



# Migration as a source of inspiration

## *Pursuit of happiness*

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Degree Thesis for Fine Art, Bachelor of Fine Art

Degree program in Fine Art

Novia University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Jakobstad, Finland 2021

## BACHELOR'S THESIS

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Degree Programme: Bachelor of Fine Arts, Jakobstad

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Title: Migration as a source of inspiration. *Pursuit of happiness*.

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Date: 09.04.2021

Number of pages: 15

Appendices: 0

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### Abstract

The main topic of my thesis is migration. I have chosen it, because a large number of immigrants and refugees live in Finland. At the same time this subject is very personal for me, because I am an immigrant myself.

In my thesis I would like to take a look back how migration started, what can cause it, but also share my thoughts about it and the most important: by telling the story of my immigration and experience of meeting other immigrants, try to convince that it has one common goal, which according to me is happiness.

*Pursuit of happiness* is the practical part of my final work. It is a visual representation of reasons for migration. Through my works I want to persuade the viewers to consider if happiness can really be the main goal of migration - whether migrants are aware of it or not.

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Language: English

Key words: migration, happiness, sculpture, embroidery, goal

## EXAMENSARBETE

Författare: Anna Ewa Malinowska

Utbildning och ort: Bildkonst, Jakobstad

Handledare: Göran Torrkulla, Ulrika Ferm, Marika Holm

Titel: Migration som inspirationskälla. *Strävan efter lycka*.

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Datum: 09.04.2021

Sidantal: 15

Bilagor: 0

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### Abstract

Huvudämnet för min examensarbete är migration. Jag har valt det, eftersom ett stort antal invandrare och flyktingar bor i Finland. Samtidigt är detta ämne mycket personligt för mig eftersom jag själv är en invandrare.

I min uppsats skulle jag vilja titta tillbaka på hur migration började, vad som kan orsaka det, men också dela mina tankar om det och det viktigaste: genom att berätta historien om min migration och erfarenhet av att träffa andra invandrare, försök att övertyga om att det har ett gemensamt mål, vilket enligt mig är lycka.

*Strävan efter lycka* är den praktiska delen av mitt slutarbete. Det är en visuell representation av skälen till migration. Genom mina verk vill jag övertyga tittarna att överväga om lycka verkligen kan vara huvudmålet för migration - oavsett om migranter är medvetna om det eller inte.

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Språk: Engelska

Nyckelord: migration, lycka, skulptur, broderi, mål

# Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Marika Holm, Göran Torrkulla and Ulrika Ferm, my supervisors, for their guidance, advice and useful critiques of this research work.

I would also like to thank Svenska Kulturfonden. The stipendium I received from this institution made creating my practical part of my Thesis possible.

I am grateful to all friends and family members who put their faith in me and encouraged me to do better.

Finally, to my loving, caring and supportive fiancé, Martin: my deepest gratitude. The support you give me is priceless.

## **Table of contents**

|                           |    |
|---------------------------|----|
| 1 Introduction            | 1  |
| 2 Let me introduce myself | 3  |
| 3 Why migration?          | 6  |
| 4 Concept of hands in art | 9  |
| 5 Pursuit of happiness    | 11 |
| 5.1 Process               | 12 |
| 6 Conclusion              | 14 |
| Sources                   | 15 |

# 1 Introduction

From the ancient times people traveled around the globe to find a good place to live. A place where they were expecting to find everything to lead a happy and worthy life. At the beginning migration applied to tribes of “modern humans”<sup>(1)</sup>, which were traveling in order to find nourishment and shelter.

With the evolution of humankind there were gradually appearing new reasons for migration. People started to explore the world. Arabic, Chinese and European folks were going on voyages during which they traded goods, met new cultures and discovered new lands<sup>(2)</sup>.

With the appearance of religions missions started. Pilgrimages traveled to spread the words of their gods.

At the same time wandering bands of Nomads were travelling around the world. Some did it out of their own will and some were forced to it, from reasons like famine caused by poverty or banishment. There existed many different groups for example Romany, Swedish Tattare, Tinkers, Finnish Zigenare and Bedouins<sup>(3)</sup>.

Between the 16th and 19th century Atlantic slavery took place. During it around 10 to 12 millions of Africans were enslaved. In my opinion this was one of the most shameful kinds of migration, because no human should be a property of another person<sup>(4)</sup>.

