which the fishing communities built their lives around their work, and speak to the overlapping and indistinct notions of home and work. In her work on Scottish fishing communities in the twentieth century, Jane Nadel-Klein (2003) argues that fishing communities and 'fisherfolk' were often talked about in semi-racialised and deeply stigmatising terms. A central component of this stigmatisation was the relatively powerful position of women in fishing communities, as key co-workers and partners in the fisheries, performing much of the onshore work needed to prepare the fishermen to go out to sea - 'fishwives' would bait hooked-lines with mussels, repair nets, knit 'ganseys', (the woollen garments worn by the fishermen), as well as performing a whole range of domestic

labour. In smaller fishing villages like Cullen, where the boats were usually pulled up on to the beach rather than tied-up at the harbour, the fishwives would carry their husbands on their back out to the boats, to save them from getting wet feet before their trip to sea.

Many of these fisherwomen also acted as fish merchants, and would buy up small catches from villages around the coast, and then carry baskets of fish to the bigger towns which had fish markets. Becky recounted her own mother and grandmother buying fish from the boats at Portsoy and walking with it to the fishmarket at Macduff (the round-trip would have taken a full day), or taking fresh fish into the inland farms to exchange for butter or cheese.

> *"And my mother, to eke oot aifter she got us up a wee bit, a well, we was still going oot, she woulda ga'ed to Macduff market, fish market, and the aul' wife at the back and the two o' them used to ging t' Macduff wi' the creels on their back and she said she wis seven months pregnant wi' at sister that wis ower the day, seven months pregnant wi' her and she was walkin' fae Macduff wi' a creel o' herring on her back. [...] I dinna ken fit way ma mither managed, d'ya ken 'at?"*

Nadel-Klein notes that because of their central role in the trade of fish, women tended to control the finances of the household, and allocate 'pocket-money' to their husbands - fishermen noted that they had no need for money anyway as they couldn't spend it at sea. (Interestingly, Sarah, the wife of John the fisherman, mentioned in the introduction made exactly the same point - she had total control over the finances and running of the household, and even though John was 'obsessed' with making money, he had no idea of any of their domestic outgoings). In the traditional fisheries the contribution of women was explicitly recognised as central to the industry. As Nadel-Klein writes, "fisherfolk talked often and proudly about women's work: what their mothers and grandmothers had done and how their labour, strengths and skills had sustained both family and fishery" (Nadel-Klein 2003:54).

Fishing was highly gendered, and fishermen were deeply concerned with the 'polluting influence' of women on their boats, but nevertheless women made vital economic and technological contributions to the work, and this was openly acknowledged. Becky's descriptions of the houses that make up Cullen reflected the fact that "[f]ishermen's houses were always workplaces as well as homes," (Nadel-Klein 2003: 58), in which the lives of men and women were intertwined in ways that made fishing communities so distinct.

The unique character of the working and gender relations of these communities was largely transformed as the industry moved away from the kin-based working arrangements to larger, more industrialised operations. As the herring boom took place in the late 19th century, men from coastal communities would join large herring fleets, working on boats owned by the fish-curers, and would follow the shoals of herring around the coast of Britain, to Shetland, the Western Isles, or south to Yarmouth. Women from fishing communities all over Scotland would trace the journeys of the fleets onshore and would work as 'herring lassies' gutting and packing the herring into barrels for transport. As the herring industry went bust in the early 20th century, and larger trawlers with hired crew increasingly became the norm, there was no longer a need for the 'herring lassies' and thus the direct role of women workers in the fisheries ended. If the gender regimes of the

traditional fisheries had made those communities seem at odds with 'mainstream' Scottish values, the expulsion of women from fishing at this point was a moment in which the lives of fishing communities became largely aligned with the lives of others around Scotland, with the emergence of more sharply gendered divisions of work and home.

The post-war years were generally characterised by a slow decline, a slipping away of small family owned businesses and the increasing industrialisation of the fisheries. Becky noted the large number of shops which had existed in Cullen when she moved there in 1946 - in Seatown alone there had been a cobbler, a draper, the ship chandlers, a butcher, a handful of grocery shops, a telephone exchange, a gasworks, a sweet shop, and a hotel. Apart from the hotel which reopened after many years of closure, all the other shops are now gone, converted into houses and holiday homes, their former identity forgotten to most[15]. Local newspapers from the time, the same newspapers in which Eddie spotted the advertisements for oil work, noted the widespread and frequent closure of small businesses.

The area remained largely non-industrialised, and with any new industries tending to centre on the major conurbations of the Central Belt, no major new forms of work emerged to replace the once ubiquitous family fishing operations. This lead to a general sense of stagnancy, and some government concern for the future of the region. Mackie (2006:32) outlines the main economic concerns in the North East at the time - "The area's ailments were first revealed in the main *Scottish Plan* of 1966: declining traditional industries, no prospects of new business, and debilitating migration that concealed chronic unemployment." The 'Scottish Plan' mentioned by Mackie was a government report into the economic situation in the nation at the time, and raised concerns about the lack of investment in the North East of Scotland due to concerns about how remote it was from the Central Belt. The plan estimated that between 1951 and 1961 35,000 people had left the area, mainly to large towns in England in search of more secure employment. Any investment in Scotland was likely to centre on Glasgow or perhaps Dundee, both once home to large industries which had closed and resulted in high unemployment. As noted in the previous chapter, the large-scale deindustrialisation which was taking place in these parts of Scotland was much more immediately impactful and of more concern to government than the more gradual transformations taking place in the North East.

This is the general context, a waning away of industries and jobs which unsettled the once relatively stable base of employment around which men built a particular sense of themselves as men. Walker and Roberts (2018:5) write about similar global trends regarding employment, loss of work and changes in masculinities - "questions arise about men's ability, in this context, to construct and maintain subjectivities that allow them to manage the 'hidden injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb 1972). To what extent are working-class men able to shore up traditional constructions of masculinity surrounding manual labour?" These issues were certainly present in pre-oil Northeast Scotland. As questions began to arise around how the area would manage to cope with the loss of the small, diverse industries through which the population made a livelihood, so many people decided that life there was becoming unfeasible and decided to migrate to other parts of the UK. In a sense oil's major contribution was to change the timeframe under which these questions were asked. It no longer

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[15] This sense of decline, particularly as manifest in the appearance of village/town centres, remains a very common topic of conversation. I return to this in chapter 5

seemed to matter if smaller, traditional, usually family-run industries began to close as oil, a large new industry with the capacity to employ many men, emerged and shifted those concerns into the future. As I show later in the thesis, these issues periodically emerge again during the times in which the oil price is low, when workers are (usually temporarily) laid off and it becomes clear that there are few other economic opportunities available.

Importantly, regarding the transformation of the fisheries and the context of employment in the North East, a transition had already occurred away from one particular constellation of gender, work, home, and technology, and the consciously embedded and intertwined qualities of the fishing era, to something which resembled a less exceptional mainstream. However, some of the unique qualities and ethical framings of the fishing era persisted - notably the pattern of small-scale industries, often kin-based, which either explicitly rejected union politics, or simply never-developed unionised workplaces because of the small-scale nature of industry in the area (Moore 1982). These are the qualities which made the area appealing as a candidate for the onshore base of the oil industry. They offered the potential for unhindered generation of capital, aided by processes of self-and super-exploitation (Tsing 2009) which rendered normal (and even desirable) individualist and anti-union stances towards work. Some of the qualities which had marked the area as radically different during the fishing era, had, in an indirect way (through the combination of lack of major industrialisation, anti-union sentiment, and a sense of gradual decline) also led to it being seen as a promising site for the new oil industry. Indeed the development of the oil industry in the North East again marked the working practices of the area as exceptional.

Experiences of oil in the Early Era

In this section I draw on the experiences of Eddie and Mick, two interlocutors who worked in oil during the early era, and examine the allure of oil work in those initial years. Mick had worked as a customs officer at Aberdeen airport prior to his entry into the oil industry. A round of strike action at the airport had unsettled him and was a key factor in moving to work in oil:

> *"It was the time of industrial action which went against the grain with, you know, saying 'I'm going on strike and picketing'. It's not my scene....I did [strike], purely 'cause I'd've been the only one that didn't, so aye. ...One of the [oil worker] agents [whom Mick met through work in the heliport] said 'well if you're so pissed off I'll get you a start offshore'."*

A chance at working in the new offshore oil industry, offered both an escape from the unionised workforce in the airport, which Mick couldn't stand, and offered the opportunity of a potentially lucrative new career.

Eddie, on the other hand, found himself entering into the slow-paced, uncertain economic climate of North East Scotland after graduating from secondary school in the early 1970s. He had worked a number of jobs - first labouring for his family's small building firm, then working as an engineering surveyor for the local district council and water board. Importantly, none of these previous jobs had been in large-scale industries or in workplaces with significant union representation.

Shortly after seeing the oil work advertisements in the local newspaper a childhood friend of Eddie's told him about an opening at the company he worked for, "Oilfield Inspection Services" (OIS). Eddie started working at OIS as a trainee radiographer in 1982. OIS were a company engaged in 'non-destructive testing' (NDT) of various forms of metalwork related to the oil industry - pipework, risers, flowlines, rig structures. Much of their work focused on the subsea pipelines used to channel the oil from the large oil platforms to the refineries on the shore. In most instances long sections of pipe would be welded together on shoreline workshops or on pipe-laying barges, inspected by the NDT team using the above-mentioned radiographic techniques, repaired where necessary, and lowered from the barge to the sea-floor.

Eddie's initial encounters with oil work signalled to him that it was very different from anything he had experienced before. Most obviously, as per his 'supermen' comment, the wages for oil work were significant. Beginning as a trainee radiographer at OIS in 1982, Eddie's income averaged £1000 per month, a stark contrast to his £5000 annual salary when working as an engineering surveyor for the council.

Some of Bill Mackie's (2004:60-61) interviewees also recount the sense of astonishment at how well paid these oil related jobs were compared to other forms of work in the area. Neil Ferguson, for example, noted that his work as a joiner in Aberdeen had paid a weekly wage of £100-120, whereas his cement supervisor role with Schlumberger meant he earned a base-rate of £200 per week, with regular large bonuses. 'Swede Lingard' recounted coming back from his first offshore trip with a cheque from 'Santa Fe Drilling' so large (physically and in terms of value) that the local shop refused to cash it in, believing it was counterfeit, a situation unimaginable in his previous work as a farm-hand.

Eddie added to this by explaining it wasn't only that the wages were higher, but that there was much more work to be done:

> *"I mean the money was crazy like, I mean it was only 1.65 in the hour and so I mean I*
> *started, well, it was April '82 and I don't think I'd had a day off for six months. But I mean*
> *you were working through the day sometimes, then stopping and going to another job,*
> *sometimes you'd do thirty hours straight you know?"*

Although the wages were noticeably higher than other forms of work this reflected the very long hours and high level of commitment expected of workers. This sense of unwavering commitment, of uncomplaining willingness to exert oneself, emerges in various ways as a key tenant of the masculinities associated with this work, while those reluctant to work hard were castigated as weak, effeminate, or severely lacking in some way.

Eddie notes that he encountered some of these qualities in interactions with the few remaining Americans he met on the pipe-laying barges, who held starkly different attitudes to the local workers:

> *"it was quite an experience, 'cause they were <u>rough</u>. I mean some of them, the Americans,*
> *it was all American, it was all American lay-barges back in the '70s. It was all American*
> *expertise that came in 'cause there'd never been an oil industry here. So the lay-barge,*
> *even then there was still a lot, quite a few, a lot of Americans and that you know [...] I mean*
> *they're all Cajuns from Louisiana and that. And I mean some of them on the barges back in*

the '70s wouldnae wear shoes! Haha! I mean it was just like, it was like the Wild West. […]
they were pretty ruthless these people. If you didnae perform they'd take you off.[16]"

Bill Mackie's (2004:80) interview with an executive from Conoco, Jack Marshall, underlines the general awareness that the American workers brought with them a unforgiving style of labour relations:

> *"I am sure that the first UK roughnecks working on drilling rigs would have been pretty*
> *shocked. But without meaning to be really ugly, one thing they needed to understand was*
> *that when you signed on, you worked, period. That was just what came with it, effort. […]*
> *For the UK offshore workers it was a new world. They didn't understand it. They had never*
> *been there and they had certainly never been there under our management style."*

Mick had started work on a rig as a maintenance labourer but quickly moved into the drilling team. Drilling operations are generally considered one of the most dangerous sections of the rig, and with the most hierarchical labour relations. Mick eventually became a drilling supervisor, and explicitly traces his own unforgiving management style to the influence of the Americans:

> *"I wasn't the most sympathetic of supervisors. … sympathy's nae in my books. But again*   *go*
> *back the Yanks, it's the way I was brought up. You know, you started in that industry,*
> *you just didn't get sympathy. We'd a guy, in what you called the mousehole - it's a ten inch*
> *pipe, we'd stick a section o' pipe in there waiting for it to go on the next thing. And it was*
> *empty, and I was a few yards away, and this guy stepped into the hole. And I heard the*
> *break, I heard the crack as he broke his ankle. And I just [shouted] 'get that fucking idiot*
> *out o' the way.' I looks down on deck [pointing to another man], 'you, you're a roughneck.'*
> *Honestly, that's no exaggeration, that's just the way it was. Guy broke his ankle, we pulled*
> *him to the side, carried on working, and when there was a break a few minutes later the*
> *driller called the medic. This guy's lying in the corner screaming. […] That was in the North*
> *Sea. That was in the good old days. But again, the Yank mentality."*

This period, prior to the Piper Alpha disaster and the complex new regime of safety procedures which followed, is often referred to (sometimes sarcastically) as the 'good old days', with a notion that workers were harshly treated but also had much more freedom in their work. Although some of this is likely to be a nostalgic rereading of the past, a valorisation of a more violent and virile working context, the early years of the industry were characterised by more forthright labour-management relations. Mick remembers the 1980s

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[16] Many of the local oil men who had become managers in the oil industry emulated the style of the Americans, becoming, as Mackie notes, "replica rednecks": *"A local man who had adopted his American bosses' unique, if doubtful style of man management - and also their accents.[…] "Goddamn, you sonsabitches. Why don't you haul your ass up there an' ging an' get a dishtool an' clean up 'at mess."* (Mackie 2004:82). (The joke here being that the faux American accent gives way to his Scottish brogue halfway through the statement). Eddie also recalls that the American companies were renowned as being particularly unforgiving, in contrast to some of the European companies, for example French Entrepose (ETPM), known to Eddie by its nickname "Easy time, plenty money."

as being particularly casualty-filled. Alongside memories of broken fingers and ears almost cut-off but bandaged back on[17], he also told me about an incident which led to him being seriously injured:

"I was working up the derrick throwing it [mechanical tongs which connect pipes]. But it was manual. Nowadays they just sit in a wee box beside it. You stand out…it's a twenty inch board and you're ninety feet up and you're standing out there. And you've got this drill pipe, collar, fitever. And drill pipe, it's about 93/94 feet high, and you've got a 3/4 inch rope with a wrap round it. You take it out and the blocks are coming up with what they call the elevators which wrap round the pipe. So it's all a case of timing. You lean out, the driller - he's looking out watching you. You lean out, you time it, and you throw this pipe. It hits the back o' the elevators which [catch it]….right? So your rope comes away and you walk back to get the next lot. […] All day. You do a hundred and…my record was a hundred and twenty in, a hundred and twenty out. I'd do two now! The thing about derrickmen is, as I say you're out at the end of the board. And you all have your harness, "belly busters". But each derrickman will all tie their own belt, their own rope. And it's tied, aye back on the wall. I was the derrick   man, and I'm five foot and a half, five-six. My assistant was six foot two. So he came up t'let me away. So I h'd ma coffee, m'drink, and went back up. And he's screaming shouting, "get that effin' pipe up" so I just jumped on. […] I had a rope on, but unfortunately it was his rope. Him being much taller, he leaned further out than me. So I'm at the end o' the board thinkin' it was my rope. So I lean out, fuckin' hell, still more rope to come, so I just went and the box came up and caught me right in the face, knocked me back on the wall. I was out cold. Fortunately it knocked me back, otherwise I'd've just been hanging. But the impact knocked me back on the board and I was unconscious. And the only thing I remember is coming round and the medic is standing over me [saying] "Holy Fuck!", and I'm lying there thinking "this isn't good." So as I say I remember that. The next thing I know is in the sick bay being treated, "chopper coming for you". And they wrapped me up like the invisible man … A suspected broken jaw. My beard was singed off. I had a bit of stubble but that was singed off by the impact. Nose was broken - it stayed broken for three years.

Although obviously distressing, the kind of accident Mick experienced appears to have been a fairly regular feature of work on the rigs in that period. Indeed Woolfson et al (1996) make the broader point in *Paying for the Piper* that cost-cutting measures during the 1980s slump and the emphasis on production above worker safety led directly to the Piper Alpha disaster.

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[17] This was partly to do with the rig promoting a zero-incident scheme where all workers were entitled to a safety bonus, and so any incidents were purposively kept quiet. Collinson (1999) discusses the obvious problems with using this approach to generate a safer working environment, and I discuss the advent of a distinct 'safety culture' in the next chapter. Mick's reflections on this period:
"I went a whole trip with a broken finger and had to get my wedding ring cut off at the end of it. Everybody had bandages on. You lost the safety bonus, the whole rig lost the safety bonus. Nobody wanted it, nobody wanted to be responsible for the loss o' the safety bonus. So honestly, the injuries that they used t'walk about wi. The best ones, they always stuck you in the engine room with a paintbrush, out o' sight. I've seen guys wi' ears hanging off. Oh yeah. Like I said, I broke ma finger in the first week. […] The medic just covered it up."

The comparatively harsh treatment of workers that characterised the early days of rig life created a sense that if one did not adhere to the strict working regime then one's contract would end. This both reflected and accentuated another particular feature of the nascent but as yet not completely defined Scottish oil masculinity that was emerging - the sense that at a bare minimum physical exertion was to be expected and admired, but that on top of this, injury was a regular threat and should be dealt with unemotionally and without complaint. Again, Mick's thoughts on the aftermath of the accident suggest that this was rooted in a particularly American approach to labour relations:

> *"I was off-pay [as he was recovering], in those days. I was off-pay. I got a call the day after I came out of hospital, saying 'can you come in to the office for an interview.' I said "I'm still in bed, I just got out of hospital yesterday." "Aye but the manager needs to see you." Well I says "no, I can't come." "Oh. Well as soon as you're ready come in." It was in Aberdeen. Again, Yanks. Yeah, Yanks. So I goes in a few days after, had my interview, and basically they said I was overenthusiastic, it was my own fault, blah blah blah. So on the way out [of the meeting with his employer] the whatchacallem, the HR manager who I know [from the days working in the heliport], who got me the job, he got me the job. He says "what you do, you go to your solicitor, claim for loss of earnings, pain and suffering." He says "they're insured for it. Nobody'll bat an eyelid, but if you don't do anything they'll just keep you off your money." So I went local solicitors, he says "how much d'ya want?" I says "ah, whatever you get." So I got a few quid off them and nobody batted an eyelid. I went back a couple of trips later, carried on working. The was the American [way of working] - "you're off-pay". Nobody ever queried it. They just accepted it. And I wouldn't have queried it. I didna know any better until he told me. Oh it's just…'at wis the days."*

In Mick's version of events though, his making mention of the fact that this was a characteristically American way to handle an accident (*"Again, Yanks"*) seems to suggest an awareness that even if his own treatment of workers was similarly unsympathetic, that this way of treating employees may have been considered somehow different from other British labour relations - the extent to which the response lacked sympathy (in asking him to go for an interview immediately afterwards and refusing sick-pay) seemed to reside at the border of acceptable behaviour, one example of defining the parameters of this specific masculinity in the spirit of, but not identical to, American working practices. His concern with not wanting to pressure the company into providing compensation (*"nobody'll bat an eyelid"*) speaks to the recurring notion of appearing uncomplaining, but again his mention of it shows that there may have been an awareness that this treatment lay at the fringes of acceptability.

Beyond the experiences of the work itself, Eddie talked of the particular qualities of his new workmates, inhabiting a more forthright, aggressive masculinity that appealed to him. This 'roughness' manifest in particular styles of speech and embodied directness:

> *"And they were rough, I mean, the supervisors were, I mean. They were, ach what would you say? I mean, I really like them, I mean, but I mean…I mean this is real stories, there was so many of them. This supervisor, Harrison, I mean he'd piss in your drink in the pub*

as soon as look at you. And I'd heard the stories yeah? But this night, me and John,
Harrison had just come off the barge and been relieved, and they'd come in and go for a
few drinks and we were in the Ferryhill House Hotel [in Aberdeen] and I'd heard stories
about Harrison. So anyway, we were sitting there having a drink, shooting the shit and then
this guy came in, mate of John, he was a bit of an arsehole eh? So anyway Harrison [says]
'we'll go to the bar and get drinks yeah?' So we were in the Ferryhill House in the bar and
he standing there, and the guy wanted a whisky, some fancy whisky or something, so
Harrison gets the drinks, and he's just standing there, down the spaver [zip], pisses into this
whisky! Haha. So back we was at the table and so, and I think he put ice in it, backs we go
to the table, and eh, we're going on and the guy says 'eh this whiskey's a wee bit strange' so
John says 'see here. [takes a sip]. Oh aye it's ok!' And another thing this guy did, back in the
seventies, I mean it was just Wild West, the clients were always a pain eh? And he was
getting a hard time from his client but he was going on. So what he did, he shit in the
client's kettle!   Haha. You wouldn't believe it!"

The surprise at the 'roughness' of these new colleagues underlines the introduction of a newly emerging form of masculinity. This was the moment of encounter with new expressions of masculinity which were the dominant form in the oil industry at the time. Similarly to Mick's thoughts on injury and his interactions with management, although there's an admiration and thrill to these new personalities, a certain wariness still exists. These stories are shared, as with Mick's, because of the extreme content, underlining the sense that they spell out the boundaries of appropriateness and are thus not *necessarily* seen as behaviours which one should seek to emulate. Nevertheless, the frequency and pervasiveness of violence, injury, and various shocking behaviour certainly influenced notions of what kind of experience was to be expected.

Indeed this early era was the moment in which the formation of an archetype of a Scottish oil masculinity, as distinct from others, was beginning to form. As part of this process of categorising the parameters of this new masculinity, forms from other contexts are held up in comparison. Mick, for example, characterises American oil masculinities as somehow uncontrolled. *"The yanks are very knowledgeable and experienced but they're all individuals, they're all cowboys. "If he can pull that 20 pounds, I'll pull 25." They're all competing."*[18] Although I don't want to give the idea that these new (predominantly American) masculinities were heavily scrutinised or criticised - most accounts give the impression that they were viewed as exhilarating and admired - nevertheless, it becomes clear that as the UK industry became established, the more extreme versions of this initial masculinity (the qualities of which inform the stereotype of *the* oil worker) were increasingly rejected in favour of working practices which emphasised restraint and control.

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[18] Later in the thesis I discuss in more detail the ways in which the idea of what constitutes a particularly Scottish oil experience is generated through comparison to oil work in other contexts, and comparison of explicitly racialised masculinities, something which became more apparent as the UK developed its own expertise, and men like Eddie and Eddie began to work in numerous different global production sites as experts in their sectors. (In fact, this idea of 'cutting one's teeth' in the North Sea before moving on to work as a superior in different global contexts becomes a desired career path for many British workers.)

So while here I examine the initial encounters with new oil masculinities and the first steps towards defining a distinctly Scottish version of this, in the next chapter I examine the development of this archetype over the course of the industry, how 'older' forms of masculinity are viewed by younger workers today, and how this impacts the way they imagine themselves. Here though I simply wish to underline the fact that these initial 'oil' masculinities were experienced as new and unfamiliar, but were also based on common tenets of understanding oneself as a working man which would have been familiar to men living in the area. The way in which these men acted signalled that these ways of displaying masculinity were not just possible, but that they were accepted forms of behaviour and perhaps necessary if one wished to 'make it' in this new industry. Much of Eddie's narrative is about reckoning with these new forms, and trying to emulate them in his own work.

