



Human security under construction: Exploring social consequences for labour migrants in an enlarged European Union

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List of Acronyms

CEE	Central and Eastern European Countries
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISS	Institute of Social Studies

Abstract

The geographical enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and 2007 made it possible for millions of workers to move across the EU in search for work. Considering the regional variation of social and economic stability, the free movement of labour had a big impact on the European labour market, especially the deepening of segmentation and thereby undermining of national labour standards, often leaving migrant workers without protection. This study investigates the dynamics behind intra-EU labour migration by citizens of EU member-states resulting from the inclusion of new member states in 2004 and 2007. The case of Polish migrant labourers into the Netherlands' construction sector is examined to show how the generations of policy measures that aim to protect the working conditions of labour migrants may not have reached their objectives, but instead generated novel forms of precariousness and insecurity in workers' everyday lives.

To bring to the fore the specific meanings of insecurity, the paper draws insights from the human security framework, itself being derived from human rights theory endorsed by the EU as a community. By bringing migrant workers' subjective notions of, and responses to, (in)security and precariousness in relation to policy changes, the paper queries the assumptions behind the policy measures. It argues that current policy debates on intra-EU labour migration may be misdirected due to the tendency of treating labour migration in an abstract form of labour as a commodity, according to which the costs and benefits of particular policies are evaluated, and comparisons with other groups in society are made. The paper argues that a perspective of human security helps to bring to light human features such as feelings, dreams and other attributes related to non-materialistic well-being, and that it can help policy makers to appreciate the deeper meanings of insecurity and precariousness so as to recognise migrants' subjective responses to their changing situation.

If inclusion is indeed the main goal, policies cannot afford to focus only on the dynamics of labour markets, but must be accompanied with an understanding of identity-making and subjectivities of labour migrants. Methodologically, a review of existing literature reveals a socially and economic stratified labour market, pointing towards certain structural dynamics of particular significance within the construction sector. The seasonal character of construction work, together with flexible employment arrangements and de-skilling processes as a result of this, is in combination with life stories from migrant workers as well as discussions with trade unionists, presenting the free movement of labour within the EU as a complicated political issue with substantial social and economic challenges.

Relevance to Development Studies

Processes concerning inclusiveness and equality are key for much literature related to development. Lacking opportunities are a central part of this, reflected in this study through the focus on people migrating across the EU in search for work.

There has been a lot written on migration, focusing on various aspects relating to migratory processes. This study sets out to reveal the effects migration has on the European labour market, and particularly what transnational living experiences implies for the migrant's themselves.

Drawing on a case with Polish construction workers involved in the Dutch construction sector, the interest in intra-EU labour migration reflects the attempt to reveal what impacts the free movement of labour has had on processes of inclusion and equality in contemporary Europe.

Keywords

Labour migration, transnational lives, Polish, construction, human security, precariousness, life-story methodology

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Intra-EU labour migration

Since the end of the Cold War, an on-going project of integrating and enlarging the European Union (EU) has sought to create an economically strong region based on the structures of the European Community (EC) and the inclusion of new member states¹. One of the essential aspects of this project has been the freedom of movement within the EU, which originally was set in place in 1957 to enhance individuals' economic freedom. The possibility to freely move and reside in another country was initially the privilege of the so-called 'gainfully employed', limiting relocation possibilities for the unemployed and other individuals who were temporarily inactive on the labour market. This was however changed with the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, giving all EU citizens the right to move freely, employed or not (Ochel, 2010: 313-314).

Thus, the EU-project, introduced in post-war Europe, has its roots in an urge for economic partnership. Yet the polarisation between East and West created by the Cold War, continued to divide Europe both economically and politically for almost half a century. Compared to earlier expansions, the 2004-enlargement of the EU can be understood as having a specific symbolic value of uniting a divided region – the last piece of building a strong and peaceful region (EU, 2006: 13-15). Together with the expansion in 2007, it caused the most extensive labour migration flows in Europe in over 60 years, and not only did it change the migratory landscape, it also highlighted social and economic challenges for the European community. These challenges have been, and still are, particularly visible on macro- and meso-levels, where issues of fragmentation in the European labour market, the undermining of national wage standards, and exploitation of foreign workers are tangible.

Turning to the construction sector, its re-structuring in the last decades has given rise to sub-contracting practices leading to labour market fragmentation, and the weakening of labour protection measures. Migrant workers through domestic firms and placed in countries abroad, have been particularly vulnerable. Based on empirical evidence from Scandinavia, Friberg (2010) recognises a tradition of collective agreements between trade unions and employers, rather than a system of statutory minimum wages as there is in most of the rest of Europe. This structure has specifically exploited posted workers from Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) in the Scandinavian labour market. This is because EU directives aiming to recognise minimum wages and protect posted

¹ The members of the EC were Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark, Ireland, The UK, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. East Germany joined in 1990 as a result of the unification between East and West Germany, while an enlargement in 1995 made way for Austria, Finland and Sweden to join the newly established EU, replacing the EC as a result of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. The enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007 made way for 12 new members, including the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania (EU, 2006: 14, Kahanec et al., 2009: 1).

workers employed in a foreign country are based on statutory minimum wages, but since not all countries have a statutory minimum wage, arrangements are made based on legal agreements in the posted worker's home country – which are generally well below living wages in destination countries (Friberg, 2010: 26-27). Another interesting feature is the process in which earlier illegal² workers, as a result of the enlargement, can reside and work legally in Western Europe. Of particular interest are the semi-formal agreements this process tends to result in. That is, how foreign workers end up in a grey zone, in which they, despite their legal status, do not have the same agreements as native workers (Engbersen et al., 2010: 119).

An excess supply of cheap labour is, together with an intricate institutional environment and variations in national labour standards, essential to highlight when discussing and analysing the freedom of movement and labour migration within the contemporary EU. As indicated, the changing status of legality, might theoretically have made it possible for CEE citizens to establish themselves in Western Europe, but it did not solve issues on a meso-level, such as formal employment contracts, minimum wages or working conditions. As CEE citizens increasingly enter the labour market in Western European countries, the market is further fragmented – making it possible for contractors and employers to hire foreign workers cheaply, positioning migrants³ in vulnerable situations. This exposes the freedom of movement within the EU as a complicated economic issue, with fundamental social consequences for the people migrating (Engbersen et al., 2010: 117-118, Friberg, Eldring, 2013: 11).

Furthermore, migration patterns have changed, implying additional pressure on labour standards, as the global fiscal crisis hit Europe in 2008. Culminating in major protests during 2011 in Southern Europe, caused by financial cutbacks in the public sector, sky-high unemployment figures and countries on the brink of bankruptcy, the (post)-financial crisis EU has revealed vast social and economic inequalities. Regional alterations of social and economic stability, bleak prospects for future access to higher education, and ethnic discrimination are all aspects that could be considered contributors to the changing patterns of migration within the EU. These aspects also reflect essential assumptions about the labour market and economic growth that symbolise the way EU policies function, indicating a market-oriented model with emphasis on economic growth and individual freedom. The prioritisation of individuals' right to choose where to take up employment not only incites individual responsibility, but also generates a norm in society portraying economic security as a preference while human security, in the sense of non-materialistic well-being, is considered of secondary importance. This points to a situation in which foreign workers are

² The use of illegal workers and illegal migrants should in this paper be interpreted in its normative sense, denoting the officially used vocabulary. Even though it is used extensively in migration research and official documents on migration, I do not conform to the idea that a person can be illegal. All people are born free and legality and illegality are terms and attributes designated to individuals by societal structures. In this case, illegal is therefore only used to recognise how these workers are labelled by contemporary legal and societal orders.

³ Migrants are in this paper referring to individuals who, regardless of the length of their stay, have moved from one country to another in search for employment. This is important to point out, since the term migrant has different connotations whether referred to in official reports or in various policy discussions (Anderson, 2010: 301).

viewed mainly as commodified labour power. The process in which human attributes are neglected on a policy level could thus be seen as key to understand the friction and fragmentation which occurs in labour markets as workers move across the EU in search of work.

Focusing strictly on economic growth and economic security is central to analyse how layers of social stratification are being formed under the promotion of free movement of labour. In a region with diverse social security, welfare systems and differences within the institutional and political environment among member states, free movement of labour inevitably leads to increased competition and altering conditions in the labour market. The impact that labour migration has had on Western European labour markets is also what has derived the most attention from scholars and policymakers. As noted by Friberg (2010), this discussion has had a tendency to focus on concerns of maintaining native workers' rights, rather than the exploitative working conditions of CEE migrants (Friberg, 2010: 25).

As movements of labour have taken more complex forms involving circular and repetitive movements, a major concern is the implications for access to workers' rights, freedom of association and pathways to residence rights after many years of work. Engbersen et al. (2010) draw on Bauman's (1999, 2005) work and describe the migration as *liquid* migration, effectively highlighting the constantly shifting nature and complex composition which contemporary migration entails. Of particular interest is, the seasonal and circular character of labour migration, suggesting that most migrants reside only temporarily in destination countries, and return home once their contracts finish or the season is over. This is in sharp contrast to contemporary rhetoric in media, among politicians and the public opinion, which tend to discuss labour migrants as permanent settlers and welfare-thirsty benefit seekers (Cameron, 2014, Engbersen et al., 2010: 117-118). It also seems as if the threat of CEE migrants draining social security systems in Western European countries is exacerbated. As pointed out by Ochel (2010), EU citizens might be entitled to welfare benefits when residing more than four months in another EU country, but the social security system is designed in such a way that it is barely possible to survive, and quite impossible to support a family, on the monthly benefits (Ochel, 2010: 316).

1.2 Research objective

The objective of this paper is to provide a human security perspective on contemporary debates on intra-EU labour migration. The anticipation is to contribute to debates with insights into both labour migration and labour market fragmentation. It sets out to contrast the uniformity of policy implementation with the plurality of subjective and real life experiences among labour migrants. It explores how through a process of subjectification within a specific institutional environment, labour migrants are given a set of capabilities and as a result, various labels based on legal and societal norms. However, this paper argues that this is rarely accounted for and that policy makers base decisions on limited knowledge – produced in a narrow framework where productivity and financial interest are prioritised. This could be seen as a failure to improve personal situations, as well as the social relations in society, which policies normally seek to improve.