With time migration started to transform more and more into a decision of an individual person and now each country can be its destination or origin.

In the present society migration is triggered by many different push and pull factors<sup>(5)</sup>. Examples of push factors are war, poverty and lack of services. As the pull factors we can count political stability in the destination country, more wealth and opportunities for study or work.

Even though the reasons for migration might be various, I think they have one common goal. From my standpoint it is happiness. However, it is worth noting that this goal can not always be achieved due to many different factors which I am going to present further in the text.

## 2 Let me introduce myself

As the subject of my thesis is connected to my life and experience, I felt that I would want to introduce myself and tell a bit about my childhood and teenage years, because I believe that those periods of my life indirectly caused my later immigration to Finland.

My name is Anna Ewa Malinowska, I'm an 24 year old illustrator and artist from Płock, Poland, who is currently living in Jakobstad, Finland.

I was born as the second youngest child in my family. I have seven siblings, two brothers and five sisters. Even though almost all my siblings are older than me, I will be the first person in my entire family to achieve a Bachelor's Degree. This fact makes me feel proud of myself, because there is a stereotype in Poland, in which unfortunately many people still believe. It says that families with many children are always pathological and none of the children will ever achieve anything in their lives.

However, here I am - living in a foreign country, speaking four languages and learning a fifth, working and finishing my studies simultaneously and living my life to the fullest. I think stereotypes are overrated and nothing should ever make us wonder if we have the abilities to do something that we always wanted and dreamed about.

My childhood wasn't as good as people thought it was. Our father was an alcoholic. He used physical, verbal, emotional and psychological violence against us, but we never said anything to anyone, we were always acting like those things never happened by hiding bruises and lying. We were afraid what could happen if someone would find out. We were afraid to change our lives. We just accepted it and thought that maybe the stereotype which I mentioned is true.

When I was six years old I learned German language just from watching television. I still remember how people were impressed later on when I was talking about it. I also

remember some of the comments how unusual it is in a family “like mine”. I didn’t understand those comments then.

In 2007, when I was 10 years old, we lost one of our sisters. It was a shock for me, when I understood I am not going to see her ever again. I think it was this moment when I grew up and started to act more like an adult than a child. I did not have any friends then, because while they were thinking about playing and having fun I was starting to think about the future, who I want to become and what I need to do to reach my goals.

I concentrated on studying and drawing. Those two things always felt easy and relaxing for me. In school I started to have the best grades in my class, without putting too much effort. So kids started to call me a nerd and bullied me. I never said anything to anyone. I was just ignoring it, because I had dreams which were more important than worrying about what someone else thinks about me.

When I was in highschool I thought that I knew who I wanted to become and what I would like to do in life. However, during this period I made probably the biggest mistakes of my life, which caused me to end up thinking what is the point of life. If it wouldn’t be just easier to end it.

Here starts the story of how I decided to immigrate to Finland.

As I wrote my life wasn’t the best. I think it wasn't the worst either. One I know for sure, I did not always enjoy it. There could be some good periods, but I wasn’t happy with that. I think I did not experience enough happiness. I also started to have a need of finding a soul mate, someone with whom I could talk and someone who would make me feel important.

My mother was always loving and caring for me and my siblings, for which I thank her. She was doing everything for us and forgetting about herself completely. After she got divorced with my father, I saw her smiling like never before.

My mental health wasn't good then, but I was happy for her and started to believe that maybe something good will happen to me sooner or later and I will experience the same happiness as she. This was my biggest goal and dream then.

In the end of 2016 my mental health got even worse. When I thought I hit the bottom something happened. A man messaged me on social media. I thought first that it might be someone who wants to use me, but I was wrong.

We chatted a lot and eventually we fell in love with each other after just four days. Everytime we talked I felt important. I started to smile like my mother when she divorced my father. I was happy like never before.

Some people thought that the man might be just acting to use me later. However, I decided that after the mistakes I made in the past I don't have so much to lose. In December 2016 I went abroad for the first time to meet him. Then the second time in February 2017 and on the third visit, on the 1st of April 2017, I moved to Finland permanently. I knew this man was my soul mate, the person with whom I am going to spend my whole life. I wanted to feel happy all the time and if immigration was the solution, then I was ready to do it. It was the best decision I ever made.