In this process of emulation, Eddie appears to view these new colleagues as role models, moral exemplars or in Tsing's (2009:171) terminology, 'figures of labour' - an ideal type embodying the key values and ethical standpoints of workers in this industry. Tsing's argument is that 'supply chain capitalism' functions by identifying 'social-economic niches,' forms of embodied difference demarcated in certain populations which allow for the unhindered generation of capital.

> "Such niches are reproduced in performances of cultural identity through which suppliers
> show their agility and efficiency. Such performances, in turn, are encouraged by new
> figures of labor and labor power in which making a living appears as management,
> consumption, or entrepreneurship. These figurations blur the lines between
> self-exploitation and superexploitation, not just for owner-operators but also for the
> workers recruited into supplier enterprises" (2009: 171).

Oil work allowed for comforting continuations of the local masculinities which were connected to industrial fishing, building, and other manual jobs. Men could still express hard-work, physical exertion, and flirt with danger, but working offshore also offered a whole new set of experiences and values that established jobs weren't able to offer, including involvement in a high-value industry, with good pay, interaction with new technical equipment, connection to global companies etc. Oil work meant that already existing idioms of prosperity through individual toil, clearly gendered work, and 'skill' rather than 'education' could all be retained and expanded upon. So rather than the introduction of a wholly new notion of masculinity, oil work meant a broadening of already present imaginaries of what it meant to be a man. Oil didn't require a reimagining of the key components of dominant styles of masculinity. Rather it became clear that these forms of masculinity could be expanded and developed, as exemplified by the American supervisors as new 'figures of labour.'

In addition to this, the aspired to ethical qualities of these new oil men also allowed for a greater degree of compliance with working practice in the industry. This relates to Tsing's formulation of the performance of niche difference as a component of super- and self-exploitation. Here a series of continuations and similarities exists between already present and 'incoming' American oil masculinities (a calculated move when deliberations were taking place about where to site the onshore base). This means that not only were oil workers willing to put up with mistreatment and potential serious injury, and keen to enact total

commitment, but these features of oil work actually become valorised qualities. These new features of oil work added to a sense of potent and vital masculinity.

The major elements and parameters of pre-oil North East Scottish working masculinities largely mirrored those of the new oil industry. Creating an ethical framework in which worker subjectivities act as conduits to the generation of capitalism - unhindered by, for example, apprehension of unsafe working practice, or reluctance to 'overwork' - mean that the interests of the companies are met not through coercion or control, but as part of the subjective understanding and expression of these qualities of work. As these men act in ways they feel crucial to expressions of valued masculinity, they simultaneously embody ways of working which further the interests of the companies, and make generation of capital more efficient.

Two aspects of living with oil technologies

In this section I consider the related but different working roles of Eddie and Mick, and the way in which their stories which emphasise, respectively, technological progress and physical strength. These two features of oil work in the early era speak to specifically Scottish working masculinities which were emerging at the time.

In the late 1980s Eddie moved to the management side of the company, for a reduced wage compared to the offshore work, but in the hope of establishing his own company, which he eventually did with some of the other managers. It was during this period that the hours at work, already long, became even more demanding, with working weeks of over 100 hours being the norm. There were a number of reasons for these long working hours. Firstly, linked to the above point about demanding clients, the expectation of total commitment to the job meant that as a manager Eddie had to be available constantly: *"It was like you never stopped. You know, it didnae matter, it's Saturday, Sunday, it doesnae matter, you know? It wasn't like we'd start at ten or whatever."*

Another problem in the late 1980s was that the depression in oil prices meant that it became difficult to find skilled workers, adding to the sense that individual effort was key to success. *"I mean somedays I would spend all day on the phone trying to get people offshore and then put on the boiler-suit and go through and do the welder tests*[19]*."* Eddie and some of the other managers would often have to take offshore shifts on the pipe-laying barges themselves as they weren't able to find enough staff[20]. Again, the quality of total commitment and dedication, as well as individual effort as a marker of success, are held as important factors. Eddie was expected to, and did, commit himself totally to the company, and did so on an individual basis. He also imagined this as a key quality of these new working relations, the willingness to prioritise work over personal matters. These new oil masculinities were alluring, and despite the potential wariness, part of this

[19] Tests to ensure the pipe metal and the welding materials were compatible and would form a solid connection

[20] Eventually they employed men from the Philippines, through an agency in Manilla. See Appel (2019) for more on employment of Filipino workers in global oil industry. And again, I return to this more explicit comparison by interlocutors of the UK industry with others around the world as the UK develops its own expertise later in the thesis

allure was a work ethic which emphasised commitment, personal sacrifice, and offered both wealth and prestige in the eyes of these new oil men in return.

The early days of oil were experienced as a mix of excitement at the prospect of hitherto unimaginable lives, but in stark contrast to the collaborative and embedded working life of fishing communities, the oil industry often led to an emergence of a much more isolated and isolating experience of work.[21] As Eddie recalled:

> *"A lot of the time I was away […] Not very good for family life. You know, but you only realise that on reflection yeah?[…] you'll be out washing the car, or you know, 12 o'clock on a Saturday and this blooming welding foreman phones you up saying 'we're needing some radiographs done on this thing and it'll be ready at 6 o'clock tonight.' You know? Well we used to try and accommodate them, but I mean, they were totally unreasonable. But, if you do that, they'll always come back to you. So that's what it's all about. […] some people just take the shit, do what's required. Other people, well, 'Claire's day's Sunday' you know? And what have you. And that's just the nature of people. I don't disrespect them for that, but for our business it just wasn't what we needed."*

This isolated and individualised context of oil work is also manifest in the particular ways in which oil technologies in the UK are imagined and developed[22]. Alongside the new men that Eddie met through oil work, the technologies, equipment, vast scale, and webs of global connection are central to his narrative of his working life. He described to me in great detail the minute chemical and atomic processes which formed the basis for the radiographic techniques, and how they changed over time as new processes were discovered. He spoke of the awe he felt at working with the 1 kilometre long sections of pipe which were welded together at the base in Nigg. And the progression of his career was mirrored by the technological changes of the 'crawlers', the remote-controlled machines which carried the radioactive sources through the pipes. As Eddie's company won contracts for work in increasingly distant places - Norway, Argentina, Louisiana, Egypt - the techniques of inspection also changed and had to be managed. The prominence of these new material experiences together with new social norms displayed by his co-workers and Eddie's excitement at recalling each new development further signals the novelty of these material and physical worlds he was entering. Through these new relationships with co-workers, tools and materials, Eddie found

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[21] There is an interesting contrast to be made here with the equally long hours of the fisheries mentioned in Nadel-Klein's work (2003:55) - she explains that husband and wife would often sit up late into the night baiting lines for the next day's fishing, before rising at dawn to go to sea. In the case of the fisherfolk this work would be carried out together, again the idea of home also being a workplace, whereas Eddie would have equally long hours but would carry out this work on his own, far from family and also unable to find enough staff to work with him.

[22] See Hatakenaka et al 'The Regional Dynamics of Innovation' for discussion of the different contexts in which new oil technologies are generated in the UK and Norway. New oil technologies in the UK tend to emerge from small R&D companies which branch off from larger companies. In Norway there tends to be more collaboration and institutional coordination by the state operated sections of the industry.

himself at the centre of complex networks which stretched around the country and the world, and underlined the importance, value, and novelty of this work. [23]

This understanding of technological work as particularly 'male' work was first inscribed, as Wajcman (2010) explains, in the late 19th century image of the engineer. It came to be associated with notions of infallibility, competence, and know-how, on the one hand, and, that of violent and brash macho behaviour centred on manual labour, on the other. Although Eddie and Mick both worked in the production side of the industry (as opposed to maintenance) their roles could be thought of as very different, almost opposite in integration and importance in the production process. And the qualities associated with work in these branches of the production regime both sit on a spectrum which includes a combination of hard physical strength and confident technical know-how.

Eddie developed and deployed rare and complex technologies which would travel to different global production sites as needed, whereas Mick was involved in the most basic and ubiquitous production process - drilling. They both embody the core values of Scottish oil masculinity - a mixture of explicit displays of strength, risk, and daring; combined with interaction with global networks of production, complex new technologies, and workplace competence and infallibility. Eddie's narrative focuses more on the personal commitment that 'making it' in oil required, and Mick mirrors this in the slightly different but complimentary attitude that one should never complain, exemplified in his anti-union stance and sharing of stories which exemplify his indifference to injury and accident. Both of their experiences of oil seems to sit on of a spectrum which means that jobs which would be considered to be 'highly technical' retain an element of rugged masculinity and stripped-back individualism; and jobs which are the most manual gained something by being part of an industry in which links to cutting edge technological processes and global chains of value are draw close. Further to this, because of the relative 'openness' in those early days, and the fact that Scottish expertise and management were only just being developed, there was a much lesser degree of hierarchy in terms of working qualifications - neither Eddie nor Mick hold engineering degrees, and in fact both take some qualified pride in the fact that they weren't successful in school.

As Wajcman (2010:150) notes, "the distinguishing insight of feminist STS or technofeminism is that gender is integral to this sociotechnical process: that the materiality of technology affords or inhibits the doing of particular gender power relations." The very technologies discussed here, especially in the early era, take a central role in defining the masculine ethics central to the industry. For example, Eddie's crawlers and pipeline technologies were based in individual developments and singular inventions, often only deployable by one or two individuals in the world. Again, Hatakenaka et al's (2011) article on UK/Norway oil technology development discusses technological development in two sites which could be considered global centres of oil excellence and expertise, and shows that the UK's development model is distinctively

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[23] He was really proud of the fact that he had worked on almost every major energy infrastructure project in Scotland, as well as protected military sites, nuclear power plants, and that the dangers his work presented meant he had to be in liaison with the Scottish Office (Westminster Department for Scottish affairs prior to Scottish parliament), with nuclear scientists, and with laboratories in Cambridge. But even those men who weren't involved at such a high level were still affectively drawn to the general value and importance that the industry held - nevertheless, Eddie's account provides a kind of heightened version of that more general sense of importance

individualistic, and based on small breakaway R&D companies, whereas Norway's tends to be based in larger institutions, often with input or assistance from the state.

But alongside the new technologies sit tools and processes which require huge physical strength and personal risk. Eddie recounts the strength needed to lift and use the earliest x-ray machines; or the danger of constant work with radioactive sources. The assemblage of the rig, which brings together both aspects of Scottish oil work, is mirrored in the valued masculinities of the men - and often, because as both Mick and Eddie's stories testify, entering the industry at a very basic entry level job can lead to careers at the top of the rig or industry hierarchy, these values are generally reflected in many of the people who worked on the rigs. Eddie, eventually someone who came to be involved with extremely complex technologies and tools was also well versed in the hyper-masculine qualities of many of the men who worked in the early days of oil. Mick too, although having spent a career involved in the drilling side, generally considered the part of the industry most associated with physical strength, bravado, risk-taking, (and the process during which oil is actually encountered and touched) is also highly qualified and knowledgable and worked in a managerial position for most of the latter half of his career. He also worked for a time as a consultant and wrote procedural documents for newly commissioned rigs. Both elements of this specific masculinity are present in both men, despite the fact they could be considered to operate in quite different aspects of oil production.

Rather than oil simply allowing men to embody valued forms of masculinity, a process takes place whereby the forms of the dominant masculinity undergoes change - at a later point in the history of the industry, namely in the post Piper-Alpha period, these exaggerated styles that Eddie and Mick encountered and embodied (and have a legacy in someone like Aidan) are used as a boundary-drawing device, signalling where the parameters of masculinity lie. Expressions of masculinity which lie outside these parameters may be castigated as foolhardy, effeminate, dangerous, uncontrolled, or immature.

Conclusions

The particular parameters of oil masculinity outlined above form a complex set of affective positions which constrict the range of potential interactions with this work. They encourage an engagement with oil work which is individualistic, uncomplaining, ambitious, and self-policing, all qualities which discourage collective action in face of mistreatment by employees and have, as key tenets, a desire to engage in work quickly, efficiently and competently. The models of masculinity discussed here have, as we see in the next chapter, been reinterpreted and are often viewed as remnants from a version of the oil industry which now no longer exists. Men like Eddie and Mick act both as representations of a lauded period of the industry, but also as embodying dangerous approaches to work which would be shunned in the current industry. Nevertheless, much as the American masculine dispositions were viewed with slight hesitancy but then incorporated in the newly emerging conception of 'the Scottish oil worker,' so too these initial Scottish masculinities, greatly transformed, form the basis for current approaches to work in the industry, as we see in the next chapter.

As Bray (2007:41) notes, the concept of hegemonic masculinity serves "as a tool to explore how particular gendered identities are attributed, achieved, and performed and their place within broader configurations of power." In the case of North Sea oil, these newly accentuated forms of masculinity may have appeared as naturalised and ahistoric expressions of manhood, familiar yet somehow untethered performances of masculinity, allowed greater scope through combination with hitherto unimaginable wages. But the novel technologies and work processes, and connection to an industry which was associated with power and prosperity, was also given the added characteristic, at least in the early days of oil, as the saviour of a financially stagnant Britain. Rather than being ahistoric and 'natural' expressions of what it meant to work as a man, the masculinities embodied by this new generation of oil workers were key to allowing the industry to develop as it did - with minimum government interference and limited involvement of labour unions.

A key factor in the appeal of oil work was its novelty and 'freshness'. It wasn't only experienced as a superior version of already existing forms of work, but rather the whole constellation of oil was markedly different, and it was this difference which gave oil work its appeal. A range of symbolic, material, affective, discursive and non-discursive elements signalled to Eddie that this work and these men were different from previous work encounters - this differentiation from normal life allowed for escape from familiarity, often spoke about in terms of a 'liberation' from a previously mundane and predictable course of events. Eddie's experience of oil in those early days was valued because it proved to be a break, a disjuncture from a previous way of being a man and opened up new unimagined ones. This experience of novelty was partly as a result of choosing to site the industry in the North East, and it felt new and unfamiliar because industrialised manual labour *was* new and unfamiliar to this region. Those men who formed the first workforces of the UK oil industry were intended to have no or little experience of heavy industrial work, in order that the political histories which often accompany this be excluded.

Wajcman (2010:147) considers a range of historical studies which trace men's control of technology to the emerging division between gendered spaces of work and home which took place during the industrial revolution. In relation to oil, establishing a new industry in a region in which nothing of comparable scale previously existed, a kind of out-of-time industrial revolution takes place in which "technology" becomes extremely strongly associated with spaces and work of men. Contrasting this with the gender and work arrangements of the traditional fisheries era can exemplify how strongly gendered activities and spaces emerge, not altogether a break with the immediate pre-oil past, but certainly the emergence of a way of imagining work which completely removes and distances it from life onshore. The physical distancing of oil and oil platforms in the sea, far from onshore life, adds to this bifurcation of gendered activity and space, something I return to in chapter 4 and 5.

Oil in Scotland both completely alters certain relationships while drawing heavily on pre-existing normative gender ideals. In this sense it constituted a kind of reversal of the process happening in some of the cases which discuss the 'disappointments' of masculinity under neoliberalism (c.f. Cornwall, Karioris, and Lindisfarne 2016:16-17). Many discussions of masculinity and work centre on the valorisation of manual labour as it becomes scarce, or the attempts by men to uphold certain forms of masculinity when the central tenant of employment disappears. The situation in the Scottish oil industry is somewhat different in that

masculinities are given new power through the emergence of oil work which allowed for the strengthening of gendered work regimes. Oil work fed into and bolstered those already existing gender notions and provided a context in which they could be easily expressed. Oil didn't require a reimagining of these key elements of work and masculinity, but rather drew on and expanded these values - the form, patterns, idea, affect of this new type of work fed into and nourished this already existing pattern of male privilege, but gave it new opportunities to expand - both continuity and change. Oil's attraction lay in its freshness, its difference from other forms of life around it at the time, even though on closer examination many elements were actually very similar - the wages were perhaps not so much higher than fishing or building work, and a continued relied upon a gendered division of work.

Eddie's narrative is about being made aware that these new subjectivities are available, and discovering whether or not they lived up to his initial expectations. Oil was a sharp break with the past of the fisheries that could be felt all around, in the layout of the towns, in the fabric of the buildings, and it allowed an escape into an unknown yet promising future. This is to do with the fact that the oil industry didn't have a history in the area, and so there weren't generations of oil workers in the way there had been generations of fishers. But, even when oil work had been common to a family for generations, as in the case with Eddie and his own son Ben, there's little in the way of direct transferral of knowledge. As Eddie reflected *"Ach, I mean a lot of it is fate isn't it? But you do need a certain ambition I think. But yeah, it's difficult. Because, well, there's no one to tell you is there?"* There doesn't exist a set repertoire which one grows up around and has to emulate or react to, but rather oil felt unknown and distant, hence our childhood confusion about radiators/ radiation - the unfamiliarity and unrelatability of Eddie's work stemming from its separation in various ways from the everyday. The construction of knowledge around what working in oil means, and the development of appropriate masculine behaviours and attitudes is imagined as an individual process, whereby each new worker has to 'rediscover' for themselves their own relationship with this work.

If in this chapter I described the sense of novelty and escape that oil offered, the next chapter is about the realisation that oil work does constrain and repress in ways similar to other work under capitalism. A period of reckoning takes place during which the masculine subjectivities at the heart of this work are gradually settled on and redefined. The emulation of certain styles of masculinity outlined in this chapter is different from the experience of younger workers like Aidan or Chris, where older men, 'old timers', take them under their wing more explicitly, and there exists a 40+ year history to refer back to. The processes whereby a 'safety culture' was developed, also served to introduce systems of surveillance and performance monitoring, which add to the sense that a great loss in autonomy has taken place since the early era of oil.

Walker and Roberts (2018:5) make the point that the key values of masculinity which stem from manual labour: "independence, autonomy, collective solidarity, skill, courage, opposition, mastery and dignity […] have gradually been undermined by structural and cultural changes that have played out over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, beginning with the impact of deskilling processes." While the oil industry most definitely takes place within a wider context in which these values become harder to reproduce, the general trend of the oil industry, especially in the two or three decades following its initial development, is in how these key values of masculinity are buttressed and upheld by the appearance of well-

paid, reasonably stable, and highly skilled manual work. The foundation of the Scottish oil industry took place in a global and national context where stable manual work was beginning to disappear, and continued to disappear alongside oil's development.

'Disappointment' is underlined by Cornwall et al (2016:15) as a pervasive emotion in neoliberal masculinities, occurring where once cohesive gender roles of 'provider', 'breadwinner', 'household head' that could largely be met through standard work eventually become unobtainable through reformed industrial settings and the service economy, and a stark mismatch between idealised male identities and material accessibility opens up. In the early days of oil the dynamic was somewhat different. A hoped-for, accented 'new' masculinity - based on hard-work, stark gender roles, unfamiliar technologies, and adventure - materialises in ways which diverge from the expectation. Instead of a clean break from the past, oil work drew on already existent forms of relationality and embeddedness, albeit made less visible. The disappointment also stems from the making invisible of kinship - Eddie imagined that most of his fellow workers would, as he had done, commit themselves totally to the industry, whereas in actuality many tried to retain some sense of balance between their working lives and their family, something Eddie imagined as signalling weakness and a lack of commitment, and as incompatible with this new form of work. His version of oil work was perhaps more of an outlier than he realised, a fleeting moment associated with the establishment period, which produced models of masculinity which were highly influential, but ultimately temporary:

"But the thing was, when you were looking at the Press and Journal and you were working with the Grampian Region as a civil engineering technician and you looked at the papers, you thought these [oil men] were all supermen, but the only thing I'm sure about now is there was very few of them."[24]

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[24] There's also a sad note where he explains that most of the colleagues he remembers from the early days have died, and that recently he was up near the main base outside Inverness and thought to ring one of his old workmates, only to find he had moved to the Netherlands. These men that he admired, got to know, and in some ways emulated, eventually disappeared again…

3. Introductions to Oil - skills 'of' and 'around' the job

Ben, Aidan and I sit in a gloomy basement bar, just off the main street in the centre of Aberdeen. The three of us, old school-friends, often meet like this, for a few drinks with Aidan when he has just returned from, or is about to depart to work on one of the oil rigs scattered around the North Sea. We usually sit and catch-up on news of each other's families, swap stories about work, and gossip about other friends. Despite being very close friends, Ben and Aidan's relationship has always sat upon a slight undercurrent of animosity. This evening has been no different, with the conversation becoming at times tense and uneasy, and Ben and Aidan not seeing eye to eye on a number of topics. Eventually, an offhand comment from Aidan about an ex-girlfriend proved to be a step too far for Ben. He jumped to his feet, pulled a twenty pound note from his pocket and slammed it onto the table, telling Aidan in no uncertain terms what he thought of him. Storming out of the pub, up the narrow stone staircase which led out onto the main street, Ben left Aidan and me in an awkward silence.

Aidan and I continued our night in another bar, with a small group of his new friends from the rigs who were also in Aberdeen for a few nights before being helicoptered out to work. But feeling uneasy after Ben's angry departure from the pub, I called him the next day to make sure he was ok. He assured me that he was fine, and that because he had to be at work at 7am the next morning he was about to leave anyway. He also explained that he'd always wanted to leave a pub in such a dramatic fashion and that the previous night had presented a good opportunity to do so. Speaking with them both later though, it became clear that the tension between these two friends wasn't really about the offhand comment, but was rather based on an increasingly divergent set of opinions about what it means to work in the oil industry, to what ends the income generated from this work should be put, and how one should balance work and obligation. Aidan had been offering Ben unsolicited advice all night about how to make progress in his career, on why Ben was missing out on important opportunities, and on why Ben wasn't experiencing more success in such a lucrative industry. Ben, on the other hand, felt that he was doing just fine.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which individuals become accustomed to working with oil and developing different scales of skill in relation to risk and constraint. The orientations to work combine the ethical qualities of the industry and oil workers developed in the previous chapter with actual experiences with colleagues and superiors at work. Not only do skills from inside and outside the industry come together to influence experiences of work, but skills 'of' work (competence, ability) are learned in combination with skills 'around' work (how to uncover and manage opportunity etc). The wider disagreement between Aidan and Ben centres on the tension between aspired-to ideals and material realities of work in the industry. Ben sees working in oil as just one particular form of industrial labour, whereas Aidan imagines oil work as involving certain qualities which underline its exceptional and unique quality.

Many significant changes have taken place in the oil industry since the 'early era' described in the previous chapter. The 1988 Piper Alpha disaster was a major turning point in the way the industry operated - not only did the disaster lead directly to the development of a dense regime of safety protocol and procedures, but

over the course of the 1990s a more general formalisation of oil work took hold, contrasting it with the spontaneity and novelty of the early era. A distinct ethics of oil, drawing heavily (and sometimes critically) on those initial 'prototypical' worker ideals, continues into the present. Certain actual or imagined individuals seem to embody these ethics and act as positive or negative exemplars for appropriate behaviour in relation to oil work.

In this chapter I also aim to show how one's imagination of what work in the industry is, and what it is for, are connected to one's initial experiences of this work. A key feature of developing a personal understanding of and relation to the ethics of work in oil centres on one's initial experiences of the industry. Younger workers are introduced into oil work and guided through the new offshore worlds they enter through encounters with managers, peers, and co-workers. These new colleagues often act as guides or exemplars of appropriate ethical behaviour, the importance of which has been key to many anthropological considerations of ethics (Humphreys 1997, Hojer and Bandak 2015, Laidlaw 2014, Robbins 2018). These exemplary figures offer not only information about everyday processes and practices required to perform work successfully, but also share more general understandings of how to incorporate oil work as part of one's life as a whole. These directly encountered exemplars in the form of new rig workmates also translate the abstract historical examples of 'the oil worker', the ethical legacies and distinct masculinities of the early era of oil, into current day realities of working in the industry.

But I further these anthropological considerations of ethics by drawing on the importance of the materialities of oil and rig work and the everyday realities of work regimes in the emergence of ethical self-hoods. Together with more 'abstract' interpretations of what it means to be an 'oil man', the safety regimes of the rig and daily working practices inform a particular version of current-day oil ethics.