Identifying the research problem starts from the disparities which have been recognised between context-dependent and subjective experiences of (in)security, and a normalised standard template which is the general solution used for policy implementation. Personal notions of security and well-being are specific to certain contexts and are therefore diverse. Depending on aspects of gender, age, generation, education or profession, people have certain expectations on life and living standards. These expectations can be altered depending on changing affinity between social groups and the life cycle of the people concerned. Hence, it is not only the plurality that is important to consider when producing policy frameworks, but also the changing character of notions of well-being. A case study of Polish labour migrants involved in the construction sector in the Netherlands aims to show migrants' experiences of (in)security, how they cope with the social environment related to their work and how they maintain well-being. This categorisation, and particularly the individual and subjective responses from Polish migrant workers involved in the construction sector in the Netherlands, is what this paper aims to explore more thoroughly.

1.3 Research question

How does European freedom of movement impact labour migrants from countries of an enlarged EU, and what are the consequences of their coping strategies in dealing with insecurity and precariousness?

1.3.1 Sub-questions

How are subjective notions of welfare and well-being produced and re-produced as labour migrants are positioning themselves in a new labour market?

What role does the status of legality or illegality play for migrants' possibilities of establishing a sense of security?

1.4 Polish migrant workers in the construction sector in the Netherlands

This paper focuses on Polish migrant workers engaged with construction work in the Netherlands. The focus on construction work is explained by both the originality of the construction sector, as well as the transformation that during recent decades structurally changed the way construction work in particular, and the European labour market in general, is organised. These changes' effect on the labour market is one reason for the interest; another reason is the increased reliance on individuals' social networks as a mean of accessing security, and the incentives for ethnic and social discrimination which these new conditions are creating. The originality of the construction sector is referred to as the constant actuality and need of construction work, either it is renovations of private houses, public facilities or infrastructure – construction work has for a long time been seen as key in generating employment opportunities.

The construction sector refers to a broad definition of construction work, drawing on the international NACE⁴ classification made up of six subsectors:

⁴ NACE is short for Nomenclature generale des Activites economiques dans les Communautés europeennes and refers to the industrial classification used by Eurostat (OECD, 2001).

Architecture and engineering consultancy, site preparation, building of complete constructions or parts thereof, building installation, building completion, renting of construction or demolition equipment with operator (MCVET, 2008: 3). As earlier research has shown (see Engbersen, 2010, Friberg, 2010, Napierala and Trevana, 2010), migrant workers are predominantly engaged in site preparatory activities – work which native workers prefer not to participate in, considering its labour intensive and dangerous nature. Building installation, completion and building of complete constructions or parts thereof are other possible working areas for migrant workers. Areas in which migrant workers are rarely found on the other hand, is in consultancy projects or as company owners. This is mainly due to the sector's degree of surplus labour and marginalised groups in the workforce – inciting obscure recruitment processes and informal employment agreements (ILO, 2001: 1-2). However, the international classification does not mention the self-employed, an important group which many labour migrants belong to. This area is representative of 'the Polish plumber'⁵, and a lucrative possibility for migrant workers as they settle and can afford to work for themselves – drastically increasing their income and control of everyday life.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the changing structure of the construction industry is a result of economic globalisation and increased possibilities to outsource employment. Sub-contractors have been given more freedom, not only excluding workers from social security systems but also affecting occupational safety at construction sites (ILO, 2001: 19-20). This reflects the situation of the Polish construction sector as well as the Dutch, where temporary employment and the number of self-employed workers are increasing. 'The Polish plumber' can thus be seen in a different light than popularly portrayed, representing a segmented labour market where work in the secondary sector are of seasonal, temporary, and labour intensive nature.

The temporal and seasonal nature was central to the governmental agreements between the two countries which gave Polish migrants access to the labour market in the early 1990s⁶. Most of these migrants resided in the Netherlands only on a temporary and short-term basis and returned home as contracts or work permits expired (Engbersen et al., 2010: 117-118). However, before the enlargement in 2004, and the following three-year transition period until 2007, there was a vast amount of undocumented labour migration from Poland to the Netherlands. Thus, there seems to be quite substantial evidence that even though the influx of migrants from Poland might have accelerated after 2007, there were already a large number of Polish citizens residing in the Netherlands. Not only was labour migration from Poland facilitated through political cooperation between the two governments. Poles have also been willing to take on work which Dutch people have been rejecting and thereby creating a shortage of work in sectors such as horticulture, agriculture and construction – leading to

⁵ The 'Polish plumber'-rhetoric originates from the French parliament. Debating the new EU-constitution in 2005, nationalist politicians depicted an image of 'Polish plumbers' invading the French labour market while working for Polish salaries – undermining French nationals' competitiveness (Johnson, 2011).

⁶ So-called 'German-Poles', from the Polish provinces Opele and Silesia, which formerly belonged to the Prussian empire had special visa exemptions due to dual German-Polish citizenship (Engbersen, 2010: 115).

less tension on the Dutch labour market and acceptance of Polish migrant workers.

Even though governmental agreements mainly encouraged temporary migration, the fragile economic situation in Poland with high unemployment figures and low salaries, made migrants hesitant to return home (Wojakovska, 2011: 48). The Polish construction sector is offering rather disadvantageous employment conditions, characterised by seasonality and a bad working environment. Health and safety regulations are rarely monitored, putting workers in dangerous situations (Napierala, Trevana, 2010: 54-55). This is gradually also reflected in Western Europe, where construction work traditionally have had a good reputation, with qualified workers performing skilled work. However, this is changing as disadvantageous employment conditions are normalised – attracting migrant workers and acts as an entry to the labour market (ILO, 2001: 1-2).

The temporary nature of construction work has effects far beyond the migrants' working situation. Even though the sector might have an unjustified bad reputation, construction workers are generally proud of their work and have a sense of belonging. Increasingly globalised labour markets, and an accelerated use of short-term contracts are however, together with the rigidity of institutions and changing social security systems, effecting construction workers sense of belonging and security in the destination country. As will be discussed in chapter two, existing literature is indeed highlighting the fragmentation of the European labour market, the migration it results in, and societal consequences thereof. Nevertheless, it is carrying a legacy from segmented labour market theory, resulting in a deterministic view of labour migrants in which workers are seen mainly as labour power – commodifying the migrants and tying their welfare and well-being exclusively to economic and labour-market security. This legacy is also preventing further analysis of the migrants' everyday life as a result of the migration, particularly of insecurities created as a result of the migration. Not only economic or labour market insecurities, but rather in relation to non-materialistic well-being such as social relations, health and its effects on identity-building.

1.5 Research methodology

This research has deployed two main methods⁷. A critical and selected review of literature on labour migration in the process of the EU enlargement, with a focus on social security as a means of identifying a disconnection between a standardised template of social security for migrant workers and the subjective experience of insecurity and precariousness. This was done to provide the context for an analysis of personal and multidimensional narratives of well-being among labour migrants, conducted with a biographic methodological approach, also known as life-story methodology. This methodology can be understood as an ethnographic approach, aiming to analyse reality as experienced by the migrants. Biographic interviewing has the advantage of providing information about migrants' experiences and an understanding of their own situations, often challenging the dominating and popular perspectives on migrants' lives and living situations (Cederberg, 2013: 2). This is also what Atkinson (1998) argues for, highlighting the importance to recognise the cultural diversity among many marginalised groups – constructing a base for new theory building and hopefully

⁷ This section is based on earlier unpublished course work material at Institute of Social Studies (ISS).

policy implementation. It also provides the opportunity to broaden the awareness of a certain societal phenomenon, in this case, labour migrants' life stories of leaving their homes, anticipating to find work in another country. As cited by Atkinson (1998) when discussing life stories, referring to Bertaux (1981) and Rosenthal (1993):

‘They can provide the researcher with information about a social reality existing outside the story, described by the story (Bertaux, 1981), as well as about the story itself as a social construct (Rosenthal, 1993)’ (Atkinson, 1998: 13)

To further facilitate the analysis, this research is formed according to a case study design, since, as argued by Yin (2009), a case study research design is helpful in maintaining the characteristics of the material in its original context. A case study design is also helpful to ascertain initially important theoretical concepts, a basic aspect of qualitative research. By identifying specific theoretical ideas at an early stage, the study was more easily guided in a certain direction, towards the research problem, and provided the research with more significant empirical material. This approach is frequently referred to as theory-driven induction, acknowledging that I have a rudimentary knowledge of the research topic and use the empirical findings from the case study to conduct analyse – providing grounding for prospective research and policy implementation (George, Bennett, 2005: 239-241).

1.6 Structure of the paper

Chapter two starts with an introduction to existing literature on labour migration within the EU. It is discussing holding concepts and notions of the discourse, and is critically assessing the normativity that exists in relation to contemporary research on labour migration. It presents human security theory and suggests that such a perspective broadens the understanding of precarity, while stressing the need to further identify migrants' lived experiences and subjective perceptions of well-being. The chapter concludes by discussing the construction of identities to further deepen the meaning of human security in migratory processes.

Chapter three tries to shift the understanding of security towards a more people-centred view, drawing on advantages of an ethnographic approach and life-story methodology. It pays particular attention to the reflexivity of the study, the relationship between me and the respondents, complications that occurred in the research process, and the relevance of focusing on Polish migrant workers in the construction sector.

The fourth chapter presents and analyses the empirical material under three main themes: ‘Migrating for security’, ‘Queuing for acceptance?’, and ‘A drive to informality’. The discussion reflects reasons for migrating, migrants' coping strategies in the destination country, and a transforming construction sector. Attention is given to the freedom of movement and processes of formality and informality, highlighting turning points in the respondents' lives with regard to security, vulnerability and ambiguity.

In the fifth and final chapter, the paper presents the conclusion by drawing on social consequences experienced by labour migrants as a result of current labour market policies, migrants' status of legality, and the migration process in itself. It is also suggesting areas for further research.

Chapter 2 : Security and well-being

This chapter presents contemporary debates on security and well-being in relation to labour migration. Drawing on a selected review of existing literature, the anticipation is to explore the legacy of segmented labour market theory and its significance for current research on intra-EU labour migration. Human security is discussed as the theoretical framework to deepen the understanding of migratory processes and to recognise subjective and lived experiences of insecurity, stressing the importance of appreciating people seeking various kinds of security, not only economic. Governmentality is introduced to demonstrate how norms are constructed and embedded through social relations in society, and specifically how these norms are taken for granted, setting the standard of what to be regarded as security and well-being. By introducing insecurity as precariousness, the intention is to shed further light on how human security as a concept can respond to an insecure environment, and how a debate on the construction of identities is intensifying the relevance of human security in relation to migration studies.

