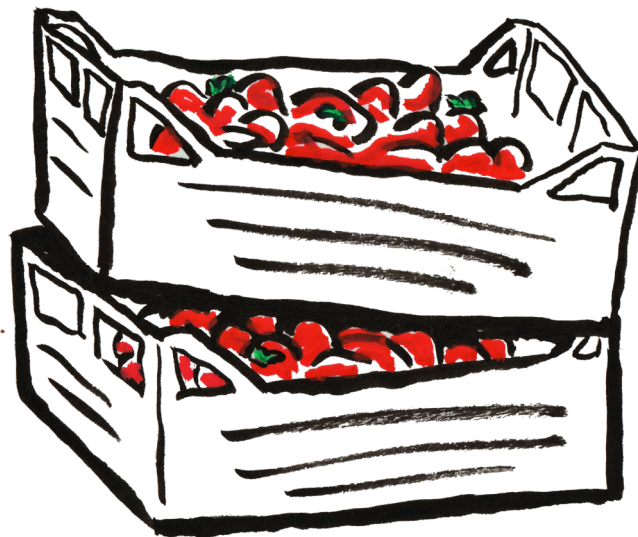


“Two words:

I’m Secure and Safe”

Employment precarity throughout the life trajectories of
Polish migrants in the Netherlands



Djoeke Reeskamp

“Two words: I’m Secure and Safe”

Employment precariousness throughout the life trajectories of Polish migrants in the Netherlands



Master Thesis
Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

Djoeke Reeskamp
Student nr. 6948677
Supervisor: Marie-Louise Glebbeek
Graphic designer: Koza Otmar
Word count: 20.034
June 2024



Cover image drawn by author

Abstract

Many Polish migrants move to the Netherlands hoping for a better income or more work opportunities. As newcomers in the country they are often drawn to employment agencies for relatively easy and quick access to work and accommodation. This also suits the plan they often initially have to stay temporarily. However, many end up staying longer than intended, and it is mainly with these agencies that they often face feelings of insecurity, unreliability and overall dissatisfaction. Stability in employment emerges as a crucial factor in Polish migrants' life trajectories, providing a sense of security and achievement.

Through qualitative ethnographic research, this study examines how temporary and unstable employment affects the personal perspectives, social lives and future aspirations of Polish migrants. The concept of precarity serves as a theoretical framework, with a focus on its implications for the life trajectories of the migrants and its subjective aspects. The research takes a retrospective approach, looking back on the experiences of migrants that arrived in the Netherlands roughly between 2007 and 2015.

This thesis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how Polish migrants navigate their precarious working conditions, highlighting their pursuit of security, stability and belonging in a foreign country.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	8
The Concept of Precarity	9
Methodology	12
Positionality	14
Research Population and Location	14
Structure of the Thesis	16
2. Polish Migrants in the Netherlands and their Experience with Precarious Employment	18
Work life in the Netherlands	19
Reliability of work and employment satisfaction	20
Unpredictable work and unpredictable lives	20
Precarity at work and around employment	21
Precarity and Housing	25
Replaceability	26
Sense of achievement	27
Concluding Remarks	29
3. Precarity and Social Life	30
Communities and social struggles	31
Precarity and social inclusion and cohesion	32
The effect of temporary work on social integration	33
Concluding Remarks	36
4. Envisioning the Future	38
Living from day-to-day	39
Future-making and sense of achievement	40
Dependence as characteristic of precarity	41
Agency and freedom of choice	41
Concluding Remarks	43
5. Conclusion	44
Bibliography	48

1. Introduction

Without knowing what to expect, Jakub left Poland in 2011 and started looking for work in the Netherlands. As was the case for many migrants who made this decision at the time, he planned to stay temporarily, but years passed and soon he found himself doing various temporary jobs via employment agencies. Jakub started to feel more and more at home in his new country; but simultaneously, as he decided to stay for the long term, a desire for a more stable life started to gnaw at him. This desire for stability illustrates the precarity that is prevalent in the lives of many Polish migrants in their quest for better opportunities, and forms the central focus of my thesis. A steady job can have a profound positive impact on the lives and experiences of migrants. Just a few years before I met Jakub in February, he finally found a stable job at a flowering company, where he continues to work happily. When I asked him how his new job made him feel, he replied, determinedly: “I can describe these feelings in two words: that I’m secure and safe.”

Poland joined the European Union in 2004, and since 2007, Polish citizens have been able to work in the Netherlands without the need for a permit. While there were already some waves of Polish migrants coming to the Netherlands in the early 2000s (Karpinska and Ooijevaar, 2016), the numbers increased vastly after 2007, making Polish immigrants the largest incoming migrant group in the Netherlands each year. This trend continued until 2022, when Ukrainian migrants, fleeing the Russian invasion in February of that year, outnumbered them for the first time (CBS 2023). Additionally, the growing labour shortage in the Netherlands may have increasingly driven the demand for labour migrants from abroad.

The group of Polish migrants in the Netherlands that end up staying has come to form a large community of Polish people in the Netherlands. Walking through the streets of Den Haag, the city in the Netherlands with the highest number of Polish migrants (CBS 2019), there are numerous Polish supermarkets, restaurants, and even Polish hairdressers to be found, many of them concentrated in Spoorwijk; the city’s main ‘Polish neighbourhood’. Furthermore, there are four Polish Parishes in the Netherlands, organising services in about twenty cities throughout the country. There are also several Polish organisations and associations, such as Barka and Samen Onze Solidariteit (SOS), which provide migrants with useful information and help. Another one is Polka, an organisation for Polish women. This organisation organises support and information sessions at local community centres, as well as social activities for fun, some of which I joined during my fieldwork.

The main motive for Polish migration to the Netherlands has been work (Karpinska and Ooijevaar 2016). This mainly entails temporary stay, as many migrants travel back and forth between Poland and the Netherlands, or end up returning to Poland (CBS 2023). Because of this, many migrants opt for employment agencies, which provide them with jobs on temporary contracts. These employment agencies, however, have a bad reputation in terms of how they treat their employees and the limited job stability they offer. Especially when migrants end up staying long term or permanently in the Netherlands, employment agencies can cause problems such as low salary, unpredictable or long work hours, or a sudden termination of the contract, which has also come to light during my fieldwork.

This thesis studies how precarious work shapes the lives of Polish migrants in the Netherlands, specifically those coming to the Netherlands for work. I have focused on their social life, personal perspectives, and future aspirations. The concept of precarity serves as the theoretical framework for this analysis. Migrant workers in general are frequently regarded as a precarious population due to, among other things, their reliance on temporary contracts and their vulnerable migrant status. This research aims to explore how precarious work, on which I will elaborate briefly in the section under the next header, manifests in the real-life experiences of the people affected. Central to this thesis is the question: ‘How does precarious labour shape the life trajectories of Polish labour migrants in the Netherlands?’ I formulated three sub-questions, which I have used as guidelines for my research questions while conducting fieldwork and which have become the ethnographic chapters of my thesis. The first question asks how Polish migrants in the Netherlands experience employment precarity. Second, I ask what role this employment precarity plays in the social lives of the migrants. Third, I ask how employment precarity affects migrants’ ideas on their futures and their abilities to envision and realise them.

The concept of precarity

Moving to a new country brings insecurities and vulnerabilities for many migrants. This effect is amplified for labour migrants who rely financially on such moves, hoping for better salaries in higher-income countries. In my thesis I use the concept of precarity to examine and understand the experiences of Polish labour migrants. Precarity impacts various groups worldwide, from performance artists in Berlin (Van Assche and Laermans 2022) to wageless workers at garbage dumps in Rio de Janeiro

(Millar 2014). In migration research, precarity is particularly relevant, as moving to another country can intensify precarious conditions and introduce additional challenges (Ramírez et al. 2021, 10). There is a substantial amount of academic work on precarity, which has grown since the emergence of the concept in the 1990s (Choonara, Murgia and Carmo 2022). This extensive literature includes many different definitions, making it difficult to pinpoint its exact meaning. However, it is generally defined by a heightened risk, uncertainty, vulnerability and unpredictability in people's lives and livelihoods (Ramírez et al. 2021; Schilling et al. 2019, 1345; Hewison 2015, 4).

Furthermore, precarity is often seen in close relation to employment status, and in this context many social scientists have placed the concept into the context of a history of neoliberalism. The global rise of neoliberalism from the 1970s transformed the economy over the course of history, influencing migration patterns and integrating countries and individuals into the global market economy and the pursuit of economic liberalism (Overbeek 2002). This wave of neoliberalism, while fostering some economic growth and international negotiations in a few countries (Paus 1994), also led to the retreat of the welfare state, privatisation, commodification and labour market flexibilisation. These changes eroded employment security (Hermann 2007, 85) and contributed to the emergence of a new social class, the 'precariat' (Standing 2011). Especially in Europe, precarity is typically tied to the absence of social protections and the decline or rejection of long term employment relationships (Hewison 2015, 6). Furthermore, one of the characteristics commonly attributed to precarity is the requirement for individuals to "self-activate resources and take sole responsibility for one's choices and social protection" (Armano, Morini and Murgia 2022, 30; Hewison 2015, 439). This is linked to neoliberal ideology, which typically views individuals as independent and self-responsible market players (Pendenza and Lamattina 2019).

More specifically within the history of neoliberalism, scholars have situated the emergence of precarity in the shift from the Fordist model of the post-war economic boom to the post-Fordist model that began in the mid-1970s. Firstly, the Fordist model was characterised by fragmentation of the production chain and standardisation using mechanisms such as assembly lines which made for cheap mass production that could be done by unskilled workers. In this way wages could remain low, yet high enough that the workers could buy the products they made themselves. Secondly, the post-Fordist model aimed to move away from the rigidity or unresponsiveness of mass production and instead introduced systems of 'just-in-time' production. This marked the beginning of a new trend where the flexibility of production chains became crucial, setting in motion the process of "precaritisation" (Bourdieu 1997, 1). In Europe, this shift resulted in decreased job security and a rise in temporary or 'on-demand' job opportunities, particularly in countries like the Netherlands, which attracted migrant workers from lower-income countries such as Poland (OECD 2014).

Between 1987 and 2007, most countries in Western Continental Europe have known a general increase in temporary employment. These growth percentages varied from about 3 percent for Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Luxembourg to 16 percent for Spain, with France, Portugal, Italy, and the Netherlands situated between 5 and 9 percent (ILO 2012). More recently, in 2022 in the Netherlands, 27.7 percent of dependent employment (i.e. waged and salary work) consisted of temporary work, the highest percentage within the EU as well as among OECD countries (OECD 2024). Temporary employment, as well as "triangular employment relationships" (e.g. employment through agencies), both fall

under the term 'non-standard work' (Carr 2015, 386). This is contrasted with 'standard work', which is associated with Fordism. Standard work was defined in 1989 by Rodgers (1989) as employment that "incorporated a degree of regularity and durability in employment relationships, protected workers from socially unacceptable practices and working conditions, established rights and obligations, and provided a core of social stability to underpin economic growth", and later by Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson (2000, 257-258) as typically full-time, waged, and stable work.

While the data mentioned above indicates substantial growth in *temporary work*, this category does not encompass all types of work regarded as precarious. Such data can give important insights, but it is sometimes wrongly equated with precarity, resulting in too much focus on "job characteristics rather than with worker characteristics or subjective experiences" (Worth 2016, 603). Temporary work, although strongly related, is not a synonym for precarious work, and equating the two would result in an overly narrow definition of precarity. However, while the traditional approach to precarity has been criticised for being too narrow on one hand, the concept has also been criticised for being too broad or 'far-stretched' on the other hand (Alberti et al. 2018), losing its definition or "flattening difference" (Richard 2020, 273; Neilson 2019). Therefore, I propose a more nuanced definition. In line with Hewison (2015), Worth (2016) and Papadopoulos (2017) I argue that the added value of precarity as a concept is that it moves beyond dichotomies such as 'standard work' versus 'temporary work'. It enriches the notion of 'temporary work' with aspects of uncertainty, vulnerability, or a lack of workers' agency regarding their work situation, or, vice versa, it adds a temporary aspect to concepts such as 'job satisfaction'. As follows from this argument, not all temporary work is precarious, and not all precarious work is temporary (Hewison 2015, 6). Similarly, I argue in line with Broughton et al. (2016) and Anwar and Graham (2020), who state that what makes flexible work different from precarious work is that flexible work can be a desirable job characteristic that is sometimes actively chosen, whereas precarious types of work are only accepted when there is a lack of alternatives.