Below I begin by outlining the huge importance of the Piper Alpha disaster in informing current day working practices. After discussing the experience younger workers new to the industry I then return to consider the nature of Aidan and Ben's disagreement and the differing perspectives they have on what success looks like in the context of oil work. The way in which Aidan and other young workers are socialised into life and work on the rig - through fear, danger, joking, and the regime of safety protocols - instills a certain work ethic which is interpreted differently by those, like Ben, who have come to the oil industry through other routes.

In examining how the 'prototype' of the new oil worker which emerged alongside the 'carbon neoliberalism' identified by Christophers (2020) has translated into the current moment I also discuss how the wider transformations of the economy, supported by North Sea oil revenues, have fed back into the oil industry and shaped its development in recent years, unsettling the notion of oil work as distinct and exceptional. If, as Norotzky and Besnier suggest (2014:S4) work involves the "making people in their physical, spiritual, affective, and intellectual dimensions," here this process takes place in divergent ways based on inherited notions of what kind of life oil work is believed to afford and the materialities of production.

The disagreement between Aidan and Ben is a small reflection of a larger trend centred on questioning and scrutinising the appropriate ethical and moral positions towards oil work which might be taken. And their discussion is also reflective of a particular moment, heavy with the influence of the earlier masculinities which emerged and expressed a rapid expansion in the capacity for and ability to express certain masculine traits. These qualities associated with the early days of oil work have gone through various significant

transformations as oil becomes familiar and a clearer sense of what working with this resource might entail emerges. But this occurs alongside the introduction of restrictions and regulations which dilute some of the earlier aspects which made oil work so appealing, in turn leading to a reconceptualisation of the wider ethics of oil work.

Another theme of this chapter is the way in which social ties are generated through a mix of joking and caring relationships, in correspondence with safety procedures and performances of skill. I argue that joking relations form one of the clearest expressions of formation of new social bonds, but are part of a continuum with other activities such as expression of skill, interaction with management, or development of caring relations with other workers. Joking relationships then add a visceral and performative element to wider processes of developing sociality offshore. They act as one element in the mesh of caring and hostile interactions experienced at work.

Post Piper-Alpha changes - risk, safety, normalisation

In this section I discuss the significant impact of the safety protocols which were developed in light of the Piper Alpha disaster, how these safety practices became a core organising feature of work offshore, and are key to the development of certain kinds of workers - as they learn the skills required to do their job they also become certain kinds of workers, and in turn learn to understand the dynamics of the industry in particular ways. For some the dense regimes of safety are largely accepted as part of work in oil; for others, like Aidan, the promise of a transformative new working life clashes with his experience of oppressive safety procedure and a sense of overwhelming constraint.

As discussed in the previous chapter the early era of North Sea oil the development of oil provided a source of well-paid work in in a region which was generally experienced as being economically stagnant, therefore providing the economic means with which to sustain life in the area. But perhaps the more explicit change was the creation of a new 'type' of worker: '*the oil worker*'. Through the new technologies, high wages, and larger-than-life new colleagues, came the expansion of the possibilities for acceptable and achievable forms of masculinity, allowing men to realise themselves in previously unimaginable ways. This somewhat stereotypical model of 'the oil worker', outlined in different ways in Mackie (2004) and Lasley (2021), ties together a number of elements common to many expressions of industrial masculinities - daring and bravado, technical competence, outwardly expressed wealth, physical strength - but adds qualities which underline this work as unique - e.g. the unusual shift rotations; connection to global networks of production.

However significant changes to the British oil industry generally, and to the ethical model of the oil worker specifically, have taken place since this early era, generally centring on the years surrounding the 1988 Piper Alpha disaster, a massive gas explosion which destroyed the Piper Alpha platform and killed 167 of the men aboard. Lord Cullen's inquiry (1990) into the disaster found that poor adherence to safety protocols, and an overemphasis on rapid production over safe working practices were the ultimate cause of the accident (Woolfson et al 1996). Concerns about safety formed the basis for a wave of strikes and protests which followed the disaster, coming to a head in August 1990 when workers managed to shut down 40 platforms and rigs in total (Harvie 1995:329; Woolfson et al 1996).

The combination of industrial action and Lord Cullen's public inquiry led directly to the 1992 Offshore Safety Act, however this only resulted in a limited degree of change in working practices offshore. Oil companies were willing to develop a 'safety culture' but only to the extent that "safety culture represented an ideal vehicle for re-establishing more general control and legitimacy" (Woolfson et al 1996: 547). I discuss some of these safety practices below - frequent incident reporting; regular training programmes; a permit system which requires supervisory oversight for even small tasks.

In addition to the new offshore 'safety culture' other important changes took place which altered the character of work offshore. In the late 1990s operators were worried about declining oil prices and the future of North Sea oil as a 'mature' oil province. In an attempt to generate efficiencies through cost saving measures operators collaborated on the "Cost Reduction Initiative for the New Era" programme (CRINE). Established in 1993 this essentially meant a systemic industry-wide approach to developing new subsea technologies as well as computerising and automating much of the work offshore (Macdonald 2009:77). The combination of the dense safety regimes, together with a workplace in which many of the very physical tasks were now automated and carried out by machines gave the offshore working environment a very different feel, with implications for how workers might imagine their labour - gone were many of the dangerous and strenuous elements which had previously been at the heart of defining oil worker ethics and identities.

Filteau (2014) outlines a similar process in the Canadian oil industry, as 'traditional' oil masculinities give way to new expressions which focus less on superiority and conflict and are more accepting of collaboration in the interests of safety. Filteau analyses these apparent changes through the frameworks of 'dominant' and 'hegemonic' masculinities, most notably put forward by Connell (1995), and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Dominant masculinities which are, according to Filteau (2014:397) "the most powerful, celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity for a given context,' differ importantly from hegemonic masculinities which must hold, at their centre, a legitimation of male domination over women. Dominant masculinities may encapsulate this gendered hierarchy, but do not necessarily do so. Filteau examines the implications of 'hegemonic masculinities' which were once the dominant form in the Canadian oil industry becoming subordinate to new masculinities which view those older forms as outdated and endangering, having been replaced by a focus on safety (backed up by strict regimes of safety protocol) and an emphasis on collective goals (Filteau 403-405). He concludes by claiming "[t]he emphasis on safety fosters tight-knit relationships among rig crew members" and that "[t]he company's collective strategy bolsters socio-positive actions among employees, while it constrains negative behaviours associated with the traditional hegemonic oilfield masculinity."

While Filteau's argument about the significant changes to oil field masculinities are important in highlighting the shifts away from a 'traditional' masculinity to something less conflictual and more concerned with one's own and other's safety, it contrasts somewhat with my own ethnographic findings. I found while there was clearly a distinct shift between early and current oil masculinities, this process was less complete, more overlapping and contested than shown in Filteau's account. Indeed, the introduction of those 'older' forms of masculinity associated with oil production was not wholeheartedly accepted or embraced without challenge, as I show in the previous chapter. In addition, it is important to think through the ways in which the shifts towards a more 'safety-conscious' industry were challenged, even in small acts of resistance or disregard.

Collinson (1999) convincingly shows how changes in safety regulation are creatively interpreted by oil workers. Initial attempts at introducing strategic safety protocol, most notably with the introduction of 'safety bonuses', simply led to a reluctance to report any incidents - much like the discussion with Mick reported in the previous chapter, whereby minor injuries would be bandaged up by the medic in order that the rig safety bonus could be won.

However more than simply small-scale resistance to sweeping changes taking place within the industry some oil workers, like Aidan, actually challenge the recent transformations in the industry by looking to emulate the ethics and practices of the early era. Aidan has reinterpreted the key components of oil work in order that his experience still aligns with some of the elements which mark oil work as different from other forms of work, and manages to generate those values which made oil work appealing in the first instance. So this isn't simply a new relationship to work which reimagines it at entrepreneurship as many anthropological studies have exemplified - e.g Freeman 1998, Tsing 2009, Prentice 2012. But rather it is through a rearrangement of elements of this work which chime with the supposed core values of oil work which reimagine 'risk' not in terms of physical danger as per the early era, but as uncertain career jumps based on skilful readings of industry dynamics.

A disagreement between friends

First I want to outline some of the ways in which Ben and Aidan's respective approaches to working in the oil industry differ before moving on to consider their often rather critical views of each other. After almost a decade of working in the oil industry (Aidan mainly in offshore roles, Ben in more onshore, workshop positions) they both emerge with a sense of things having largely gone to plan, despite having had rather divergent experiences of the industry. This is partly as a result of their contrasting viewpoints on the character and ethics of the industry, and the ends to which oil work should be put, but also relates to divergent paths of socialisation into the industry. Aidan's somewhat idiosyncratic approach to oil work relies upon a desire for self-created fortune and expressions of agency which are central to his attempts at trying to bring into existence the kind of industry which he sees as being reflective of the traditional values and ethics of oil.

Ben has generally taken a much more conservative approach to his career, aiming for a slow progression up through the ranks of the oil-electronics firm he works for. During the 2014 slump in oil price, during which many workers were made redundant, Ben was able to retain his position and is now in line for a promotion to a more senior role within his department. Although Ben is aware of the peculiarities which define oil work - the turbulences in oil price which impact employment prospects; the staccato rhythm of shift patterns etc - he imagines his work as relatively stable, predictable, and tied to career progression through the company he current works for.

Aidan, despite the ups and downs of his own ten year career has also emerged with a similar sense of things having gone to plan; or at least having worked in his favour. He started his career as an apprentice on one of the offshore rigs, before beginning work in an entry-level position as a maintenance technician. A few years into this role, acting on the advice of workmates, he gave up his relatively stable job with promise of career progression and began to work as a contractor in the hope of being able to earn the less certain but often much higher wages. This entailed a pattern of work which was more changeable, ad hoc, with an increased

element of risk and personal responsibility for success or failure. During the proceeding slump in oil price Aidan lost his job and was unable to find work for a number of months. He did eventually find new contract work and returned to a similar pattern of freelance employment as before, and he tries to incorporate the story of his redundancy into a narrative of being a daring risk-taker in search of hard-won opportunities.

They therefore both emerge from the crisis of 2014 with a sense of validation for their own particular readings of the industry and the choices they took during that time. And this partly goes towards explaining the underlying tension that came to a head that evening in the pub. Ben imagined success and progress in the industry in a way that made Aidan's risky behaviour seem foolhardy and destructive when it didn't go to plan, and undeserved and lucky when it succeeded. Aidan saw Ben as falling behind, as misunderstanding the way in which oil wealth had to be approached, and he told him so directly. Before moving on to look at the content of their disagreement in more detail, I want to first sketch out the professional histories of both Ben and Aidan.

Ben currently works as an electronic technician specialising in remotely operated underwater vehicles (ROVs). ROVs are essentially small robots which can be used for all sorts of underwater operations – e.g. for surveying underwater oil rig structures, for mending pipes on the seabed, or for inspecting subsea anchoring and chains.

After graduating from secondary school Ben briefly attended university, but lack of financial support from his family meant that he had to cut his studies short and he moved back to Aberdeen in his early 20s. A friend told him about an opening at an oil electronics firm in a workshop on the outskirts of Aberdeen, and Ben took on an entry-level job as an equipment tester, performing various safety-assurance tasks on gauges and sensors used in oil production. He worked a similar role at two more companies before being scouted by the much larger company he currently works for – this larger company had made a number of their permanent staff redundant at the beginning of the downturn, and were looking to take on temporary staff, on flexible short-term contracts for the duration of one specific project. Ben joined the company during this period, but as the oil price rose again and the number of projects increased, they decided to offer permanent positions to some of the temporary workers, including Ben.

Ben has built up experience over years of working with subsea electronics and is now a specialist ROV technician. Having worked in his current role for a number of years, he has been offered a supervisory position in his department, and he has also been offered an offshore role within the same company, which would mean travelling around the North Sea rigs looking after an ROV 'in the field'. Ben feels that *now* is the right time to make such a move – he was wary about doing so after the 2014 slump in oil price which led to thousands of redundancies – he felt that during this period 'keeping his head down' and remaining in his current role was a better option than seeking promotion or a move to another company which many have resulted in him losing his job.

Generally, Ben aims for a kind of orderly progression, where work follows a path of gradual increments, as increases in skill and experience lead to promotion over time. He also has a more respectful attitude towards his superiors at work, seeing for himself a career path similar to theirs.

Aidan's career history is different from Ben's in a number of important ways. Aidan and I left school together on the same day in Summer 2007. Having somewhat stumbled through the last few years of school, Aidan left with almost no qualifications. While still at secondary school Aidan was told about an Oil and Gas industry careers fair by a family friend, and it was at this careers fair, accompanied by his father, that he found out about the OPITO (Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation) scheme. *"I remember seeing this flyer, 'upstream oil and gas apprenticeship'. It was like 'do you want good time-off to travel? Earn over 60k a year with benefits.' And it was a picture of this guy in a convertible with this dame next to him and the big oil and gas stuff in the background."* Aidan managed to secure a place on the OPITO scheme which was run through a college in the North of England. He spent four years training as an offshore electrician, through a mixture of college classroom learning and on-the-job training on the Delta and Bravo rigs on the Forties oilfield.

After graduating from the programme, Aidan was offered a job as a trainee electrical technician on the same rig on which he had completed his apprenticeship. In this role Aidan could be tasked with anything from fixing kettles and changing lightbulbs in the accommodation suites, to working on one of the huge generators which power the rigs.

After a year of working with this particular company Aidan was given advice by some of his oil rig colleagues, the group of friends we were planning on meeting after Ben's explosive departure from the pub. They had explained to Aidan that a more lucrative avenue through the industry was to register oneself as an individual limited company, sign up to a labour agency, and work on short-term projects, jumping to and from rigs sited all over the North Sea. This kind of work would attract much higher 'contractor' wages, as well as meaning Aidan would be able to gain experience of different types of installations very quickly. Declaring oneself as a limited company would also mean having a much smaller annual tax bill. The risk, however, was that if the industry went through a period of stagnancy, these contractor jobs would cease immediately – he had no guarantee of work as he did when he was a company employee.

On the basis of advice shared by his new rig friends Aidan left his job as maintenance technician, registered his name with an offshore employment agency, and found a temporary contractor job with the drilling team on the Beryl rigs. This was a significant change for Aidan as he now worked alongside the core drilling team – roustabouts, drillers, derrickmen. Working with the motors, pumps, and generators that are instrumental in the oil extraction process, he was also more likely to end a 12-hour shift covered in oil and mud pulled up from below the seafloor.

Aidan hadn't realised that during a slump in the price of oil exploratory drilling projects, like the one he was working on, would be more likely to be terminated than long-term, stable production operations like the one he had worked on after his apprenticeship. After only a few trips as drilling electrician, Aidan's supervisor informed the team that they were to be made redundant.

Aidan managed to secure a handful of trips on other rigs after being informed of his redundancy, but after this brief window the slump in oil price took full effect and he could no longer find any work. He gave up the lease on his Aberdeen apartment, moved back to live with his parents, signed on for unemployment welfare benefits, and with some help from his family had to restructure his debts on which he was beginning to miss payments. After weeks of making phonecalls every day to employment agencies he was interviewed and

accepted for a position on a new offshore windfarm project, but on a £25,000 annual pay packet, much lower than his previous job. Despite the firm insistence of his parents that he must take his job, he felt it would mean too much of a step backwards, and so he rejected the offer and decided to hold-out for something better.

A few weeks later, with the help of an old supervisor, he found another offshore position, and was back to his old pattern of working temporary but lucrative contracts all around the North Sea. This pattern of short-term contracts has now continued essentially unhindered, and Aidan has also worked on a number of highly sought-after and well paid commissioning jobs.

Ben and Aidan have therefore had relatively distinct experiences of oil work in their careers so far. Ben's working history largely corresponds with general patterns of industrial work, and is less specific to oil; whereas Aidan's involvement with the industry has aligned more closely with certain ethical traits considered as being key to imaginations of what constitutes oil work - a mixture of turbulence, opportunity, and affluence. The disagreement between Aidan and Ben about the ethics and purpose of this work, discussed in more detail below, centres on differing responses to change in the industry and the transformations which have taken place since the early era described in the previous chapter. For some workers, like Ben, the post-Piper Alpha period has been defined by an increased formalisation - as training programmes, safety protocols, and standardised career trajectories have replaced the often erratic yet adventurous ethos that defined the initial years of the industry. The 'exceptionalism' of oil work falls away and it becomes one form of work among many.

Yet for others, like Aidan, oil work still retains a sense of being an exceptional form of labour and way of life. Oil company aesthetics (e.g. the aforementioned career-event flyer) and the demeanour and discourse of his peers and colleagues informs a view of oil work that continues to emphasise lucrative futures made possible through individual hard-work and skill in uncovering opportunity. However, the reality of Aidan's experience often falls short of these promised-for ways of life - dense safety procedures and rigid platform hierarchies clash with expectations of freedom and unrestrained expression of skill and strength at work. Creative responses to work which is experienced as constraining are familiar topics of anthropological investigation (Day et al 1999, Freeman 1998, Ong 1988, Walsh 2003). Building on these understandings we can see that Aidan's decisions, based on advice, instruction and emulation of guides and exemplars, are not only about creative expressions of agency as methods of dealing with disappointment, but are attempts to bring into existence worlds which had been excepted but not forthcoming.

However, we must also bear in mind Walker's advice that "we should be wary of interpretations that posit men's subjectivities - their claims to power - as a form of agency" (Walker 2016:62). Although Aidan is able, to some extent, to make his work more closely align with the ethical forms and practices he had imagined it might comprise of, he isn't able to alter the structural forces which shape the parameters of oil work, and his reincorporation of failures as a form of success are, in Ben's interpretation, dangerous misreadings of an industry which no longer corresponds to the dynamics of the early era.

The disagreement between Aidan and Ben centres on a number of issues. Firstly, Aidan speaks about Ben having missed many opportunities in the industry as a result of fundamentally misunderstanding how chances to progress should be seized. Aidan, during a previous conversation between the three of us, had

encouraged Ben to '*chase the coin,*'- i.e. to try and find opportunities within the industry to make money as quickly as possible. In essence, Aidan recommended that Ben think about leaving his role in the workshop and go straight into a low-rank offshore role, as a means of getting 'his foot in the door.' Aidan also worried that should Ben not take this advice then, like in 2014, the opportunities might suddenly disappear again. The unique temporalities of oil in the UK North Sea, particularly the carefully orchestrated sense of scarcity through underreporting of reserves and the always looming end-of-oil inform a particular sense of urgency, and contribute to this particular ethics of oil work in which opportunity for immediate gain takes precedence over long term career plans.

And so perhaps in an attempt to impart some of the lessons from his own career, Aidan felt he should offer Ben advice about how to progress quickly:

> *"I wish I could just take what I know about offshore and throw it in his heed so he'd be like "fuck that! I'm going to start my own shit, you know?" 'Cause he's got good qualifications and he's got experience. Now he's got his tickets [permits to work] offshore he should just start applying for contracts and shit, you know, he could get something […] But the only thing is, he's getting a steady wage which he's saving for a hoose and blah blah blah blah […] If you're good at your job and you're confident in your job and you know you can do it, you've got lots to learn obviously but you know how to talk to people and you know how to play the game, which I've learned the hard way, don't get me wrong."*

Aidan, in leaving his more stable first job, rejected the idea of gradual progress through moving up the ranks of the company, and imagined instead success as only being achievable through risk-taking and opportunity seeking. In line with many of the statements around 'presentism' in Day et. al's Lilies of the Field (1999), Aidan broadly sees oil work as an abundant source of wealth which is supposed to be 'tapped', rather than as a normal form of work which needs to be cultivated over time. Aidan doesn't think that his model of success can be achieved through Ben's gradual progression, but instead sees that the industry must be taken advantage of, opportunities must be sought. And he feels a certain duty, as a friend, to tell Ben about this – this isn't 'normal' work and shouldn't be approached as such. And indeed this sense of oil work being exceptional has historical precedent - the model of oil work in the early era *was* explicitly intended to counter the prevalent image of industrial workers at the time - as unionised and antagonistic towards the interests of capital. In line with this, Aidan's approach to oil centres on the idea that standard career trajectories which might apply to other industries cannot be used to understand career trajectories in oil which responds to a different set of dynamics.

Ben, on the other hand, feels that Aidan's narrative around risk-taking as necessary for success is often used as a cover for bad decisions and as an excuse for some of Aidan's overspending and excess. Ben *does* see oil work as normal work, albeit a 'good' form of work, but nonetheless a form of work which still has to be managed and cultivated over time. If oil work *is* exceptional in any sense it relates to its survival as a buoyant form of industrial labour in a region and country in which deindustrialisation has been widespread.

Another point is that Ben feels Aidan's success is based less on skill and competence and more on luck. In some ways, Ben sees Aidan's approach as an attempt to 'reap without sowing' (Day et. al. 1999:4), an

attempt at effortless success based on chance and opportunism rather than development of skill. This relates back to a common topic of contention and conversation among oil workers, one which I brought up in the introduction to the thesis with Aidan's insistence that his successes in oil were built upon individual hard-work and ability to 'read' the industry rather than solely tied to historical chance that led to the industry being located here and required men like him as workers. Again, this forms a break with historical understandings of work, rejecting systemic or class-based understandings of workers relation to economic processes and instead emphasising individual accountability and responsibility for success or failure. Here it is important to note that while Aidan claims a certain degree of success reliant upon his own skilful decision-making, Ben sees this as a false reading of the situation. Without certain core engineering knowhow and incremental experience, Aidan's route to success through manipulation of the parameters of oil work can, in Ben's opinion, only ever be superficial and partial .

Aidan's tendency to spend liberally is a particular point of contention for Ben. Recently, on returning to Aberdeen, Aidan purchased a very large SUV-style car, (a model popular with his oil worker friends) despite the fact that his partner had only recently passed her driving test and wasn't able to drive such a large car[25]. Ben found this to be a key example of how Aidan's attempts to present a certain image of himself often mean he fails to meet important obligations. Ben also sees Aidan's attempt to present himself as wealthy and successful as superficial, because he knows, through experience of helping Aidan through his redundancy, that times were never quite as good as Aidan had claimed - despite his high level of income, liberal spending on cars, clothes, holidays etc had led Aidan to generate a significant level of debt. He was able to maintain these debts when work was available, but as mentioned above, he began to default on these loans when he was made redundant.

Carla Freeman (1998) picks up on a similar occurrence in Trinidad where attempts at "making oneself through the expression of taste" are called out as false. The cars and extravagant spending of Aidan, like Freemans' fashions, are perhaps being used to disguise a more mundane, powerless reality.[26] Indeed this appears to be a pattern common to those involved in the extractive industries. Andrew Walsh (2003) calls to our attention the phenomena of 'hot money' observed among Sapphire miners in Madagascar whereby these miners immediately spend their earnings rather than attempting to save them, and through spending on drinking, sex workers, drugs among other things, their income rapidly disappears. These patterns of excessive consumption are central to current-day imaginings of oil workers, with those workers who spend their earnings on new cars, designer clothes, expensive watches etc, often being framed as 'negative exemplars', as lessons in how *not* to manage one's wealth. Walsh (2003) uses the work of Day et al (1999) to analyse the practice of 'hot money' as an attempt at expressing agency in relation to industrial systems which can feel impenetrable and constraining.

While Aidan most definitely aligns with Walsh's model, I think he goes much further in attempting to express agency in relation to his work - not only does he engage in practices of liberal and visible

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[25] Ben finds this particularly insensitive because Aidan is offshore so much of the time, he doesn't really need the car as much as his partner, who *does* need the car to drive the children around Aberdeen.