2.1 A segmented labour market

Literature on migrant workers in the EU that focuses on social security has paid much attention to both economic aspects of labour migration, as well as issues of social entitlements. Pioré's (1979) early work, as well as Brettell (2003), and Massey's et al (2005) work on migrant labour to industrial societies, contributes to account for the economic and social processes behind migration, as well as potential issues and conflicts resulting from labour migration. Even though published more than three decades ago, Pioré (1979) provides a thorough and detailed analysis of migrant labour to (amongst other) the industrialised economies in Northern and Western Europe. Through a discussion on policy implications as a consequence of the extensive labour migration during the 1950's- and -60's, the text elaborates on the dualistic nature of a capitalist labour market, identifying a dichotomy between jobs in a primary and a secondary sector, arguing that the challenge is to organise the financial costs as a response to market fluctuations in the supply and demand of labour (Pioré, 1979: 16, 35-36).

Issues relating to the nature of a dualistic labour market were also the concern of Reich, Gordon and Edwards (1973), who questioned neo-classical assumptions of labour market differences disappearing over time through competitive market forces. However, according to this more radical approach of segmented labour market theory, it is not only about a dual labour market consisting of a primary and a secondary sector. There are also segmentations within the sectors due to race, sex, education and industrial groupings, originating in efforts by capital- and factory owners to curb increasingly homogenous labour forces by actively dividing workers into different segments of the labour market (Reich et al., 1973: 359-361).

The segmented labour market identified by Pioré (1979) and Reich et al (1973) have similarities with contemporary literature on adverse incorporation, denoting how different segments of labour markets constitute interacting platforms in which structures of marginalisation are reinforcing already vulnerable

groups of workers (Phillips, 2011: 382-383). This kind of reasoning is evident in research on intra-EU labour migration, suggesting that migrant's marginalised position in destination countries make them prone to take on low paid jobs in certain segments of the labour market which native workers are unwilling to take – effectively creating a secondary sector of the labour market (Friberg, 2010: 25-26).

In contrast, reports and evaluations from the EU and its partners tend to focus on financial aspects of the labour market, describing the expansion as a great success, referring to the boost of internal markets, the increase in foreign direct investment, and the “modernisation of not just the new member states” (EU, 2006: 10). A report from the European Policy Centre (2013) discuss the EU-intra mobility in a post-Lisbon treaty EU, and post-financial crisis EU, focusing on the political willingness among member states in moving towards a common legal solution on how to handle increased EU-migration (Pascouau, 2013: 6).

More critical literature tend to focus on either economic or legal aspects of labour migration, evolving around labour market policies, brain circulation, portability of social security for migrant workers, migration flows and employment experiences of labour migrants in destination countries (Taha et al., 2013: 20-31). The segmented labour market theory is moreover apparent in Anderson et al (2006), where the mismatch which often occur between migrant's qualifications and the skills required for jobs in the destination country is discussed, elaborating on how migrant's perceptions of immigration status relates to possibilities of acquiring employment and work in their new country. In relation to this, Kahanec et al (2009) argues that so-called brain circulation within the EU tend to facilitate issues surrounding demographic and economic problems, rather than create unwanted tension and competition for employment opportunities between domestic and foreign workers (Kahanec et al., 2009: 27-28).

Empirically, there is also an extensive body of literature of Polish citizens emigrating after the EU-enlargement to the UK, Ireland and Sweden. These countries were the first to open up their labour market for new member states, and it is estimated that around 500 000 Poles migrated in search for work to the UK and Ireland between 2004 and 2007 (Cizkowicz et al. 2007: 1, 3-4). The large number of Poles migrating could be explained through the combination of high unemployment figures, around 20% at the time of Poland's entry to the EU, and low domestic salaries (Drinkwater, 2009: 162). It is also explained through the extensive network of social relations which people obtained through a Polish diaspora, after decades of ‘irregular’ labour migration to Western and Northern Europe. As identified by Garapich (2007), there might have been an increasing popularity of speaking and writing of Polish immigration after the EU enlargement in 2004, but the migration itself should not be seen as something new. Rather than as a turning point in migratory processes, the enlargement accelerated an on-going process within transnational networks, where migrant's earlier status of ‘illegality’ became legal (Garapich, 2007: 3, 5). In the UK, as well as the Netherlands and other Western European countries, there has been an influx of Poles for at least three generations, creating a diverse Polish population – highlighting the internal heterogeneity of what is usually referred to as ‘Polish immigrants’.

As indicated, this discussion is based on the constituent that written work and literature have been focusing on labour migrants from a rather instrumental

and deterministic perspective, trying to address contemporary societal consequences of migration processes. In relation to this discussion, it is important to mention the conceptually intimate connection between *migrant* and *class*. As already noted, the term *migrant* is exceedingly contextual and has various connotations in relation to its use. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) took this further by showing how literature debating transnational networks continuously neglects a vast amount of people as migrants, due to their *class* belonging. For highly educated people involved in transnational corporations, international organisations, or in decision making organs at a supra national level, it is the symbolic capital of education and language which legitimises cross-border movements. Other groups are effectively separated and threatened as migrants in its normative sense, rather consistently referred to as persons deprived of social and economic rights, portraying and excluding them as foreigners and as a burden for the destination country (Bryceson, Vuorela, 2002: 7-8). Additionally, a common feature for most research on labour migration, is the feeling of normativity surrounding debates and discussions on policy implications, originating in neo-classical assumptions of labour market economics, and converging around notions of the maximisation of utility through income or other materialistic measures (Bartram, 2010: 357-359).

There seems to be a somehow limited amount of contemporary research on labour migration within the EU, focusing on migrant's subjective experiences regarding meanings of insecurity and precariousness. Particularly in a context where the self is produced and reproduced in an environment permeated by discrimination, creating a lack of recognition and appreciation. Highlighting the process in which migrant's identities are constructed and reconstructed, shifts focus from a macro perspective of migrant flows and labour market policies, to the importance of understanding how identities are constructed at different stages in migrant's lives. Specifically, how societal and cultural norms, as well as gendered expectations, constantly impact the construction of migrants' identities at various stages of the migratory process. An anthropological perspective on migration draws more attention to meso and micro levels, but as argued by Brettell (2003), it does not necessarily reject the relevance and interest for macro analysis of migration. Understanding the structural context in which individuals tend to migrate, provide an important insight to migration as something deeply rooted in society, and how different social and economic contexts reflects values related to migration in both sending and destination countries (Brettell, 2003: 2-3).

2.2 Human security and migration: A focus on daily lives

2.2.1 Why human security theory?

The human security approach is proposed as the theoretical framework in this research. Building on the radical approach of segmented labour market theory, it aims to recognise subjective notions of lived experiences to a further extent than other discourses, moving away from an instrumental view of strictly economics or human rights (Gasper, 2010: 18).

It is to a large extent based on the capability approach⁸ and the thoughts of Nussbaum and Sen (1993), reflecting on people's quality of life and how, if possible, the quality of life could be measured. Most scholars, within a wide range of discourses, agree that it is necessary to involve more factors than income levels as a measurement. Yet, what this pluralistic definition should entail have been debated for over two decades – carefully reflecting upon issues of utility, relativity as well as subjectivity (Nussbaum, Sen, 1993: 2-5). What seems clear though, is that human security refers to basic fundamentals of well-being and the need of prioritising it in policy making, stressing the vision of a political shift which put people at the centre of societal and economic change, and which does not see the economy as an end in itself, but rather as a means of changing people's lives (Vietti, Scribner, 2013: 21).

First adapted on a global level in the Human Development Report in 1994, human security theory focused on aspects of human rights and well-being, recognising the failure to secure human dignity for a vast amount of the world's citizens. It is formulated as a response to the hegemonic paradigm of state security, and the inability of nation-states to protect its citizens from a globalised market and the threats which individuals are facing as a result of this. It has more over a lot of resemblance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 which supports a human-centred definition of security – drastically opposing the Westphalian model⁹ and its more territorial conceptualisation of security (Vietti, Scribner, 2013: 17-18).

The notion of territoriality and its conceptually close link to nation-state borders, influence governments and the way they treat migration, in particular, so-called irregular migration. This is reflected in the current political landscape, where migration is seen as an attack on state sovereignty and therefore met with tightened borders. Though it is sometimes suggested that the enlargement of the EU has erased intra-regional borders, this is only partially true, since, first of all, the borders have merely expanded the EU and thus replaced the old frontiers with new ones. Second, as will be discussed further on, even though the physical borders might have been removed for people to move freely within the EU, there are still visa rules and other regulations in place – effectively limiting possibilities to migrate.

Additionally, the general mind-set, and the way migration is governed, still perceives migrants as a threat to the nation-state. Either through rhetoric of asylum seekers putting pressure on the national economy, or if it is labour migrants undermining welfare systems and “stealing” jobs from native workers (Cameron, 2014). Whichever way, human security theory emphasises the numerous elements creating migration flows, and points to various forms of migration and

⁸ The capability approach, developed by Nussbaum and Sen (1993), refers to the capability of a person to embrace a number of set functionings, identified as the core features for living an affluent life. This includes fundamental aspects such as having good health and access to drinking-water, but also more intricate functionings related to people's social life, self-image and overall well-being. Having access to these functionings, reflects the capability of person's to choose which life they want to live (Sen, 1993: 31).

⁹ The Westphalian model refers to the peace of Westphalia in 17th century Europe. It changed the political landscape at the time and laid the fundament for the birth of the nation-state, accentuating state sovereignty and nation-state borders in the formation of the nation-state (Vietti, Scribner, 2013: 17).

seek to understand migrants' vulnerability and insecurity rather than addressing the need of tightening borders (Vietti, Scribner, 2013: 23).

As argued by Truong (2006a), it is not only the issue of identifying migrant's insecurity and securing rights. It is also of importance to recognise which persons are accessing their rights and in which context, paying attention to the social categorisation based on attributes such as gender, ethnicity and generation (Truong et al. 2006a: ix, xxii). The contribution by feminist theory, of situating knowledge and understanding it in context specific situations, has significant value for human security theory. Without discarding universal notions of human rights and securities, it highlights the necessity of recognising multi-dimensional aspects of discrimination and oppression, enhancing the credibility as well as adapting human security theory as a more holistic framework. To recognise migrant's well-being within this framework, while identifying well-being as people's subjective perceptions of both quantity and quality of life – not necessarily material well-being, and neither as referring only to happiness and maximisation of utility - is further complementing human security theory (Gasper, 2004: 1-3, Gasper et al, 2008: 12).