There is another debate on precarity, which I will elaborate on in the first chapter of this thesis, which relates to the differences between precarity and its related concepts such as flexible labour or job insecurity. While many authors write about precarity as a negative phenomenon, others have a relatively optimistic view on it, highlighting the possibilities for autonomy, agency, and liberation it can offer people (see for example Millar (2014)). Similar to Anwar and Graham (2020, 241), who state that what is "flexibility for one, can be uncertainty for someone else", I would problematise this optimistic attitude towards precarity, and argue that precarity is inherently undesirable. In my thesis, I will do this by shedding light on the insecurity and vulnerability caused by unstable agency work, highlighting especially the broader effects of this in various life aspects. As such, in a conceptual sense, the distinction between precarity, and its related 'neutral' terms such as flexible labour, becomes especially crucial, as blurring these lines risks neglecting the negative consequences inherent in precarious lives. Besides, I argue for being wary of an overly optimistic attitude towards flexible and temporary labour in general, considering the commonness of precarious experiences in such forms of employment.

Additionally, the argument that links precarity to neoliberalisation and poses it as something new—such as is implied with the notion of the 'emerging precariat' (Standing 2011)—has been criticised for romanticising the previous Fordist system, overlooking the fact that many societies have always been characterised by precarity and that for working people, particularly in the Global South, precarity

has always been prevalent in their lives (e.g. Breman 2013; Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Millar 2014).

While the historical background adds depth to the concept of precarity; in recent literature, the concept has been defined in ways that go beyond precarity as economic condition and highlight the life-aspects of it, or the ‘issues of subjectivity, affect, sociality, and desire’ (Millar 2014, 35). Some authors have tied precarity to issues of inclusion into citizenship (be it formal or informal) and sense of belonging. For example, Eriksen (2015) highlights the cultural aspects of not belonging to citizenship, as opposed to citizenship being a purely legal status. In this sense, precariousness is also used to refer to a general “ontological experience” (Neilson and Rossiter 2008, 54) of insecurity, vulnerability and displacement, manifesting itself into and affecting the life trajectories of those experiencing it. Further defining the concept, Armano, Morini, and Murgia (2022) refer to the latter as precarity (or as they prefer to call it in this case, ‘precariousness’) *as experience*, as opposed to precarity *as condition*, which sees precarity as a certain labour condition tied to neoliberalism and class relations, as previously emphasised. Similarly, in her article on the working lives of millennial women in Canada, Worth (2016) refers to this approach to precarity that goes beyond socio-economic aspects as *feeling precarious*. In line with these approaches, I argue that it is in particular the subjective aspect of precarity that sets it apart from what could otherwise simply be called ‘poor job quality’ (Campbell and Price, 2016, 315) or what would be a tool for measuring the duration of job contracts (Parsanoglou, Stamatopoulou, and Symeonaki, 2023). Several authors have written about people’s hopes, or lack thereof, in precarious contexts. Examples include Appadurai (2004), who writes about how people’s *capacity to aspire* is unevenly distributed among the more and less privileged in society or Cangia (2018) who writes about how precarity can limit imagination. Biglia and Martí (2014) have coined the term *life precarity*, referring to generally unstable life conditions, or a constant ‘state of flux’ in people’s lives, complicating things like planning the future.

In this thesis, I continue along the line of these approaches to precarity that emphasise its subjective and lived aspects, focussing on how objective understandings of the concept (e.g. temporary agency work) correspond and relate to subjective aspects, or ‘feeling precarious’ (Worth 2016).

Methodology

From February 7 until April 27 2024 I conducted qualitative ethnographic research among the Polish migrant community in the Netherlands. In order to answer the research question, I have relied for the largest part on interviews. The advantage of interviews has been that they provided me with very in-depth information about the migrants’ experiences in a relatively time-efficient manner. However, interviews alone offer a limited insight into the daily lives of my research participants. I therefore applied participant observation to enrich my interview data. While doing participant observation and conducting interviews (which were all recorded with permission), I took notes that I transcribed and later analysed using open coding in Nvivo. All participants’ names were anonymised.

Prior to starting fieldwork, I wrote a research proposal. Although I stuck to the planned approach and scope of my research for a large part, there are several small changes in my thesis compared to the proposal. One of those changes is that I chose to focus on migrants that had experience with agency work. I realised during my fieldwork that there was quite a significant difference between people that

were working (or had worked) for employment agencies, who were often struggling and wishing for something more stable, and people who had found a steady job, satisfied and optimistic about the future. This difference is not a binary opposite, and therefore I tried not to take it too much as a rule and assume this would be the case for everyone during my fieldwork. Yet, it is something that stuck out, so I decided to explore it further.

During my fieldwork, I conducted thirteen interviews, of which ten were in-depth. The in-depth interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours in duration. The interviews were semi-structured; I prepared the interviews with topic lists and a few pre-formulated questions, however, the interviews were typically informal. They resembled casual conversations and often took place at a local coffee place or at the participant’s home. The reason I chose to enter the field with a relatively open approach is because I wanted my participants to feel as comfortable as possible and to encourage them to bring up any information they deemed important, or alternatively, that perhaps they considered themselves to be irrelevant initially. Still, a topic list allowed me to stick to relevant topics to a sufficient extent during the conversations I had. In my interviews, I used a person-centred method, meaning that I asked both *informant*-type questions (the interviewee provides ‘objective’ information), and *respondent*-type questions (the interviewee gives insight into their personal way of looking at something) (Bernard and Gravelle 2015). Informant-type questions give valuable information and context, while respondent-type questions especially suited my focus on precarious labour as *lived experience*. I asked questions about the migratory process (reasons for migration, experiences upon arrival, initial expectations, previous life in Poland), about the participants’ work experiences (what a typical work-day looked like, what they liked or disliked about it, hours per week, the atmosphere at work, their colleagues), about their social lives (if they have family or friends in the Netherlands, ties to Poland, contact with Dutch people in the Netherlands, or other Polish people, if and how their social life had changed in the Netherlands), and how they envisioned their futures (if they make plans, if they want to stay or leave the Netherlands, if they have hopes, wishes, or worries, if they are saving up for anything financially). At the end of every interview, I always asked if participants wanted to add something that we had not talked about yet.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I realised I needed more information specifically about if and how agency work and stable work were experienced differently, and how these affected migrants’ lives differently. I decided to ask these more narrowed-down follow-up questions via text to a couple of participants that were most relevant for answering them, to which they replied via text or voice messages.

I did participant observation on several occasions. I joined three activities organised by Polka. Such activities were often creative workshops such as decorating easter eggs, or a board game night. I joined another board game night at the Polish library in Amsterdam, a small place hidden in a basement of one of the canal houses in the city centre. I visited two work sites: one was at a company that grows, sorts and packages tomatoes, and one was at a flower processing company. At the latter, I walked along with one of my participants the full work-day, which allowed me to do participant observation by joining work activities and striking up conversations with other employees during the breaks. Furthermore, I went to a Polish church service, where I also had an extensive conversation with a Polish woman living in the Netherlands for over thirty years.

Positionality

My positionality as a young, middle-class, university student has likely played a role in my research, mostly in how I was perceived by my participants or how I have (perhaps subconsciously) perceived them. Although there are some similarities between my participants and me, such as our shared European backgrounds and a few cultural similarities, the differences are more significant. My parents, both highly educated, have raised me in a stable environment in a medium sized city in the Netherlands. I never had to migrate to another country for better opportunities, nor have I ever had to work excessively to be able to sustain myself or my family financially. Although finding a job after I graduate will not necessarily be easy for me, as a Dutch-born citizen, speaking both English and Dutch, and having a university degree, I have certain advantages my participants did not always have. These differences may have made it harder to get in touch with my participants initially and to get a proper understanding of their lives and challenging situations. However, I do not necessarily see this as having a merely negative effect on the research process and findings, as a more distanced stance sometimes provides insights that tend to be taken for granted or seen as normal by more integrated members of the community. Besides, I noticed that most of my participants seemed to get comfortable with sharing their struggles quite early on, which helped me understand their situation relatively well. Moreover, the fact that I do not speak Polish and that my participants had varying levels of English or Dutch may have affected the depth and quality of my interactions and data collection.

During my fieldwork, I was quite frequently asked by my participants why I had chosen to research Polish migrants. My intention has been to learn about a group of people that has always been very much outside of my personal social bubble. I wanted to stay in the Netherlands where I am already familiar with the location, so that I could focus on the research itself instead of practical issues that come with research abroad. I realised that the Netherlands has for a long time been known for its multiculturalism, being a popular destination for migrants from over the world. Specifically, the biggest wave of immigrants per year in the Netherlands has for a long time come from Poland (CBS 2023). Because of this, I expected them to be most established as a community. This is visible for example in the many Polish shops all over the country, or in the fact that the media frequently write about them. Yet, I had never really met a Polish ‘labour migrant’. I was curious to talk to people from this relatively large group living in the Netherlands, instead of just reading about them in the news.

Research Population and Location

Initially, I found my participants online, via the many Facebook groups for Polish people in the Netherlands (e.g. *Polacy w Hollandii*; Poles in the Netherlands). Afterwards, I made use of the snowball method to find more participants, but I also kept on establishing new contacts using Facebook throughout my entire fieldwork period. When I first started looking for research participants, I was open to any opportunity to get into contact. As the research project progressed, I started to be more selective. I decided to find people who came to the Netherlands for work specifically, with a focus on migrants with (previous) experience with temporary and/or agency work. I chose this focus because I did not

want to just look *if* precarity was ‘out there’, but rather to find out, within the group regarded as most precarious, *how* it plays out in their real life experiences.

Furthermore, I aimed for a retrospective approach during my fieldwork, selecting people who had previous precarious experiences in their lives mainly. This is for several reasons. Firstly, it was easier in a practical sense to talk to migrants that had decided to stay permanently as opposed to the ones coming and leaving, and the ones that made the choice to not return tended to be the ones that ‘found their place’ and settled with a steady job and thus generally were no longer in the most precarious positions. Secondly, the retrospective approach allowed for a comparison within each individual’s life, which brought interesting insights into how changing job situations played a role throughout their lives. Third, I expected earlier cohorts of migrants to have more precarious experiences than the most recent ones. Unlike the earlier groups of migrants, some of them even arriving before Poland became part of the European Union and not uncommonly working in the Netherlands illegally, recent migrant groups benefit from stricter regulations regarding job quality, improved inspection and more awareness within Dutch society on these migrants, as well as more knowledge specifically among the Polish migrant community about navigating their new country. Lastly, I saw less ethical issues in choosing a research population that would no longer be as vulnerable as some of them used to be when they were still in more challenging positions upon arrival.

Because many Polish migrants find jobs in the agriculture and processing industry, they tend to live in certain areas, as opposed to being spread evenly across the country like other migrant populations (CBS, 2019). The highest percentage of Polish migrants lives in Westland, Steenbergen and Zeewolde. In absolute numbers, most Polish migrants live in Den Haag. This distribution makes sense given that Den Haag is the nearest city to the agriculturally rich Westland area (CBS, 2019). Not surprisingly, this is also where the majority of my participants lived and where most local communities had formed, such as Polka.

Besides, when looking at labour exploitation and mistreatment¹ in the Netherlands, a similar geographical distribution seems to apply. After Amsterdam, The Hague is the municipality with the most reports of labour exploitation and mistreatment, followed by Rotterdam. These three cities—the largest municipalities in the Netherlands—are followed by Westland in fourth place, an unproportionally high position. While the province of Noord-Holland sees the most reports of exploitation and mistreatment (mainly in the hospitality industry), Zuid-Holland, where The Hague and Westland are located, ranks second, with the majority of reports coming from the temporary employment agency sector. Additionally, as many as 98 percent of workers facing exploitation or mistreatment are migrant workers. Jobs with the lowest hourly pay are most often done by people from Central and Eastern Europe, with Poland ranking second. Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland are the top three countries of origin for people facing mistreatment in the Netherlands (Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie 2022).

¹ The Dutch government defines labour exploitation (*arbeidsuitbuiting*) as a situation in which a suspect can use coercion to perform actions concerning a victim, intending to exploit them, and so that the victim has no real choice but to endure the abuse.

Mistreatment (*ernstige benadeling*) is defined as anything that seriously puts employees at a disadvantage, but does not meet the strict definition of exploitation, such as underpayment, long working hours, fines, workplace bullying, and (sexual) harassment (Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie 2022).