[26] Other friends of Ben's also pick-up on the apparent falsity of Aidan's efforts, taking great humour in his over-the-top macho behaviour, appearance, and particularly his newly acquired Glaswegian accent (presumably a result of spending time on the rigs with men from Glasgow).

consumption in order to express an ease with money that suggests substantial wealth (see Osella and Osella 2003), but he also seeks to recast his career path in a way that suggests a greater personal control over his work than might actually be the case. In interpreting the oil industry as a form of work which requires individual discovery of hidden avenues of success, Aidan seeks to re-establish his own agency and cast any success he does have in oil as emanating from his own skill and ability. This relates back to his comment in the introduction of the thesis on the sense that personal effort and commitment rather than fortune are central to his success. Taking risks in seeking out career trajectories which lie outside the norm serves to reenforce this sense of self-constructed prosperity.

Aidan sometimes finds Ben's relatively conservative attitude to work and life a point of fun. Aidan told me he imagined Ben sitting at his kitchen table at home, newspaper spread out in front of him, telling his partner, *"I would really like to ask you to marry me, but you see the oil price is only at 55 dollars a barrel at the moment, we couldn't possibly. When it gets back up to 70 I'll think again."* Aidan's point here, about Ben's lack of willingness to take risks because of worries about how this may affect other aspects of his life chimes with other ethnographies which outline the tensions which can arise between conceptualisations of work as allowing for some form of individualist self-realisation, and work which allows for the fulfilment of wider familial and societal obligation - e.g. Tom Gill (2001) examines *Yoseba* day labourers understanding of their work as liberating and untethered in contrast to the stereotypical Japanese salary-men burdened by commitment; or Osella and Osella's (2003) examination of the ways in which successful forms of masculinity in Kerala rest on a fine balance between meeting obligation and expressing wealth through generosity.

The process of casting certain forms of industrial work as 'exceptional' isn't unique to oil. Nixon (2018:60) describes the process of categorising certain working class manual labour as 'exceptional' as key feature of many forms of industrial work: classifying one's work as distinct from and superior to other forms of work, on the basis of the physicality or technical competence required to perform labour, separated it from, for example, work defined as 'woman's work', or administrative or service jobs seen as middle class. In this sense, by highlighting the unique qualities of manual labour, and by association the unique qualities of the people who performed it, manual work was given a value distinct from other forms of work.

Oil work responded to similar dynamics, in that it is a form of manual labour with certain qualities generic to, and other qualities distinct from other forms of industrial work. But rather than a sense of exceptionality being generated solely from the bottom-up, as may have been the case with other forms of work, oil work, as Christophers (2020) suggests, was portrayed as a model form of work which was expected to pave the way and become standard as neoliberal transformations in the wider economy took hold. In that sense it was, from the very outset, placed in opposition, not only to other kinds of work (office work, service work etc) but also to other forms of manual industrial work.

However the wider economic transformations which the North Sea oil revenues allowed for - e.g. weakened collective labour representation, depressed wages, increased workplace surveillance and worker accountability with the aim of driving up profit margins - have been common to many industries *including* oil, stripping it of many of its original unique characteristics.

The qualities which one was once expected, and indeed required to embody in order to be an oil worker - willingness to take risk, total commitment to one's work, and confident expression of know-how - can now be seen as liabilities or imbalances if not managed properly. Now this sense of unbridled expression of masculinity that the early era of the industry promised still retains a certain power and attraction - it is often these exaggerated ethics which act as a draw into the industry, and indeed can stall attempts at seeking any kind of improvement in working conditions or relations to management.

New friends – First experiences of rig life

Leaving the basement pub, after Ben's departure, Aidan and I walked through the back-streets of central Aberdeen to another bar to meet three of his oil rig friends. These were friends that Aidan had made during his apprenticeship years at college in the North of England, and had then also worked with on the rigs in the early days of his career. All three were also involved in the electrical side of operations on rigs, and one, Frank, who was slightly older than the others, had progressed up to a supervisory position.

After Aidan's introductions and explanations of who I was, one of his friends went to the bar to buy a round of drinks. The conversation quickly turned to everyone's recent developments at work. Frank told us about his purchase of a buy-to-let flat in Edinburgh, and about his intention to begin online stock trading in his time onshore. Aidan expressed an idea that by declaring himself 'self-employed' he might be able to pay much less tax. Frank warned Aidan that he should be very careful and he advised Aidan to speak with an accountant, to make sure he wouldn't be 'found out'. Frank offered to provide Aidan with the contact details of some reliable accountants that he had used in the past. Aidan nodded along to Frank's advice, but had little to say in response.

This conversation about Aidan's financial affairs struck me as important though, not just because of the content, but rather because I came to realise that many of the major decisions in Aidan's career had been made on the basis of advice given by friends in circumstances like this. As I will discuss later in this chapter, oil work and windfall wealth were something new to Aidan's family, and so these new friends and his colleagues on the rigs provided one of the few sources of information Aidan felt he could rely upon. In this section then, I want to discuss the ways in which younger workers are introduced to regimes of work and life on the rigs, and are encouraged to think about their work in certain ways by colleagues and superiors on the rig.

The trepidation and nervousness which underline the first experiences of many workers on the rigs could be thought of as part of a process of 'dislocation' (Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018) in that they create disorientation and feelings of being 'out-of-place' which leave these young workers in a state of vulnerability, and perhaps pliability. This is part of a process of 'breaking-down' before workers are 'reconstituted' with the sensibilities and demeanour of a 'rig worker', and could be thought of as a way of 'socialisation' into the hierarchies and relationships of dependency which exist on the rig. This is about "making people in their physical, spiritual, affective, and intellectual dimensions," (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S4) in line with the dominant values of offshore rig work, through a mixture of joking, adherence to safety regimes, and small acts of care. These processes of becoming an oil worker might also provide clues as to why Ben and Aidan's views on work differ as much as they do.

Care and danger, hostility and joking

Most of my interlocutors remembered their first trips offshore as intimidating, and some mentioned the fact that this feeling stemmed partially from the fact that they felt the rigs to be dangerous places in a number of ways – a 'triple threat' – firstly, the danger of the helicopters used to transport the workers to and from Aberdeen and the rigs, which have on a few occasions broken-down mid-flight and crashed into the sea; secondly, the risks of being at sea generally, often thought of as a dangerous place to work due to the history of fishing accidents; and thirdly, the ubiquitous presence of flammable hydrocarbons, which is connected to the memory and discussion around the Piper Alpha incident. Despite the 'triple threat' most of my interlocutors would agree that offshore work is generally safe and that accidents are rare. Most had stories about accidents that they had encountered directly, or were told about by friends and colleagues. But many spoke to me of the sense that their operating companies were extremely wary of accidents or incidents, and engaged in such stringent safety procedures that even performing everyday tasks became very difficult.

A defining feature of conversations about work and life on the rigs is the overwhelming presence of safety protocol and form-filling the workers must engage in as part of their daily work practices. Before any tasks are carried out workers must apply to their superiors for written permission. Different areas of the platforms are graded in line with the relative dangers present – accommodation suites are generally considered safe to work in, whilst areas with flowing or 'live' hydrocarbons are most dangerous and work can only be carried out by engineers with advanced qualifications. All workers must also complete a 'safety talk' exercise whereby they have to record a number of conversations with other workers about safety concerns – e.g. Chris remembers stopping a colleague and having a discussion about a saw left lying on the floor, and how this might be hazardous. These conversations must be logged, and form a part of the annual review process for each worker.

The point I want to underline is that the safety procedures serve to radically constrict motion and action on the rig. Workers are only able to work in very restricted working areas, and are limited in the types of actions they can perform. As with the Polish meat processors described in Elizabeth Dunn's ethnography (2004), these safety practices serve not only to produce a certain kind of workplace, but also strong hierarchical relationships between younger and older workers, and also lead to the production of compliant (and 'pliant') new workers.

Despite the transformations connected to the greater focus on safety in the post-Piper Alpha period a central way of forming relationships at work is through joking relationships. These interactions, usually between older and younger workers, act as expressions of both hostility and care. Collinson (1988) examines shop-floor humour in a way which breaks from romanticised accounts of working-class sociality, and instead highlights the often isolating experiences of interactions at work.

Smith Rolston (2014: Chapter 6) examines these relationships in more detail, and considers the line between joking and harassment. The wide range of practical and verbal jokes that are shared in the Wyoming mines in which she carried out fieldwork serve a number of purposes - most basically they act as a way to assuage boredom on long shifts. They also act as a way of cementing social relations, demarcating those who are able to respond to and create their own jokes as part of the crew. In this sense they act as tools which generate

social ties, and can be viewed as small acts of care (2014:171). But, argues Smith Rolston, joking behaviour also serves to establish and reinforce gender hierarchies at work - jokes which serve to demarcate inclusion into the crew can also just as easily exclude those who are unable to respond to jokes, or cross a line and appear as little more than sexualised harassment.

In this section I also want to show how joking relations and performances of skill act as a kind of grassroots version of the safety culture and professional hierarchy of the rig. Joking interactions between workers veer between small acts of care and harsh boundary marking devices. But they also serve as a more personalised avenue for workers to express skill and competence - a version of skill and competence outside the constraints of work practice and safety regulation, but an activity which nonetheless also serves to underline particular workers as competent and able. Being able to 'take a joke' generally extends to also being one component of being a skilled and able worker - to be able to comfortably respond to humour shows an ease with ones work that extends beyond jokes to wider notions of ability.

Furthermore, these joking practices form a continuum with other performances of care, hostility, or skill. Particularly evident in the accounts of younger workers, well-natured jokes are interpreted as welcoming gestures on behalf of more experienced workers. Practical guidance or expressions of vulnerability also serve to put new workers at ease. And, in contrast, jokes which are more severely barbed chime with chastisement for lack of knowledge or more direct forms of rejection. In this sense joking behaviour, despite its particularity, acts as one form of social relation creation, in concert with others such as expression of skill or offers of assistance.

A stand out feature of Aidan's recollections of his early days are the constant jokes and jibes directed at him by other workers, many with a slightly vicious undercurrent. *"The first trip, quite daunting really. And people are winding you up. You know you're gonna get wound up eh?"* Most of my interlocutors could point to numerous jokes or pranks they had experienced whilst working offshore. Aidan's list of jokes and pranks include: first timers being told to sleep in full life-jacket and survival suit in case of emergency in the middle of the night; young technicians being told to go to the storeroom and ask for a 'long-stand', after which they were made to wait indefinitely, i.e. having a long stand; told to ask for tartan paint from the storeroom; being asked to stand on the helideck and lookout for icebergs; work-boots being filled with cold coffee.

Chris, another OPITO apprentice, also noted this joking from his very first moments on a rig. The green armband he had to wear to signify that this was his first time on this rig, together with the yellow hat-cover which told other workers that he was a new apprentice marked him out as a suitable target for jokes. He remembers a constant barrage of jokes, none of which he found particularly funny: about whether his mother knew he was here (because he looked so young), and if he was old enough to be out on the rig alone. *"They'll try and kinda wind you up wherever they can. But it's all a good laugh really. You've got to know how to take it."*

Experience of these kinds of jokes are common to all my interlocutors. While some enjoy the style of humour, spoken of as 'banter' or 'good crack, many others dislike it. Craig, who classes himself as a seaman due to his initial career in the merchant navy, resents the joking behaviour and finds it a form of bullying.

Jim, with his experience in the army, enjoys 'good crack' as a form of camaraderie which reminds him of his days as a soldier, but he isn't deeply invested in it – he often writes it off as silliness and as irresponsible. John, the fisherman, found the jokes and bad language particularly shocking to begin with, and drew a line between himself and what he felt was immoral behaviour. It appears that these joking relationships are most powerful when they connect older and younger workers, particularly younger workers who, like Aidan or Chris, have little experience of other forms of work, and do not have strong pre-oil identities.

Generally though, my interlocutors speak of learning how to 'take' a joke, how to respond with good humour, but without challenging the joker directly. The ability of the receiver to 'take the joke' and not react with anger or frustration marks them out as willing to make sacrifices as they gradually become part of the team of offshore workers. Because risk and danger underlie much of the activity on the rig, jokes are effective at 'dislocating' new workers – because new recruits don't have the experience to know, for example, whether being a lookout for icebergs is a serious request or a joke, and the consequences of *not* listening to one's superiors could provoke serious danger. Alongside this, new recruits speak about the recognition that to progress up the rig hierarchies themselves, they must cultivate good relations with their supervisors. Whilst many jokes are intimidating, many are also small acts of care, and form the basis for common ground between strangers.[27]

Because younger workers aren't able to respond to jokes directly with humour, either because they haven't learned how to yet, or because to do so would transgress rig hierarchies, one alternative way to garner respect is through the expression of skill. Chris, the new OPITO apprentice told me about an experience which exemplifies this. On his second ever offshore trip, working night-shifts, he and his mentor were tasked with dismantling a drilling mechanism: a pumping instrument had become completely seized on to a pipe. The fragile and expensive components inside the pump meant that they couldn't hammer it off as they might with other kinds of fixtures which had become stuck, and so all they were able to do was gently shake the pump until it started to move down the pipe. After hours of work the pump had only moved an inch or two. Chris's mentor went for a tea-break and Chris saw his chance: by bolting the whole thing to the pipe supports he could be more forceful without fear it would drop and smash –

> *"that's when the problem solving's come in, like it's weird, but when you're standing on your own going "I kinda need to impress here, I'm the apprentice" looking at this thing going "what can you do?" I ended up just getting two bolts into it and then a plate to sit on top of the shaft, and then you wiggle it a bit and you could see it dropping. [...] I managed to get it to drop a good foot or so."*

On his return from the tea-break, Chris's mentor was pleasantly surprised that Chris had found a way to solve this problem, and Chris felt pleased that he was able to express skill and competence at such an early stage of his career. He hoped that his mentor might remember this in the future when Chris was applying for a post-apprenticeship job on the rig.

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[27] Chris was involved in a major incident on his very first trip offshore – the platform lost all power, and those on-board were evacuated to other platforms nearby – (Chris ended up on a Norwegian rig). He managed to use this experience to 'make a name for himself' and played on this to create positive relationships with other. based on jokes about whether or not the shutdown was his fault, and if Chris was actually a bearer of bad luck.

Whereas Chris was quite comfortable and able to express skill as a means of garnering respect, this was often a point of anxiety and doubt for Aidan. He found that during his first few trips, his period at college hadn't fully prepared him for work offshore, and he was always 'on the back foot' when it came to expressing knowledge and skill. Aidan remembers his mentor with intense dislike, barking orders with his *"little tash flapping",* and a constant questioning of Aidan's knowledge about electrical engineering (e.g. component numbers for pumps and fuses). *"When I was an apprentice I remember the guy I was working for thought I was shit. Thought I was fuckin' clueless, and I probably was, I didnae know much."*

Jokes about apprentices often have a condescending tone, focussing on lack of skill and ability – electricians only ever 'change lightbulbs', and don't engage in serious work. Or, as Chris the apprentice mechanic noted, mechanics are joked about as walking around the rig with a hammer, hitting anything that isn't working in the hope that the problem will be solved. While enjoying some of this humour, and finding much of it highly tedious, Aidan also felt worn down by it at points; unable to respond to these jokes, they often felt more akin to bullying behaviour, especially when they were focussed on his lack of ability:

> *"Just 'cause you were a young boy they used to like, they use to gi'e you quite a bit of shit, you know? Just wind me up, wind me up, wind me up, you know? There's only so much somebody can take you know? I mean, I'm quite thick skinned, and eh, I think it's when people keep saying it, "You're stupid, you're dopey blah blah blah" you start to kind of believe it in a way, and it hurts you. You know, you start really questioning "Am I really that fucking stupid?""*

This also has to do with the process of 'making familiar' that I write about below. Chris and Ben both grew up in environments where manual labour and tools were present to some extent, (both of their fathers worked offshore, but also enjoyed doing DIY projects when at home) whereas for Aidan, this was something relatively new. Ben often felt aggrieved that Aidan, despite being an engineer, lacked certain basic knowledge – e.g. I witnessed a fairly intense quarrel between them about whether or not diesel engines have sparkplugs. This feeds into Anna Tsing's point about super-exploitation drawing on knowledge and skills that certain people are expected to have as a consequence of *who* they are – Tsing uses the example of garment workers being expected to be able to sew because they are women (2009:162). Here, I think, a similar process is occurring which underlines another way in which Aidan is unfamiliar with oil – Ben expects him to have this basic knowledge of 'how things work' as a result of being a man. For Aidan it adds to the sense that he had a lot to learn in his process of becoming an oil worker: technical information about the job as well as knowledge about how to manage oneself as a man.

Chris notes a quieter, less confrontational way of forming relationships with older workers. He recounted many instances on his first trips offshore where older workers would share stories about their experiences at work. For example one mechanic told him about another pump repair job which was carried out on Christmas day, with gale force winds and snow, and sympathised with how difficult that kind of work can be. Another worker Chris met in the airport shared stories about flights to the tiny airport in Sumburgh[28] in bad weather, where the plane would bump down the runway, barely able to stay on the ground because of the gusts of wind. Chris read these stories as small acts of care, as ways of expressing to Chris that he would go

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[28] This is a small airport in Shetland – oil flights use this as a halfway point between Aberdeen and rigs in the Northern section of the North Sea

through similar experiences and was on his way to becoming an oil worker. Chris even took comfort from the expression and comportment of other men on the helicopters – on his first helicopter trips from Sumburgh to the rig, he was shocked at the discomfort, with the very hot dry-suit, intense noise, oxygen tank digging into his ribs, and was worried that the vibrating and shaking of the helicopter was the sign of a problem. He noted, though, that the relaxed demeanour of the other men showed that this was a normal flight, and this put him at ease.

Aidan also mentions many positive experiences with older workers, which gave him hope that after his initial trepidation offshore work would eventually improve. A number of older electricians mentored Aidan informally, 'after hours,' and allowed him to work on their own projects. He also remembers a man in the offshore office who helped him restructure his CV and prepared mock interviews when Aidan was coming to the end of his apprenticeship.

Having worked in the industry for over ten years, Aidan now views himself a highly experienced offshore worker. He notes an incident when he really felt like he had become part of the rig hierarchy. In the 'smokers', the designated smoking shack on the rig, Aidan bumped into an old classmate from school, Tom, who had, in his school days, been known as a 'loudmouth' and a troublemaker. Now, on the rig, he was very quiet: *"remember him at school? See offshore? He's like a wee pussycat man."* Aidan recounts other men trying to 'have a laugh' with Tom, taunting him about the tattoos all over his arms, but Tom hardly responding at all. This reminded Aidan of his own early days on the rig and acknowledges that *"it would be quite daunting, you know? Different for me [now]. For me being affshore fir ages I would just go and di it, you ken? [...] tryin' to get familiar and tryin' to have crack and then fit in"*.

These new relationships which the younger workers have to learn to navigate during their first trips offshore are both intimate and intimidating. As with Don Kalb's (1997, 2017) discussion of the way in which factory-worker homes in Eindhoven were both spaces of care but also sites of production of a docile and pliable workforce (accomplished with the assistance of highly patriarchal family structures), the older oil workers simultaneously isolate and draw-close the younger workers. I also hope to have shown how "kinship and friendship networks may provide a crucial resource for employers as well as for workers, when personal networks are deployed to recruit and discipline the workforce" (Goddard 2017:10). This process, together with the processes of making oil households that I discuss in the next chapter result in the creation of particular imaginaries and approaches to work.

Familiarity

Earlier in the thesis I discuss the ways in which an important part of the whole narrative around oil in Scotland focuses on oil's forgetting and 'distancing'. When oil was discovered in the early 1970s, it was seen as a lucky break, an instant solution to increasing national debts, and the industry was established at breakneck speed. American oil majors, who had experience of drilling in deep waters, were essentially given free rein to operate as they wished in those early days – and these majors brought with them strict anti-union politics and regimes of secrecy about their business. Another crucial decision made during these early years was to establish Aberdeen as the onshore base for the industry – Aberdeen didn't have a strong tradition of industrial activism like Glasgow or Dundee, and so was seen as a blank slate, a frictionless environment in

which the companies could operate on their own terms. Narotzky (2017), and Trappmann (2017), both make the point that the initial way on comes to 'know' a particular way of working shapes one's continuing relationship with it – these bonds are hard to break. In the case of oil in Scotland, I want to argue that this applies at multiple levels - national, regional, and personal.

A key theme in this discussion of the history of oil in Scotland is the idea of oil purposely being kept unfamiliar and distant as a means to limit scrutiny and encourage 'frictionless' production. In this chapter so far I have attempted to show how oil work is 'made familiar' and becomes incorporated into a specific way of being, using the differences between Aidan and Ben to highlight some of the specificities of offshore work. In this section I want to think about some of the areas in which Aidan and Ben's divergent approaches to oil work stem from similar concerns - who the audience of one's efforts is; notions of what prosperity consists of; using oil wealth to recreate or break from the past.

First I want to very briefly sketch out the family work histories of Ben, Chris, and Aidan:

Ben's family have a complicated relationship with oil, in that his father, Eddie, owned and operated a small but successful oil service company through the 1990s and early 2000s. The intensity of Eddie's work and the rapid international growth of the company meant that he was absent for much of Ben's childhood. Despite Ben and I being close friends when growing up I didn't know, until beginning fieldwork, that his father was involved in the oil industry. Eddie's attachment to his work, discussed in chapter 2, and his absence throughout much of our childhood meant we were uncertain as to what his work consisted of. As mentioned above, when trying to make his own way in the world, Ben received little financial support from his family, and ended up having to drop-out of university in England. On return to Scotland he found his first oil industry job through a friend, and has always supported himself. Ben's father, when telling me about his own experience of the oil business, summarised his career by telling me that *"there's no one there to tell you what to do."* i.e. that one must find out for oneself how to approach work in this industry. And Ben does in some ways emulate his father in that he is working out, for himself, on his own terms, what it means to build a life around this resource. Ben reflects on his own somewhat difficult background, and attempts to subvert it by creating a stable work and home life.

Chris was somewhat better prepared for the ways of offshore life, in that both his older brother and father work offshore. His father is a catering manager, with responsibility for the food provisions on a number of rigs. Chris's brother is now a production supervisor, but had originally also gone through the same OPITO scheme as Chris and Aidan, training as an electrician. Despite this familiarity with the offshore world, Chris explained that the huge diversity of types of work, and the difference between his own and his brother's job meant that there was little direct advice his brother could provide. He did, though, look to his brother as a source of inspiration for the initial impetus to apply for offshore work. *"It was in a way because I'd seen him come out of the scheme, gotten himself a job quite easily [...] And I'd seen ...like he'd made not a bad life for himself."* His father also encouraged Chris to apply for offshore jobs, and Chris notes that most young men in his life at the time were involved in the oil industry – immediate family, cousins, friends from school – and so it felt 'obvious' to Chris that like many of the other men around him, he would also eventually work offshore.

Aidan's initial experience was very different, being the first in his family to work in the oil industry. Aidan notes that many of the other men on his OPITO training course had close relatives involved in the industry, but he was one of the few without these connections. This novelty of oil to Aidan's family is crucial in his management of the image of wealth. The relative 'unfamiliarity' with oil in Aidan's case does two things - firstly, as discussed above, it makes him more open to the advice of those new acquaintances he meets on the rigs, because he feels they are the only figures who can understand and relate to his work; but also it makes his project of presenting a certain kind of success viable, because his family have little experience of what the kind of wealth generated from oil work might be like and only have Aidan as a reference point.

A key question here concerns the audience of one's efforts - who 'success' is directed at, (as well as how one measures 'success', and indeed what 'success' is supposed to look like). Aidan often only presents an image of success which may not correspond to any actual economic stability – quite the opposite – he sometimes attempts to cultivate an image of prosperity which is based on debt and borrowing. Especially during his time as a drilling electrician, Aidan would often rent very expensive cars and return to Banff to visit his family - a kind of 'economy of appearances' (Narotzky and Besnier 2014) in an attempt to portray success even when this was not the case. And in part, Aidan was successful in this. At a barbecue for his birthday at his newly rented house in the West End of Aberdeen, Aidan presented a 'total image' of success to all his family present – a spectacle which drew in various elements he considers to be markers of prosperity - house, car, family, increasingly large muscles, and a very charismatic attitude and demeanour. He led small discussions amongst his family about his career and what he should do next, almost boasting that he was now in a comfortable position in which he could decide to continue with oil work, or leave it behind. His grandfathers and uncles present all replied with approving nods.