Nevertheless, mainstream economics have had a tendency of reducing meanings of well-being so that it merely implies pleasure or well-feeling, conceptualising it as something which is measurable and thus possible to maximise – either financially or materially. Such a utilitarian approach to well-being is not particularly comprehensive. Rather, it is deterministic and gives little room for interpreting well-being differently. Other aspects of well-being could involve human needs of having, doing and interacting. It could also involve, as mentioned above, aspects of quantity as well as quality of life, and refer to time patterns in people's everyday life – something which is rarely encountered for in mainstream economics (Gasper, 2004: 4-5). Well-being is furthermore a normative concept, referring to values constructed in and presented by our society as something constant (Gasper, 2004: 15). This is challenging, since the normativity leaves no space for, and thus cannot co-exist, with the notion of subjective desires of well-being as shaped in an environment where what is just has been decided by historic events – and not by fairness (Griffin, 1986: 40-41).

2.2.2 Governmentality and human security in cross-border migration

The process of shaping desires and subjective notions of what well-being could entail, cohere and relates with Huxley's (2008) explanation of governmentality, and how people act to fulfil desires of the imagined narrative, thus reproducing a mainstreamed and normalised depiction of well-being. Based on Foucauldian thinking, governmentality questions the process of how social relations, norms and specific ways of thinking came to be – and how it is taken for granted (Huxley, 2008: 1636). Truong (2006b) also discusses governmentality, but from the perspective of neo-liberalism and how a change in politics pursued has globalised capitalism and created new forms of human insecurity. Her interpretation is that this change rests on fundamentals of self-government, visible through increased personal responsibility for the individual and intimately bound to rational decision making, economic wealth and well-being. This transformation has established a direct link between individual rationality and the rationality of governments, facilitating a process in which the economic realm structurally

penetrates the social, enforcing the notion of the market and economic efficiency into the social sphere (Truong, 2006b: 3-4, 8). But the change which a neo-liberal message implies has not only produced new forms of insecurity, it has also changed common perceptions of well-being – having a direct influence on people’s quality of life.

These increasingly important incentives to self-governance in society, is illustrated by the free movement of labour within the EU, where a process of individualisation drives the responsibility and urge for well-being towards the migrant, making migrants themselves accountable for their own well-being. Recognising the absence of a lacking social legislation aiming to protect migrant workers in destination countries, parallel with the freedom of movement, highlights what Larner (2000) calls market governance. People, in this case migrant workers, are, due to the freedom of movement, not only able but also obliged, as well as made responsible for making independent and self-fulfilling decisions, as a mean of improving their personal well-being (Larner, 2000: 12-13). This technique of governing, as recognised by Merry (2001), Ferguson and Gupta (2002), Zuckerwise (2012) and others, offer a way of understanding how policies and interventions are instigated through *spatial governmentality*, in this context explained as a structure which provides individuals already possessing access to security, with security, while leaving disadvantaged people to self-governance through migration on the labour market (Merry, 2001: 17, Zuckerwise, 2012: 150).

However, as pointed out by Ferguson and Gupta (2002), discussing governmentality easily denotes an abstract symbolism of the state as penetrating society and everyday life, operating from a higher level – “up there” (Ferguson, Gupta, 2002: 983). Reflecting on Foucauldian thoughts of knowledge production, rejects the abstract symbolism and generates a notion of the state’s authority and its impact as social processes, shaped through “multiple, mundane domains of bureaucratic practice by which states produce spatial orders and scalar hierarchies” (Ferguson, Gupta: 2002: 984). In the context of intra-EU labour migration, this refers to the inter-play between employers, national labour market policies and supra-national decision making organs like the EU. Aiming to minimise costs of labour reproduction, the free movement of workers contributes not only with keeping costs to a minimum, but also of redistributing the costs to other social security systems, emphasising the role and interest of employers engaging with labour market institutions (MacKenzie, Ford, 2009: 142-144).

As indicated, human security theory is applied as a means to address well-being, but also a lack of well-being. By giving attention to subjectivity and the loss of things in a material sense, as well as loss of emotional meanings and identity, the understanding of spatial forms of ordering society provides an (in)direct link to individuals’ search for security (Gasper et al., 2008: 9). These forms of governing is not only reflecting neo-liberal ideas of governmentality, but also liberal notions of freedom and rights, expecting people to be fully accountable for ensuring their own individual security and well-being (Zuckerwise, 2012: 155).

2.2.3 Insecurity as precariousness: links to a human security perspective

Liberal notions of freedom and rights, permeating political and societal institutions during recent decades, are a major challenge to the people-centred vision of seeing the economy as a means, rather than as an end in itself. Portraying individuals as responsible for their own well-being has resulted in an institutional separation between the 'economic' and the 'social' domain, where a one-sided focus on economic growth and the economy as an end in itself have kept social investments on a distance, falsely anticipating that markets develop economic growth more efficiently without social interventions (Elson, 2004: 63).

As recognised by Standing (2011), this has been done to increase the flexibility of the European labour market, prioritising financial interests and transferring insecurities and risks from employers to the workforce, inevitably leading to a decrease of social security for most workers (Standing, 2011: 1). Already marginalised workers, migrants and youths, have been identified as particularly vulnerable and insecure – a fundamental aspect of the group referred to as the precariat¹⁰, often forced to accept precarious labour contracts (McDowell et al., 2009: 4, Standing, 2011: 7). Standing (2011) identifies seven forms of precariousness which are linked to workers situation on the labour market. These insecurities range from possibilities to adequate income earning, protection against arbitrary dismissal, insurance against illness and work-related injuries, minimum wages, possibilities of organising collectively, acquiring new skills and upward social mobility in terms of status and income (Standing, 2011: 10).

The intimate relationship between precariousness and migration highlights labour market policies as a major driving force to precariousness. Introducing foreign workers into low-income sectors on an already segmented labour market, reflects Anderson's argument (2010) of the de-naturalisation of immigration controls. She argues that immigration controls work with and against migratory processes, fashioning workers into certain positions in society – limiting their possibilities on the labour market. Stressing the inherently biased nature of jobs as well as immigration policies when discussing processes of social categorisation, sheds light on the close relation between the two, suggesting that migrant workers are subject to and in a higher degree controlled by employers (Anderson, 2010: 308, 310-312, Coe, 2012: 275). This dependency, on employers but also (in)directly on the market, effectively works as to detach migrant workers from their social and economic security. As put by Esping-Andersen (2006):

'It is as markets become universal and hegemonic that the welfare of individuals comes to depend entirely on the cash nexus. Stripping society of the institutionalised layers that guaranteed social reproduction outside the labour contract meant that people were commodified' (Esping-Andersen, 2006: 163)

¹⁰ The precariat is defined as a socio-economic group with certain class characteristics, produced through the accelerating fragmentation of global class structure. The fragmentation is seen as a result of the flexible and open labour market where class characteristics are prominent, reflecting the minimal trust shown to employers and the state. But perhaps also through the lack of social contract relationships. This is explained as the system traditionally used in many welfare states, where labour contracts were provided in exchange for subordination and loyalty towards the employer (Standing, 2011: 7-9).

As a response to the process of commodification, the notion of social citizenship is introduced to grant social rights to everyone, based on citizenship rather than based on performance. This response could trigger a de-commodification process, in which individuals are empowered in relation to the market, making it possible to access societal rights and maintain a livelihood without a market dependency (Esping-Andersen, 2006: 162-163).

The term precariousness derives from discussions on *precarity* and the aspiration of identifying the changing character of the contemporary system as a new phase in capitalism. This new phase is argued to have unique characteristics, since it is not only denying people the opportunity of stable jobs and quality labour conditions – but also a process in which people are neglected the possibility of housing and the provisioning of welfare (Arnold, Bongiovi, 2013: 298-299). Precarity could also entail more subjective meanings, stretching further than social entitlements, referring to social relations and processes of precariousness which workers (in)voluntarily engage with on an everyday basis. Or as stated by Neilson and Rossiter (2005) when elaborating on the Milanese activist Foti's (2004) argument:

“.. Precarity is ‘being unable to plan one’s time, being a worker on call where your life and time is determined by external forces’. The term refers to all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons. But its reference also extends beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations” (Neilson, Rossiter, 2005¹¹).

This broader definition rejects the uniformity of precarity as only precarious work, and highlights how social categorisation is decisive in determining the level and depth of precarity for different groups of workers (Arnold, Bongiovi, 2013: 289-290). It is also what a human security perspective is contributing with, directing its focus to insecurities felt subjectively – but experienced objectively by individuals. It is thus facilitating to contextualise experiences of insecurity, enhancing as well as nuancing the understanding of social, economic or political insecurities which migrant workers are exposed to in destination countries (Jolly, Basu-Ray, 2007: 459-461).

That precarity differs for different groups of workers is important to address, since work is more than just a central part of the individual identity. It is an essential part of society as a whole, linking individuals to each other and, at least from a Eurocentric, industrial and capitalist perspective, what socially determines the position of an individual in society (Kalleberg, 2009: 1).

2.2.4 Human security, migration and the construction of identities

To identify with someone, or something, is a vital aspect of human security. Group belonging through social relations and to have somebody looking after you – or to look after someone else, caring for and share opinions with, are all

¹¹ No page numbers available. For reference follow link and scroll down to fourth paragraph.

<http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-022-from-precarity-to-precariousness-and-back-again-labour-life-and-unstable-networks/>

aspects that increases well-being and security. Together with historical and structural contexts, dominating societal institutions and contemporary power-structures, it is also part of the volatile and constantly changing process in which identities are constructed (Castells, 1997: 6-7).

In relation to migration and transnational living arrangements, this is of particular interest. The process in which people leave their home, family, friends and the world as they know it – surroundings, environment, language, food and culture – is a process which affect persons emotionally, shaping their identities. Generally, it is suggested that people conform to, or dissociate themselves from, so-called collective identities that are explained as standard identities representing certain symbolic value in society. Using the typology developed by Castells (1997), the process of socially constructed identities can be divided into three categories based on forms and origin. Legitimising identity, is seen as the identity which is introduced by dominant institutions and organisations in society, as a means to enhance and rationalise their domination in relation to its members. It is argued that these identities are introduced through civil society, which, based on Gramscian thinking, is defined as various institutions such as the church, trade unions and cooperatives that prolongs the dynamics of the state and other dominant actors. It is in contact with the civil society as individuals legitimate and conform to these social and cultural practices by building their identity on the shared values of the societal institutions (Castells, 1997: 8-9).