Structure of the Thesis

I present my findings in three ethnographic chapters. In the first one, I will discuss the concept of precarity and how it takes shape among the Polish migrants I talked with. This chapter highlights that while temporary work may provide quick employment for temporary migrants, the lack of stability and precarious living conditions often result in challenges for those who end up staying in the Netherlands, pushing many migrants to seek more stable and fulfilling employment over time. In this chapter I discuss the conceptual debate on precarity, divided by on the one hand more negative views, and on the other hand relatively optimistic views on the consequences of precarity and precarious employment. By highlighting the negative consequences of unstable agency work and my participants' desire for stability and security, I problematise overly optimistic views on precarity and argue for the importance of seeing precarity as inherently undesirable for those experiencing it. In the second chapter, I delve deeper into precarity related to social aspects. I describe the Polish migrant community, as well as the challenges they often face in terms of social interactions; such as loneliness or perceived discrimination. I argue that stable employment plays a significant role in the quality of migrants' social networks and integration. Finally, the third chapter covers how precarity is related to migrants' abilities to envision their futures, or their ambitions to do so. Polish migrants in the Netherlands doing agency work often live more day-to-day than those who have steady jobs, due to the financial instability and unpredictability of agency work, preventing them from planning for the future. This precariousness traps them in a cycle of dependence, troubling their sense of career progression and achievement. Those with permanent jobs gain stability, enabling them to make long-term plans and improve their overall well-being. In this chapter, I aim to show how precarious employment can hinder migrants in imagining, planning, and realising their futures and ambitions. After these three chapters, a conclusion will follow, where I will bring all the findings together to provide a comprehensive understanding of how precarity shapes the lives of Polish migrants in the Netherlands.

2. Polish Migrants in the Netherlands and their Experience with Precarious Employment

As Poland joined the EU in 2004, many Polish people made the decision to travel to the Netherlands. Temporary employment agencies were a popular choice for these migrants, and to this day they still play an important role. While flexible employment via agencies provides opportunities for some, especially for those who only plan to work abroad temporarily, for many others it significantly contributes to their precarity. In this chapter, I will examine how precarity is experienced among Polish migrants in the Netherlands, with a focus on the detrimental personal effects it has on further aspects of their lives.

I begin this chapter by describing migrants' reasons for migration and why they often choose temporary employment agencies. Then I discuss two views on precarity: one more optimistic that senses potential for freedom and autonomy in precarious experiences, and another more negative that sees precarity as a threat to people's sense of security. I argue in favour of the latter, emphasising migrants' desire for more stability, and add that negative outcomes on other life aspects are inherent to the concept and that this is what separates precarity from related concepts such as flexible labour. Then I analyse the aspects of work in which precarity manifests itself and has negative consequences for workers, with an emphasis on the nature of work itself and job prospects.

Work life in the Netherlands

The period around the financial crisis was described by many of my participants as “difficult times” in Poland. It was around these years, roughly between 2007 and 2012, that most of them made their way to the Netherlands. Because of my choice to focus on economic migrants, the most common motive for migration my participants mentioned was hope for finding (better) work, which is also statistically the most common reason for migration among Polish people in the Netherlands (Karpinska and Ooijevaar 2016). However, people added a variety of other reasons as well, ranging from romantic relations, wishing to be with family members, feeling adventurous, politics, or even the desire to smoke weed freely.

One of my key findings is that nearly everyone I met told me that they had never planned to settle in the Netherlands. They would tell me that the plan was to stay in the Netherlands for a couple of months, usually maximally half a year, make some extra money, and then return to Poland. With this goal in mind, a lot of people end up working for employment agencies, usually called *uitzendbureaus* by my participants, even when they did not speak Dutch. Employment agencies are a popular choice for temporary workers for three reasons. Firstly, they offer flexibility because of temporary contracts, which is beneficial for people who plan to return and do not want to be tied to anything long-term. Secondly, they typically offer jobs that do not require any special education or experience, making them fitting for anyone. Thirdly, they offer immediate work and often include accommodation, making it a very quick way to start working immediately upon arrival, and avoiding the often time consuming and frustrating process of finding a job and accommodation in the Netherlands. Kazimir described how quickly the process had gone for him when he migrated in 2017:

I check on the internet for some job. After one day, they message me if they can call to me, if I speak English and everything... and they call the next day, they check my CV, and they ask if I can come next week to the Netherlands for working. ‘Next week?’ I say, ‘okay, we can do that’.

Avoiding the hassle of first having to familiarise oneself with a new country and its systems is important for those planning to stay only for a few months. When I asked Janusz, a man in his late thirties working self-employed as a street paver, why he had chosen for employment agencies when he first started working in the Netherlands in 2009, he said:

Back then they still gave you a house. So then you just get up, and you have work and everything. That was easiest. But you know then you're screwed, but you do it anyway because, what else do you have. There's nothing else you can do; you're new in another country, you don't understand anything. With more time you become wiser and then you can find things out yourself.

What Janusz described here resonated with a lot of migrants working for employment agencies: On the one hand, they are often aware that it is not necessarily best for them to do agency work and that agencies may even exploit their employees (“you know then you're screwed”). On the other hand, they still choose these agencies, because they offer benefits in the short run, or because they seem to be the only option for the time being.

Reliability of work and employment satisfaction

In her article on (non-standard) job seekers in the US, Strauss (2024) discusses the contrasting perspectives of *labourist* (a term coined by Weeks (2011)) and *post-work* views on work ethic and satisfaction. Labourists, Strauss writes, hold the eudaimonic² idea that well-being implies living a meaningful life, and that work plays a central role in achieving such a sense of meaning. In contrast, post-work views see everyday pleasures in the hedonic³ sense as crucial for well-being. Strauss argues in favour of the post-work point of view. Furthermore, she adds to this view that such pleasures do not necessarily only occur during time spent off work, and that labourist scholars wrongly assume that temporary work is necessarily considered less enjoyable than steady work. Non-standard work includes temporary employment, as well as “triangular employment relationships”, such as is the case with employment agencies (Carr 2015, 386; Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson 2000, 257-258). I do not advocate for the somewhat outdated labourist view or deny that everyday pleasures at work were of importance in defining how my participants experienced their work. However, I argue that based on my fieldwork, pleasure in work in the eudaimonic sense remains of great importance among the Polish migrant workers in the Netherlands. Although I agree with Strauss (2024) that temporary work is not necessarily universally perceived as less enjoyable, I argue that it depends on many other factors, such as certain life circumstances. In the case of Polish migrant workers in the Netherlands, it is two-sided: in certain aspects, temporary work comes with advantages, yet for the majority of my participants, steady, non-precarious work was still the desired goal. These two views can be associated with on the one hand a more optimistic view on precarity or flexible work in general, and on the other hand a more negative attitude towards it, seeing the detrimental effects it has on the lives of those experiencing it such as many of my participants (had) experienced. For the following part of this chapter, I will explain these two sides, with an emphasis on the latter.

Unpredictable work and unpredictable lives

Several authors have put precarity and employment flexibility in a relatively positive light. Autonomist Marxist theorists Hardt and Negri (2000) have a rather optimistic point of view on the decline of stable work and sense a potential for the flexibilisation of the labour market to be liberating, in the sense that it poses possibilities for self-determination and autonomy. Similarly, in their article on students in Australia who hold part-time jobs in the retail sector, Campbell and Price (2016) argue that the students’ ‘precarious’ jobs have limited effects on their further lives. They write that this is due to mitigating factors such as having access to a sufficient amount of alternative income sources and career options. Campbell and Price (2016) do not necessarily see precarity in a positive light, but they do highlight that

² ‘Eudaimonia’ originates from Aristotle’s virtue ethics, according to which ‘the good life’ is determined by doing what is meaningful, worthy, or aimed towards a ‘higher purpose’ (Ryan and Deci 2001).

³ ‘Hedonia’ refers to the subjective experience of pleasure and defines well-being in terms of the direct attainment of pleasure and avoidance of pain (Ryan and Deci 2001).

according to them, it does not always have to result in negative changes in people’s lives. Furthermore, in the article mentioned in the previous paragraph, Strauss (2024) draws on an article by Millar (2014) about precarious labour at garbage dumps in Rio de Janeiro. Millar (2014) argues that in situations where life is in itself unpredictable, a steady job can be an obstacle rather than a desired position. In the article, Millar (2014) tells the story of Rose, one of the informal workers, who is delighted about having found a formal wage-job for the first time in her life. However, Millar writes that soon after, she is surprised to find Rose back at the dump after quitting her job as a cleaner. The reason Rose gives is that the fixed hours of her cleaning job were impossible to combine with ‘everyday emergencies’ that destabilise her life. At the dump, for example, she was able to go back to her child at any time needed. Millar’s main argument is that for people like Rose, doing wageless work in a context of unpredictable life circumstances, it is not the precarious work that makes life precarious. Instead, life was already precarious in the first place, and flexible work does not necessarily exacerbate this—if anything, it in fact allows for more autonomous navigation through the context of precarities in daily life.

Some Polish migrants who came to the Netherlands for work found themselves in a situation similar to Rose (Millar 2014), in the sense that flexible employment suited their flexible and unpredictable way of living well. They would choose an employment agency because they have not yet planned their future life, or they planned to only stay temporarily. In those cases, it works best for them to have quick access to a job, one that does not tie them to any long term obligations, and that allows them to quit anytime they want to leave again (depending on what phase⁴ of the contract they are in). In such cases, temporary work may be the desirable option.

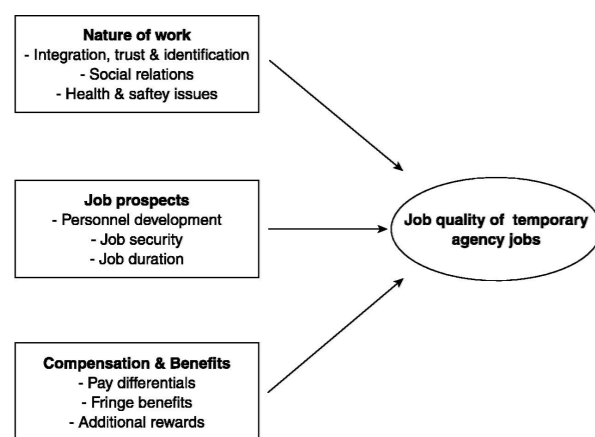
However, I argue in line with Broughton et al. (2016) and Anwar and Graham (2020) that there is a crucial difference between flexible work, which can be a desirable or chosen option, and precarity, which inherently implies negative effects on people’s lives. In the case of my participants, consisting mainly of staying migrants, this difference shows, as my findings emphasise migrants’ desire for stable work which contrasts with the argument made by Hardt and Negri (2000), Campbell and Price (2016), Strauss (2024) and Millar (2014). In flexible employment contracts, just like workers can quit any-time, their employers can often also end the contract any time. While many migrants actually return to Poland as intended, many also end up staying. For people who try to settle in the Netherlands, the precarity that comes with work via employment agencies can cause problems in their lives.

Precarity at work and around employment

Job quality of temporary agency jobs can be analysed through three aspects, as outlined by Mitlacher (2008). Firstly, there is the nature of the work itself. This includes issues such as workers’ health, well-being, safety, and social relations (on the latter, I will go into more detail in chapter two). Secondly, job quality can be assessed in terms of future job prospects, including aspects like job security, duration, and opportunities for skill development and advancement within the workplace. Thirdly, job quality depends on compensation and (financial) benefits, such as the level of salary offered. I contend that precarity manifests across all three aspects in temporary agency employment, but is most evident in

⁴ Employment agency contracts work with three or four phases (A, B and C, sometimes 1, 2, 3 and 4) that come with increasing rights for the employee such as sick pay and pension.

the second. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will delve into the first aspect before addressing the second, which is the most pivotal aspect in understanding precarity and the problems it can cause for migrants. I choose to not go into the third aspect in detail, as the detrimental effects of financial struggles are relatively self-evident. In this analysis, I aim to focus on the more nuanced and less discussed subjective experiences of dimensions of job quality, specifically the nature of the work and future job prospects, which are important for a comprehensive understanding of precarity in temporary agency employment.