Carla Freeman (1998) takes up a similar discussion in her ethnography of IT workers in Barbados, who attempt to create a particular image of self and work through cultivation of image - they develop a particular demeanour and buy expensive 'office attire' which underlines their sense of this work being different and superior to other forms of work in the area, even though it is often less well paid or has to be subsidised through secondary jobs. For Aidan these displays of wealth are important, because in trying to be successful he is attempting to transcend, not just the hierarchies and influence of his parental family, but also trying to escape their history of work.

At the barbecue, Aidan's grandfathers shared with me their own career histories, a mix of taxi driving, spells in the army, property maintenance jobs, and work in factories in the central-belt of Scotland. Aidan's parents worked in healthcare when he was growing up, and then in local government. The worry for Aidan is that he might fail in his attempt at building success around oil and slip back into their world of, as he sees it, mundane, poorly paid, low-status work. He wants to create a life for himself that is a break with that of his parents and grandparents, and the risk and uncertainty of his type of oil work are, in his view, better options than the predictability and relative stability of their lives. This is an attempt at "making difference between the past of these places and an alleged better present or future" (Narotzky 2018:212).

This notion of work as a tool for self-realisation and breaking with perceived familial entrapment has been observed elsewhere. Rita Astuti (1999) presents a way of imagining work which is similar to Aidan's in her chapter in Lilies of the Field. Neny, the protagonist of Astuti's piece, holds dear her work in the local fish

market, which is seen as being inappropriate by many of those close to her because it curtails her ability to meet her obligations as a mother, daughter, and wife. Neny finds a joy in trading, partly because it allows her to transcend all these networks of obligation and simply enjoy her work. Aidan attempts something similar. By cultivating an image of windfall wealth and material success, he shows to himself and those around him, that he is on a different path to that of his parents and grandparents. His decision to reject the offer of the windfarm job, and hold-out for something better serves to underline to Aidan the notion that he has a better grasp of the dynamics of oil work than do his family, and that they shouldn't use their own categories of success and well-being to evaluate his decisions.

Trappmann (2017) underlines the ways in which, in many cases of unemployment, the sense of loss is not so much as a result of the loss of wages but at the loss of particular masculine identities, identities which often revolve around concepts of the 'breadwinner' or provider role. I think this is the case for both Aidan and Ben, although their idea of what constitutes a successful masculine identity differ.

Ben imagines successful masculinity as being a 'provider' or breadwinner, and sees his work as being a means to this - oil wealth, if managed properly, can provide stability for Ben and his family, that had been somewhat lacking in his upbringing. The sense of obligation and being a provider goes beyond that of himself and his partner, but spreads out to include his mother and younger siblings who still live at home in Banff. Around once a month Ben drives back to see his mother and siblings, and either cooks for them or takes them out for lunch in one of the nearby seaside towns. He feels it necessary to care for them, and act as an anchor of stability in their lives, and he needs a stable job in order to be able to do this. In some sense Ben both presents and provides an element of stability in their lives.

Aidan on the other hand imagines successful masculinity as being wrapped up in local, and perhaps even oil-worker specific, notions of prosperity, and aims to generate this impression at all times, whether or not his working situation allows for actual expression of success.

Despite the specific relation of Aidan and Ben to their respective family backgrounds, I want to make the point that their reflections on the environments in which they grew up act as a stepping stone that directs and influences the types of success that they see as valuable. Whereas Goddard (2017) explains that a common theme in intergenerational views of work is either an attempt of older generations to 'pave-the-way' into work for those following them, or to try and bring about a life which *isn't* similar to their own, in the case of Aidan and Ben I've tried to show how they reflect on the work of older generations and try to either recreate a similar life, or create a radically new kind of livelihood for themselves.

Parry (2018) notes that despite neoliberal discourse's tendency to emphasise intense individuality, kin and friendship networks are often key in both finding work in the first place, and in providing support and care when things go wrong. In the comparison between Aidan and Ben, it's actually Aidan who relies on his family much more despite his discourse of being an individual risk-taker and self-made man. Narotzky (2018:210) also notes that these processes of reliance in projects of self-making often involve unrecompensed and unacknowledged acts of care – the costs of reproduction are unaccounted for here, undermining a restricted notion of labour theory of value. Aidan seems to react to this reliance on family with an even more steadfast attempt to break away from them. Mollona (2009) notes a similar tension in his

ethnography of steelworkers in Sheffield, the tension in dynamics of work and family, between the need for mutual support, but the desire for independence.

Parry (2018) also makes the point that this neoliberal 'self-fashioning' is only available to the relatively prosperous who will be able to cope if risks taken don't come to fruition. Ben's worry that he wouldn't be able to fall-back onto his family for support perhaps encourages his seeking out of more 'stable' work; whereas Aidan's experience of this actually happening, during his redundancy, and the feelings of inferiority and infantilisation which emerged, served to harden his view that he must try, in a more spectacular fashion, to escape networks of family obligation and hierarchy.

Rather than spending time cultivating family relations as Ben does through small but regular acts of care, Aidan sees the responsibility of family as a trap, as potentially dragging him back into an undesired way of life and work. Day et al. (1999) and many of the chapters in their collection, note that this aversion to the household and to the family is common to many who 'live for the moment'.

Conclusion

This is partly a story of how individuals working in the oil industry come to understand their work and make it familiar. Importantly, however, these are also stories about how people come to comprehend their place in the capitalist labour process, more generally. My aim here was to show how these standpoints might be formed in relation to initial experiences of work, commonly held assumptions about what oil work entails, and everyday engagement with tools and processes of the industry. This 'expanded' view of labour ethics, as emerging from a whole host of intersecting aspects of life - exemplars, skills, tools, kinship relations etc - has been a core feature of recent anthropological writing (Bear et. al. 2015, Kalb 1997, 2017, Kasmir and Carbonella 2014, Narotzky and Besnier 2014, Mollona 2009, Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018). Alongside this anthropological approach the arguments I have laid-out here hopefully go towards understanding some of the key points in which the 'varied pursuits of being and becoming particular kinds of people, families, or communities' (Bear et. al. 2015) begin to take shape.

Mollona (2009:27-28), drawing on Burawoy (1979), discusses the ways in which workers consent to the labour process by reproducing capitalist values at work and in their home lives so that capital is able to exploit various aspects of worker's subjectivity to its own ends. Aidan certainly engages in this, with his visible expressions of wealth as an attempt to incorporate failure into a longer term narrative of individual success. Prentice (2018:304) notes that "insecurity becomes recast as freedom, self-exploitation reframed as 'being your own boss.'" But Ben reproduces the values of the capitalist process too, albeit in a different way, through respect for the company and those he works for, as he sees financial success as being reflective of a mixture of hard work and ingenuity. Ben sees success as 'within' the industry and achievable through conventional career paths, whereas Aidan understands success as only being possible through an opportunistic exploitation of gaps in the industry.

Connected to the idea of expressions of agency through risk taking, individualist or presentist behaviours, some anthropologists concerned with more phenomenological approaches to ethics challenge the Durkheim-derived starting point of ethics as a facet of social structure and system of rules. Emphasising the emergent and non-determined basis of ethics, as opposed to a focus on continuation and reproduction of social norms,

requires an appreciation of the indeterminacy and potential for change in each moment. Dyring, Mattingly, and Louw (2018:30) build on the work of Wentzner (2018) to explain that for phenomenological ethicists 'freedom' must be a central concept - "[…]human freedom is linked to this existential condition of indeterminacy as an ontological condition coupled with the burden of action - 'we have to live a life instead of just living it.' (Wentzner 2018:219)"(Dyring et al 2018:30). Aidan's ethical positioning in relation to oil could be seen in relation to this understanding of ethics - as an attempt to fully express the promised idea that oil could both offer both unforeseen opportunity and lead to a transformation into a new person with expanded ethical capacities. When the reality falls short of this image he takes action in an attempt to regain some of those promised for qualities.

This pursuit is given added urgency because of the temporal constraints of oil - Aidan's understandings of the industry, his reactions to the shortcomings and disappointments in light of what he thought this work might offer are deeply entwined with the carefully manufactured sense of scarcity which defines the political nature of oil in the UK.

Webb Keane (2016) aims to understand the particular conditions under which heightened ethical consideration takes place, and in combination with Zigon's (2007) suggestion that ethical wrangling usually takes place in circumstances of disturbance or crisis, we can think of oil as being 'held' in this moment of scarcity through the underreporting of reserves by oil companies in an attempt to consolidate power over resources. This political situation feeds down and shapes 'ethical affordances' (Keane 2016) unique to North Sea oil work. The crisis that was unfolding during fieldwork was only part of a larger and more constant general condition of turbulence and temporariness that defines all relationships to oil, but is particularly heightened in the specific political economy of UK North Sea oil.

Oil work is usually experienced either as in momentarily acute crisis or as about to enter terminal crisis, and this limited temporality stems attempts at resistance and can generate a particularly fatalistic attitude to work in this industry. But this constant state of crisis prompts an ever present theorising and consideration of the ethics of oil. All ethical action appears in reference to an approaching or currently present crisis, and all in reference to the end of oil.

In addition to this process of grappling with the ethical and temporal qualities of oil, both Aidan and Ben view their success or failure as emanating from their own decisions and skills. In the neoliberal framework "individuals are resourceful and creative, take charge of their own fate, give free rein to their entrepreneurial instincts, and adapt to market conditions. If they fail, they have only themselves to blame" (Parry 2018:28). I think this way of imagining work applies equally to Aidan and Ben, even if Aidan is more explicit about it: *"I don't believe in chance, I believe in control. […] So if you choose to fail you choose to fail. You didn't fail because of anything else."* Neither Aidan or Ben make connections to wider economic processes – neither would see redundancy as the fault of the company (or government) to manage their resources properly. They both view their successes as emanating from decisions they have taken themselves.

Ben's father's simple statement about having *"no one to tell you what to do"*, seems to capture a sentiment common to all my interlocutors - This one-by-one reckoning with how to enmesh one's life with the often unpredictable oil markets, a process which is often isolating and exciting in equal measure. Ben and Aidan

both feel that they've made oil familiar in their own, very different ways, by tempering or accommodating the instability of oil and finding ways of synchronising this rhythm with their life as a whole.

4. Oil households - Familiarity, obligation, constraint

This chapter focuses on the relation between oil work and the kind of families which come into being alongside the idiosyncratic rhythms and processes of the industry. Alongside the shifts in conceptualisations and experiences of work discussed in previous chapters, the role of oil work in the wider lives of oil workers, their families, and the communities of North East Scotland also transforms as the industry goes through periods of upheaval. In this chapter I focus more specifically on the interlinkages between oil work and the wider lives centred around this industry. My analysis draws on reflections offered by the partners of oil workers and their experience of living with oil work. I also examine the historical shifts in their understanding of the appropriate role that oil work plays in their life as a whole.

Here I argue that as work in the industry loses some of the exceptionalism of the early days and becomes a recognised and ordinary part of life, so the nature of ethical attachments to the specificities of this work change. Unlike other accounts of these shifts, however, my reading understands these transformations as partial, limited, and fragile - despite the normalisation of oil work over time, the historical processes whereby oil came to dominate understandings of work in the area leave behind specific forms of contextual and ethical attachment that continue to influence relationships to the industry in the present. My reading of how oil work gives opportunity for the formation of certain kinds of households centres both on the varied intimate connections between this work and life as a whole, but also on the fractures which emerged during the recent downturn and made the nature of these connections apparent. This approach draws inspiration from other anthropological accounts of resource production which highlight the tension between, and the mutually constituted basis of work and kinship relations (e.g. Shever 2008, Smith 2013).

One theme which emerges through examination of these 'accommodations' of oil work is the varying scales - personal, familial, regional - of adaptability to, and familiarity with this form of work. In this chapter I first discuss a range of studies which have plotted dominant familial dynamics in relation to oil work. As the industry has developed different aspects of how family networks relate to the patterns of oil work have changed. The 'strangeness' of oil in the early era was matched with distinct and problematic family dynamics and a great deal of upset in learning to

accommodate family life within the industry. This gives way to a more recent lauding of the distinct patterns of oil work as allowing for aspired-to lifestyles.

This chapter then deals with the broad relations between the material bases of resource production and the related social worlds. Again this harks back to the question I raise in the introduction around Ferguson's (2006) idea of social thinness/thickness in relation to resource extraction. There are no 'automatic' communities of workers and worker families here in the way there might be with other extractive or manufacturing industries. Both the location of the oil deposits, adjacent to rural and coastal communities, and the political decision to site the industry here made sure that the social networks which formed around oil were dispersed. But as I have argued for other aspects of this work, communities *do* form around oil, albeit in less obvious ways. From an initial experience of oil work as isolating and fragmenting, in relation to the partners of oil workers, over time accommodations to this work have been made. This work now 'makes sense' as a basis for aspired-to livelihoods in their totality.

This chapter then extends my thoughts on the attachments which form around a model of industry which corresponds to many of the elements Ferguson describes as 'socially thin', here in regard to familial relationships. Again the kind of relationships which coalesce around oil work have shifted over time in relation to other changes within and outwith the industry - older generations of oil workers tended to view having families and developing a career as separate pursuits, whereas for younger generations of workers these two projects are imagined as mutually constitutive. And again, whereas earlier generations of oil workers imagined oil work as a out-of-the-ordinary opportunity, the role of this work has shifted to become central to everyday life. Thus when the industry becomes unstable so too do the vast array of aspects of life which rely upon this work.

Making oil work familiar - Changing household patterns

Since the discovery and development of the Scottish oil industry in the early 1970s a range of scholars from various disciplines, including social psychology, sociology and management studies, have sought to understand the complex impacts of the industry on personal, familial, community and regional life (Clark et al. 1985, Clark and Taylor 1988, Collinson 1998, Lewis et al.1988, Moore 1982, Parkes et al. 2005). Many of these authors posited a contrast between conventional

industrial work patterns and the idiosyncratic rhythms of oil work, and attempted to understand how the latter posed a number of challenges to family and community life.

Early studies on the impact of this new form of work centred on the isolating and disruptive effect of the staccato shift-rotation pattern on partners of oil workers (Clark et al. 1985, Clark and Taylor 1988, Lewis et al. 1988, Morrice et al. 1985). They focus on generally very negative experiences of the frequent separations and reunions required as oil workers travel to and from the offshore platforms. In comparison with other industries in which similar working patterns were a common feature, most notably the fishing industry, these studies observe a lack of social support and various detrimental impacts on these disruptions on the partners and families of oil workers. Whereas members of fisheries families may have been well-known to each other in onshore life as well as at (offshore) work, with men who worked alongside each other at sea also generally living close to each other in the coastal settlements, oil lacked this sense of cohesion (See also Nadel-Klein 2003 and Webster 2013). Oil platform crews were, and still are, drawn from across the UK, and indeed many rigs have diverse international crews. And although the majority of UKCS oil workers come from the North East of Scotland, the lack of correspondence between onshore locations and the platforms upon which one might work mean that communities don't 'go to sea' together in the same way as had been the case in the fisheries. Men leave from various areas to work on different offshore installations and return home, to different places, at different times. This has meant that, from the early era of this Scottish industry, partners and families of oil workers had little connection with others experiencing the same new work patterns.

This pattern of men leaving and returning, but lacking the distinct temporal and spatial mutuality of other industries, was an area of concern for earlier scholars of oil communities. One topic of academic interest was the potential for this arrangement to cause considerable distress on the part of spouses of oil workers. 'Intermittent husband syndrome', a newly identified stress-related psychological condition, was claimed to stem from the confluence of a number of factors (Morrice et al 1985, Clark et al 1985). The constant need to accommodate the departure and return of the oil-worker partner was seen to contribute to a destabilising pattern of rapid acclimatisation to the alternate presence and absence of one's partner. The core issue, however, was considered to be the relative isolation of the wives and girlfriends of oil workers. Not only did they have little interaction with other women in similar situations, but the majority did also not work outside the home. Clark

and Taylor (1988) found that only 34% of 'offshore wives' were employed outside the home in the period 1971-1981.

These studies of the impacts of the oil industry on partners, families, and communities mostly underlined the negative and constraining relational and intimate aspects of oil work and contrasted sharply with the generally celebratory accounts and impressions of offshore oil work itself (See Chapter 1 of this thesis, and Newlands and Brehme (2007) for further elaboration on the historiography of North Sea oil). More recent studies have sought both to update the empirical details of wider relationships to oil and to complicate understandings of how families of oil workers relate to this form of work. Collinson (1998) and Parkes et al. (2005) both attempt to bring up to date understandings of how work in offshore oil relates to the lives of partners of oil workers, and couch their analysis in much more positive terms. Collinson (1998) finds that although many offshore oil workers and their partners still express difficulties in maintaining intimate and family relationships alongside the disruptive shift-rotations of offshore work, many have come to appreciate aspects of the life oil work affords. Offshore workers, in particular, express a sense of relief at their ability to leave behind the pressures and demands of home life, while long periods onshore offer respite from the stresses of work.

Parkes et al., writing in 2005, found an even greater degree of self-expressed satisfaction in relation to oil work, particularly in reference to the separations and reunions of oil work which have been reinterpreted as a largely positive feature. Parkes et al. put this down to two main societal shifts, both of which allowed for new relationships to oil work. Firstly, a much greater proportion of partners of offshore oil workers now worked outside the home: 67% of Parkes et al.'s interlocutors were in paid employment, almost equal to the national average of employment among working age women at 69%, at the time (Parkes et al 2005: 427). The second factor that markedly changed the experience of oil work for families linked to the industry, according to Parkes et al. (2005: 415-417), is the greater engagement of fathers in domestic labour and childcare. Noted as being related to society-wide shifts in parenting approaches generally, the extended time off work granted to offshore workers has meant an opportunity to share childcare labour between partners in a significant way.

Parkes et al. (2005) suggest that these two changes that contribute to more positive evaluations of the effects of oil work patterns are related to wider societal shifts. The problematic elements of oil

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work identified by the earlier studies - of oil partners experiencing oil work as disruptive and isolating – had been transformed by the gradual development of systems of community support, and the recognition that routine separations and reunions could provide opportunity for alternative but overall positive familial patterns.

The greater appreciation of oil work reflected in Collinson's and Parkes et al.'s studies, was also a prominent feature of discussions among my interlocutors. Although feelings of upset and restlessness in the days prior to travelling offshore were ubiquitous, interlocutors all explained that these disruptions were fleeting, 'a part and parcel of the job'. They all had developed personal methods of coping with the situation. Most noted a tendency to isolate themselves from their partners and families in the day prior to departure in order to assuage any potential tension; and the majority of my interlocutors reported that the sense of upset at leaving home largely dissipated on arrival at the heliport/port and meeting with colleagues. The overwhelming sense was that these temporary upsets were manageable and, unlike discussions around job insecurity (which was, for some, an element of oil work which prompted a desire to leave the industry altogether), and therefore an acceptable aspect of oil work.

Indeed, more than just an acceptance and accustomisation to the difficulties of the routines associated with oil work, this form of work has, for many, come to be highly appreciated because of the unique rhythms and the implications of these on the structure of the household. Many of my interlocutors who had partners or families did adhere to some kind of coordinated or complimentary routine in which the offshore and onshore partners attempted to generate a sense of balance in household tasks around the oil shift rotations. Most commonly the routines of the household were altered on return of the oil working partner. Steve's partner Julie, for example, told me that after recovering from the return journey from the offshore platform on which he works, Steve would spend a day or two thoroughly cleaning the house, and would also take on the majority of childcare during his time at home: doing the daily school run, preparing meals etc. Julie talked of Steve's contribution to household routines as offering her a 'break' where she could take some time off and pursue her own interests.

For other families, where both partners were employed in work outside the home, the staccato rhythm of work often proved to apply as much to the oil-working partner as it did to the partner

who remained onshore - for example, Daniel and Jenny in some ways both worked two-week shift rotations. Brian, part of an offshore drilling team, would return home after two weeks' work, and, like Steve, whom I mentioned above, would take on much of the routine household labour. "I jist di the fatherly thing when I'm hame," he explained. This allowed time for Jenny to work in her role as a care supervisor for the local council. She would book shifts at work to correspond with the weeks Daniel would be at home. Jenny remarked that she felt that this gave some important variety to her own work routine: "It was fine 'cause it actually got *me* oot and nae just dein' the same routine day in day oot." The mirrored coordination of the working routines of Daniel and Jenny was somewhat unique amongst my interlocutors. Nonetheless, even those who managed work and childcare or household labour simultaneously, described the return home of the offshore partners as offering 'an extra pair of hands' and a sense of respite, and showed an appreciation or sense of possibility which oil rhythms allow for.

It should still be noted, however, that differences exist within the experiences of oil workers and their partners in relation to the ways in which households form around oil work. Those who are most deeply invested in the 'unique' qualities of oil work, often older workers who have had longer careers in the industry, and those who view oil work as holding exceptional and exclusive qualities also often tend to have domestic arrangements whereby their partners do not work. For example Eddie and Mick, the two main interlocutors in chapter 2 were married to women who did not work outside the household. Those who come to oil more informally, or have had distinct working lives prior to beginning work in the oil industry, tend to be in relationships with partners who themselves have professional careers. Jim, Gary, Ben, all of whom have mixed employment backgrounds within and outwith the oil industry are in long-term relationships with partners who work as a nurse, a senior teacher, and a care worker respectively.

Similar to the literature cited above, my research shows how oil workers and their families have adapted to oil work, first, by aligning their lives with the specificities of the industry and, second, by incorporating features of this novel form of work over time. I refer to this process as one of accommodation. If in the past, couples and families sought to accommodate oil work by seeking to alleviate the negative aspects that come with specific work patterns and routines, they now integrate them into their efforts to achieve a "good life".

The emergence of oil work in Scotland strengthened models of families with a dominant male breadwinner at the centre. This contrasts with the rather 'loose' arrangement that existed prior to the arrival of oil, with diverse forms of work onshore, the lessening importance of fishing, and the lack of a dominant industry. The novelty of oil, and comparatively high wages led to a situation whereby households 'nuclearised', with women tending not to work outside the home, but rather perform domestic labour within the home. Today, division of labour and work patterns within oil-worker families take a variety of forms, with an increasing number of partners of oil workers having jobs outside the home. It has become common practice for couples to coordinate offshore and onshore work. Significantly, although generally regarded as secondary or only tangentially beneficial to the household, female partners' work can become central to making it through downturns in the industry as well as individual moments of precarity (Chapter 5).

The general shift around oil work and the household has been from a pattern of work prior to oil which was indistinct and diverse, becoming replaced by a new industry in which men's work was underlined as of central importance, dominant, and often with detrimental implications for the dynamics of the household. However, over the course of the industry, a degree of dissolution of those earlier very strict divisions of labour has occurred and not only have the rhythms of oil work been accommodated within the household, they often come to form an appreciated and valued part of lives built around oil work.

Ends of oil - obligation, responsibility, appropriateness

The transformations in the wider relationality of oil work described above correspond to a more complex set of circumstances than a simple process of 'adaptation' to conditions surrounding work. These shifts to imagine oil work as a foundational element in pursuit of particular kinds of lives relate to a whole range of overlapping processes: shifts in material working practices discussed in the previous chapter; societal level changes in gender and work relations as presented in the studies referenced above; considerations of the trajectory of the oil industry and 'end of oil' as temporal boundaries to these projects etc. I want to argue here that these shifts refer to, and are deeply influenced by, older understandings of what it means to work in oil. The patterns and ethics of oil

production corresponding to the 'early era' (essentially prior to Piper Alpha but see chapter 1 for discussion of these periods) despite their transformation or disappearance, continue to set the parameters for what is understood to define appropriate or desirable approaches to oil work. In this section, I examine the lasting impact of the foundational oil work ethics and masculinities in defining the boundaries for acceptable or respectable engagement with oil work.