At the moment of writing my thesis, me and my partner are living together for over 4 years, we are engaged and plan our wedding.

As you all can clearly see my reason for migration was finding a life partner, even I didn't plan it to begin with. I would like to point out that I believe that I achieved the common goal of migration, which according to me was happiness.

### 3 Why migration?

When I start thinking why I have chosen migration as the topic for my thesis. I think there isn't any simple answer for this question. There were many different factors which influenced my decision.

The first is the fact that I am an immigrant myself. I experienced and learned that moving to another country, where the culture and society differs from the one we know, the one with which we grew up, can be shocking.

Even though Poland and Finland are both European countries there are some differences between them. I think the biggest difference might be the behaviour of people. In Poland we express a lot of emotions, we talk a lot and loud. Here in Finland it seems to me that people are rather calm and talk just when they have too, they don't get overexcited too often.

Another significant difference between my home country and Finland is the way people treat immigrants and refugees. Here it is common to see people of different races everywhere, it seems that most of the people native to this country have nothing against them. Unfortunately, in Poland immigrants aren't always treated well, especially if they stand out from the crowd, for example by the color of their skin or their faith.

When I compare those two countries, living in Finland is better for me. I feel more secure, I have way much more rights as a woman, the social services are much better here and those are just some of the advantages. As I lived in Finland for over 4 years now, I realized living here is also much more expensive, but I think it is worth it for the privileges which I get in return.

I am happy I made the decision to move to Finland. My friends from Poland are still impressed that I took the risk and continuously say that they are jealous of my life. However, even though I am happy like never before, I have moments when I really miss

my family and the places where I grew up. This is one thing about which people forget sometimes. We immigrants are still people, we have feelings and from time to time we can get homesick, especially when we aren't able to visit our home country and meet our friends and family.

In my case every time I get sad my fiancé cheers me up. Hence, I don't feel homesick so often. I remember that he was my reason to migrate. I migrated, because I wanted to be happy.

I think I have chosen migration as the topic of my final work, because the act of moving to another place is quite simple, but the paperwork connected with it can be very time and nerve consuming, and the hate which immigrants need to face sometimes can be overwhelming. I thought it might be good to point that out, because maybe not everyone can be aware of it.

I am a Polish citizen, so probably for many of you it can seem that it should be very easy for me just to move to another European country or at least it should be easier than for people from outside Europe. Those who think so are wrong, because even though I come from a European country there were some obligations I had to fulfill to stay here in Finland.

For example, I needed to prove that I have a place to live and have my own income in Finland. The first wasn't a problem, because I moved into my fiancé's apartment. However, finding a job wasn't so easy, because at that time I did not speak any Swedish or Finnish.

After three months I managed to find a job in Finland and get a permanent residence permit. Nevertheless, I still had some obligations to fulfill. Many immigrants and refugees coming to Finland are planning together with the TE-Office a "integration plan". It is simply a plan of what the immigrant or refugee will do to integrate into the Finnish society.

In my plan we decided my tasks will be learning the Swedish language and starting studying Fine Arts at Yrkeshögskolan Novia in Jakobstad. I fulfilled my tasks and finished the plan almost without any problems, but I know that some people did not have it as easy as I had.

Coming back to the reasons why I wanted to make my Thesis about migration. The third and probably the most important reason is the fact that I think that there is a common goal which people want to achieve through migration, no matter what was the reason why they moved to another place. Sometimes they might know about the goal and it might be their driving force to migrate. On the other hand, some may not be aware that this goal exists and maybe they achieved it, without realizing it.

According to me, the common goal of migration as I mentioned earlier is happiness.

## 4 Concept of hands in art

When I decided about the topic of my thesis, I already knew some artworks about migration, but I decided to do more research. As I am interested in sculptures, I looked mostly for this type of artworks.

I found out that there are quite many sculptures on this topic. As an example I could mention the *Monument to Migrants*<sup>(6)</sup> located in Perth, *Angels Unawares*<sup>(7)</sup> in Vatican, *Memorial to the Migrant Children*<sup>(8)</sup> in Victoria Quay and probably the most recognizable *Les Voyageurs (The Travelers)*<sup>(9)</sup> in Marseille.

Those sculptures were my favourites. They present whole figures, but I wanted to make something of a smaller scale, so I wondered what kind of sculptures I could make.

I was always fascinated with the human muscular system and the sense of touch, so I decided to make sculptures of hands.