Framework for analysis (Mitlacher 2008)

Challenges at work itself can be experienced by those working in the Netherlands for years as well as those who only work short-term. One large aspect defining job quality is social belonging within the workplace, which I will discuss elaborately in chapter two. Furthermore, a common issue I found was the many work hours my participants had. Most of them usually worked five or six days a week, and sometimes up to fourteen hours a day. “I work eight days a week”, Janusz joked when I called him on the phone. During one of the activities organised by Polka I had a conversation with Paulina, a woman who told me about the difficulties she had experienced combining her work hours with being a single mother. We were crafting easter wreaths at a local community centre, she had her young child on her lap while trying to decorate her wreath as she started talking to me. Initially, she said, she had worked at the flower centre in Aalsmeer, but this soon turned out to be incompatible with caring for her child. One time, she told me, she was called by the school, because her child had not shown up. The babysitter would not pick up the phone, so in panic she had gone back home, a 40 minute drive away, only to find out that the babysitter had fallen asleep. Then, she said, she found a job that worked better. “I worked from 03.00 to 06.00 in the morning”, she said, “I brought my child to school at 07.00, I slept, got my child from school, and then when I put my child to bed I had another evening shift”. Occasionally, hard work takes its toll on the health of workers. Tesia, a woman in her thirties working in the same flower centre as Jakub, told me about her time as a team leader in a fruit sorting centre, working via an agency. One day, during a long and busy work-day, she had to accompany a co-worker to the hospital after they had fainted: “I been in the hospital with two person... Because they are work a lot of hours, and they are fall down. It was Christmas time...”, she said. Her boyfriend Kazimir, sitting next to her, added: “Ah christmas time, always super busy, they have a lot

of orders”. Tesia expressed her anger at the office at the time, for sending her to accompany the person to the hospital instead of the (Dutch-speaking) office employees, but did not seem too impressed by the accident itself. Another example for how precarity manifested itself in migrants’ everyday work experiences is that some migrants said they would often not hear in advance what their work-day would look like the next day, such as described by Stefan: “It was a bit uncertain at the time. When you go to work the next day, you didn’t always know where. And sometimes, when you had to work, you didn’t know how long you had to stay.” A woman from Polka whom I met just briefly at a local community centre, told me something similar, saying that she often would have no clue what her work-day would be looking like, even still upon arrival at work, “(...) and I *hate* this insecurity”, she said.

The second aspect mentioned by Mitlacher (2008) concerns problems that are less about the work itself, and more about the way it is organised in their lives. In fact, I found most precarity to be centred around difficulties that come with unstable work among staying migrants. Sometimes, informants did not have a problem with their work, but were struggling with what they often described as feeling ‘insecure’ or ‘uncertain’. Such struggles exemplify that precarity is more than someone just having a temporary contract or ‘bad job’, but rather that it is a long-term, continuous struggle, which additionally comes with many side-effects. While Jakub was very positive about his current job during our interview, when I asked him some follow-up questions almost two months later, I realised that for him too, precarity had been a big part of his life in the Netherlands. He described a clear difference between the time he had to hop from job to job when he was working via agencies, and his current, steady job. “I’m really happy now that I have *vast contract* [permanent contract]”, he said, “I can describe this feeling in two words: that I’m secure and I’m safe.” He described to me how his first years in the Netherlands had been:

I came here in April, and for the first month it was really rough. I came with the employment agency, and they were just throwing me every week a new location, every week another job, every week different people and everything. But that was thankfully only for a about one and half month, yeah. And after that... wait a second, no, two months. Because eh first, 6th of June, I came to the work were I have last for 5 years. Finally, something stable, something good. So after that eh, yeah but after that... In that job I didn’t have any future you know. I knew that I didn’t go any further. So I quit also, and I found something on my own. I was just going from the company to the company looking for a job, finally I found some, I think it was 3rd company that I asked. And I’ve been there around 2 years I think, and there eh, yeah it was a difficult situation because I couldn’t get a full contract over there.

Jakub’s rather chaotic description of his personal job history seems to be representative of the chaos characterising these precarious employment experiences.

Klaudia had a similar experience, but not only did she change jobs constantly, she also had to switch around employment agencies every three or four years. She told me that every time someone works another year for an employment agency they reach a new scale and their salary is raised. However, she told me that because of this, agencies would always end her contract after a certain amount of years because it would be too expensive for them. At the time we talked, her agency had just ended her contract again: “The employment agency tells me that there is a problem between me

and the manager or with people who work there”, she said, “but I really didn’t notice anything, heard nothing, had no conversation about it.” She had never been able to get out of this position for the 17 years she had been living in the Netherlands. Expressing her frustration and desperation, she said: “At every start, when I start at a new employment agency, I say yes, everything will be fine now, I will get a permanent contract, everything will be fine within six months. And every time is the same.” Klaudia went on to tell me about a moment she had felt like she was being discriminated against. She had applied for a job offer, a permanent position at a plantation. After looking through her phone during our interview, she found the email she had gotten as a reaction, and showed it to me. It was a referral to an employment agency.

The struggle to get a permanent contract appeared to be common among the Polish migrants. Janusz described to me how he ended up working self-employed as a street paver:

I asked if we [Janusz and his work partner] could just have normal permanent employment... I was there with that man for 7 years, he says ‘no, it won’t work, it won’t work’. Then I left. And then I worked at another company, also through an employment agency. And he promised me that when the project is finished, I will get a permanent job. But coincidentally, they lost the contract with the municipality of The Hague, so it didn’t work out again. So I said: ‘I’m going to start my own’. Is better, because if I wait for someone I’m never going to get anything. Then I became ZZP [self-employed].

One of the reasons why migrants would try to get a permanent contract somewhere, is because the flexibility of temporary contracts poses risks, creating (feelings of) uncertainty. A case that illustrates the possible problems caused by temporary employment very well, is that of Stefan, who described how he had once lost his job back when he still worked for an agency. When I asked him why, he said that the agency refused to pay him his holiday money, and would not agree with paying his travelling costs, while his co-workers with a permanent contract did get this. For that reason, he had contacted a lawyer, and so it came that the agency ended the contract:

I didn’t want to lose my job, I just wanted to get some money, you know, which I was entitled to. Well, they weren’t happy. My contract was not renewed. Anyway... I remember then... It was like a contact person, a Polish woman. And she sent me a message in the evening, a text message, and she said ‘tomorrow you don’t have to come anymore’. That was my dismissal. After two years, after two years!

Luckily, Stefan had found housing just shortly before his dismissal. This was a place independent from the employment agency, which he had gotten via personal connections. However, he explained that if he would not have, things might have been very different for him:

Some people from Poland, they are being fired, and they also have to move out immediately on the same day, you know. And they don’t have a room anywhere... That’s very difficult, if you get work and also accommodation from an employment agency. Then if you leave work, you have nothing left.

Stefan’s example portrays what is frequently described to be one of the key characteristics of precarious work, being that workers increasingly find themselves to be the only ones responsible for managing the risks associated with their employment (Hewison 2015, 439; Armano, Morini and Murgia 2022, 30; International Labour Organization 2011, 6). In case Stefan would not have happened to have found a place on his own shortly before being fired, he would have moved back to Poland, he said, because finding a job and/or accommodation on such a short notice is often impossible. People like Stefan are put into a position in which they fully depend on factors such as the opportunity to move back or to get support from a social network, or in other words, their ability to “self-activate resources” (Armano, Morini and Murgia 2022, 30). This ‘ideal’ of being the only one responsible for bearing risks regarding employment and livelihood security can be linked to processes of neoliberalisation, shaped by the ideology of the individual as “unattached, self-responsible market player” (Pendenza and Lamattina 2019, 100). Brown (2015, 84) refers to this “neoliberal responsabilisation” as the various techniques that coerce the subject into becoming a “responsible self-investor and self-provider”. If there are no such possibilities for self-investment and -provision, the more vulnerable migrants are left to fend for themselves, running the risk of homelessness and debts.

Precarity and Housing

In her article on precarity in Mexico and Argentina, Bayon (2006) defines ‘social precarity’, which includes issues regarding living conditions and working conditions, both influencing each other. Firstly, precarity of work conditions concerns the nature and quality of employment, which I have discussed so far throughout this chapter, as well as how these factors play a role in determining migrants’ job satisfaction and prospects for learning and personal development, which I will elaborate on towards the end of this chapter. Secondly, she considers factors that determine precarity of living conditions to be mainly an inadequate income, and the effect it has on other things such as housing and social networks.

Indeed, a lot of dissatisfaction among Polish migrants working for employment agencies seemed to be centred around housing. Experiences of living in the housing provided by employment agencies were almost always negative. Angelica made a joke about it: “It was like a discotheque-home”, she said, but I could tell that she was serious about it, “there was always loud music, marijuana, alcohol...”. Klaudia described her roommates at the time she lived in agency housing:

They drink a lot, smoke a lot... There are also normal people but... in those homes usually are the bad people. Really bad people. Oh... I was scared in the house too. We lived with a couple, and another boy... my husband was, I don’t know, doing groceries, I don’t know. I was alone upstairs and the two started arguing. I was so scared. They first drank together, alcohol, and then argued. We lived like this for 6 years.

Substance use was frequently reported among Polish migrants in general, but described to be particularly prevalent in the agency houses. During an interview, Tomek recalled his days at these houses:

I lost my life there. Because thirteen years ago, I live in the hotel by the *uitzendbureau* [employment agency], and I also take the drugs. And I take too lot, and I have heart attack. I almost lost my life. And after this, I stop take everything, and from this time I'm clear.

In contrast, during my conversation with Tomek over ten years after the incident, he completely distanced himself from the others in the agency houses, saying: “That’s why I don’t want to live together with Polish guys. They only talk about work, money, party, drugs, drinks”. Interestingly, most people I talked to expressed their disgust with all the alcohol and drugs they had been surrounded with, and let me know that they did not place themselves within this group of the “others” that were “always drunk” or that were, as Jakub said, “just coming here to party”.

Replaceability

Precarious labour can be characterised by hyperflexibility in the job market. When I joined one of my participants to his work at the flower centre one day, I spoke to his boss, a Dutch man around his 50’s. He told me that the reason his company chooses for *uitzendkrachten* (people working via employment agencies) is because they are flexible. “For example when it’s really busy around Mother’s day, or Valentine’s, we hire some extra workers”, he said, “and the thing is, because they are temporary, it’s also easier to just kick them out when they are always late, when they try to argue with me all the time, when they drink alcohol or take drugs...”. This view on temporary workers is very telling of the way they are treated differently than standard employees, and plays a big role in what makes a precarious employment position.

Because of the fragmented nature of temporary agency work, and because the types of jobs provided by employment agencies are usually jobs that do not require any formal education or years of experience, workers are not always seen as unique or ‘valuable’ by their bosses—after all, anyone else could do the job instead. This ‘replaceability’ is typical for precarious labour among Polish temporary workers. Not only is being ‘replaced’ sometimes a reasonable risk for workers without a steady contract, it is something that is also subjectively felt by them. Klaudia described this feeling as being “like a number” instead of a “name”; “In my place, ten other people could take over. I feel like an *arbeidsmigrant* [labour migrant]”, she said. While the term ‘arbeidsmigrant’ is a commonly used term to refer to the group of migrants that I focused on, another woman (whom I met shortly at a workshop organised by Polka) also let me know that she did not like it when people used the term to describe her; “As if we’re all just robots”, she said. Similarly, another woman I met at another Polka activity described herself, distancing herself from the ‘others’, saying: “I’m not an *arbeidsmigrant*, I’m an adventurer”. Jakub described his previous work places in a similar way, saying “You’re just another ant. You just do what you have to do and shut up.” Tomek expressed his discontent with his previous agency work at a meat factory: “When working in big factory you are only number. [...] That’s why I hate the big factory.”.

A term that is in line with these findings is ‘perceived replaceability’, researched by Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman (2022a). In their research on atypical workers’ experiences in the Netherlands, this term described whether workers saw their current position as easily replaceable. In her research

on millennial women in Canada, Worth (2016) found that for many of her participants this perceived replaceability was actually a reason to take or keep any full time job they had acquired. For these women it did not matter whether the job was in the field they were trained for; the fear of unemployment was greater. Moreover, Cangia (2018), who did research on husbands and wives accompanying their ‘trailing spouses’ (those travelling around for work) in Switzerland, found that her participants often had trouble finding work. For her participants, this was due to the fact that there was little certainty about the length of their stay in a new country, which was always dependent on their partner’s job. Because of this, their career paths were typically unpredictable and fragmented. Cangia (2018, 10) writes that “these diversified career paths—also defined as ‘generalist’ profiles by some of the people I met during my fieldwork—can complicate the identification of personal professional specificity.” It is exactly this ‘professional specificity’ that, for my participants too, seemed to be what they often felt was missing when doing agency work.

Sense of achievement

Strongly related to the sentiment of being replaceable or just ‘one of the many labour migrants’, comes a sense of not being appreciated, either by workers’ bosses or by workers themselves. This feeling my participants experienced, which I describe as (a lack of) *sense of achievement*, has a couple of related implications. The first two implications I will discuss have also been noted by Clayton and Vickers (2019), who did research on a topic similar to that of this thesis. Writing about Eastern European working migrants who arrived in North-East England from 2004 onwards, the authors point out that both the rapid transition into employment as well as the undervaluing of competencies created a “little sense of progress” for their participants (Clayton and Vickers 2019, 1477).