Key to understanding how these processes play out is an appreciation of the correspondence between workplace practices and household dynamics. Matthew Filteau's account of changing masculinities in the Canadian oil industry is an important intervention on this issue (Filteau 2014). He argues that a distinct shift has taken place in the forms of acceptable masculinity associated with oil work in recent years. An earlier model of oil work relied on a sense of fear and a regime of strict labour control which disciplined labour in production sites in very direct ways. This is similar among Scottish oil workers. As I showed in Chapter 2, to 'make it' one had to embody and display certain masculine ethics including strength, courage, competence, commitment, and these qualities provided a certain degree of allure and garnered respect.

These earlier ethics, according to Filteau, have given way to approaches to work which centre around safety, care for co-workers, and an ultimate end goal of provision for one's family. The new ethics centre around the structuring ideals of safety procedure which is accepted as enabling workers to meet obligations outside the workplace. These changes align with the new dominance of 'breadwinner ideologies' and relationships of obligation, both to one's colleagues and to one's family, and these have largely replaced the older individualist accounts of oil work, which underlined core masculine qualities of individual competence and commitment as both respected and necessary for work in this sector.

Despite this shift in oil work ethics, many of my interlocutors still viewed employment in the industry as suited to particular types of men. Even prior to the 2014 downturn and associated disruption many of the younger workers, particularly single men, expressed the notion that oil work was not completely appropriate for 'family men' due to the long periods of time away from home and the potential for instability in the industry which could seriously upset household and family arrangements. It was common to speak of oil work as 'a young man's game' despite the fact that figures show a middle-aged and ageing workforce (OGUK 2021). In addition to this some workers planned their lives around work in different sections of the industry which are seen as being more or

less appropriate to certain life-stages - Ben, for example, was keen to eventually have children with his partner. For now, however, he planned to work as much as possible on offshore projects, both in the hope to save large amounts of money and to eventually secure an onshore supervisory position. He imagined such a position might better suit the dynamics of having children.

Nevertheless, the trend that Filteau highlights is also reflected in the experiences of my interlocutors. As I discussed in previous chapters, a clear transformation has taken place in the dynamics, ethics, and procedures surrounding oil work in the North Sea. The ad-hoc, improvised, and often shocking experiences of the early cohort of workers contrast with the more mundane and quotidian realities of current day work in the industry described by younger generations of workers. Nonetheless, I contend that the older form of oil worker masculinity and ethics still play a role in informing and ordering current perceptions of appropriate relations to oil and the parameters of respectability. The division between old and new oil worker ethics is not as clean a break as Filteau describes. Both as a general caricature, but also present in a small section of the workforce, qualities of hedonistic excess, conspicuous consumption, aggression, all still inform abstract notions of qualities which define the men who work in oil. These patterns are recognised and discussed as being a part of 'oil culture'. They are widely seen as an undesirable and immoral facet of a life arranged around oil work. The discursive (and sometimes material) presence of these notions of what it means to work in oil are used as a marker against which to measure the success of oneself and one's family.

Jessica Smith Rolston's (2013) ethnography on coal miners in Wyoming can aid in understanding this relationship between images and realities of what it means to build a life around work in resource extraction. Smith Rolston proposes an examination of the "less sensationalist aspects" (2013: 214) of miners' lives. Where many media or scholarly accounts emphasise sensationalist aspects of 'boom towns' – including rising incidence of crime, high divorce rates, prevalence of extreme hedonistic behaviour - Smith Rolston reveals that most of her interlocutors sought resource industry jobs for the relative stability and longevity of this work. These images of the disruptive qualities of coal, argues Smith Rolston, are a common misunderstanding of how the majority of oil workers attempt to make lives around work in this industry, lives which similar to lives elsewhere are in reality centred around securing stable, well-paid work supporting the reproduction and care for one's family.

This is also a familiar pattern in my fieldsite. Common accounts of the hedonism and extravagance of oil workers mask a more everyday reality in which the majority of oil workers use oil work as a means to construct particular kinds of home life. Although oil work is deemed to be both more risky than, and superior to other forms of work, it is still expected to allow for the construction of "normal" or indeed "better" lives. In this context, earlier models of oil work as both somehow liberating but also dangerous and potentially destructive allowed for re-imaginings of local masculinities. And these qualities still influences the current experience of oil work, even if tangentially or in a negative sense - i.e. through defining the parameters of unacceptable behaviour around oil work.

So rather than simply challenging the veracity of these commonly circulated accounts of larger-than-life oil workers, I argue that the ethics of work and notions of powerful masculinity implicit in these characterisations actually shape the lives of less exuberant oil workers in in subtle and pervasive ways. While oil work is put to quotidian ends, in some sense, this feeds off the oil worker's stereotype. Stories and images of oil workers as careless and as squandering the opportunities provided by oil work, regardless of their accuracy, serve to set parameters demarcating how oil work should be managed and lead to self-policing and restraint. Smith Rolston (2013:223) highlights the importance of questioning "why certain moments of Gillette's history have come to dominate popular and academic portrayals of the town and the energy industry at large". By contrast, I seek to understand how these portrayals, narratives, stereotypes of what it means to work in oil impact on worker relationships to the industry. How do these portrayals shape the experience of oil workers and their families as they try and form lives around this industry?

A prominent subject of conversation with interlocutors during fieldwork centred on denials of excessive consumption or overspending. Refrains of "We're not a flashy family"; "I've never been a big spender"; "We always live within our means" were frequently and loudly voiced. Accusations of carelessness with money and living outside ones' means focused on other oil workers and usually involved one of a set of frequently occurring examples, such as the excessive consumption of alcohol; purchase of expensive designer clothing; those who lived in very large new-build houses; over-spending on items for one's children; and, the central symbolic target for accusations of carelessness with money - the purchase of expensive cars.

As I show in the next chapter, claims of one's own frugality were often given as partial reasons for 'survival' through the downturn. Those who, for example, owned too many cars, or had very large mortgages on expensive properties, were seen as being largely responsible for their own financial difficulties during the post-slump precarity. And, following from the points put forward by Filteau, because of the increasing emphasis on oil work as a means to provide for one's family, accusations of overspending were also considered to reveal a failure to meet obligations towards one's dependents.

Therefore the stereotypical constructions of 'the oil worker' are often invoked as a negative exemplar, a model of how oil work and life should *not* be approached. Simultaneously, these stereotypes are often based on ethical approaches to oil which existed in the period immediately following oil's discovery. These 'negative exemplars', in the form of individuals or even entire families who are deemed to be 'mismanaging' their oil-derived wealth, often act as a moral boundary marker, situating oil work in a moral discourse of self-responsibility, breadwinner ideological frameworks, and appropriateness.

The pervasiveness of these images of oil workers and the way in which they shape understandings of the appropriate approaches to oil therefore provides a critique of Filteau's account of a sharp divide between 'early' and 'current' oil ethics. While those earlier individualist models of oil work may have been materially transformed, they still exert considerable discursive power in moulding current understandings of how to live with oil appropriately.

Indeed, my two main interlocutors of the previous chapter, Aidan and Ben, in some sense represent manifestations of both of these contrasting approaches to oil. Ben's emphasis on slow progression through the industry, and his vision of an intimate relation between different career and life stages fits quite neatly with the trajectories sketched by Filteau and Rolston. Oil work is imagined as the core element in the pursuit of a stable life, and allows for the meeting of various familial and friendship obligations. In addition to this, Ben views Aidan's attempts at harnessing the instability of oil as irresponsible and as the cause of his failure to meet his own personal obligations, for example, to his girlfriend.

Aidan, on the other hand, views oil as potentially transformative and a unique form of work. It becomes a means through which to escape what he anticipates as the mundanity and claustrophobia

of family life. This became apparent at a family barbecue I attended, held at Aidan's house in Aberdeen to celebrate his birthday. Speaking with Aidan's grandparents and parents, none of whom had experience in the oil industry but had work histories in a mix of light industry, nursing, local government administration, taxi driving and the army, it became clear that Aidan's reflections on the 'hidden' opportunities of oil, available through alternative routes through the industry, were partially informed by a desire to escape what he saw as a family background of restrictive working class employment. Oil work, despite all the shifts which had taken place since the indeterminacy and promise of the early era, still held a suggestion of transformative potential for young workers like Aidan.

The contrasting views of Aidan and Ben speak to an underlying dualistic quality apparent in oil work at all stages of the development of the industry. Oil has acted both as a break with the inherited industrial past and has offered a new form of industry which allowed for familiar expressions of labour. The introduction of oil into the North East of Scotland was experienced both as a radical remedy for stalling regional economics; but also as allowing for continuations of familiar forms of life. As I showed earlier, the 'new' oil masculinities were both a departure from, and a continuation of previous forms of gender relation. In other words, despite the apparent trend towards discussions of oil work which emphasise its importance in sustaining networks of obligation over understandings which underline individualist and strenuous expressions of labour, neither of these elements of oil have disappeared or been replaced by the other. They exist in constant tension and shift in emphasis as the industry and social/family lives transform.

This shift towards oil becoming 'accommodated' is neither a linear process, nor it is uncontested. Rather, earlier models and conceptualisations of oil work as something extreme or unusual (like Eddie's "supermen") continue to act in the present both as warnings and inspirations for modes of ethical engagement with this form of work. Differentiated approaches to oil (in terms of how familiar one was with this kind of work beforehand (Aidan compared to Ben compared to John) in addition to varied modes of labour relation within the industry - contract work, permanent positions, occasional work, onshore work - ensure that this conversation around the 'appropriate' form of relation to oil work and utilisation of the wealth generated through this work is a question under constant scrutiny. Far from being settled, these questions continue to be reassessed and approached in different ways, and the looming 'end of oil' gives these relationships a new urgent quality.

Relational constraints of oil livelihoods

So far I have largely presented an outline of the development of relations to oil work which have focussed on adaptation to its distinct patterns and nuances. These adaptations have generally been focussed on attempting to align desired-for forms of life with work in the oil industry. Alongside these alterations, dense constellations of familial, material, and ethical attachment centred on the core activity of oil work have formed. In this section I consider how these attachments, while partially an expression of "successful" intertwining of life as a whole with oil work also serve as a mode of disciplining and tying workers to labour in this industry. As oil shifts from being seen as a lucrative additional form of work to being viewed as a core enabling feature of the everyday, so it becomes vital to all expressions of life in the region. Through its quiet ubiquity it gains an added power, and this wide reach of oil to all aspects of life acts as a diffuse controlling force over labour.

Labour scholars have sought to understand the myriad ways in which labour is 'disciplined' in the widest possible sense. This might be through forms of coercion Braverman (1974), consent (Burawoy 1979) or under conditions of incessant conflict (Beynon 1973). In addition, anthropologists have examined ways in which kin relations specifically can act as a force in the disciplining of labour. For example, Mollona (2009) shows how patriarchal family relations in "post-industrial" Sheffield lead to a situation where fathers implore younger family members to enter into the informal fringes of the steel industry, ensuring a cheap and flexible source of labour for the factory owners. Don Kalb's concept of 'flexible familialism' (1997 and 2017:127) exemplifies a similar situation in which, in the electrical goods industry in Holland, dynamics of capital shape familial structures - the 'intimate and intimidating' (2017:129) context of family life served as a control mechanism over labour and served to produce a cheap and obedient source of labour for the factories.

Elana Shever (2008) links labour and kinship in an alternative but complimentary way. In her ethnography of the oil industry in Argentina, Shever shows how dense kin relations, patriarchal company-worker relations, and the deep emotional attachment felt by workers to the state oil company were drawn on to mask unequal and exploitative neoliberal transformations brought about during the process of privatisation.

These examples all situate control and reproduction of the labour force, at least partially, in kinship networks and the household. However, in most of these cases, kin relations act as direct controls on sections of the labour force and shape labour in the direct interest of capital. Among Scottish oil workers, I suggest attachments to the affordances and livelihoods made possible through work in the oil industry can also act as a mode of inhibiting labour, albeit in diffuse and tangential ways. The processes of accommodation and making-familiar that I described above make the rhythms of oil work bearable and meaningful. Once these accommodations are made and lives are built around work in the oil industry, imagining life outside of this working environment becomes difficult; it would also mean an upheaval of all these attachments.

It is important to note that this is only one aspect of labour discipline in the oil industry. Other factors related directly to the experience of oil workers on the platforms, such as the direct, often brutal, management techniques of the early era, through to the establishment of a dense safety protocol post Piper-Alpha, are discussed in previous chapters (see also Appel 2019). But the extensive constellation of attachments generated outside the workplace is nevertheless one of the most powerful, and intimate, mechanisms in ensuring adherence to the ethics of the industry and cooperation with the labour process.

Essentially this relates to the widely-held notion that the livelihoods made manifest through oil were impossible to replicate through other means - both because of the lack of alternative well-paid work in the region, but also because of the familiarisation and value attached to the distinct patterns of oil work. Craig, for example, frequently expressed to me a strong desire to leave his job in the control room of a North Sea platform on which he had worked for a number of years. A combination of dissatisfaction with the day-to-day routines onboard, matched with a lack of progression to superior positions, and a falling out with his line manager had made his work feel unbearable. This added to a deeper sense of unhappiness at working in oil and a desire to leave offshore oil work altogether. He felt the long weeks spent offshore were no longer well suited to his role as father of a young family.

Craig's partner shared his concerns and suggested he try and find alternative work onshore that would allow him to spend more time at home. Nonetheless, Craig worried such a move would disrupt the finely-balanced, if non-ideal constellation of work and home they had managed to achieve over the years. Leaving offshore oil work would likely mean a huge loss of income, a steep

decline in their disposable income, and, central to his concerns, the inability to afford the upkeep of his beloved house.

Indeed many of my interlocutors were equally emotionally attached to their homes, concrete manifestations of the attachments oil work generates. A commonly-held local assumption was that oil workers tended to live in expensive newly-built developments in the outskirts of the small coastal towns of my field-site. However, most of my interlocutors lived in older houses requiring significant physical upkeep. Mostly bought in need of major repair, these served as DIY projects with which could occupy their time while onshore. Indeed working on home-improvement projects seemed to fill the majority of time for most of my interlocutors while not on the rig or actively at work. Craig had redecorated his extensive townhouse in the centre of Banff room by room during his periods of leave; Sam gave us numerous tours of his countryside cottage, bought as the roof was on the point of collapse but now reconstructed as a very comfortable home; and Ben's continual work on refurbishing a downstairs bathroom became a point of fun between us, as it seemed it would never be completed. But as many of my interlocutors were keen to impress upon me, these homes were only made possible through their oil work. Craig stated, on multiple occasions "there's *no way* I'd be able to afford this place if it wasn't for my job in oil."

These carefully worked-on home reconstruction projects are not the only reflections of the high incomes and extended times of leave that these men access through their work offshore. There are many more subtle, less tangible manifestations of life which surround this work. Despite the changes in household patterns throughout the progression of the industry outlined at the beginning of this chapter, partners of oil workers often expressly shape their own careers in relation to the oil work which dominates the household. For the wives and girlfriends, working outside the home generates a sense of independence, a means of developing systems of resilience and support and sense of 'equality' as both partners partake in at least a degree of both employment and domestic labour. Rather than making a *financial* contribution to the household, women's work outside the house – similar to men's domestic labour during their time onshore -was largely talked about in terms of its implications for wellbeing and sociality. "It gives them something to do while I'm away," my interlocutors would say, or "It gives her a chance to get out of the house and have a social life." Rarely was the paid labour of women expressed to me as the central economic activity of a household. At most it was spoken of as a support in more precarious situations: "Their income takes the pressure off me a bit."

Oil work, then, has a number of 'positive' and 'negative' constraints. Positive constraints include the notion that oil work allows for the construction of desirable ways of living. For some, this manifests in an ideal division of the spaces and times of home and work; for others, it is the time and money to engage in home restoration projects. The flipside is that the implications of leaving work in oil would mean the loss of many of these highly-valued and interconnected qualities.

In short, working in oil is both a point of both pride and a cause for stress for my interlocutors' families. Oil work is cast as "too good to reject" or even to complain about. The sense that oil work's core function was as a means of 'providing for one's family', in ways impossible to replicate through other forms of labour in the region, means that any difficulties at work have to be borne rather than challenged. As a result, the extended ethical and material affordances of oil work act as a means of control.

Earlier in the thesis I discussed the transition from oil work as a domain of risky and extreme forms of labour to one largely shaped by experiences of management control and safety protocol. A parallel and complimentary shift has taken place in communities and families dependent on oil work. Oil work in the context of North East Scotland, had once been viewed as both unusual, at times spectacular, and essentially as an appendage to already existent forms of life in the region. Oil work offered a heightened version of relatable forms of industrial, physically strenuous labour, particularly in relation to work ethics and masculinity. Those who were able to 'make it' in this new industry understood their work as a superior: better paid, more powerful in its relation to global networks of technical expertise, and markedly distinct from surrounding forms of work.

Importantly, however, these understandings of what oil work had to offer have centred on a vision of this work as *different from* 'ordinary' life. Oil has offered an extension of possibility, somewhat outside of the parameters of familiarity. Today, as the idiosyncracies of oil work have been increasingly accommodated, oil has become very much a central organising feature of everyday life in the area. Oil work has a ubiquity and familiarity in the North East, which contrasts with the sensationalist descriptions of oil of the early era. It becomes impossible to imagine life without oil, when oil work is seen as sustaining force. Rather than an 'alternative' kind of work, oil work becomes recognised as an accessible and ordinary career path. And so, as oil has moved from being

an 'exceptional' form of activity to an 'ordinary' one, it has faded into the background and become woven into a dense and pervasive web of attachments.

Oil work has become almost unremarkable. Stories of larger-than-life oil men and the extreme working conditions of the rigs have been replaced by a situation where everyone seems to be related to someone who works in the industry. Like Chris, many oil workers have followed fathers and brothers into the industry or, like Ben, were introduced to this work through friends already employed in the industry. For others, the pervasive presence of this work in friendship and kin networks would make *not* working in the industry unusual. Gary, for example explained that "the whole family" works in oil. His three brothers work on platforms in the North Sea, and his mother, step-father, and step-brother run a small oil services company. "Even my step-sister's man's a crane driver offshore. Most people know at least three people [working in oil]," he claimed, "and I mean even my brother's girlfriend. She works in oil as well." This ubiquity and 'normalisation' brings with it complex and intimate attachments which ultimately restrict the possiblities of imagining life here without oil.

Oil work is related to varied diffuse systems of discipline which are located as much outside the workplace as within it. 'Breadwinner ideologies' place oil work at the centre of household economies. They tie individual workers to their work through the ongoing need to retain the means of supporting one's family, as in the case of Craig. At the same time, the ability to maintain a range of material expressions of prosperity serves as a public proclamation of one's masculine competence. However, given the common moral assessment of certain forms of household consumption as excessive and irresponsible, oil workers have to navigate a narrow path between, on the one hand, demonstrating their competence and enjoying the prestige their work brings and, on the other, avoiding judgment by neighbours, community, and wider family.

At first it could be understood that oil work in the North Sea does correspond to extreme lifestyle or contentious, unusual forms of combining work and life as a whole. The accounts of Aidan in the previous chapter, or Eddie's supermen in chapter 2 can be easily linked to ideas of 'presentist' modes of living discussed by Day et al and Walsh. These refer to situations where specific groups of people attempt to 'live in the moment' and deny forms of social attachment as a means to escaping various dominating socio-economic environments.

This relates to Olivia Harris's notion of the household as a trap (discussed in Day et al 1999:13-15), something to be evaded through presentist dispositions - an emotional disposition and practice of rejecting the long-term attachments associated with the household and with constellations of social reproduction. But it becomes rapidly apparent that the majority of oil workers in my fieldsite are not using oil to break free from restrictive societal bonds in the way it might have been in the early days of the industry but rather is a conduit for the development of meaningful attachments. The purpose of this chapter, and the thesis as a whole to some degree, is to discuss the ways in which those earlier ethics are inverted and indeed 'the household', or wider life outside the workplace does act as a tie and perhaps a 'trap'. Oil work is associated with the reproduction of social life in varied and complex ways - to remove this 'base' from life in the region would involve unravelling networks thick with attachment, and therefore, in pursuit of the maintenance and nourishment of these attachments, oil work must persist.

The shift toward a more moralistic evaluation of "excessive" livelihoods enabled by wealth gained from oil has placed responsibility for 'failure' onto the individual workers and his ability to manage oil work. It has also changed conceptualisations of what 'kind' of work this is. As oil has become such an intimate part of the everyday lives of people in the North East of Scotland, it has lost the earlier 'windfall' element, and largely ceases to be a fleeting opportunity available to those with enough daring to take it. This has wider implications for understanding the ways in which the ability to secure a stable career in oil is regarded. Failing to 'make it' in the industry, to some degree regardless of structural conditions, imbues these experiences with a certain sense of individual moral shortcoming. As we will see in the next chapter, this had important implications during the 2014 downturn, when many of those who lost work were regarded as living outside their means and, therefore, partially to blame for their own misfortune.

In emphasising this point, my research departs from other ethnographic accounts which engage with oil primarily in terms of its conflictual politics, magical qualities, or destructive potential (e.g. Behrends et al. 2011, Coronil 1997, Weszkalnys 2013). Rather, my ethnography highlights the surreptitious disappearance of these contentious or aggravating (?) aspects from everyday perceptions of, and encounters with, oil in the Scottish North East. Here oil has become firmly incorporated into the most intimate relations of sociality (almost to the point where it 'disappears' as with oil historiography mentioned in chapter 1). The processes whereby oil work becomes not only familiar but commonplace mean that its unique connection with a certain way of life has

become obscured. Moments of crisis, unwinding this 'everyday incorporation', make oil's significance starkly clear.

5. Going to sea - Remoteness, Mobilities, Crisis

I arrived at Frank's home at around 10am for a late breakfast and an opportunity to talk about his work in the oil shipping and supply business. Having accepted numerous such invitations from Frank in the past, I suspected that, as per usual, our conversation would slide off on a tangent, and rather than speaking about his involvement with oil, Frank would spend our time enthusiastically recounting humorous tales about his time at the Nautical College in Glasgow, stories about his travels around the world, or details about the purchase and restoration of his home in which we now sat. After finishing breakfast, Frank suggested that we go for a morning walk through the village. As we made our way out I accepted that, once again, I would probably fail to garner any information about his work.

On our way out, Frank took a detour to show me the new workshop he had recently built in the garden. Sitting on the workshop floor, amongst curls of wood shaving, was the frame of a small boat. This was Frank's weekend project, and he showed me detailed drawings in a woodworking manual of how the boat should fit together, the next step being to attach long, thin strips of wood to the frame in order to form a smooth hull. He confided, however, that the frame had been completed months ago and that he doubted if he would ever find time to finish it and take it out on the water. The reason he hadn't been able to spend as much time as he would have liked in the workshop was partly due to his job as 'marine superintendent' - a high-power, high-pressure position in a global shipping company, managing a fleet of twelve oil support vessels from the office in Aberdeen. Frank was now working a five-day week, travelling each day to and from the office situated in the Western outskirts of Aberdeen city. This was markedly different from other oil-related jobs and from Frank's previous role as chief officer onboard an oil supply boat.