Resistance identity on the other hand evolves as marginalised groups in society organises through resistance, basing their identities on principles different from the oppressing ones, often inspired by historical events or other commonalities – creating sharp boundaries to effectively isolate themselves to other non-resistant groups. The third identity according to this typology is project identity, which refers to the process in which individuals try to re-locate themselves in society by building a new identity – seeking to transform an encompassing social structure which does not conform to their own values and beliefs (Castells, 1997: 8-9).

A discussion on the construction of identities is not only enabling a more nuanced understanding of the various insecurities which different groups of workers experience. It is also deepening the meaning of human security – effectively visualising how, in particular migrants, are vulnerable to new insecurities as settling in destination countries. Nonetheless, as distinguished by McIlwaine (2008), Truong (2006a), Datta (2009) and others, the migration-identity nexus is also a gender-sensitive process, in relation to the individual, family, the state or the labour market (Datta et al, 2009: 854).

Even though eclipsed by other dominant factors in relation to migrating men, it is of particular interest. Namely, a successfully migrated man is often seen as returning home after months or years of working in a foreign country, legitimising himself towards society as a *real* man, reflecting the long withstanding image of the male breadwinner-model. But at the same time, men are also more prone to return home than women, and for other reasons than women, since migrant men tend to experience what could be described as downward

social mobility – a procedure involving a de-skilling process¹², limited social networks, lacking appreciation and recognition, as well as ethnical and racial discrimination on the labour market (Datta et al, 2009: 856).

2.3 Summary

This chapter has emphasised the role of segmented labour market theory, and possibilities of explaining the high rate of migrant labour in the construction sector as a result of processes of fragmentation, channelling migrants into certain segments of the labour market. However, it is argued that existing literature primarily discusses these processes through an economic-centred lens, and human security theory has therefore been applied as the theoretical perspective to shed light on non-materialistic features of importance in migratory processes.

Introducing the concept of governmentality reveals how norms and ways of thinking about migrants are social and cultural products of the economic-centred lens, embedded in society and influencing political decisions. This depicts a complex labour market structure in which migrant's insecurities extend further than just in relation to work – recognising the encompassing precarity experienced by migrants in everyday life and its impact on the construction of identities.

This is also what the next chapter elaborates on, discussing how a people-centred view of security involves an understanding of processes surrounding downward social mobility. Without rejecting the importance of economic security, it is drawing on ethnographic research from the construction sector to emphasise also non-materialistic well-being as a means to security.

¹² De-skilling in this paper refers to the subjective and personal process in which individuals experience lacking recognition and downgrading of his/her skills and abilities from society as a result of their migration. De-skilling should therefore, in this paper, be seen as rejecting the normativity which tends to surround the term and debates of skilled, semi-skilled, un-skilled and de-skilled work frequently occurring in academic work on labour migration.

Chapter 3: A people-centred perspective of security

Security is a central feature in this paper. It is a frequently used concept, used in a variety of situations, contextualised and interpreted differently. When referring to discussions regarding *human* security, it should go without saying that the concerned groups – in this case labour migrants – and their subjective attitudes towards security are respected. However, as indicated in the literature review, this is not always the case. In short, by drawing on ethnographic research and life-story interviews conducted in the construction sector, this chapter explores underpinnings of a people-centred perspective of security. Through an insight into research processes, my relation to the interviewees and the importance of reflexivity when using an ethnographic approach, this chapter encourages an epistemological shift of how security is defined and addressed in research and policy-implementation¹³.

3.1 Positionalities and situating the knowledge produced

Approaching the research in its early stages, I felt the importance of identifying my own role as a researcher and MA-student. Bearing in mind the research questions, the aim of the research, as well as my interest in politics pursued in relation to social, political and economic issues in Europe, it was crucial to take into consideration my somewhat limited experience of the research - including possibilities of identifying myself with the respondents in my research. As middle-class, male and in my late twenties from Sweden, I probably interpreted and analysed the respondents' experiences, memories and feelings in a different way than if we shared the same background, and not least the same age. This is what Rose (1997) states when stressing the importance and need of situating the knowledge produced. Referring to feminist research methodologies, she argues that knowledge is produced differently based on the background of the persons producing it. Hence, it is unavoidable for me as an interviewer not to have an impact and situate the knowledge produced, based on the respondent's experiences and life-story, on a new arena - created by me, the respondent and our relationship (Rose, 1997: 306-307).

The focus on the relationship between me and the participants in the study, highlight an important part of the research process, in which much of my understanding of the respondent's subjective experiences and knowledge is being interpreted and analysed. Not only that, it is also done to show awareness of similarities as well as complications which arouse during the research (Rose, 1997: 309). A striking similarity in this research, is the shared migrant identity between me and the respondents. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an intimate connection between migrant and class, in this research personified by me and the respondents. My enrolment in a Master's programme rarely labels me as a migrant, in sharp contrast to the respondents in the research, who, even

¹³ Fragments of this chapter is based on earlier unpublished course work material at ISS.

though they have been living here for twenty-five years, still are being referred to as migrants. The normativity permeating the notion of migration is effectively determining who is regarded as a migrant or not. Yet, denunciations of our shared migrant identity proved to be an advantage for me in the research. Discussions exposed not only common experiences of integrating into the Dutch society, but provided us also with laughter regarding the complicated Dutch language.

Language difficulties was moreover key to a re-occurring complication during the research. Since I do not speak either Dutch or Polish, I had a somewhat limited access to the Polish diaspora in The Hague, making it difficult to get in contact with further respondents than the initial two. This was also reflected by the participants, as well as the trade union representatives who were interviewed, explaining that many Polish migrant workers residing abroad are sceptical to interviews, authorities and to give out information about experiences in general, considering their insecure living and working situations. On the other hand, those who did participate, were more than willing to share their life-story. This highlights what Atkinson (1998) argues to be the strength of life-story methodology, that even though there might be limited access to respondents, those who do participate are most often eager to share their life experience:

‘I believe that for the vast majority of people, the sharing of their life stories is something that they really want to do. All that most people usually need is someone to listen to them or someone to show an interest in their stories and they will welcome the opportunity.’ (Atkinson, 1998: 25)

Thus, accessing the material was not an issue dependent on the numbers of respondents. What proved to be problematic was rather to access further respondents through my intended gatekeepers. This will be further discussed in the section named ‘selection of respondents and locations’.

3.2 An ethnographic approach

The methodology of this study is based on an ethnographic *approach*. I describe it as an approach, since the ethnography in this particular study differs substantially from traditional definitions of ethnography. These definitions have been linked to anthropology, and the idea that a researcher needs to spend a longer period of time with the group or community of interest for the study, in its ‘natural’ context, to create a thorough understanding of its practices (Falzon, 2009: 1). This is not the case in this study, since the time made available for research was limited and the material gathered have been restricted to a couple of interviews per participant, each consisting of a couple of hours.

The restricted time for research also prevented a so-called embodiment process which recently have gained popularity among ethnographers in construction work (Pink et al., 2013: 5). Emphasising the process of learning through one’s body, is arguably vital, particularly in a physical profession as construction work. However, this has not been done in this research, but it does not mean that the study is not ethnographic. I have engaged through discussions, meetings and interviews, and even though I was not embodying the process in its full sense, it still involved moments of unease, alienation, (mis)understandings and compassion (Pink et al, 2013: 6-7). Moreover, separating the contemporary interpretation of ethnography from more traditional forms, enforce the consideration of

social and economic globalisation. The impact which social and economic globalisation have had on the production of knowledge, has meant that traditional forms of ethnography no longer have the possibility of explaining changing behaviour on a local level, and that it is therefore necessary to see contemporary ethnographic research from a different lens; taking into consideration the multiple sites in which much of the cultural knowledge is produced (Marcus, 1995: 96-97).

It is argued that the ethnographic approach in this study is multi-sited. The interviews used for the research were conducted in the Netherlands, but based on Foucauldian thinking, if space is socially constructed, thus not permanent to a specific geographical area or time, then ethnographic research has to be viewed and conducted in a similar way. Exploring alterations of cultural and social meanings in area(s) of importance to the research – rather than according to the norms and traditions of (single-sited) ethnography, is of particular significance when engaging with migrants, recognising the importance of placing research at various ends of migrant trajectories (Falzon, 2009: 4, Gallo, 2009: 87, Marcus, 1995: 96). And as identified by Falzon (2009), language is probably the decisive factor differentiating between single- and multi-sited ethnography, referring to processes of containing or extending cultural production in social contexts. Thus, multi-sited ethnography should not be seen as referring to geographic terms, but to cultural differences.

The most prominent used criticism of an ethnographic approach, is that there are limits to its representativeness in other context specific research problems than that what is being investigated (Marcus, 1995: 99). However, this does not mean that it is not possible to exemplify other, structural patterns. This could also be seen as a strength of ethnography; the discovery of societal issues in context specific areas which do not conform to the general image of those issues, (in)voluntarily introduce more research in the area of interest.

3.3 Learning people's life-stories

While ensuring that the interviews was designed to maximise the understanding of the migrant's social situation, it was equally important to leave the interviews as informal and open-ended as possible, making sure that the life story interview was effective – in the sense of reflectiveness. A reflective life story does not only recognise special, important and decisive moments in life, it also facilitates to understand narrative processes constructed during the interviews, illustrating the intimate relationship between me as an interviewer and the interviewee, and how knowledge is produced as a result of our interaction (Atkinson, 1998: 40-41).

To force more reflective and thoughtful answers from the respondents, I prepared the interviews thematically. Focusing on turning points in the life of the respondents, involving factors such as family relations, health or changes in income levels, was advantageous since it allowed me to go in depth, and focus on the parts of the life story which turned out to be of specific interest for the research as the interviews proceeded. This was furthermore done to highlight the different trajectories among the respondents, linking it to specific and important periods in Poland's history – such as the fall of the USSR, Poland's entry to the EU or periods of high unemployment numbers. The interviews were not

digitally recorded, even though it is sometimes argued that this is an advantage. However, by not recording the interviews, I was hoping to create a more relaxed atmosphere, where the respondents themselves were in control of their story; in the sense of what was said, how it was said and how it is read in the end (Atkinson, 1998: 41). Instead of recording, I have been taking notes and been writing summaries of the interviews, highlighting important features and critical junctures in their stories. As with the preparation of the interviews, the material gathered was organised thematically, according to three broad themes. Work, health and social relations, and identity. Summaries were written shortly after the interviews, and together with my personal diary (acting as a fieldwork-notebook) special attention was given to impressions, moments of laughter and the surroundings during the interview. This was done to smoothen the analysis, facilitating the process of theoretical induction and identifying relevant concepts.