Firstly, temporary work does not offer the durability needed in order for workers to get better and grow within the work-place, giving them a lack of sense of achievement. Although some participants described some temporary jobs they had as ‘alright’, I found that for most, there was a big difference in job satisfaction between agency work and steady employment. In contrast, people with a steady job were ‘investing’ more (e.g. time, energy) in getting better at their work. Not only did this make their bosses content, it also felt more rewarding to workers themselves. Many migrants mentioned that they had no special connection to the previous temporary jobs they had, but felt content with or even proud of the positions in steady jobs they had achieved. For example, Janusz told me that for him, the biggest difference between agency work and his current steady job as a street paver was that for one, he was now getting paid more, but most importantly, that he was finally doing something that he liked. “The nicest thing about it is when I make something and it’s still visible in the streets”, he said. Jakub too was a clear example for this contrast between his current job at the flower centre and his previous employment agency work:

The most important reason for me [that a steady job changed my life] is that I just feel appreciated. For me personally, being a foreigner, and getting a steady job, it’s something that I feel really like I achieved something. Because I came from abroad, not knowing a single word in Dutch, I started from the bottom, like I started with that kind of jobs that didn’t require any knowledge

or language, that people just gave you do this, they showed you with a finger do this this this, and I did it. And the thing is, sometimes they were treating us like we were dumb, or that we were just some Polish people who came here just to earn some money because we're from 'such a poor country', let's say. And you know they didn't have an idea what kind of people we were and where we're coming from. Like I started from the bottom, and step by step I've learned this language, and to find out more about flowers... I really like my work, and I'm really good at it. And I know that it's not that easy, and not everybody could be capable of doing that.

Secondly, in temporary work, previously acquired work experiences, training, or talents are hardly done justice, as agency work provides very limited opportunities for applying specific skill sets. An example is given by Kazimir, who explained why he had been discontent with the salary he had gotten back when he was still working for an agency:

After five years, when I see my salary, almost nothing changed. And then new people coming, they don't know nothing in work, and they have the same money like me, and I say to my employment agency, 'yeah I think it's something not nice, not correct, the guy who finished the cooking school, now he does iron work, he does some construction for metal, you know, and he earn per week 150 euro more than me, when I finished the electrician school and everything'... And I say to my manager, I think it's something not correct, not fair, you know. I finished the school, I didn't do so many years to earn less money than the guy who finished cooking school and now does iron work, you know.

Sometimes, these limited opportunities for applying acquired skills or knowledge is not merely about doing agency work, but also about the move from Poland to the Netherlands, where certificates or degrees may be of different value. Kazimir proceeded, explaining this:

I can also do iron work, you know, also I do iron work, electrician... Because here, when I come, I say I'm technician, electrician, and they say me: 'Ah you are only for connecting.' I say, 'Connecting only?' ...because in Poland, electrician, they do everything, we dig in the hole, we put in the cable, we do some iron work, construction, everything... and I connect.

In cases like these, migrants may feel that the efforts they put in throughout their lives or career paths would go 'to waste' for a large part when doing agency work, resulting in dissatisfaction and a lack of sense of achievement.

Thirdly, with a sense of achievement after having worked at the same place and having grown within the company also comes an improved independence, both actual and perceived. While expanding their skillset after a longer period of time, workers no longer need to be told what to do all the time. "Nobody say, work harder, work faster...", Tomek explained to me; "We make our own work". Similarly, Jakub expressed his content with the independence he gained at his current steady job, saying "I can divide my job, what to do, when to do, how to do it, I know when I can go take a smoke break, walk around and talk with people, you know that kind of stuff. I feel like I'm allowed to do more".

Finally, when someone has worked at the same place for longer and has specialised or promoted

within their work, this in turn makes them less 'replaceable' for their employers. Many people I spoke with said that they had not followed any special education for the job they were doing, but that they learned things within their job over the years. These learning opportunities are something that people in temporary jobs usually miss out on, reinforcing both their perceived and actual replaceability.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have described migrants' reasons for migration and why they often choose temporary employment agencies. I have discussed two views on precarity: one more optimistic, sensing potential for freedom and autonomy in flexible employment; and another more pessimistic, which sees precarity as a threat to people's sense of security. I have argued in favour of the latter, emphasising migrants' desire for more stability. I have stressed the relevance of regarding negative outcomes on life aspects as inherent to the concept of precarity and as that what separates precarity from relating concepts such as flexible labour, a more neutral term. Finally, I have analysed the aspects of work in which precarity manifests itself and has negative consequences for workers, with an emphasis on the nature of work itself and job prospects.

For many of my participants, the search for stability is of central concern. A lack of work stability can have a major impact on migrants' further lives. While for some migrants, such as those who stay only temporarily, agency work provides a good opportunity to get quick access to the Dutch labour market, for many others it can be the culprit playing a role in many challenges they face. This becomes evident when following the narratives of those who have successfully made the transition to stable employment, as these narratives suggest that stability, on the other hand, can lead to significant positive changes in migrants' lives.

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed how precarity manifests itself into the personal experiences of Polish migrants in the Netherlands. In the next chapter, I will further explore the role precarity plays in other life aspects of Polish migrants, focusing on their social ties.

3. Precarity and Social Life

On a Friday in February, a bit after 12.00, we are all gathered around the communal table in the office, eating French fries. It has been a tiring day at Jakub's work at the flower centre, and somehow arriving at work at 6.00 in the morning makes one crave fries and a Coke at noon. It is noticeable that all the temporary employees have gone home already. Jakub, who no longer works via an agency but directly for the company, is the only Polish employee that is staying for lunch with the all-Dutch office team. Sitting on the right of me, there is the boss of the office, stroking a small white dog that is sitting on his lap. Youssef is sitting at the head of the table, who is, besides Jakub, the only other employee present that works 'downstairs', referring to the big hall around the office space where the flowers are brought around in trolleys, sorted, and bound into bouquets along the assembly lines. Jakub, whom I met only two weeks before this day, is sitting opposite me. He has a slightly confused look on his face, looking through all the empty paper bags and plastic boxes that are scattered around on the table. I notice he is the only one with an empty plate. "Are you gonna put that in your research paper?", one of Jakub's colleagues asks, looking at me. I laugh, they are messing with me. "Imagine what it would say: 'Polish worker mistreated because he does not get lunch at work'", someone else adds, and everyone laughs.

Obviously, Jakub is not being mistreated. In fact he fits in seamlessly with his colleagues at the flower centre. They banter with him in Dutch, a language Jakub seems to follow effortlessly and manages to reply to with quick wit. They joke about his burger that did not come and other inside jokes, and Jakub laughs along. Amid the jokes, the boss is on the phone with someone from the snackbar, asking where the forgotten burger has gone.

While observing Jakub and his colleagues joking around, I am reminded of the importance of stable work in facilitating these social bonds. Temporary work, by its very nature, can deprive workers of the time and continuity needed to form such connections. In contrast, Jakub's contentment with his social connections at work, which becomes clear in the instance described above and was also mentioned by Jakub himself during my interview with him, highlights how stable employment can have a positive effect on social integration at work and elsewhere.

In this chapter, I discuss the role work precarity plays in shaping the social ties of Polish migrants in the Netherlands. First, I briefly describe how shared precarious experiences can contribute to the formation of social communities. However, I argue that most of all, unstable work hinders migrants in connecting with others such as colleagues at work, signifying how precarity is prevalent in their social lives.

Communities and social struggles

Over the past years, many communities have formed within the Polish community in the Netherlands. There are larger ones, such as Polka, SOS, or Barka, or smaller local clubs like at the Polish library in Amsterdam. There are also many Facebook groups, often containing ten-thousands of members. On the one hand, I interpreted such communities to be actually a product of precarious experiences of migrants. For example, in many Facebook groups, people would ask each other for advice, or sometimes more desperately for immediate help (e.g. someone lost their job and place to stay). Polka, an organisation for Polish women in Den Haag, organises social gatherings, just for fun, or for people who feel isolated or have difficulties establishing contacts in a new country. One woman I talked with at a checkers tournament organised by Polka, said that she was at the community centre almost every Friday to drink coffee with the other women from Polka. Polka also organises information sessions, for example about paying taxes in the Netherlands or finding accommodation. In their book *Empire*, Negri and Hardt (2000, 56) describe how "constituent struggles create new public spaces and new forms of community". Similarly, in cases in which people deal with issues in life by organising themselves in communities and helping each other out, precarious times can enforce social cohesion.

On the other hand, despite these social communities, I found that Polish migrants frequently described several social problems. Loneliness was frequently mentioned, often also in relation to not being able to speak Dutch. Filip, a thirty-two year old temporary worker who was about to return to Poland in the week that I spoke with him, said that he felt very lonely in the Netherlands. He had decided to come here for some financial reasons, mainly, but also because he was curious what it would be like to work in a different country. But being in the Netherlands and working six days a week, and in the little free time he had just sitting at home scrolling on his phone, had made him feel depressed. That's why, after having spent some months in the Netherlands, he had decided to go back to Poland. "It's not worth the little bit of extra money I get here", he said. Paulina, whom I met at one of the activities organised by Polka, also said that she felt lonely and depressed. Coming to the community centre for social activities with other Polish women was an attempt to improve her social life, she said, and so far she was enjoying it. In fact, as Ala, another woman I met at Polka, told me, therapists commonly encourage their Polish clients to join Polka activities.

Moreover, something that almost everyone I talked with mentioned, was that they frequently felt excluded or discriminated against for being Polish, usually by Dutch people. Lena, a Polish woman I talked to on the phone, said that sometimes, she would feel ashamed of talking Polish with her young child in public, and even try to hide it, because she was afraid of the assumptions people would make if they would know that she is Polish. Some participants also said that they felt that discrimination or "racism" was hindering them in the process of applying for certain jobs, in particular jobs that are not typically associated with the 'Polish migrant worker', such as steady jobs, or a position in the office team instead of physical work. For example, Klaudia explained that already twice, she had had a situation where she had replied to a job offer for a direct position at a company, and that the company's response was to refer to employment agencies they worked with.

Additionally, multiple participants described not just instances of resentment between the Polish and the Dutch, but also a certain culture of rivalry within the Polish community in the Netherlands. According to some, instead of helping each other as fellow migrants, for example in finding work, they would sometimes drag each other down or keep to themselves. “Here, they [the Polish] are like, if you make more than I do for example, then I don’t like you”, Oliwia said. Both Jakub and Tomek said that “where there’s too many Polish guys in one place it’s always a problem.” This was something people felt in the migrant community in the Netherlands specifically, and not necessarily something that they would experience in Poland. Paulina, who also mentioned this ‘rivalry’ she felt among Polish people in the Netherlands, speculated that it was because of the more individualist culture in the Netherlands. This finding corresponds with what Bourdieu (1997) points out, stating that as a result of increasing rates of unemployment, (especially stable) employment has turned into a scarcity. This scarcity, he contends, fosters fierce competition among job seekers, which is “destructive of all values of solidarity and humanity” (Bourdieu 1997, 1). Therefore, thinking in line with Bourdieu, I would speculate that precarity, for example in the case of low job security, feeds a competitive culture within the Polish migrant community.

Precarity and social inclusion and cohesion

While precarity can stimulate the formation of social support systems, I argue that most of all, it can have negative effects on social inclusion and cohesion. In his book *The Fight For Time*, Apostolidis (2019, 6) discusses critique on post-Fordism and its characterising precarity, drawing on Austrian philosopher André Gorz (1989). Gorz argues that work becomes fragmented and disconnected from life trajectories and notions of time, as people constantly switch between jobs both short term and over the span of their lives. According to him, precarious workers are “out of time” in three ways (Apostolidis 2019, 6).

Firstly, because of long working hours and many work-days each week, working migrants may simply lack free time, for instance to spend with friends or family. Stefan said that he once had a temporary job in the Netherlands where he had to work a lot of overtime, working fifty to sixty hours a week on a regular basis. This was too much for him, and he said that it sometimes also affected his social life. Working many hours can also entail that people have little time outside of work to develop themselves, for example by learning Dutch.

The second problem with modern-day precarity and its life-disrupting nature according to Gorz (1989) is the fact that people in precarious employment positions continuously need to look for new jobs while doing their current one. The process of looking for a new job can be time consuming and frustrating, especially when it needs to be done next to a full-time job. Klaudia said that she was tired of always having to look for new jobs and starting over at a new place with new people, every three to four years. When I talked to her, she had just become unemployed and was looking for a new job again. Luckily, she got some compensation money from the government because the agency had ended her contract. She happily told me that she finally had some time to study Dutch and do the exams, which she needed to pass to apply for Dutch citizenship. However, she told me multiple times that she was

constantly feeling stressed and anxious because of the pressure to find new work.