Standing in the workshop, Frank began to tell me of the strains of his weekly commute. Each weekday morning he would drive from his home, a few miles inland from Cullen, to a nearby train station, taking the early morning commuter train to Aberdeen. Upon arriving at the station in Aberdeen he would then travel by bus to the company headquarters on the other side of the city. At the end of his daily shift in the office he would repeat the journey in reverse. Thus, he explained, from Sunday evening, when he went to bed, until the following Saturday morning, he spent the vast majority of his time either sitting or lying down: driving in the car on the way to the station; sitting on the train and bus through Aberdeen; spending the day behind a desk in the office; sitting for the duration of the return journey home; then lying in bed, asleep during the night. This routine had begun to wear on Frank physically and mentally and struck him as a particularly unfulfilling way to spend his time - constantly moving but always in a sedentary position. The only moments in which he could move as he wished - when cycling, or running, or diving - were relegated to the weekend, and that time usually felt constrained by thoughts of his immanent return to his weekly commute. Frank also explained that his weekends felt particularly pressured because of the feeling that he should spend the brief window of time that he was at home with his wife: *"At the weekend I feel terrible disappearing off to my shed, or going off diving, or doing anything really that doesn't involve her, and then my projects fall by the wayside."*

Frank offered me this story of his daily commute and restricted time partly as a reason for a lack of progress on his woodworking projects, partly as an explanation for his lack of time or desire to talk to me about his work, and partly as an admission that he isn't content in his current job. The onshore life Frank had built for himself through working at sea - his house, his workshop, and his life with his wife in the Scottish countryside - felt too distant and ungraspable to be fully appreciated. Those things required a certain way of being at home, a kind of stillness which his current job didn't allow for. Instead, rest had become little more than a preparation for work, leaving, as Frank put it, *"little time to recharge one's batteries."*

I came to understand that my seemingly fruitless efforts to talk with Frank about his work told me a great deal about his unhappy relation with his job. This was confirmed when, a few months later, Frank left his office job and returned to work as chief mate on an oil supply ship. Frank's career, from his time as an officer in the merchant navy prior to working in oil, through to his initial experiences of working on the oil supply vessels and the forays into management in the office in Aberdeen had involved constant attempts at fine-tuning the different aspects of his work and life in an attempt at finding some ideal combination. The pressures of the office job in Aberdeen had made Frank's feel unbalanced, and in order to rectify this he returned to sea. After this, during Frank's periods of time at home, I was able to speak to him at length about his work!

In this chapter I bring together discussions from previous chapters about the varied ways in which oil work becomes embedded at an individual, regional, and national level. I consider how these different modes of attachment to oil work came to shape and inform experiences of the major downturn in oil price in 2014, the repercussions of which were still keenly felt during my fieldwork. Drawing on recent anthropological literature on ideas of remoteness, mobilities, and 'stuckness' I examine the ways in which the interrelation of these qualities, although always present, became starkly apparent during the time of volatility. This moment of uncertainty fostered much discussion around the relationship of the industry to the Scottish region. However, the livelihoods that the industry affords are so closely intertwined with the nature of oil extraction and the specificities of oil work, they are difficult to replace by other means. This meant that although a small number of interlocutors attempted to disentangle their lives from oil in the wake of the crisis, the majority found creative ways of 'filling-in' by taking on temporary work, or simply waited until the prospects of the industry improved.

This period of crisis in the industry revealed a previously under-appreciated sense of local dependency on oil work. Nonetheless, awareness of this dependency did not translate into substantial shifts in individual approaches to work in the industry. In the wake of the major disruption caused by the downturn, most of my interlocutors returned to patterns of work similar to those they had been engaged in prior to the crisis. This period of crisis didn't so much disconnect the area from networks and patterns of oil production as suspend and illuminate these connections. It emphasised the pervasive and deep connection between oil work and the ways of life which have been built up around it in North East Scotland. This process simultaneously underscored the lack of local alternatives to generating these desired ways of life, leading to a widespread sense of powerlessness and lack of agency.

The chapter opens with a description of the ways in which Frank tries to fine-tune his work and life in an attempt to find some ideal balance - moving from shipping, to oil, to office work, and back to oil - with certain values and meanings reflected in the mobilities each of these combinations. Emphasising the relation between the projects of life onshore and offshore, and the sense of creativity and agency which goes towards bringing these into an idealised sense of balance, I then turn to consider the impact of the downturn on such personal decisions. I highlight the pervasive sense of 'stuckness' expressed by my interlocutors, and the challenge it posed to their ideas of oil work as an individual, self-reliant pursuit. Finally I consider the impact of this moment of crisis on understandings of what kinds of life working in the industry allows for.

These questions of attachment to the peculiarities of oil, its material affordances and geographic conditions relate back to the debates around social thinness and thickness discussed earlier in the thesis. Some of the key components of a socially thick industrial model proposed by Ferguson (2005 & 2006) include an active and distinct resource community; a social contract between the industry and these communities which afford much more than wage labour, but extends to wider forms of social reproduction; and a workforce, often centred on powerful unions, which is able to assert itself and make claims of the company. These components are intentionally lacking in the industrial model of North Sea oil.

In lieu of these features I argue here that other specific aspects of this work become full with meaningful attachment. In an industry in which collective assertion is not imagined as a viable or desirable avenue to success, other phenomena, such as a need for constant mobility, become markers of success and vitality. And through these markers wider networks of responsibility and communality are brought into being. These might not be recognisable as the kind of community or practice associated with other industrial workforces, but these idiosyncrasies of oil work provide evidence as to the complex personal importance this industry holds for so many.

And these developments, of layered and unpredictable attachment to oil work, are of course shadowed by the shifting masculinities I discuss earlier in the thesis. Something once novel and strange becomes, over time, familiar and routine. As part of this process, so too masculine identities become enmeshed with the routine of everyday forms of social reproduction. As work becomes more a means through which to realise abundant social and familial ties, the earlier masculine identities which were once centred on performances of oneupmanship with other workers becomes redirected towards performances of ability in relation to being competent and able.

This speaks again to my aim at presenting a history of relational masculinities, or, 'composite masculinities' (Wentzell, 2013) where multiple factors, for example labour regimes, kinship ideologies, and technologies, come together to shape expressions of masculinity in interconnected ways. And because of the layered constitution of these masculinities, when it becomes difficult to express them in times of industrial precarity, so the whole system which they connect with becomes unstable.

Another point it is important to underline is the sense that although this moment of precarity was at some moments experienced as a marker of the end of the industry or a sign of its immanent demise, it was mostly understood as a period of deep instability which one had to quickly adapt to. And so this moment then becomes wrapped back in to the story of oil, adding an extra layer of complexity, and a new challenge for workers - now, one had to not only manage the staccato rhythms, the often abrasive offshore environment etc, but also learn how to position oneself in order to secure work in times of trouble. For some older workers these cycles formed part of a recognisable pattern, while for younger workers the initial shock of being thrown out of the comfort of a new working life gave way to a recognition that one had to learn quickly to manage this instability in order to benefit from it.

Nevertheless it gives oil work a further quality which segregates it from other forms of industrial work in Britain. The industry was, during my fieldwork, not envisaged as being anywhere near an endpoint. Most of my interlocutors imagined that anyone entering the industry at present could enjoy a career-length position in the industry. It may be that the forms of work would change, but there was a strong sense that the oil industry would continue on for quite some time to come.

This places my work in contrast to other examinations of deindustrialisation. For example, Simon Charlesworth (1999) charts the responses to rapid deindustrialisation in Northern England, and the strategies his interviewees employ to deal with this new social order. Or, in Mollona's (2009) ethnography of the steel industry in Sheffield, workers learn to deal with the transformation from an industry which dominated the city and provided work to a majority of the population, so a situation where employment is much more piecemeal, and although the industry continues, it does so in a drastically altered version of its former self.

For oil the situation is somewhat different. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the proceeds from this industry allowed the Conservative governments of the 1980s to fund a widespread programme of deindustrialisation and instigate a new set of relations between state, capital and worker. But more than this, oil differs in that its fortunes have always seemed to hard to predict, and even in times of retraction there very infrequently exists the sense that the industry is in a state of rapid decline. While the 'end of oil' is a recognised temporal marker, and interlocutors were aware that the industry was bound by geologic and social limits, the timescales in which oil work was imagined meant that an overriding sense that oil would last for 'long enough' prevailed.

This has important implications for the kind of 'stuckedness' discussed in this chapter. This is not merely a sense of decline, abandonment, or erosion, experienced as emanating top-down, but rather a facet of the oil industry which is recognised as central to the way in which it operates and thus something to which one can become skilled at navigating. This implies that this kind of 'stuckedness', a momentary blip or a regular, cyclical instability is one which can be managed and insured against. This reading rejects structural accounts, and places the responsibility for managing this turbulence at the feet of individual workers.

'Establishing connection'

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In this section I examine the specific ways in which oil has 'connected' the region to global networks of oil production. While at various times North East Scotland has been presented as a particularly remote region, I show how it has, in fact, been connected to other places through specific and intense networks of relation. The development of the oil industry fostered unique and vibrant new connections to other sites of resource production around the world. These new connections generate, in turn, a whole range of mobilities, temporal and spatial rhythms, and distinct separations of onshore and offshore worlds, all of which become valued features of oil work.

Using anthropological literature on 'remoteness' I then discuss the political, material, cultural ways in which oil is held at a remove, and the implications of this for the construction of the onshore and offshore.

I then move on to discuss the ways in which certain mobilities, temporal and spatial rhythms, distinct separations of offshore and onshore worlds are strived for and become a commonly understood and valued way of life associated with oil work - and how these patterns become familiar and accustomed to. The movement between a space of home which is associated with rest, family, expression of the gains generated through work, and meeting of obligation; and a space of work which is valued for its variety of experience, constant difference, and autonomy.

A co-dependence where offshore becomes associated with difference and change, and onshore is imagined as a carefully managed stillness. The ways in which oil work and life as a whole becomes accustomed to - Frank and other interlocutors play around with the combinations of work/home but the general arrangement is valued and a marker of a standard quality of life - the combination of onshore and offshore life make for a 'life worth living'. Mobilities are the everyday experiential and agentive acts which take place in a wider context of connection/remoteness. I still think it's important to engage with mobilities here because these journeys are somewhere between a daily commute and a long term migration - they act as markers of success and form a crucial organising idea around which livelihoods are constructed, drawing together ideas of agentive labour, self-created and carefully managed livelihoods, but also create a distinct temporal and spatial separation of home and work. (Underlining the sense of personal creativity and agency in making idealised futures - harking back to Aidan's concern in introduction with understanding his success as self-generated). While in some ethnographic contexts (particularly anthropological studies of migration) movement becomes associated with hope in that through mobility one can move out of a place or time of crisis (e.g. Osella and Osella (2003), Pine 2014, Narotzsky and Besnier (2014)), here mobilities and movements associated with oil form an everyday base for social reproduction, and the desire is for the continuation of these routine movements.

While it is possible to challenge the idea of the North East coast as a particularly remote or disconnected region, the important point here is that the development of oil led to a sense that the area and its inhabitants were now connected to potent networks of production.

As discussed in Chapter 2, prior to the establishment of the UK oil industry in the early 1970s, North East Scotland was generally considered to be going through a period of slow decline. With the gradual closure of many small local industries and the transformation of fishing and farming, now requiring smaller workforces, it became increasingly difficult to find ways of making a living. Many left the area in search of work elsewhere. At the same time, the geographical, economic, and cultural 'remoteness' of the area and the lack of alternative large-scale industry meant few opportunities for employment, spurring outward migration.

Although often considered the epitome of 'remote', the North East of Scotland and the Highlands had, in fact, very vibrant and complex connections to global networks of production and trade, often via the sea (McCall Howard (2012), Nadel-Klein (2003)). The North Sea has always accommodated dense trade networks (Hein and Couling 2020), and the importance of fishing and shipping work, in addition to the prominent role played by Scots in the British Empire (Devine 2011) show that rather than the chronic disconnection which is often supposed, these areas were dense with national and global connection.

However, North East Scotland's apparent 'remoteness' and state of apparent disconnection also led to the British oil industry utilising it as an onshore base. The distance from the traditional centres of industry and corresponding radical workplace politics of central Scotland appealed to incoming oil companies who sought to establish a new industry without the antagonistic workplace politics which were a hallmark of British industrial relations at the time. Saxer and Anderson (2019:140) suggest it can be 'economically useful' to categorise certain areas as 'remote'. In the period immediately prior to the establishment of the oil industry, this was certainly the case as by emphasising the remoteness of the North East of Scotland from the industrial legacies of other regions, a new industry with a novel form of industrial relations was founded.

The establishment of the oil industry saw the emergence of new sets of connections. Most obviously North East Scotland found itself increasingly intertwined with places and patterns of global oil production. Initial relationships with American oil companies took precedence as American drilling experts were central to the development of deep-sea oil deposits. But, as the industry progressed and as local expertise grew in its own right, so Aberdeen came to be considered a centre of oil knowledge, meaning that highly-skilled workers developed their own connections to global sites of oil production. Eddie's account in chapter 2, for example, attests to the diversity of these connections, working, as he did, in most parts of the world in which oil production occurs. Therefore from a position of relative 'remoteness' from centres of economic, industrial, political power, the establishment and development of the oil industry led to the region developing new connections to global networks of energy production, partly bypassing the centres of power from which it had been distant.

More immediate relationships in the region also went through significant upheaval. While connection to the sea through fishing and shipping had always been a central feature of life in North East Scotland, the oil production infrastructures made for a transformed connection. Nancy Couling (2020) describes the process of establishing widespread fixed infrastructures at sea, the development of which created sites of permanency to which workers develop certain attachments. These new offshore places offer entry into vibrant and diverse networks of work and sociality, drawing together various collections of people and technologies from around

the world in a bounded space. Alongside the valued separation of the onshore and offshore, it is this variety, connection, and sociality that is so commonly at the centre of positive conceptualisations of offshore oil work.

The basis of these new connections are, however, very specific and usually limited to a few particular uses. Couling (2020:21) notes that this 'urbanisation of the sea' leads to the development of 'specialist spaces,' which tend to be restricted in function. In addition to this, the "specialised nature and distance from settlement areas [of offshore spaces] prevents organic contact. […] Specialist knowledge and skills are required to enter these realms on an individual basis, and therefore the ocean takes on an abstract, remote status" (Couling 2020:21). The kind of engagements made possible through these connections to oil networks are on the one hand open-ended and diverse in that workers enter into complex and extensive technological and social networks as they go offshore, but they are also bounded by the nodal form and specificity and exclusivity of offshore development.

Saxer and Anderson (2019), in critiquing Harm et al's (2014) suggestion that remoteness essentially constitutes a way of being rather than a physical property, emphasise the continuing importance of geographical distance and inaccessibility as a core feature of remoteness. I would add that in addition to particular geographies inducing a sense of remoteness, the materiality of work on the sea generally, its temporal patterns, and the infrastructures of extraction specifically, add further complexity to the particular form of remoteness. The exclusive and difficult to access infrastructures, as well as isolated hydrocarbon deposits, located in deep water with often poor meteorological and oceanic conditions, and in increasingly scattered and limited reservoirs requires development of new technologies and specific expertise. Therefore the material, physical, geographic and geological qualities of oil in the UKCS are drawn upon to create a certain political condition of remoteness, as well as scarcity and precarity. The difficulty and cost of producing North Sea oil means it has always been presented as a disincentive for oil companies to produce, thus giving the impression that they might leave at any moment. In other words consideration of the materialities of resource production in this context are vital to understanding the particular form of remoteness present here (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014). Therefore the ways in which remoteness or connectivity are conceptualised must take into account the various scales and diverse material conditions of what these relationships consist of.

Anthropological accounts of work have often sought to emphasise the fluid boundaries between work and other aspects of life (e.g. Mollona 2009, Prentice 2012, Bear et al. 2015). By contrast, my ethnography shows that oil work is given meaning through its connections and contrasts to life onshore and to other forms of making a living. For example, oil workers in the 1970s and 1980s experienced the new industry as a means of extending and amplifying already present masculine ethics; at the same time, workers' 'inherent' competencies and knowhow, developed prior to their picking up oil work, was considered central to being successful in the industry. In addition, as I showed in the previous chapter, the dynamics of oil worker households have come to find form around the patterns and rhythms of oil work. In this sense Narotzky and Besnier's (2014) claim that economic life is inseparable from the whole of life holds true. However, the materialities of oil, the distance and remoteness of the places of work from home, and the exclusivity of

possible engagements with the ocean give work in the industry a much more binary quality. Despite the diversity and variety of oil jobs, one is either at work offshore or not. Therefore, the spaces of onshore and offshore and their associated temporalities, ethics, and imaginations are clearly demarcated and easily maintained as distinct. This interplay of simultaneous desire for separation and connection between spaces of work and home gives this constellation a unique dynamic.

Rebecca Prentice (2012:402) describes an 'occupational multiplicity' among her Trinidadian garment worker interlocutors, holding, as they do, a range of jobs at once, including factory work, piece work done at home, and so on. In the case of Scottish oil, though, the remoteness of the region, the material and geographical conditions of offshore work, and the dominance of oil work create the conditions for an 'occupational singularity.' The exceptionality of oil work through its unique and valued patterns and ethics, plus the material constraints which make the places of work exclusive, make for a conceptualisation of oil work as superior and irreplaceable. Again the material, geographical and historical conditions of oil production in Scotland come together to create this particular sense of dependancy.

Returning to Anderson and Saxer's definition of 'remoteness' then, we can see that there are topological (as in phenomenological) and topographical (as in geographic) elements to the ways in which the region has been, and is, portrayed as remote. But in addition to this the materiality of oil and the infrastructures and technologies which allow for oil production add an additional layer to the construction of remoteness, necessitating, as they do, the division between spaces and times of onshore and offshore life. This then makes for a form of work which entails journeys to workplaces which could be considered remote in their specificity and inaccessibility, from onshore spaces which, in their own way, have also been constructed as remote through their highly specific connections to some places, and sense of disconnection from others.

Oil Mobilities

The relationship between these different scales of remoteness and connection can be further understood in relation to literature on mobilities. Mobilities theorists posit that by examining movement on various scales and over long periods of time, and by paying attention to the meaning and importance of these movements, we can learn something about dominant values and ethics in a particular place or for a particular group of people (Cresswell 2010, Salazar and Smart 2011). Further, Adey (2006), drawing on the work of John Urry (2000), uses the dichotomy of 'mobilities' and 'moorings'. First, he suggests that to an analytical focus on mobilities means focusing on differentiation - the notion that when something moves, something else must necessarily stay still, or at least in relative stillness to that which is termed to be mobile. Those aspects of one's life which are deemed to be relatively immobile provide friction, "something to push off from" (Adey 2006:86). Therefore, there exists a relationship, perhaps of reliance, but at least of dynamism between that which is mobile and that which is immobile (Cresswell 2012). In the case of North Sea oil work, the dynamism and variety of the offshore space is contrasted with the relative stillness of the onshore. The onshore comes to be associated with a certain maintained stillness - 'projects' which can be nurtured and become a focus for time and energy. These become the realised 'ends' of work - a solid, stable, representation of the efforts of work and time spent away.

In addition to this Creswell (2010) underlines the sense that questions of mobility are often also questions of agency, about who is able to manage and take control of their movements and how they are able to do so. This is a crucial element in understanding the values associated with making decisions about the balance between work and home in this context - the fine tuning that Frank engages in with his moves between different roles within the industry speak to a common theme of oil work as being based on self-determination and skilful decision making. Rather than onshore life being a neutral other to work offshore, it becomes, for many, a 'managed stillness' - a careful and considered construction of a sphere of home which requires active skills to maintain.

There are distinct commonalities and overlaps here with studies of labour migration in that a complex division emerges between spaces of generation of wealth, and spaces of obligation and exhibition of wealth. But where so much of the anthropology of migration literature focuses on the way in which hope is often placed in the idea of physically escaping difficult circumstances, in moving away from them in order to seek a better life elsewhere, here something different occurs. Hope is placed in the potential for these regular movements between spaces of work and home to continue on into the future, allowing for the maintenance of the two distinct ethical spheres. Narotzky and Besnier (2014:S11) explain that:

> "In many societies, people equate hope with displacement in the belief that geographical mobility may translate into social mobility, it is hoped, in the right direction (e.g. Cole 2014; Palomera 2014; Pine 2014' Villareal 2014). In these situations migration can be understood as a material projection in to a future that is located somewhere else."

Oil work doesn't entail the same long-term displacement involved in the above accounts of migratory labour, but nevertheless still places the continued mobilities involved in oil work at the centre of attempts at creating a good life. The future here is similarly associated with mobility, but of a regular and fixed type which allows for the maintenance of the onshore/offshore divide. And, in concert with other readings of migratory labour (Osella and Osella (2003), Pine (2014)) a divide emerges between spaces and times of labour and spaces and times of 'home' (or non-work) and the exhibition or consumption of the fruits of one's labour.

Unlike migratory movements, these movements are less than a long-term displacement, but are more than a standard daily commute. This co-dependence, of offshore as associated with difference and change, and the onshore as a carefully managed stillness become central to aspired for ways of life. As this configuration becomes accustomed-to workers often aim to 'tweak' or fine-tune the elements of their work and life so as to find an ideal balance. Frank, as mentioned above, had attempted to do so on numerous occasions.

Beginning his marine career as an officer in the merchant navy Frank very much enjoyed his work and came to particularly appreciate the separation of work and home. However after some time he found that the 4 month long trips aboard the ship meant being away from home for too long. Frank then moved to work as an officer aboard oil supply ships, which paid slightly more than the merchant navy position, and, more importantly, involved a shift rotation of month-on month-off which Frank felt was a happy medium.

After a few years of work onboard various oil supply ships, mainly in the North Sea but also further afield, Frank again felt that a career change was needed. Partly due to the stresses of piloting boats in the violent wintertime North Sea, but also due to the occasional gaps in employment when his ship had no work and was in dock, Frank decided to move to the onshore management side of the oil supply shipping industry. This was the office-based role mentioned above, with the long daily commute to and from Aberdeen. Describing this as a 'compliance' role, Frank was involved in managing a fleet of ships, both writing procedural policy and, through periodic inspections, ensuring it was being practised onboard the ships. There was still an element of global travel – including trips to the Middle East and East Asia - but this was sporadic and specific, with the vast majority of the work being centred in the office in Aberdeen. It was during his time in this role that the highly-valued qualities of offshore oil work came into stark relief and Frank came to realise the extent to which he valued the patterns and mobilities of offshore work.

Frank explained that the elements of his offshore work which he most valued were the diversity of experience at work, the constantly changing set of daily tasks, and the way in which this type of work requires collaboration between a team of people with different skills. Offshore work is often lauded as being highly varied and is placed in contrast with the extreme mundanity and predictability of office work. This was a common topic of discussion amongst interlocutors, with many contrasting their "hands-on" work with the routine of office work, and the importance of being able to experience tangible effects of one's actions. Frank reflected positively on his first trip back after returning to sea:

> "I have now completed a month on this ship; we have made a lot of improvements to the ships'
> structures, we have taken on supplies, all that cargo, and two teams of specialists with their
> equipment, we have sailed the ship safely to Africa, helped to mark out the position for the drill ship,
> and transferred to that ship some of the cargo, we have looked after the ship and solved a few
> specific problems."

The sense of blurred boundaries between work and home in his onshore office work was amplified when, during his time in the office role, he applied for, and was granted, the right to set up a home-office and work one day per week at home. Rather than allowing for a less burdensome commute and thus more time at home, Frank found that it simply meant he worked longer into the evening and often at weekends. Central to his appreciation of offshore work, he then came to realise, was the clear separation between spaces and times of work and home:

> "At the end of my trip, I can hand over to my back-to-back and walk off the ship. I don't need to
> think again about anything to do with the ship until I go back up the gangway again. That is
> something you never get in an office environment.[…] With a whole month spreading ahead of me of
> time off, I feel like king of my own life."

Prior to the major downturn, the valuing of the distinct division between onshore and offshore worlds was often expressed most clearly by those workers who had taken on onshore office-based roles as part of their work, often for a temporary period in order to complete a particular project. Mick, the drilling supervisor mentioned in chapter 2 was asked to work in his company headquarters in Aberdeen on a new policy writing project, called upon because of his expertise on the fleet of rigs the company operated. Like Frank, Mick

found the daily routine unbearable, noting "seeing the same cars parked outside in the carpark every day." Mick, too, returned to sea as soon as possible after this period onshore and spent the rest of his career working offshore.

Generally then, oil workers attempt to find a particular working rhythm that they feel best suits their life as a whole, whether it be the shorter 2 to 3 week trips on platforms in the North Sea, or the longer shifts which come with working on ships. These attempts to balance different aspects of one's work and life, certainly in the period prior to the downturn, were spoken about as creative acts, carefully considered decisions which sought to create a valued way of life. Mobilities in this context come to act as symbolic markers of success, but are also important concrete acts which make work and onshore life mutually meaningful, the diverse and active offshore being held alongside the 'managed stillness' of the onshore. The example of Frank tweaking with the patterns of oil work in order to find an ideal balance corresponds to this. This is somewhat different from Aidan's attempts at developing skills 'around' the industry, which I discussed in chapter 3, and his learning about how to manage work and one's career. By contrast, Frank's actions here are less about skill in securing work and more to do with trying to incorporate work in one's life in a meaningful sense. But both are deemed to be expressions of creative control in regard to one's life and work.