During the interviews, the language used was English. However, both for me and my respondents, English is only our second language. This was given specific attention as the interviews were interpreted and analysed, since language barriers often hindered us from speaking as freely as we would want to, resulting in the same phrases being used to describe various events – with varying meanings. The interviews were moreover thematically structured, since it facilitated to keep the discussions relevant to the research. Certain events, such as memories from their first weeks in Holland, big political happenings or sports events were used throughout the interviews to accentuate experiences from particular time-periods of the respondent's life, decisive for decisions made later on (Atkinson, 1998: 29).

Further, the analysis was initiated already with the first informal meetings between me and the respondents. This was essential to recognise, but of even more importance is to distinguish and prevent the use of alien or deterministic language to explain certain contextualised situations (Emerson et al, 1995: 109). Avoiding a vocabulary which tends to be influenced by my own background, was obviously something that I, myself, needed to pay attention to.

3.4 Selection of respondents and location(s)

One of the most prominent groups of labour migrants in the Netherlands has for a number of decades been Polish workers. Frequently involved in construction, agriculture or domestic work, emigration has appeared as a lucrative option. This partially explains the relevance of directing the study towards Polish workers. The reason of focusing on construction work on the other hand, was partially due to my first contact with a respondent who has been involved in construction work for twenty-five years. Additionally, construction work is a diverse profession, attracting a diverse group of people, and often subject to hard work under tough conditions. This, in combination with the long history of Polish guest workers in the Netherlands, made it particularly interesting to focus on Polish construction workers in relation to the choice of life-story methodology as my ethnographic approach.

My initial contact was Roman¹⁴, who I got in contact with through an acquaintance. He is in his early sixties, and has been living in the Netherlands for the last twenty years. I met with him two times to ask questions and discuss his reasons for migrating, his life in the Netherlands, challenges and times of insecurity. Except for the two interviews with him, I conducted four more interviews. Two of them with Jacob, a Polish man in his mid-forties, who just as Roman have been living here for the last twenty-five years. The last two interviews, were made with representatives for a trade union, FNV Mondiaal¹⁵, and its smaller branch FNV Bouw – to widen the scope of the research, contextualising changes in the Dutch construction sector in particular, and in the European labour market in general. One of these interviews were held in Amsterdam, and was more of a meeting where we discussed issues the construction sector is facing. The meeting with Irene in Amsterdam more over acted as an opening to the second interview, with Henrik and Thomas at the FNV Bouw in Rotterdam.

All the participants in the research were informed about the research and its aim, guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants. They were also informed about their possibilities to cancel the interview if they wanted to. In total, I have made six interviews with five respondents. I have also had access to interview material from an earlier project at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS)¹⁶, to draw on insights and feelings from the Polish construction workers who were participating in that research. It should also be mentioned that five out of six respondents in this research are men. This was anticipated, considering the gendered status of both construction and trade union work.

A snowball sampling technique has been used with the anticipation of getting in contact with further respondents through the initial interviews (Bryman, 2004: 100). However, there are several uncertainties and obstacles surrounding snowball sampling, not least the lack of control which I as a researcher has when trying to access further respondents. This turned out to be crucial, as most of the construction workers who were approached avoided and sometimes refused to participate. This is partly explained through language difficulties. But also because migrant workers tend to be sceptical about giving out information which might not always be in accordance with the law, and there are still scepticism towards researchers, journalists or authorities, even though Polish migrants these days are here legally. Thus, even though snowball sampling generally is seen as a good way to get in contact with suitable respondents, as the snowballing turned out, resulting in only a few respondents – I did not have any other choice but adapting the research to the respondents available.

Considering the obstacles I faced with the sampling, I got to appreciate the contact which I initiated earlier in May with FNV Mondiaal in Amsterdam. Compared to the 1990s, when trade unions struggled with employers hiring ‘illegal’ labour, today’s work focus much on issues of identifying employers who hire legal workers, but do not follow collective agreements of salaries and safety. A

¹⁴ The names of the respondents used in the research are fictive to protect their anonymity.

¹⁵ <http://www.fnvmondiaal.nl/>

¹⁶ CHUBU was a five year project conducted by the Open Research Center of Chubu University, in collaboration with five research teams from Thailand, Mexico, Senegal, the Netherlands and the US focusing on human insecurity of ‘people on the move’ (Mushakoji, 2008: iv) .

discussion on changes of the construction sector and relating it to the broader European labour market, pin-pointed the structural change of how to organise labour through sub-contracting and flexible employment arrangements, leading to a grey sector of informality and blurry employment agreements while exposing migrants as vulnerable on a competitive labour market.

Thus, the interviews held with trade unionists provided me with an additional understanding of central aspects in relation to labour migration within the EU. Supplementing life-stories with a broader contextualisation of the construction sector and the European labour market, offered me an insight into the central aspects of how to better understand security from a people-centred perspective, emphasising the importance of an epistemological shift of how security is popularly viewed. Based on this, the upcoming chapter presents and analyses events and turning points for Jacob and Roman, taking into account the transformative changes which Poland as well as the EU has gone through during recent decades. It aims to reflect on these institutional changes in the labour market, paying particular attention to the construction sector.

Chapter 4: The man looks for a better life

There is a vast number of Polish people living across Europe. This is also the case in the Netherlands, particularly in The Hague and Rotterdam, where the presence of Polish corner shops and firms is having an impact across the cities. The presence of construction work is also apparent in almost every street and neighbourhood, and looking more closely to these construction sites reveals a diversity of workers, from all over Europe, and not least from Poland.

This chapter presents interviews and discussions made with two Polish workers, Roman and Jacob, in The Hague. Together with interviews made with trade unionists, the stories told by Roman and Jacob are used in relation to a wider institutional environment to highlight motives for migrating, strategies to support themselves, and challenges they have faced over the last three decades in the Netherlands. The aim is to identify critical junctures evolving around citizenship status, health issues and self-employment, ascertaining the impact these junctures have had on the human security of Roman and Jacob.

4.1 Migrating for security

Official numbers of Polish labour migrants increased after the expansion of the EU in 2004, but migration from Poland to the Netherlands is nevertheless a new phenomenon. There has for decades been an extensive influx of Poles, not least visible through the mentioned Polish diaspora in the Netherlands. The exact numbers of Polish immigrants are unclear, since official figures after the enlargement do not consider migrants already residing in the country ‘illegally’, active in the informal sector. Neither do the figures account for people employed by non-Dutch employers, including self-employed people (Engbersen et al, 2010: 126-128, 130, 134). Ignoring these groups of migrants in the statistics is deceptive, since a vast amount of Polish migrants are working for non-Dutch employers, for Dutch employers on the ‘black’ market or as self-employed, running their own business.

These kinds of employment arrangements have been identified as main pull-factors in cross-border migration from Poland to the Netherlands (Engbersen et al, 2010: 119). A diaspora is crucial in establishing the initial contacts for new arrivals, acting as the foremost tool in the anticipation of realising dreams of improved financial situations, and better working- and living conditions. Both Roman and Jacob’s stories confirms this picture, as they decided to move in search for employment in the early 1990s. A friend, or a friend of a friend, suggested that it was easy to get a job in the Netherlands, and that it was easy to make money. Encouraged to move, they both got work through their acquaintances in the Netherlands – working for a short period of time. As reflected in existing literature; most labour migration is for short periods of time (Engbersen et al, 2010: 118). However, a fair number of, particularly, young men tend to stay as they do not have close ties with their home country. Jacob decided to try his luck and stay after his first round of work, while Roman made the decision after a few years, as his family situation changed.

Roman tells me that the decision to move in search for work in the early 1990s was based on financial reasons. He was in debt from gambling, and considering the labour market in Poland of the time, the Netherlands appeared a good option. The reason for staying in the Netherlands on the other hand, was due to his family situation. A worsened relationship with his wife, and a stagnating economy with bleak prospects in the labour market as an engineer, made him decide to stay in the Netherlands permanently. As with other migrants in similar situations, the prospects of earning money, having a stable living situation and future possibilities of working as self-employed were convincing enough.

Jacob gives another impression. Initially in The Hague to visit a friend, he got the taste of a different life and wanted to stay. He got a short-term job for a couple of weeks through his friend who was working as a carpenter, and as soon as he went back to Poland he started planning his next trip. Jacob emphasises that money has never been important to him, but that it was something else which was attractive about the Netherlands. It was a different culture, it was *Europe*, with more to offer than post-communist Warsaw – still in transition from the Soviet-era. Thus, it seems that financial motives might be a central reason to leave home, but not the only one. The opportunities to a ‘better’ life, more freedom in an open and not as traditionally- and religiously bound society as Poland, seem to be just as valid a motive. As put by one Polish guy interviewed for the earlier mentioned CHUBU-project:

“The migration is about a decent life, you know... the man look for better life conditions, that is all” (P30, Interviews from CHUBU-project)

The search for a different and decent life seems to be an essential part of the migratory process, even though it implies residing illegally in a country for several years, relying on informal social relations (through acquaintances and friends to secure a livelihood). However, friendships are not a sustainable and long-term solution to security and well-being. Roman tells me that this was something he recognised at an early stage, and as soon as he got a job or got in contact with new clients he built on that relationship. Many times, he proposed working for a cheaper hourly rate if provided with accommodation and possibly a meal or two a day, while working on the project. In this sense, he established not only trustworthy contacts and sometimes friends, but he was also recommended to others – extending his professional network and building friendships. Jacob on the other hand, solved his housing situation and economic security separately, and in a different way than Roman. During his first visit, he got in contact with the punk-rock community in The Hague, and as he returned searching for work he moved in with a few of them in a squatted community. After a few weeks he called on an ad in a newspaper:

“A saw an ad about a painting job for a Dutch guy. Back then there was not so many Poles or other East-Europeans so it was no problem getting the job. I did the job with two guys from Ghana I think.” (Jacob, personal interview, 19/9, The Hague)

As I got to know Jacob and Roman and listened to their stories, it seems as if even though residing in the country unofficially, they acquired a basic level of security pretty quick. They might have been isolated socially, not least through the language barrier and their unofficial status, but they still managed to acquire a certain level of housing and income. Roman explains that it is different today.