Lastly, Gorz argues that stable full-time employment is intrinsically linked with social belonging, as people who fail to live up to the cultural ideals of standard employment tend to be regarded, and see themselves, as “out of sync with ‘normal’ society” (Apostolidis 2019, 6). This viewpoint aligns with Eriksen’s (2015) concept of the *cultural precariat*, which emphasises the cultural dimensions of not belonging to the citizenship framework beyond its legal aspects. Eriksen suggests that those experiencing disconnection from mainstream society are not necessarily part of the economic precariat described by Standing (2011), but rather a ‘cultural precariat’, as they can be excluded, by others in society, or even by themselves, from cultural and social notions of citizenship at any time. Nowicka (2018) expands on Eriksen’s emphasis on the cultural aspect and introduces the term *cultural precarity*, which encompasses the sense of disbelonging to the imagined community, resulting from and contributing to a vulnerable and insecure position in society. Indeed, this exclusion or inclusion is not only something that can be posed upon migrants, but is also something they play a role in themselves. Ong (1996) points this out in her article on the experiences of (dis-)belonging Asian immigrants have in the United States, using the term *cultural citizenship*. This form of citizenship refers to membership and belonging in the substantive sense, that is, culturally and informally as opposed to formal or legislative citizenship (Holston 2008). For Ong, key to the concept is its understanding of citizenship as a dual process of being-made and self-making. From what I have observed and heard, the self-definition of belonging or not belonging to (Dutch) society was actually stronger than the ‘being-made’, in the sense that migrants explicitly labelled themselves as either part of the Netherlands, Poland, or of both equally. Yet, at the same time, this self-making was influenced by external factors, again in particular by the nature of their work. Although challenging to assess through only three months of ethnographic fieldwork, my research indicates that the migrants with stable employment tended to feel included in Dutch society. Most people described that they felt like they belonged culturally to both the Netherlands and Poland. However, I found that the people that had stayed in the Netherlands for long felt connected to the Netherlands primarily more often than that they felt connected to Poland. For example, Tomek, explaining why he had decided to move back to the Netherlands again after having gone back to Poland for five years, said: “My heart still be in Netherlands after these five years in Poland”. In contrast, Filip, a temporary migrant who was just preparing his return to Poland when I talked to him, said that he felt lonely in the Netherlands and could not wait to go back to his home country. Evidently, and as many migrants themselves also pointed out, feeling included in Dutch society can be both the result of and the reason for deciding to stay long term or permanently. “Everyone here is happy”, Janusz said, “because if they wouldn’t be, they would have gone back already”.

The effect of temporary work on social integration

Specifically within the workplace, there seemed to be a divide between the group of regular workers and the one of temporary workers. Constantly switching from job to job may disrupt social life. On the other hand, a steady job not only fosters financial security, but can also enable more social security for migrants. For instance, I observed that the temporary workers at Jakub’s work were not really so-

cialising with the others during breaks in the canteen. Moreover, Jakub clearly pointed out this divide when I asked him some follow-up questions later over the phone, saying: “With a company where you have a steady contract, you’re also getting invited to company parties, [...] You feel even more like a team, sometimes even like a family. You’re getting involved in your company’s life.”

Coincidentally, Jakub’s phrasing corresponds almost literally with what Kunda, Barley and Evans (2002) have found in their research on the dynamics between permanent and temporary employees. They observed that those with temporary contracts were often regarded as ‘outsiders’ by permanent employees, to the extent of “being excluded from company parties” (Kunda, Barley and Evans 2002, 250). I found that a steady contract gives employees the opportunity to make connections with their co-workers, while constantly shifting jobs disrupts this. Almost everyone described the social climate of their steady jobs as positive, while social relationships in temporary jobs were described as varying between good, neutral, or bad, but most often relatively absent. This highlights the reciprocal relationship between work precarity and social cohesion, wherein stable employment fosters a sense of (social) belonging within the workplace. Others have proposed similar understandings of the situation, such as Apostolidis (2019, 9) in his book *The Fight for Time*, writing: “Rapid employee turnover, as mega meat companies churn through the ‘disposable’ migrant workforce, further undercuts efforts to kindle solidarity, or even just sustained acquaintances, among workers”. Although not very recently, corresponding results were found in research conducted in Germany (Wieland and Grüne 1999), which discovered that 30 percent of temporary agency workers have a poor (or hardly any) relationship with the regular employees working for the client company. According to another German study, temporary agency workers state a perceived lack of respect and recognition by their steady-contracted colleagues, and tend to have lower status than regular employees within a company (Noller 2003).

Not only does steady work expand and strengthen the social networks of employees, it also strengthens the bonds between employees and their boss. During interviews, it was not uncommon to hear participants talk negatively about their relationship with their boss at the company they worked for via an agency. For example, Tomek left his temporary job and position as team leader because of problems with his boss. On the other hand, many people with a steady contract described the relationship with their boss as positive and very informal, and I also interpreted it this way myself during my fieldwork at workplaces. In contrast with his previous agency work experiences, Tomek, now working at a family company as a truck mechanic with a steady contract, described the relationship with his current boss: “Everyday my boss is coming to me, we smoke a cigarette together. We talk about me, about my family, we talk about him, about the cars... it’s fun time.” Similarly, the HR-manager of a tomato company I visited told me on the phone that they have regular check-in conversations with their employees about their personal lives, but that this is difficult to maintain during peak season when they hire a large number of temporary workers. Jakub said that the bond with his boss at the flower company was very good and that one time his boss even helped him when he had a depression and financial problems, by giving him a loan and checking in on him every day. Such relationships exemplify what has been referred to as ‘relational contracts’ (DeMeuse, Bergmann and Lester 2001), as opposed to ‘transactional contracts’ (Kraimer, Wayne, Liden and Sparrowe 2005). Research found that temporary workers were more likely to have transactional contracts with their employer, based on rather short term and narrowly specified obligations, while steady workers were more likely to have

agreements such as the one between Jakub and his boss; based on trust and loyalty (Rousseau 1995; Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni 1995).

Better social ties at work can make it more accessible for employees to speak up or voice complaints at work (Rybnikova 2016; Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman 2022b). When employees have a good personal relationship with their boss based on mutual trust, they will be less fearful of talking to them about any discontent at work. Besides, being well-integrated into the social network of other employees can make it easier for employees to form a group and voice complaints as a collective. Only doing temporary work, however, makes it harder to form such bonds at work, putting employees in an even more precarious position. I can give the example of Klaudia for this, who was working via an agency and told me that at a certain temporary job she had, she had felt discriminated against at work. Her colleagues were on her side, and she said that she had gotten them to agree with joining her to go talk to their boss. However, every time she wanted to get people to join her, they would decide at the last minute to remain silent. When I asked her why she thought people remained silent, she said they were afraid of losing their jobs. Looking back at the example of Stefan I gave in the previous chapter, describing how he lost his job after calling a lawyer about the holiday money his agency refused to give to him, these fears do not seem too unreasonable. Still, Klaudia’s experience contrasted strongly with that of Jakub, who had settled in a steady job at a flower company. While I walked along with him on his work-day one day, he told me about a time when he was having personal issues with one of his bosses. Coincidentally, this happened to be an issue of feeling discriminated against too. However, unlike Klaudia, Jakub felt secure enough to go on his own, and he managed to have a good conversation with his colleague about it. “After that, I realised he’s actually a super nice guy”, Jakub told me.

Additionally, with a steady job also comes the benefit of having more opportunities to learn Dutch. While some participants had taken occasional Dutch classes, most people had mainly or even fully learned Dutch during work. This learning process could start with basic job-related terms; for instance, Jakub incorporated words such as “koelcel” (refrigerator) or “pauze” (work break) into his English conversations, and gradually progressed to near-fluency over the years. Learning Dutch can contribute to feeling socially integrated at work, or in Dutch society in general. Many of my participants felt like language was a barrier when trying to socialise with Dutch people. For example, Stefan said: “When I just came here, I did not speak Dutch. I felt discriminated or excluded sometimes, you know. But now I don’t have that feeling anymore.” Maria, a woman I met at a board game night in a Polish library, said that although she speaks English just fine, she decided to learn Dutch because she had often felt that she could not keep up with the informal banter of Dutch speakers.

Not only does speaking Dutch include migrants into informal citizenship, it can also allow them to apply for Dutch citizenship by naturalisation. Klaudia, for instance, was using her free time after being fired to take the Dutch tests needed for Dutch citizenship. Furthermore, learning Dutch often provides growing opportunities at work. Speaking Dutch is often a requirement for jobs, or it can offer new positions within the workplace. After having worked at the same company for years, Jakub was offered a Dutch course by his boss. After Jakub had completed the course, his boss offered him a promotion to the office. Stefan also pointed out that besides feeling excluded from society, not speaking Dutch when he first came here also limited his opportunities for higher functions. Now, speaking Dutch quite fluently, he found a job as a project leader at the harbour of Rotterdam. “What I

like about it?”, he said, “That I’m responsible for big projects now. Sometimes new steel constructions, worth millions.” Thus, thanks to a steady position, employees may get more opportunities to learn Dutch (or English), which allows them to feel more integrated, and in turn open up new opportunities.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this chapter I have explored how precarious employment shapes migrants’ social lives and vice versa. On the one hand, shared experiences of precarity can play a role in the formation of social networks. On the other hand, most of all, unstable employment has a detrimental effect on social integration and cohesion. Permanent jobs offer more opportunity for building and improving social relationships at work, both with peers and bosses, improving the social integration and sense of belonging of migrants at the workplace. In turn, this improved social network at the workplace can help workers speak up or raise issues at work, which, on the other hand, is often a risky action at more precarious temporary jobs. Furthermore, it helps migrants learn Dutch, especially when the majority of their co-workers speak Dutch, further bringing new opportunities.

While this chapter has focused on the role precarious employment plays in the social lives of migrants, the next chapter will shift this focus to how migrants envision, plan and realise their futures. I will show how precarious employment can hinder migrants in forming broader perspectives that go beyond the here-and-now. By understanding their personal stories, this final chapter allows for a more adequate understanding of the broader implications of precarity on migrants’ aspirations and life trajectories.

4. Envisioning the Future

In their book *Faces of Precarity: Critical Perspectives on Work, Subjectivities and Struggles*, Choonara, Murgia and Carmo (2022, 31) emphasise that “(...), for those (...) in the temporariness of work contracts, the greatest suffering seems to be linked to the difficulty in giving shape to an oriented narrative—in defining a story, in making out a ‘plot’ in the activities and identifying a recognizable objective to reach (Sennett, 1998)”. In this chapter, I will discuss these difficulties my participants have experienced; difficulties in shaping their narratives, setting goals, and realising them. I will show how unstable employment can hinder this, affecting their *imagination* (Cangià 2018) or *capacity to aspire* (Appadurai 2004), further contributing to their experience of precarity. I will connect this to the previously mentioned lack of sense of achievement my participants experienced, arguing that struggles with ambition can result in a feeling of not progressing or achieving as much. Furthermore, I place precarity in the context of interdependence. This can be related to a perceived or real lack of agency as well, as my participants often felt like they had limited options for alternatives and this way were dragged into precarity.

Living from day-to-day

Many people described their situation as living more day-to-day when working for agencies. Firstly, this was for financial reasons. They would wait until they get paid, only to immediately have to spend it again on rent (in many cases this was already withheld from the salary by the agency) and health insurance. With agency work, people typically earn just enough to get by, but not enough to save up extra money for future expenses. For example, Jakub described how his financial situation changed as soon as he started his steady job at the flower processing centre:

I remember when I was with this agency it was like this money was gone in a few days. Because we had this money, we got to pay this, buy this, buy this, buy this, and gone. It's like, literally living from week to week. But right now, when I get paid, I'm paying what I have to, and I see this progress, you know what I mean. You can save something, what I can save, what I can use.

Secondly, and this is of course indirectly tied to financial reasons, my participants' living from day to day was due to the unpredictability and unreliability of their job. I found that when migrants were working precarious jobs, this affected the way they looked ahead into the future. Many times, especially with agency work, employees had little insight into their future financial situation, or whether they would even be able to keep their job.

In his book, Apostolidis (2019) mentions three ways in which precarious workers are ‘out of time’ according to Gorz (1989), which I discussed in chapter two. Later, adding to Gorz, Apostolidis (2019, 6) describes a fourth way, writing that precarious labour “blocks them from consciously and collectively intervening in capitalism’s globally distributed and historical temporalities”. Apostolidis draws on a quote by David Harvey (2016, 116), who describes the compressing of time into merely a ‘here and now’ in which people in precarious positions are trapped, limiting their possibilities for future-building and planning or reflection on the past. This resonates with many of the (past) experiences of my participants, who, due to the volatility of agency work, often struggled to maintain a sense of continuity in their lives. Stefan’s shift from agency work to a permanent position at the harbour of Rotterdam illustrates how gaining job security can restore a sense of temporal stability, enabling people like him to make plans and reduce their stress and worries about the future: “I now have more security regarding my salary and income, so I can make plans for the future. I can also go away for a long holiday, and when I come back, I’m sure I still have my job. I generally have less stress and worries about the future.”