The more I was thinking about my choice the more I was convinced I made the right decision, because from my standpoint, hands play a significant role in art. They aren't just a tool, which we use to create art, but also they are the subject of art. We could even say that art actually started from hands.

Let's take a look in the past, at the hand markings found in Sulawesi caves in Indonesia<sup>(10)</sup>. They are dated to be around 40000 years old and probably are the oldest known signs of art. Another example we can find in *Cueva de las Manos (Cave of Hands)*<sup>(11)</sup> in Argentina. This cave painting was executed between 13000 BC - 9500 BC and also presents hands.

The hand was always important in art, even its appearance was changing with time. In the first centuries it had a flat look, which we could observe on ancient bowls from Greece or illustrations placed in manuscripts.

However, with the beginning of the Renaissance the perspective of how people saw the human body changed drastically. The most recognizable artworks of hands come from this era. I talk here about artworks like Leonardo da Vinci's *Study of Hands*<sup>(12)</sup>, Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*<sup>(13)</sup> or Albrecht Dürer's *Praying Hands*<sup>(14)</sup>.

In those works the artists presented the hands in a more scientific and realistic way. Their attention to details made the hands look more anatomically correct and what goes with that the gestures of the hands were even clearer to understand.

In my opinion the image of the hand still plays an important role in the present world. I think it is quite impressive how many emotions a simple gesture of a hand can arise.

## 5 Pursuit of happiness

Can happiness really be the main goal of migration?

I am sure of it, but I am not going to force anyone to believe in it. We all are free people and have the rights to believe in what we want. Although let me present to all of you my thoughts and see if I will manage to convince you.

The first time I started to wonder if migration can have a common goal was a bit over one year after I moved to Finland. I got a response then that I got approved for the studies at Novia. I knew there weren't so many places for Fine Arts studies in Jakobstad, so when I got one I was more than happy. I also felt really proud of myself.

It was then when I started to think more how my life changed after I immigrated. I felt more secure. My mental health was getting way much better and I could spend each moment next to the love of my life.

I came to a conclusion that all those improvements in my life made me happy. I am not sure if I ever would get this happy if I wouldn't take the risk and immigrate to Finland.

Also after meeting a few refugees and immigrants and talking with them, they admitted that they became happier after moving to another country, and their reasons differed from mine.

It was this time when I started to think that migration actually might have a common goal. Any subsequent immigrant or refugee, who admits that the migration made him or her happy reassures me in my opinion that migration must have a main goal and it is happiness.

## 5.1 Process

The practical part of my final work consists of a series of four sculptures created from plaster and plywood and four embroidered canvases.

The canvases represent the most common - according to me - reasons for migration: finding a life partner (clasped hands), education (hand holding a book), the desire of travelling (hand with a compass) and improving the economic situation of an individual (hand squeezing money).

Each canvas is accompanied with a sculpture which is representing the exact same reason for migration. However, the sculptures present just hands. I decided that I will skip the objects (compass, book, money) which could make it easier for us to understand them.

I did it, because I wanted to persuade the audience to stop for a while and try to figure out what is missing there. What reason for migration each sculpture is symbolizing. I thought that people who might be missing something in their lives might find out quickly if maybe they dream about travelling, wish to improve their living, want to gain knowledge or find a soul mate.

Who knows, maybe migration could help them, like it did in my case. That's why one of the sculptures is not missing anything - it's complete. The clasped hands show my and my fiancé's hands, what should be easy to understand that they might symbolize love. Through this sculpture I wanted to prove on my example that migration can make us happy.

In my introduction I wrote that we should be aware that the main goal might not always be possible to achieve. I think the reason can be for example moving to a country where the culture differs drastically from the one in which we grew up.

Having too high expectations about the destination country may also lead to disappointment, because it is different to listen to how others feel in a country and how we feel after moving there, because each person is different and has a different background. Also hate which immigrants need to face sometimes can be an obstacle to achieve full happiness.

## 6 Conclusion

Above all, I still believe that happiness is the main goal of migration. The migrant can be conscious of it or completely unaware that there exists a common goal. I hope that by telling my migration story and presenting my beliefs and experiences related to it I convinced some of you to believe in my words. Although, as I said it before, we need to understand that in some cases achieving the aim of migration might be difficult or impossible, due to different aspects.

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