Things have changed, both for him and other new arrivals from Eastern Europe, particularly the attitudes towards Eastern Europeans by the Dutch society:

“Back then people were more friendly. There was not so many Poles and other Eastern Europeans. I think, maybe, because people were interested in a different way. You know, the wall had separated so much. Not only people, but culture, languages. // That is different today. Now with all the Slovaks, Czechs and Hungarians people are tired of foreigners. And not interested.” (Roman, personal interview, 12/7, The Hague)

The separation of Europe by the Berlin-wall up until 1989, together with less migrants, seems to have influenced Dutch people’s interest and attitudes towards CEE-migrants, showing an honest interest of people ‘on the other side’. Henrik and Thomas at the FNV Bouw also confirms that it was easier for migrants back in the 1990s to achieve a basic level of security. Today, the freedom of movement and the status of legality have created new forms of insecurity for migrant’s involved in construction work. By being recruited by employment agencies focusing on jobs in the periphery of the economy – on an already stratified labour market – in a sector with pre-dominantly semi-formal employment relations, and without knowledge of the local language or the social security system, migrant workers are easily exploited when seeking to establish themselves in the labour market. At first glance, this appears contradictory since the free movement of labour implies an imperative of voluntary migration. However, as indicated by Truong (2008), the free movement of labour might be an economic concept, but it generates severe social challenges for those migrating, and thus also for the European community.

As unemployed or underpaid in their ‘home’ countries, CEE-migrants are prone to migrate in search for work abroad. The intention of residing in a foreign country and work for a short period of time is advantageous and compatible with the seasonal character of construction work, inclining migrants to take up employment in uncertain environments. But as they arrive in the destination country, there is no, or not enough, social legislation protecting them. This indicates a one-sided focus from a policy level, with decision-making organs underestimating the social consequences of intra-EU labour migration, focusing solely on economic concerns.

Organising labour markets according to a prioritisation of financial interests is leaving the incentives of arranging employment agreements to profit-seeking employment agencies. This leads to a mainstreaming of semi- and informal employment relations within the European construction sector, where entrepreneurs see opportunities of hiring cheap labour. However, it goes without saying that not all firms, entrepreneurs and employers actively seek to exploit migrant workers. Yet, in the current institutional environment, where migrant workers are seen as labour or any other commodity – stripped from human attributes as feelings and dreams – lower payments and exploitative conditions are normalised. Moreover, the exploitative nature of construction work which migrants experience, acts as a subtle and legal way to informality, forcing migrants to rely on friends or establish other informal networks as a means to secure a livelihood.

4.2 Queuing for acceptance?

After having spent a decade in the Netherlands, by 2004, Jacob was working for himself. He had learnt to speak Dutch through work, clients and thanks to

his life in the squatted community. He had plans of setting up his own business, and had not been back in Poland since migrating in the early 90s. He enjoyed life in the squatted community and he was thinking of applying for Dutch citizenship. Up until then, he had only had limited contact with the Polish community in The Hague. If he did, it was mainly through work. He says that the only time he speaks Polish, is with his brother on Skype once a month, and he has no intention of moving back to Poland:

“Even if I speak Polish with the guys I work with they don’t see me as Polish. I’ve been here for too long. So I speak English. Which is fine by me”. (Jacob, personal interview, 16/5, The Hague)

It seems evident that Jacob’s relation to Poland and the Polish community changed over the first ten years of his stay. Even though residing illegally in the Netherlands, he tells me that he started to feel Dutch, or at least European, rather than Polish. His aspiration of applying for Dutch citizenship was always a priority, and his way of living, integrated with a specific Dutch sub-culture, constantly interacting with Dutch society and exposed to the Dutch language, provided him with confidence to go through with the citizenship application when Poland’s entrance to the EU made it possible .

Even though not interacting as much with the Dutch society as Jacob, and neither feeling as Dutch, Roman expressed similar feelings towards the European identity during our second meeting, when I asked him if he still felt Polish:

“Well if somebody ask, I say I’m Polish. But I don’t feel Polish. This is home, even if I’m not Dutch. I think I’m European, that’s how I like to see it.” (Roman, personal interview, 26/7, The Hague)

Roman had initially also been keen to apply for citizenship in the Netherlands, and he told me that he spent a lot of time learning about Dutch culture, especially learning the language. However, as Poland became a member of the EU, his enthusiasm decreased. He still had strong ties with Poland, visited his family a couple of times each year, and as an EU-citizen, he was entitled to social, economic and legal rights also in the Netherlands, making him less eager to go through with the complicated process of applying for a Dutch passport.

The way Jacob and Roman have organised their life in the Netherlands can be interpreted according to Castells (1997) theoretical typology on the construction of identities. It seems as if Roman, still in contact with home and with family, has more or less accepted his identity as a migrant. Or rather, he has adapted to the identity of a migrant, an identity with characteristics constructed and introduced to him by dominant institutions in society, such as a Polish diaspora, and attitudes from the Dutch society, as well as Dutch authorities. Compared to Jacob, he arrived in his late thirty’s, as a family man with certain responsibilities. This reflects also the gendered nature of migration, fulfilling traditional expectations from the Polish society as a man supporting his family according to the ‘breadwinner-model’.

In relation to the mentioned typology of identity-building, Jacob correlates to the ‘project-identity’ – breaking away from society, starting a new life in a new environment, working with a new profession and socialising with new friends. This ‘project-identity’ is also reflecting short-term aspects of labour migration in general, considering that most migrants plan to stay only for a short period of time. Categorising people according to typologies of identity is sometimes difficult, but it is valuable when trying to understand how (in)security is experienced

differently by heterogeneous groups, such as labour migrants – and particularly their subjective responses to their experienced (in)securities.

As a result of Poland's entrance to the EU, Roman and Jacob could not only reside and work legally in the Netherlands, but also start their own official business, having a big effect on their economy. Roman emphasised the financial aspects during one of our discussions:

“Starting my own business meant a lot more money. Compared to before, I earned fifty percent more, between 600 to 800 a week.” (Roman, personal interview, 26/7, The Hague)

Running their own business was something which both Roman and Jacob had been dreaming of ever since arriving in the Netherlands. It implied not only a better situation financially, but also the possibility of planning activities outside of working hours, increasing every day freedom. As exemplified by Jacob:

“Eight hours a day is more than enough for me. I get enough money, and I have time for other things too. But the other guys want to work more, so we usually compromise on 9 hours a day, but then it's enough.” (Jacob, personal interview, 19/5, The Hague)

Thus, Jacob's experience of freedom, and also security, is connected to other activities not involving his work. This goes hand in hand with the definition of precariousness, given by Foti (2004), stressing the importance of not isolating precariousness only to work-related issues, but also include a broader context, involving issues such as not being able to plan one's time and building a life and identity not only around work.

For migrants like Roman and Jacob, who had been residing initially illegally for a long period of time (thus secured connections and social contacts), the enlargement meant an advantage compared to newly arrived migrants. Their economic and social situation made them not as vulnerable to the changing labour market. However, the expansion of the free movement of labour, and the growth of employment agencies, provided an alternative to the organisation of labour within the construction sector. Employment agencies themselves were not a new phenomenon on the Dutch labour market – rather the opposite. Yet, the legalisation of CEE-migrants to work in the Netherlands facilitated an institutional change in which employment agencies further specialised in foreign workers, providing entrepreneurs and contractors with a more ready supply of cheap labour.

As explained by Henrik at FNV Bouw when I met with him in Rotterdam; this has created new labour market tensions. These tensions refer to shifting segments on the labour market, in which cheap labour replaces existing labour. This labour market ambiguity which the enlargement of the EU resulted in, is reflecting the ideas of segmented labour market theory. It not only channelled CEE-migrants into certain sectors of the labour market, but stratified these segments of the labour market still further. Even though Roman and Jacob had a stable ground with social connections, knowledge of the system, and plenty of work – they also started to feel the competition.

Increased competitiveness among workers, and a shift in employment relations in a labour market already dominated by semi- or informal employment agreements, effected the established migrant workforce. This process has taken place all over Europe, across sectors – not only in construction work. According to Henrik and Thomas at the FNV, the reorganisation and institutional change

of the labour market implied a process of deregulation. In combination with variations in living standards across a wide geographical area, this process facilitates and encourages marginalised groups of people to move. In Poland, it means that domestic workers are driven out of the labour market as Ukrainians, Moldovans and Belarusians are hired to do the same job for less money; the post-financial crisis Southern Europe is generating a flow of workers moving up north, competing with CEE-migrants and working for less money than domestic workers; and since January 2014, the transition period for Romanian and Bulgarian workers have expired which leads to a new influx of even cheaper labour than from the other CEE- or Southern European countries.

This process of job displacement is central to an understanding of the freedom of movement within the EU, and its human security impacts reflects increasingly important incentives of self-governance on the European labour market.

4.3 A drive to informality

The acceptance of Poland as an EU member made it possible for Roman and Jacob to legally start their own business in the Netherlands. Being self-employed and running their own business had for a long time been their primary goal, and even though informally working for themselves for a number of years, the enlargement of the EU made it possible to set up a legal business. The opportunities of starting their own company, working in the formal sector, accessing state pensions, insurances and recognition from Dutch authorities and the Dutch society, illustrates a different sense of security than what was accessed through informal relationships in the 90s. Further, experiencing economic security as well as the freedom of how to organise their time outside of working hours, contrasts self-employment as a successful option compared to other work forms. Yet, although self-employment implies a recognition of success, more freedom to decide when or where to work, and what kind of jobs to take, it is also characterised by a vulnerability to externalities.

Thomas at FNV depicts this different picture of self-employment during our interview. In the light of structural changes in the labour market, Thomas tells me that the process of deregulation and subcontracting is troublesome – particularly for the self-employed. As self-employed, workers are most often not members of trade-unions, and neither are they protected through collective agreements. Positioned in a grey zone in the labour market, self-employed workers are also prone to use other, more recently arrived migrant labour, acting as an entry to the labour market. Thus, this parallel and informal process of channelling labour into certain segments of the labour market is further segmenting an already stratified labour market. The vulnerability of externalities is exemplified by the increased competition which the enlargement of the freedom of movement implied:

“You know, I do quality work for 10 euro/h. Now Slovaks and Czechs come and say they do the same for 6 or maybe 7 euro/h.” (Roman, personal interview, 12/7, The Hague)

Thus, even though Roman has his own business and works in the formal sector, the surplus of labour available on the Dutch labour market puts him in a vulnerable position – due to competition and stagnating salaries. But it is also an

ambiguous position, considering Roman's own history as a migrant involved in informal activities and exposed to insecurity. The institutional pressure is thus compelling him to place other persons in a similar situation as experienced by himself. Meeting me for a beer, Jacob also reflected on this ambiguity towards the fellow countrymen he hires:

“I pay them every week because I know they need quick money. It's not always good though, because sometimes they don't show up after the weekend and I don't see them again...” (Jacob, personal interview, 19/9, The Hague)

It seems as if Jacob has felt this ambiguity too, and also the unease he is facing as a result of institutional changes on the labour market. Nevertheless, the same policy changes have also made it possible for both him and Roman to successfully set up their own business.