Similarly, in her article on experiences of precarity among ‘trailing spouses’ (people who travel along with their working partners) Cangià (2018) draws a reciprocal connection between precarity and envisioning the future, or what she refers to as imagination. She describes instances of imagination—what she refers to as *as if* or *what if* modes of thinking—as mental processes people use to detach from the *as is*, or in other words, to free themselves from the confinement in the ‘here and now’ as described by Apostolidis (2019) and Harvey (2016). This takes the shape of people envisioning potential future scenarios (*what would it be?*) or alternatives (*what else could I do?*). *As is* and *as if* modes of thinking do not contradict each other, Cangià writes, but in fact have a mutual effect on each other. In a sense, she writes, imagination can mitigate the experience of precarity and can provide “an important space

where personal identities are revisited” (Cangia 2018, 12). Simultaneously, however, precarious life limits imagination.

In line with this, Appadurai (2004), uses what he calls *the capacity to aspire* to describe to what extent people have the means, skills, knowledge, examples, or confidence required to envision, set and realise long term plans and aspirations. The capacity to aspire, he argues, is unevenly distributed among societies worldwide. In a recent interview, Appadurai (2021) further clarifies that this uneven distribution is not about mental capacity, a matter of intelligence, or a “cultural poverty kind of argument” instead, it is a matter of how many opportunities one has to put this capacity into practice. Relatively privileged people, he says, generally have more capacity to aspire, as opposed to socially or economically marginalised people. I argue that this is also the case for people experiencing precarity within societies. These people, such as my participants (now, or used to) typically have less financial means. On top of that, they encounter many challenges when it comes to planning their lives ahead due to the unpredictability of their futures, further limiting their capacity to aspire.

Future-making and sense of achievement

I contend that the concept of a ‘sense of achievement’, as discussed in chapter one, is intrinsically linked to workers’ future-building and planning. For these workers, reaching a sense of achievement in their careers and general life trajectories is not merely about the immediate tasks they fulfil, but is connected to their ability to envision and work towards a better future. Jakub illustrated this connection by sharing his experience:

I’m an ambitious kind of person, and I knew that, there, there was no future for me. I knew that I would stay in this one workplace, you know, I was *inpakker* [packer], I was packing the flowers—because I’m only in the flowering companies since the beginning—and I knew, I’m not gonna go further. And I didn’t enjoy it at all, you know. And I wanted to do something further.

For Jakub, the lack of a sense of progression or an envisioned goal, as a result of being “imprisoned” in the present (as described by Apostolidis (2019, 6) and Harvey (2016, 116)) in turn, stifled his sense of achievement. The inability to advance beyond the (temporary) role of a flower packer meant that he could not engage in future-building and planning the way his steady-contracted colleagues might have. Without prospects for career progression, participants felt their ambitions were hindered or impossible to realise, leading to dissatisfaction and a lack of fulfilment. Of course, this may be ‘just the way life goes’ for many people, but I argue that precarity enforces this ‘general unpredictability’ of migrants’ life trajectories. For example, Paulina, who dreamed of finding work in the field of childcare, even said that she felt like not being able to do the work she liked was a big factor that caused her depression. In contrast, Jakub, who finally found a steady job he liked, told me about his plans for the future. “I would like to buy a house now on my own, so I’m trying to save some.”

Dependence as characteristic of precarity

A steady job not only feels more reliable for workers themselves, but also for other parties such as real estate agents. In turn, this can affect things like buying a house or getting a loan, further influencing whether, and in what ways Polish migrants planned their futures. Stefan pointed this out in an interview, and described it as being stuck in a loop of dependence on the agencies:

With that kind of contract [0-hours], it is also difficult to rent a house. Because you are not reliable for the landlord. And so you stay with the employment agency’s accommodation. And if you live there, you are also dependent; maybe you have a chance for a better job, but then you have no accommodation. So then you still have to continue working for the employment agency. For a bad salary. You are somewhat dependent on that.

Other participants described the same thing, such as Klaudia, who felt like she had been “stuck to agencies” ever since she had been living and working in the Netherlands. The HR-manager of a tomato company (not a Polish migrant), whom I spoke with through the phone, confirmed this: “We could offer those temporary workers a permanent position”, she said, “but then they would not have an accommodation”. Thus, migrants were in a way ‘stuck’ to employment agencies, or dependent on their personal networks for finding a temporary place to stay.

This cycle of dependence illustrates the far-reaching implications of unstable work beyond the workplace. For Jaatsi and Kymäläinen (2023), who discuss precarity in housing in their article on everyday urban precarity in Helsinki, precarity is characterised by high levels of dependence on others for (temporary) opportunities to stay. Correspondingly, in her article on the working lives of millennial women in Canada, Worth (2016) writes that precarity is not an individual experience independent from others, but relational and embedded in social networks. These social networks of dependence can include friends or spouses, employers, or even ‘the labour market’, who can have the power to impede or encourage workers’ *imagination* (Cangia 2018). The concept of dependence is evident in the lives of Polish migrants, especially among those who are in more vulnerable positions. Their aspirations and plans are highly influenced by and dependent on others, such as employers (especially employment agencies) and landlords, or more casual social networks consisting of friends and family. Not only can the people or entities surrounding workers influence their subjective experience of precarity, they can also constrain the control over their life trajectories and future planning, such as is (or was) the case for Stefan and Klaudia, which can have ‘real-life’ consequences for the labour or housing market (Worth 2016).

Agency and freedom of choice

One of the most noticeable things I found is that nearly everyone I met told me that they had never planned to settle in the Netherlands. Many times when migrants leave the Netherlands, they would hardly have a concrete plan. Or they would tell me that the plan was to make some extra money in the Netherlands for a couple of months, usually maximally half a year, and then return to Poland. I

noticed this during interviews I had with my participants, for example, Magda, whom I talked to at her work at a tomato packaging factory, said: “First plan was for work, three months. Now almost eight years here”; but I also noticed this while observing the many Facebook groups I joined. One post for example, asking for a general opinion about the Netherlands, was full of comments of people responding in the line of “Living here is alright, I never planned to stay this long”. Staying long term has often not been a deliberate choice for the migrants. Rather, it can be a kind of postponement of the planned return to Poland, a ‘step by step’ extension of a temporary stay, usually to the point that the initial wish to return is no longer there. For example, Klaudia, who had been living in the Netherlands since 2007, said: “In the beginning we thought, okay three months, half a year, and we’ll go back. Okay, then another half year, okay another half year, okay another half year, okay another year, okay last time...”. She also told me that in the beginning, she sometimes regretted her choice to migrate. However, she said that as time passed she started to be more and more happy in the Netherlands, in spite of her problems with finding steady work, and that she no longer wishes to return.

Not only has moving to the Netherlands often not been a conscious choice or something migrants had deliberately planned, many migrants described experiencing a lack of freedom in making such decisions. Jakub, for example, told me why he decided to move to the Netherlands: “I didn’t have any choice anyway, because I knew that if I would stay in Poland, I would be all the time deserted”. Similarly, Janusz told me how he felt about moving to the Netherlands: “You’re just getting into the car and you don’t know what you are going to do, and another language, in a house with 20 other people... Yeah, but then I *have* to. What else can I do?”. This rhetorical question Janusz asked, quite literally ties into the concept I mentioned earlier of *occurrences of imagination*, described by Cangià (2018, 12). She writes that imagination includes people wondering about alternative scenarios, which she exemplifies by a question that emerged from her fieldwork: “what else can I do?”.

However, Janusz’s question asking what else he could do suggested a more desperate tone, implying that at the time, he felt like he *had* no other options. Linking the concept of precarity to agency, I would therefore argue that inherent to precarity is the toll it takes on people’s personal agency. In doing so, I align with Broughton et al. (2016) and Anwar and Graham (2020), who contend that flexible work becomes precarious in cases where it is not an active choice or an employment characteristic job seekers desire, but rather the only option they have. I can illustrate this link further using other instances where migrants felt like they were deprived of their freedom of choice. One of these instances includes having no other option than to work for an agency, a position I described earlier in this chapter as a loop of dependency. Another is not ending up in the field of education (if any) or personal interest. It was remarkable that almost no one I talked to had followed any education or schooling that was relevant for their current jobs. While talking to Paulina in a community centre during one of the Polka activities, she told me with a slight sadness that she was educated to be a teacher for young children in Poland, but that she could not work in the Netherlands with this degree. Her plan had been to move to the Netherlands, do some extra courses if needed, and start working as a teacher. However, this did not go as planned, she divorced, had physical and mental health issues, and could not find a steady job. All this time, she said, she had still been dreaming of doing some kind of work with children. Other examples include Stefan, who had a university degree in European Law, but after a couple of temporary jobs via agencies, he ended up working as project leader at the harbour of Rotterdam. Jakub

had started film school, which he loved, but could not finish because it was too expensive, and so he ended up finally finding a stable job at a flower company. Klaudia had started her education in Poland to become a lab analyst, but she went to the Netherlands to do various agency jobs.

Due to unstable (work) conditions, migrants may feel as if they can not plan as far ahead, or they may actually be unable to do so, resulting in their life just ‘going the way it goes’. Because of this, many participants felt like they were just having ‘bad luck’, or like they had no say in where their future would take them. In that way migrants experience constraints on their abilities to make autonomous choices or on the extent to which they experience a sense of control over their life trajectories, further putting them in a precarious position.

This aligns with what Appadurai (2021) describes during the interview I mentioned earlier in this chapter, saying that the future is something that is (wrongly) often seen as something that just ‘unfolds’, something that we can try to predict or calculate certain risks of using models and graphs, making it appear as a ‘natural fact’. He calls this view the *future as probability*, as opposed to the *future as possibility*, a future that is makeable and involves or requires people’s agency. This agency, however, is not evenly distributed. Appadurai suggests that a lack of (perceived) agency among the less privileged people leads them to feel as though their futures are determined by external forces rather than their own actions. This perception is evident in the stories of the migrants, where the unpredictability of their circumstances and the precarity of their employment conditions limits their capacity to envision and realise their futures.

Concluding Remarks

With this chapter, I have aimed to explore to what extent and how unstable work affects the ways in which migrants are able to envision and realise their futures, and how they have perceived this effect over the course of their lives as working migrants in the Netherlands. In unstable work situations, my participants often experienced difficulties in planning ahead and seeing their lives through a broader temporal scope, which Harvey (2016) and Apostolidis (2019) describe as being trapped in the present. In order to escape from this confinement, people use instances of imagination; however, precarity can obstruct this process (Cangià 2018). Moreover, as Appadurai (2004) argues, the *capacity to aspire* is not equally distributed across society. This dynamic tended to shift for those who found the permanent positions they desired, as they had more financial stability and improved job security.

Moreover, an improved ability to realise personal ambitions can lead to a stronger sense of achievement. This can be related to the concept of agency in the sense that when people are more able to have control over their futures, they gain a sense of agency. In contrast, those who experienced difficulties in planning ahead tended to feel like their lives simply ‘unfolded’ upon them (Appadurai, 2021), experiencing a lack in agency. Thus, as I have argued, the extent to which individuals have the capacities to make free choices throughout their lives is an important aspect of precarity, distinguishing it from flexible work or related terms.

5. Conclusion

This thesis explores the subjective experiences of precarity among Polish migrants that have come to the Netherlands for better work. In doing so, my objective was to obtain information on the Polish migrant community in the Netherlands and their personal experiences throughout their life trajectories, as well as to enrich the body of academic work on migration and precarity within the discipline of anthropology. The main question guiding my research was: ‘How does precarious work shape the life trajectories of Polish ‘labour migrants’ in the Netherlands?’

To answer this question, I have focused on three sub-themes, along which I have structured the ethnographic chapters of my thesis. In chapter one, I have discussed the precarious experiences of my participants. In the second chapter, I have focused on how precarity plays a role in the social lives of Polish migrants in the Netherlands. Finally, the third chapter covered how precarious work affects if and how migrants envisioned, planned, tried to realise and looked back upon their futures.