Without the distinct spatial and temporal division offshore work allows for, Frank's life at home had stopped making sense to him. But by altering the kinds of work he engaged in he eventually came to find a balance that felt accommodating of the various elements which made work and life as a whole worthwhile. These attempts to bring one's working life into coordination with other particularly important elements of life are present in various ethnographies - Millar's rubbish collectors seeking coherence between flexible work and complicated personal lives; Gill's (2001) Japanese day labourers aiming for autonomy from mainstream labour regimes; or Tsing's mushroom pickers searching for a sense of 'freedom' through work. However as we see in the next section the specific connections which are developed to oil are fragile and dependent upon a buoyant oil price and plentiful work. When this dissolves the whole ways of life which are built around oil become unobtainable.

'Stuck onshore' - the impact of the downturn

Steve was a familiar face in the Three Kings pub in Cullen and usually sat quietly at the end of the bar, either alone or accompanied by a family member. It was common to see oil workers who had just returned home having a celebratory drink and recounting tales from their recent trips offshore, before then disappearing again for a few weeks, back to the rigs. Steve, however, was increasingly present on weekend nights in the pub, not vanishing back to work the way it was common for oil workers to do. As I got to know Steve and his family, I learned that these more frequent encounters in the Three Kings and the extended periods at home were connected to the lack of work resulting from the global downturn in oil price and deep instability in the industry since 2014. Steve's work on a well-intervention vessel, a ship which assists in the development or maintenance of subsea oil wells, had become more sporadic with companies putting new well development projects on hold until the hoped-for return of higher oil prices. Usually working a month-on, month-off shift rotation on his ship, the periods of time onshore had gradually increased from 4 to 5 to 6

weeks and, occasionally, Steve had found himself without work for months at a time. With few other options for work, either offshore or locally, there was little else to do apart from waiting out the downturn and hoping that his ship would set out to work at sea again before too long.

As I began fieldwork in 2016, the global oil industry was going through a period of severe downturn. Although frequent booms and busts were recognised as a common feature of work in the industry, none of my interlocutors had even experienced as sharp a decline in the price of oil, or the resultant instability and precarity of work which followed in 2015/16.

Many of my interlocutors were made redundant, or had at least been at risk of losing their job during this period. This took various forms. Some, notably those who worked on short-term contracts, were suddenly without work, receiving calls to say that future trips offshore were cancelled. Others were given a few weeks or months leeway and, after going through rounds of voluntary and then compulsory redundancies, many received small compensatory payments. Many, like Steve, experienced a long drawn-out process whereby work gradually became more and more sporadic before eventually disappearing altogether. A small number of people I met during fieldwork had made preparations for an expected slump in the industry, by putting money aside. But regardless of the way in which this instability was experienced, most of my interlocutors experienced periods of time 'stuck' at home, waiting for a call from an employer or, at the very least, found themselves 'stuck' in their position at work, unable to make career moves they might have anticipated in more 'normal' times. Whether there had been a forewarning of redundancy or not, the crisis was so widespread there was little those who were forewarned could do in regard to finding new work outside the industry.

As the downturn took hold a shift occurred whereby the understanding of oil work as allowing for creative attempts at making a life for oneself gave way to feelings of entrapment. The complex range of attachments to oil and the perceived normality of the lives built around this work were suddenly missing the key component of regular well-paid offshore work. This led to a sense that the lives which had been constructed around oil were suddenly impossible to maintain, but with no other way of replicating these qualities for many the only option was to wait out the crisis and hope that the oil price recovered.

Recent anthropological interest in experiences of waiting (Janeja and Bandak 2018; Jeffrey 2008) stuckness (Hage 2009; Jefferson et al. 2019) and remoteness/disconnection (Saxer and Andersson 2019; Harms et al. 2014) attempt to describe processes whereby projects of work and life are disrupted for various reasons and have to be put on hold. These ethnographies underscore the idea that stuckedness/waiting is not solely a product of external factors but also relate to an ethical understanding of how life is meant to progress, and what happens when this expectation falters. s.

In the case of North Sea oil and the crisis which resulted from the drop in oil price numerous factors came together to make this a moment in which these qualities of waiting, stuckness, and connection/disconnection gained new relevance. As the downturn took hold and jobs became scarce many workers felt that in an area so dominated by the industry their only option was to wait out the crisis in hope that the oil price would

rebound. This became a moment in which my interlocutors reflected on their relationship to this type of work, often feeling a great sense of powerlessness in directing their own futures, a stark contrast with the 'fine-tuning' and attempts at generating an ideal working life as mentioned above. And indeed contrasting with the dominant narratives around oil work as an individual pursuit reliant upon one's own ability and skill in reading the industry as discussed in chapter 3.

This is then a kind of heightened ethical moment (Zigon 2007) during which notions of appropriate and achievable ethical self-hoods come under great scrutiny. The volatility of oil, its propensity to boom *and* bust means that the promise of a soon recovered oil price and resultant increase in jobs stems any impetus to action. The volatility of oil encourages practices of waiting in moments of uncertainty. And I now turn to ethnographic material for a view of how this played out among my interlocutors.

Although Steve's experience during the downturn was relatively extreme, it was not by any means uncommon. Steve had worked for 9 years on same ship as able-bodied seaman, which entailed all the deck-work which would be involved in any large vessel on the sea - dealing with onloading and offloading cargo, maintenance work, assisting in mooring the vessel in port etc. However Steve's ship happened to be related to the oil industry - providing assistance to other rigs or ships which were establishing new subsea wells. Although his own work was not significantly different from that of an able-bodied seaman on any large ocean-going vessel, his ship was also usually home to a second project team - e.g. teams of drillers, ROV pilots and technicians, or ocean surveyors. As with Frank, Steve had begun his seafaring career in the merchant navy but had then moved to work in oil on account of the better pay and shorter periods of time at sea.

At the point that it became clear that there would be no work in the medium term, Steve considered his options in regard to finding work. One possible alternative was to seek work at one of the new onshore wind-turbine landing sites dotted along the coast. The pay was not dissimilar from his previous work; however, the working pattern of 17 continuous days at work followed by only 4 off dissuaded Steve from taking up a position. He also talked disparagingly of those who took up jobs at nearby food factories, notably the local soup and biscuit factories which were commonly held up as an example of very low-quality work. For Steve, not working at all was preferable to having to take on employment of this kind.

In order to get through the period of unemployment Steve and his family relied on the income of his wife who worked two part-time jobs, as a cleaner and a cook in a local primary school. In addition to this, they occasionally had to 'dip into savings' which they had built-up a few years previously when both were in full-time employment. In addition to having to find enough money to 'get by', Steve now also had to ensure that his offshore certifications were up-to-date so he would be ready to apply for any upcoming jobs. In fact, he took a number of college courses in a variety of skills, including offshore firefighting, heli-deck and lifeboat training, and banksman slinger training for crane-operations. In total, Steve spent over £8000 on these courses. *"The company used to pay for them before,"* he explained, *"[but] once you got made redundant, to keep yourself available to get the jobs you want you've got to spend the money."*

Eventually, after months 'stuck' onshore, broken by the occasional week or two of work found through an employment agency, Steve's ship secured a new drilling project and he returned to his usual role as able-bodied seaman. However a deep sense of trepidation that this work too might dry up remained. *"You can't afford to say you're back for good when you know the ship's going to get laid up for a few months. You're going to be home again looking for work,"* Steve mused. Whereas before he had experimented with agency work in hope of both better wages but also more constant employment, his goal now was to find a permanent job, and if the position arose he would consider returning to the more regular, but less well paid work of standard merchant navy shipping.

Rob's experience of being made redundant was somewhat more clear-cut than Steve's gradual disappearance of work. After having worked as a drill-bit technician for a large multinational engineering company for almost a decade, Rob and his colleagues were informed that significant redundancies were to be expected in the coming months. First a company-wide meeting was called where it was announced layoffs would be made.

> *"They spoke to ab'dy, nae just me, but the whole company and said 'look, we dinna want to be dein' this, but it's come to the stage where we've got to, to be still competitive we've got to really let some folk go.[…] There was nae two boots, they gave us a good warning like"*

Older members of staff nearer retirement were offered redundancy packages first. This was followed by a point-based assessment of the rest of the staff drawing on previous regular workplace audits. Rob understands that his 'computer work', the process whereby detailed reports on completed projects were submitted to the company, was less complete than that of other colleagues and on this basis he was let go: *"It's nae fault of mine. I never did anything wrang at work to get paid off. Ken, it's just part and parcel of fit went on in the North Sea."*

Registering for job-seekers' allowance for 6 weeks after losing his offshore job, Rob quickly returned to work as a labourer for a small local construction firm, a job he had held prior to working in oil. These jobs tend to be difficult to find as many school-leavers work as apprentices in the construction industry before using this work to find employment offshore. However through family connections to the company Rob was able to find regular and stable work.

Another interlocutor, although in a different sector of the industry, had a similar experience. Gary had initially trained as an electronics engineer and found work in the workshop of a large multinational oil company in the outskirts of Aberdeen, hoping to 'get his foot in the door' before using this as a gateway to offshore work. However, number of health issues meant that Gary was not permitted to work offshore. Instead he began building a career in the drilling technology industry, first as a technician building high complex drill-bits, and latterly as a workshop supervisor managing a team of technicians and organising the completion and deployment of projects to rigs all around the North Sea.

Gary made the move from his basic technician position to the supervisory role shortly before the downturn hit.

*"From the day I started at the company it was like "Ok, everything's busy, there's lots of
jobs on the board." And as the jobs went off the board no more went on. [...]I thought,
well, it's Christmas time, maybe things slow down, and I hadn't done that kind of work
before. It was always manufacturing or repair I'd done, so I thought "maybe operations
slow down at Christmas."[...] And then January, February came, nothing changed. March
came and we   got a job, so I thought "ok, so it's picking up in March." There was 2/3 jobs
then. And then nothing for 5 months. [...] There's literally a board on the wall, and it was full   of
stuff. Things that were going to be happening, dates, and they'd shifted a few times
before the Christmas [...] We knew work was bad. And you just watched the board, slowly,
line by line getting deleted."*

After widespread redundancies were announced Gary's line manager managed to secure an extra 8 weeks of work in order that he could look for another job.

*"The guy basically said 'look for work. Just take the money.' He said 'we've got a few
tasks we need you to do but do them towards the end of the 8 weeks. But meanwhile just
look for work.' They were pretty good that way. They were just trying to get us extra
money.[...]And he was applying for jobs as well, the division manager. He was trying to get
out of there as well. He knew it was going downhill."*

During the last few weeks at work Gary had also used his time to apply for a teacher training course, making use of a government scheme which aimed to support oil workers' transition into alternative careers. However during the interview for the position Lenny felt the transition was too drastic, saying *"I worked on tools, not people…I just decided halfway through the interview, I'm not going to get this. And even if I come back again, I'm not sure I want it."*

At the same time as applying for the teacher training role Gary had registered for jobseekers allowance, but found that the amount of money offered too small to meet the various outgoings of the family, and found the process of reporting each week to the job-centre deeply disheartening. Nevertheless Gary had continued to apply for various jobs:

*"I'd take anything, you know. I'm well aware that minimum wage meant 10 and a half
thousand pounds a year, which is more than nothing…I'm not too proud to work at the
meat factory, anywhere, if it meant more money. [...] So I was always trying to find that full-
time job. But I mean I tried everywhere, I applied to Tesco, Asda, everything, shops even in
Aberdeen. You name it, I applied.[...] I mean I applied for 146 jobs or something, in
that first 9 months. I applied for everything. I went for it all."*

He still continued to apply for the few oil industry jobs that were advertised during the downturn, but with no success:

*"136 people had applied for that one electronic technician job. Now I remember applying
for jobs [prior to the downturn] and like 20 was how much would normally apply. [...] It's
just crazy amounts. And you're up against that for everything."*

Gary eventually found an informal job with an old friend cleaning and repairing guttering on houses in the local area. Despite the very sporadic nature of this work Gary found that his small income in combination with his wife's return to full-time work as a nurse meant they were able to cover all their household outgoings. This 'fill-in' work allowed Gary to wait out downturn until realistic opportunities of return to the oil industry reemerged.

The experiences of Steve, Rob, and Gary were common to many at the height of the downturn. It was a drawn out process of becoming aware of instability in the industry, being made redundant followed by patching together various onshore jobs with an increase in the work of their partners, and often a reliance on savings which had been built up in the days in which oil work was plentiful. Some of my interlocutors did manage to remain in oil work throughout the downturn. For example, although Frank, Ben, and Craig, had all faced moments in which they sensed their careers were under threat, they remained in their working roles through the crisis. Nonetheless, among this group, too, planned-for career moves were put on hold. Ben had envisaged moving from his work in the Aberdeen workshop to an offshore role, but decided to wait until the industry was less turbulent. Craig had considered moving to a career outside oil, perhaps work on a surveying ship, but also decided to remain in his post on the FPSO until work became more readily available.

Regardless of whether redundancy was experienced during this period or not, most of these men suddenly found that the careers and wider livelihoods that they had been attempting to build around work in oil had suddenly been thrown into confusion. The 'fine-tuning' and careful curation of projects of life based on the rhythms of plentiful oil work had been thrown into array, and despite the widely held knowledge that the oil industry regularly corresponded to periods of boom and bust, nothing of this magnitude had been experienced before. As one interlocutor put it,

> "Those opportunities, when you're in them, you think that this is just the norm and that will continue…in a buoyant market that's been buoyant your whole career.[I'd] never seen anything else. […] 2008 had a slight dip in activity, but nothing much, just a slight blip and it got back on track very quickly."

Jake, a young technician who had worked on dive support vessels prior to the crisis neatly summarised his experiences during this time:

> "I'm not even on hold. I'm not on anything. I'm just hoping. I'm just quietly hoping that I'll get another shout[…]'cause all of a sudden you feel like 'right I've finally got this sorted, and I'm at the level that I want to be at, and I know that I'll make roughly this much in a year, and I'll have roughly this much time off in a year,' and you start getting a bit of a plan going and then all of a sudden its gets turned all upside down, so yeah it's kinda… it's not a secure kind of job to be in though. And in a way I'm kinda glad I've learnt this lesson now rather than when I've got all those commitments. I'd rather learn the lesson now that I can't just solely rely on offshore because it can just finish just like that."

Conclusion

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The way in which the downturn played out largely served to highlight the particular forms of 'connection' which lives lived in tandem with the oil industry allow for. In some ways the crisis constituted a 'return of remoteness' (Saxer and Anderson 2019) as so many of the issues which had impacted the area prior to the establishment of the oil industry reemerged or, with the suspension of oil work, were reassessed. Although a sense of fragility existed around the embeddedness of the oil industry in the region, it was generally understood that one could insulate oneself from the underlying economic pressures of the region through a career in oil.

Among Ben and Aidan, the protagonists of chapter 3, a common topic of conversation was the sense of failure that, in their view, characterised those schoolmates who had not been able to leave the area or progress to 'successful' forms of work. Remaining at home after leaving secondary school and working in what they deemed unappealing jobs - in care work, retail, or indeed in being unemployed - was seen as a definition of failure and stagnancy. Therefore even in times when oil work was plentiful, wealth was viewed as being an individualised characteristic. Indeed, the region as a whole, and especially the small coastal towns, were not seen as prosperous or affluent; rather, it was accepted that oil work could temper the general decline which was perceived to persist despite the existence of the industry.

The crisis, then, served to reemphasise the strong associations of the onshore with a certain stasis on various levels. However in contrast to the carefully 'managed stillness' mentioned above which was placed in valued contrast to the ethics of offshore work, the stillness associated with the onshore during the downturn had strongly negative connotations. Furthermore, the loss of power and agency over the choices available to workers throughout this period, the sense that the downturn foreclosed on the ability to make beneficial career moves highlighted the fragility of the connection to oil and the wide array of elements which rely upon this connection.

This also links back to anthropology of migration literature, especially Narotzsky and Besnier (2014:S13) and their discussion of how immobility can easily translate into a sense of worthlessness. Aidan and Ben both regarded acquaintances who had been unable to either find work in oil or leave the area, but were still at home, as 'failures'. In this sense immobility, or becoming 'stuck' at home, does inform ideas of success, thus equating movement away with hope or progress.

The downturn, then, resulted in a number of interlinked experiences. It brought a return of the 'remoteness' that initially drew oil companies to the area, now exacerbated as oil came to dominate work in the area and drew labour away from other smaller industries. It led to a 'stalling' of the mobilities which generated the desired division between spaces of work and home, and a collapse of the onshore and the offshore. And it generated feelings of 'stuckness' as the lack of alternative ways of meeting the affordances and lifestyles associated with oil work generate feelings of powerlessness.

The historical legacies of those initial decisions around the establishment of the industry, and the aim of founding an industry which would break with industrial legacies is again shown to be very important, as the area's lack of other alternative forms of work, originally a draw for the oil companies, now means a dearth of

other employment opportunities. This particular dynamic, the retraction of connection to the oil industry allows us to examine the composition of this arrangement - as it disappears, even momentarily, we are able to observe the ways in which oil does or does not become embedded in the region and in the lives of those connected to this form of work.

The different ways in which the crisis was experienced as a discordance between not being able to access oil work, or for those less directly impacted, not being able to fine-tune their work and life as Frank does for fear of faltering and losing work. With no other obvious ways of replicating the range of elements which make oil work valuable the only option was to wait out the downturn in expectation of a more stable situation. This was, to some degree, experienced as a 'return of remoteness' and sense of disconnection similar to the sense of place prior to oil. The stalling of the generative mobilities which give home and work their distinct but mutually constitutive qualities also led to much self-reflection on how these features of oil work coalesce and make 'waiting' the obvious option.

Conclusion - *"There's a lot of work in the North Sea, aye. They a'y say it's finished but it's nae finished yet"*

Eventually, in around 2018, it came to be understood that the worst of the downturn had passed. A common refrain at the time was that 'things won't go back to how they were before,' reflecting both an understanding that the oil price would likely remain much lower than it had done prior to the crisis, and also that work would remain uncertain and less plentiful. The upheaval of the downturn, and the questioning of relationships to the industry which the moment prompted, in many ways resulted in very little change. The vast majority of my interlocutors returned to their old jobs, or to work in very similar positions, but the uncertainties brought to the fore by the crisis had impacted the ways in which they approached work. For most, the previous goal of finding an ideal job and corresponding combination with home life had given way to an emphasis on finding work which was seen as stable and would last through any further turbulence in the industry, the strived for 'managed stillness' now being sought at work.

Steve eventually returned to his able-seaman position, the trips now regular after his ship secured a number of projects in the North Sea. Gary was offered a role as tool technician in a new start-up drilling company in Aberdeen. Ben retained his position in the ROV workshop in Aberdeen and was even promoted to a more senior role offshore as subsea projects began again with the recovery of oil price.

For some the disruptions of the downturn were taken as a signal to leave the industry for good. After being made redundant Rob returned to work in the local construction industry and was certain that he would never return to oil. Loss of work during the downturn meant that he was forced to return his recently purchased car, and he very nearly also defaulted on the mortgage payments on his house. The pain of these experiences meant that Rob decided not to try and return to work offshore:

> *"I'm probably a bit scared incase you go offshore and I'm left in the same boat again. I could go offshore for a year and then the oil might tak' a hit again, I'm back to square one. […] I couldna hack it again.[…] Like I say to ya, I havena thought about going offshore since I've been awa'. It hisna crossed ma mind about going back offshore to be honest. I probably wouldna be worried now, if it never happened again. I've got a stable job, I've got money coming in."*

A small number of other interlocutors were able to harness the uncertainty of the downturn and use this to their advantage - for example, after being made redundant from his maintenance role at the beginning of the downturn, Jim found work through an agency which replaced permanent platform staff with ad-hoc generic labourers, and he therefore found a new alternative career path through the downturn, 'hopping around' various platforms carrying out a range of maintenance and surveying work. He bolstered this new working pattern by opening a small construction business at home during his time onshore. This was explicitly developed as an insurance against further uncertainty in the oil industry and the prospect of another wave of redundancies.

Frank's initial forays into office work mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter hinted at the unease of pairing of unfamiliar onshore work with lives which had been carefully built around the patterns of oil. This mismatch between a life which centred on certain forms of masculine labour, complex ethical self-hoods, and the material conditions of offshore life speak to themes which run throughout the thesis. My interlocutors all attempted to build lives for themselves which brought together these key elements which made oil work a valued form of labour.

Frank's discomfort at being away from the sea in some ways foreshadowed the wider sense of 'stuckness' that the downturn would bring. The moment of crisis led to an unravelling of the carefully constructed ethical arrangements, and subsequent processes of self-reflection in the wake of the downturn on which much of my ethnography is based.

The experiences of crisis discussed above may also provide clues as to how the looming 'end of oil' might unfold. As the oil industry in the UK North Sea begins the long and complex process of coming to an end, this will likely be an extended and varied process with overlapping and conflicting timeframes. Decommissioning of many of the older platforms and rigs has begun and the majority of these operations will take place over the next decade. At the same time new deposits, of varying size and significance, are still being discovered and developed, some of which have the potential to produce oil and gas for decades to come.

Alongside these changes in the make-up of the oil industry itself the renewable energy industry continues to establish itself in Scotland and may allow for some degree of transition of labour away from oil. Many of my interlocutors have already worked in all three 'industries' - oil, decommissioning *and* renewables - either through career shifts to different sectors, or because the tools and technologies they work with (e.g. ROVs or subsea surveillance technologies) are readily transferrable.

This all suggests that the end of oil and the transition away from oil work may be gradual, staggered, and mean that oil industry workers have increasingly varied careers in overlapping sectors of ocean based energy production. Therefore, the 'approaches' to oil discussed in the thesis - the cultivation of skills 'in' and 'around' work; the balancing of onshore and offshore times and spaces; the ability to 'read' the market and respond appropriately will all likely continue to be central organising features of energy work in the UK North Sea.

A large part of my thesis has been a concern with the ongoing attempts to make oil production in the North Sea as 'smooth' as possible. Thinking back to the work of Ferguson (2005 & 2006), Appel (2012 & 2019), Tsing (2004) my thesis began with an examination of how oil companies sought to create a new model of industrial work, as a break with the old, and as part of this process imagined an ideal environment for this venture in the old fishing communities of the North East. My work traces the legacies of this decision into the present, and thinks through how deep relationships to the affordances of this work bloom despite attempts to tamper them. Oil work might not generate communities of work in ways recognisable to those familiar with mining or manufacture. But the formation of complex webs of attachment to this industry raises

questions about the ability for capital to remove itself from claims made against it. People combine elements of their work and life together in complex ways to imagine ideal ways of living, and attempt to find avenues within their situation which might make these aspired to ways of life possible.

In the process of companies imagining industry in certain ideal terms, as smooth or unhindered, people, communities, and relationships go through transformations in relation to these aimed-for industrial models. Most evidently in the case of the development of Scottish oil this applies to forms of masculinity. The draw to the communities of the North East in the early days of oil rested on assumptions, I think largely correct assumptions, that local imaginations of work would provide little challenge to the planned operation of oil companies. But as the industry developed and changed, so too were the kinds of ideal worker 'smoothed' and tailored to new industry desire - brusque and assertive workplace identities were transformed over the course of the industry into a new, reconstituted worker identity. A focus on 'safety culture' with a changed management-worker relationship, newly aspired-to livelihoods, and transformed 'readings' of the industry. These changes were never uncontested, and never total - these masculinities bring together workplace relationships, new interactions with technology and tools, older forms of dominant masculinity, and new configurations of work as part of life as a whole. And very importantly, they are always questioned and part of a constant debate about the labour process. So not a 'smoothing' of a docile population of workers, but part of a messy process whereby different political, personal, material processes come into conflict in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

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