It is, however, important to remember that the success it implied for Roman and Jacob, and which it implies for other migrant workers of having a business and working as self-employed, is a result of individual success. It is not a success of labour market processes or labour market integration, but a result of an individualised labour market. Distinguishing incentives of self-governance and individual responsibility of maintaining security is key to the understanding of segmented labour markets and dual economies. This is so, since the emphasis on individuality depicts successful individuals with a secured livelihood as up and coming and with an entrepreneurial spirit – while individuals deprived of social and economic security are blamed as weaker, and therefore pushed into certain sectors of the labour market permeated by insecurity.

Roman's story illustrates the limitations to such a narrow understanding of labour market processes. After a couple of successful years as self-employed in the formal sector, he was diagnosed with throat cancer. Heavy smoking for too many years, bad luck, and unfavourable working conditions were given as an explanation by doctors. Due to the late discovery and severe spread of the cancer, the glottis had to be removed and replaced with a prosthesis. The worsened health condition affected Roman in several ways; limiting his possibilities to work and depriving him of most his social relations which in the Netherlands were attached to his work. It has also affected his identity, which up until the point of the discovery of the cancer was intimately bound to work. As he explained to me in one of the interviews:

“Even though I didn't have to work, I would. It's me, it's who I am. I'm not a person who just don't do anything.” (Roman, personal interview, 26/7, The Hague)

Illustrating issues of de-skilling and downward social mobility, Roman has to accept that his health condition is limiting his possibilities to work. This could be seen as the second time in his life where external factors are forcing him to reconsider and accept his limited possibilities. The first time, it led to his decision to migrate to the Netherlands and take up work in the informal sector due to a lack of work opportunities as an engineer in Poland. The second time, he is also pushed into the informal sector, as he continues doing work since his sick pension is too low.

“I get around 900 a month. But it's not enough, so I try to work so I get another 300 a month” (Roman, personal interview 26/7, The Hague)

His health condition and the low economic compensation is thus bringing Roman back into the informal sector, and the low sick pension from the Dutch authorities is a result of his limited time working formally in the Netherlands,

resulting in only minimum compensation. That Roman continues working even though the prosthesis has to be adjusted every thirty minutes, is furthermore a result of his uncertainty about the future. Getting close to retirement age, he is concerned about his pension, considering he spent most of his life in the informal sector – giving him a minimum of compensation from both the Polish as well as from the Dutch state. His concerns are not only financial though. After many years in the Netherlands, he has only limited contact with Poland. He is divorced and has lost contact with most friends, and even though in contact with his children and his grandchildren, he does not want to be an additional load for them.

Jacob's relative success of having his own business is thus in contrast to Roman's situation. His decision to live in a squatted community has been financially advantageous for him, making it possible to save a fair amount of money. But not only that. He was younger when he arrived in the Netherlands, he did not have any family to take care of, and his living situation has provided him with a wide social network. Jacob is thus in a different situation, even if he did not fall ill.

4.4 Summary

The stories presented in this chapter reveal experiences of transnational livelihoods common to labour migrants across Europe. It is illustrating a constant struggle between formality and informality, and how individual decisions – as well as institutional changes – can change conditions over a night, leaving migrants exposed to precarious and ambiguous living situations.

More specifically, this chapter has highlighted turning points in Roman's and Jacob's life; the different strategies used to solve their housing situation as newly arrived in the 1990s, and how they engaged with informal activities in the construction sector to make a living; the successful (and ambiguous) point of establishing their own legal business; and finally, the critical juncture for Roman when diagnosed with cancer.

Even though case study examples, they are also reflecting a broader shift in the European labour market. Consequently, in the following chapter, it is argued that a human security perspective has facilitated to understand how EU labour market policies are misdirected, and how similar shifts of informality, ambiguity and precariousness can be traced in other sectors and other groups of the European labour market.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study has discussed and analysed intra-EU labour migration. It has set out to identify potential implications which the freedom of movement might have on labour migrants as a result of the inclusion of new member states in 2004 and 2007. It has also explored what consequences politics pursued and policies implemented have had on migrants' possibilities to accommodate a sense of security and well-being. More specifically, the ambition has been to highlight the process in which subjective notions of well-being are produced and reproduced as foreign workers are establishing themselves in a new labour market.

Based on a critical and selected literature review, supplemented with life-story interviews with Polish construction workers, the study has identified a narrow framework from which EU-policies are implemented. This has been contrasted by stressing the legacy of segmented labour market theory, and the significance it has for contemporary politics and policy implementation. A human security perspective has been used as a means to nuance and further deepen the understanding of migratory processes, stressing how people seek various kind of security, not only economic. Accentuating an alternative understanding of security is also facilitating an appreciation of the specific effects which a changing European labour market has had on the construction sector, the way labour is organised, and its impact on migrant workers involved in construction work.

5.1 Shaping precariousness through flexibility

There is a misdirected focus on policy debates in relation to the free movement of labour within the EU. This paper argues that the prioritisation of financial interests neglects important social consequences for workers migrating, as well as further segmenting an already stratified labour market – accelerating the marginalisation of certain segments of workers increasing inequality.

Understanding the EU as the economic partnership it is, depicts the freedom of movement within the EU in a somewhat different light than the so often projected picture of unlimited possibilities for unemployed, less-fortunate or otherwise marginalised groups to move in search for work. Rather, it points to important ideological underpinnings which are encouraging individuals to self-govern and take responsibility to find work wherever it might be possible. If inclusion is the main goal with policy implementation for the EU, this technique of spatial governing is missing its goals. Exemplified through the freedom of movement, individuals who already possess security are provided with security, while disadvantaged and marginalised groups are left with the option to migrate. This is effectively minimising costs for governments, supposedly responsible for unemployment figures and an integrated labour market. It is also generating an insecure and precarious environment for unemployed people, leaving workers with no option but to migrate and take up precarious work. This is contradictory, since it can be seen as worsening the situation for already marginalised workers.

The shaping of precarious work is a result of misdirected labour market policies. At the same time as it is creating space for insecure employment, it is

also commodifying migrant workers, in the sense that migrants to a further extent are becoming dependent on the market. There is a direct link between the scant economic framework which labour market policies are based on, and the commodification of migrant workers. This is of particular significance in an enlarged EU, where socio-economic inequality is generating an unlimited supply of labour, increasing competitiveness and pushing down salaries.

However, this is rarely reflected in policy evaluations and reports, mainly due to the economic-centred lens of policy makers. Rather, there is a focus on the increased flexibility of the workforce. From this point of view, flexibility refers to availability, short-term contracts, no restraining collective agreements, and willingness to take up employment anywhere. Thus, from an economic point of view, a flexible workforce is something good, and also something which matches perfectly with the construction sector, considering the fluid composition of employment. Additionally, the seasonal character of construction work also has an important role to play, limiting job opportunities to certain seasons of the year which effectively legitimises flexible employment agreements.

This flexibility is also implying something else. Inherent in the very notion of flexibility, is that to be flexible mean to sacrifice something – implying that flexible workers probably have given something up. As in the case of Roman, and thousands of other migrant workers in the EU, this has meant giving up on their family to migrate in search for work. Conforming to the traditional image of a family-man, supporting the family according to the earlier mentioned ‘breadwinner-model’, means that many men arrive home ‘successfully’ – providing financial support not only to their family but sometimes also to relatives and friends. Yet, this is not always the case. Living as a transnational migrant tears on social relations, and at times, as in Roman’s case, they are destroyed – contributing to a divorce.

Acknowledging this process, where workers are prepare to migrate, to give up on family relations as a means to support that very same family, is central to the understanding of both flexibility and the earlier mentioned commodification process. These issues further illuminate the central part of precarity as a state of mind – an ongoing process of being flexible, available and constantly prepared to sacrifice more.

5.2 The legalisation of cheap labour?

The freedom of movement within the EU erased borders which earlier divided Europe. It made it possible for EU-citizens to move, reside and work all across the EU, and as illustrated by the cases of Roman and Jacob, it had a major impact on ‘illegal’ migrants undertaking informal activities on the labour market. In their case, it made it possible to return to the formal sector, and even to set up their own business.

However, this narrative is only partially true. From a human security perspective, this paper has explored a misdirected policy focus in relation to the free movement of labour, displaying a failure to address workers’ vulnerability. Rather, this paper argues that the free movement of labour has encouraged a one-sided focus on capital growth, generating new forms of insecurities for migrants moving across the EU in search for better opportunities. The one-sided focus

on capital growth has facilitated a process in which cheap labour has been institutionalised. This process, and the way that labour is organised on the labour market, is not exclusive for the construction sector – but relevant across sectors, such as in agricultural work and transportation. This is explained by similar processes taking place across the EU, as employment agencies are established and increasingly influence the labour market. A wave of deregulation, and the free movement of labour as well as of capital is effectively undermining labour standards. The absence of regulation and control of minimum standards, leave an empty space on the labour market. This is filled by the employment agencies, actively recruiting foreign workers as a means of providing entrepreneurs and employers with cheap labour, thereby institutionalising not only cheap labour, but also precariousness.

Considering indications presented in this paper, the role of employment agencies should not be underestimated. The fact that migrants might be subject to more vulnerabilities under current arrangements, than during the 1990s when employment agencies did not have as much influence and possibilities to hire cheap labour legally, suggests further research on the topic. It would be of particular interest to examine aspects of formal and informal work, and to critically assess the normativity surrounding the free movement of labour within the EU.

In relation to this, it is also suggested that further research investigate feelings of ambiguity among self-employed labour migrants. Through a lens of ethnography, findings indicate that the institutional environment is pressuring self-employed migrants involved in the formal sector, to hire newly arrived migrants informally, as a means to sustain their own livelihood. It is therefore suggested that further research investigate social consequences of EU-policy measures, across sectors, while paying particular attention to migrants' subjective responses to shifts on the European labour market.

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