Precarious work shaped the lives of my participants in various ways. Many migrants envi-

sioned their stay in the Netherlands to be temporary, which often led them to opt for employment agencies. However, when their stay extended beyond their initial plan, these temporary employment agencies tended to put them in challenging situations, exposing them to precarity. Arguing against an optimistic view on precarity, such as presented by authors like Millar (2014), I have highlighted that my participants often desired stable employment but felt ‘stuck’ to temporary employment agencies. The conceptual differentiation between precarity and flexible labour becomes crucial here, where the former is tied to negative effects on workers’ lives (Broughton et al. 2016; Anwar and Graham 2020), whereas the latter can be a desirable form of employment. My participants experienced precarity in issues at work itself, or due to their low salaries, but most of all, they experienced it in the uncertain nature of temporary agency work in general. The fact that workers increasingly find themselves to be the only ones responsible for managing the risks associated with their employment, such as exemplified by Stefan who lost both his job and accommodation when he was fired, is frequently described to be one of the key characteristics of precarious work (Hewison 2015, 439; Armano, Morini and Murgia 2022, 30; International Labour Organization 2011, 6). Precarity further manifests itself in the struggle to find a stable job, issues around housing, fear of sudden dismissal, and in feeling like a ‘replaceable’ individual within the Dutch (temporary) job market, often leading to migrants experiencing a lack of sense of achievement in their life and career trajectories. A lack of sense of achievement entails that migrants often felt like they had limited opportunities to improve themselves or their skills while doing temporary work, that they could not do the type of work they enjoyed, and that any talents, previously acquired skills or education were not made use of. Overall, this shows how precarity is more than just a moment of insecurity, or having a ‘bad job’. Rather, it is a continuous struggle that is not always easy to escape from. When people did find their way out, there was often a noticeable shift in people’s life trajectories and how they experienced it, indicating the significant role the nature of migrants’ work played in shaping various aspects in their lives.

Precarious work also impacts the social lives of Polish migrants by hindering their ability to form and maintain social relationships. The demanding nature of temporary work leaves little time for finding friends or maintaining such relationships outside of the workplace. Following the analysis of Gorz (1989) as described by Apostolidis (2019), precarity disrupts migrants’ lives in three ways. Firstly, because of much time spent at work they may lack free time. Secondly, precarious employment often implies that workers need to spend a lot of time looking for a job, even when they are still employed, as job prospects are typically unpredictable. Thirdly, doing non-standard work has a detrimental effect on social belonging. On the one hand, this belonging can refer to formal and informal citizenship in Dutch society, such as described by Eriksen (2015) and Nowicka (2018) as *cultural precarity*. Using Ong’s (1996) theory of *cultural citizenship* as a dual process that involves ‘being made’ as well as ‘self-making’, I have emphasised that my participants played a role in the definition of their own citizenship; for example, my participants sometimes labelled themselves by pointing out that they felt more Dutch than Polish after many years of living in the Netherlands. Simultaneously though, their informal citizenship status was influenced by external factors such as their employment status as well. On the other hand, doing non-standard work also has a detrimental effect on social belonging within the work-place. A crucial aspect that can improve migrants’ experience of job quality is the social relationships they build with colleagues at work, which there are limited opportunities for when

constantly switching from job to job as is the case in precarious work. With steady work, migrants are generally more capable of building relationships with their colleagues and bosses. For these migrants, this also means that they tend to be more effective in speaking up about issues at work or feel more comfortable doing so and that they get more opportunities to learn and practise Dutch. Thus, better social ties at work improve migrants' integration and sense of belonging at their job. In contrast, while some migrants find support through community organisations, the overall effect of precarious work is detrimental to social cohesion and integration.

Finally, the uncertainty associated with precarious employment affected how my participants envisioned and planned their futures. Those who did or had done temporary agency work for a longer period in their lives tended to live in a rather fragmented, day-to-day manner, struggling to set and work towards long-term goals. My participants often seemed to have a hard time maintaining a sense of continuity in their lives and career paths, which Apostolidis (2019) and Harvey (2016) have described as confinement in the present. To escape from such confinement, people may use instances of imagination (Cangià 2018); however, precarity can simultaneously hinder this. Moreover, as Appadurai (2004) argues, the *capacity to aspire* is not equally distributed across society. In contrast, migrants in stable employment faced fewer obstacles in imagining, planning and realising their futures. Furthermore, the precarious nature of migrants' work and the interdependence that comes with it can also influence their (sense of) agency and achievement, often curbing their ambitions and making them feel incapable of realising their aspirations. As I have argued, the extent to which individuals experience freedom in the choices they make throughout their lives—for example whether they have other employment options than temporary agency jobs—is a crucial defining factor of precarity.

With this thesis, I aimed to expand on the existing theory on precarious work, mainly by showing how this plays a role in various aspects throughout the migrants' life trajectories. While a large part of the academic work on precarity places it in a context of neoliberal restructurings of the labour market, I have expanded this scope beyond merely work or financial aspects. By showing how work precarity shaped my participants' overall life and career satisfaction, sense of achievement, social relationships, and desire for or accessibility to future-making, I have shed light on precarity as a subjective experience and expanded its understanding beyond a solely structural condition. In doing so I have simultaneously differentiated the concept from related terms like flexible labour and stressed why it is relevant to use the concept of precarity in such contexts. Anthropological fieldwork lends itself well to social scientific research on migration and precarity in general, but is particularly valuable for this more subjective approach I took, as ethnographic methods like participant observation and in-depth interviewing provide a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of precarity among the participants. In turn, with a better understanding of the challenges Polish migrants face in the Netherlands doing precarious work, I hope to contribute to the process of paving a way towards a more inclusive and well-informed society. This process is of great importance in today's globalising world, characterised by high levels of migration and the increasing level of new tensions and challenges this brings.

This study has some potential limitations. Firstly, I have mostly spoken with staying migrants. This was an intended focus because I wanted to be able to look back with them on their life trajectories in the Netherlands and how this changed over the years. However, this meant that I excluded a group of Polish migrants that likely has very different experiences than my participants had. Secondly, I was

only able to speak Dutch or English with participants, which forced me to exclude the group of migrants that only speaks Polish. For a large part, this divide overlaps with the first limitation I mentioned, as staying migrants tended to learn Dutch while those staying temporarily often did not. Thirdly, I was not always able to meet my participants repeatedly due to the limited time frame of the fieldwork and the busy and unpredictable lives of my participants. Therefore I was not always able to build rapport with them as much as I would have preferred.

On a final note, based on my findings I would like to make a suggestion for further research on the topic. According to many migrants and employers I spoke with, there has been a shift happening in the demographic composition of migrants coming to the Netherlands for work in recent years, from primarily Polish migrants, to migrants coming from a variety of other Eastern-European countries such as Bulgaria and Romania. According to some of my participants, these newcomers are yet relatively ignorant about any pitfalls the previous waves of Polish migrants have already faced, introducing them to challenges that are similar to those Polish migrants (used to) experience. This would suggest a continuity in the issues surrounding precarious work. It would be interesting for future research to explore the experiences of these growing migrating populations, possibly through comparative studies with earlier waves of Polish migrants, to gain insights into how migration and precarious labour are experienced throughout the lives of different groups of migrants. Such investigations would enrich the understanding of migration patterns, labour markets and the precarious experiences that comes with it, contributing to ongoing discussions within anthropology on these topics.

Bibliography

- Alberti, Gabriella, Ioulia Bessa, Kate Hardy, Vera Trappmann, and Charles Umney. 2018. "In, against and beyond Precarity: Work in Insecure Times." *Work, Employment and Society* 32 (3): 447–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017018762088>.
- Anwar, Mohammad Amir, and Mark Graham. 2020. "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Freedom, Flexibility, Precarity and Vulnerability in the Gig Economy in Africa." *Competition and Change* 25(2), 237-258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529420914473>.
- Apostolidis, Paul. 2019. *The Fight for Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190459338.001.0001>.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2004. "The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition". In *Culture and Public Action*, edited by Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton. The World Bank. Stanford, CA: Stanford University press.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2021. "Arjun Appadurai: the future as cultural fact (full interview)". Interview produced by Future Rural Africa - CRC 228. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7SX8PKOzUU&ab_channel=FutureRuralAfrica-CRC228
- Armano, Emiliana, Cristina Morini and Annalisa Murgia. 2022. "Conceptualizing Precariousness: A Subject-oriented Approach". In *Faces of Precarity : Critical Perspectives on Work, Subjectivities and Struggles*, edited by Joseph Choonara, Annalisa Murgia, and Renato Miguel do Carmo, 29-43. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.
- Bayón, María Cristina. 2006. "Social Precarity in Mexico and Argentina: Trends, Manifestations and National Trajectories." *CEPAL Review*, no. 88: 125–43. <https://doi.org/10.18356/85f9377d-en>.
- Bernard, H. Russell, and Clarence C. Gravlee, eds. 2015. *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. Second edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10891906>.
- Biglia, Barbara, and Jordi Bonet Martí. 2014. "Precarity." In *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, edited by Thomas Teo, 1488–91. New York: Springer. https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_230.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1997. "La précarité est aujourd'hui partout". *Contre-feux*, Ed. Liber Raisons d'agir, Grenoble.

- Breman, Jan. 2013. "A bogus concept?" *New Left Review* 84, 130-8.
- Broughton, Andrea, Martha Green, Catherine Rickard, Sam Swift, Werner Eichhorst, Verena Tobsch, Iga Magda et al. 2016. *Precarious Employment in Europe. Part 1: Patterns, Trends, and Policy Strategy*. European Parliament.
- Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos : Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Brooklyn, New York: Zone Books.
- Campbell, Iain, and Robin Price. 2016. "Precarious Work and Precarious Workers: Towards an Improved Conceptualisation." *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 27 (3): 314–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304616652074>.
- Cangià, Flavia. 2018. "Precarity, Imagination, and the Mobile Life of the 'Trailing Spouse'." *Ethos* 46 (1): 8–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12195>.
- Carr, Franoise. 2015. "Destandardization: Qualitative and Quantitative." In *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Work and Employment*, edited by Stephen Edgell, Heidi Gottfried, and Edward Granter, 385-405. London: SAGE Publications.
- CBS. 2019. "Poolse en Syrische immigranten per gemeente." <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2019/44/poolse-en-syrische-immigranten-per-gemeente>.
- CBS. 2023. "Uit welke landen komen de meeste immigranten? - Nederland in cijfers 2023." <https://longreads.cbs.nl/nederland-in-cijfers-2023/uit-welke-landen-komen-de-meeste-immigranten/>.
- Choonara, Joseph, Annalisa Murgia, and Renato Miguel do Carmo, eds. 2022. *Faces of Precarity : Critical Perspectives on Work, Subjectivities and Struggles*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.
- Clayton, John, and Tom Vickers. 2019. "Temporal Tensions: European Union Citizen Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees Navigating Dominant Temporalities of Work in England." *Time & Society* 28 (4): 1464–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X18778466>.
- DeMeuse, Kenneth P., Thomas J. Bergmann, and Scott W. Lester. 2001. "An Investigation of the Relational Component of the Psychological Contract across Time, Generation, and Employment Status." *Journal of Managerial Issues* 13 (1): 102–18.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2015. "Rebuilding the ship at sea: super-diversity, person and conduct in eastern Oslo." *Global Networks*, 15: 1-20. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1111/glob.12066>
- Gorz, André. 1989. *Critique of Economic Reason*. London: Verso.

- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Harvey, David. 2016. *The Ways of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Worth, Nancy. 2016. "Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34 (4): 601–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775815622211>.
- Hermann, Christoph. 2007. "Neoliberalism in the European Union." *Studies in Political Economy* 79: 61–89.
- Hewison, Kevin. 2015. "Precarious Work." In *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Work and Employment*, edited by Stephen Edgell, Heidi Gottfried, and Edward Granter, 385–405. London: SAGE Publications.
- Holston, James. 2008. *Insurgent citizenship: disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil*. Princeton: University Press.
- International Labour Organization. 2011. *Policies and Regulations to Combat Precarious Employment*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Office.
- Kalleberg, Arne L., Barbara F. Reskin, and Ken Hudson. 2000. "Bad Jobs in America: Standard and Nonstandard Employment Relations and Job Quality in the United States." *American Sociological Review* 65 (2): 256–78.
- Karpinska, Kasia, and Jeroen Ooijevaar. 2016. *Familierelaties van Polen in Nederland*. Den Haag: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.
- Kraimer, Maria L., Sandy J. Wayne, Robert C. Liden, Raymond T. Sparrowe. 2005. "The Role of Job Security in Understanding the Relationship between Employees' Perceptions of Temporary Workers and Employees' Performance." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 90 (2): 389–98. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.2.389>.
- Kunda, Gideon, Stephen R. Barley, and James Evans. 2002. "Why Do Contractors Contract? The Experience of Highly Skilled Technical Professionals in a Contingent Labor Market." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 55(2): 234–261.
- Millar, Kathleen M. 2014. "The Precarious Present: Wageless Labor and Disrupted Life in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil." *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 1: 32–53. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca29.1.04>.
- Mitlacher, Lars W. 2008. "Job Quality and Temporary Agency Work: Challenges for Human Resource Management in Triangular Employment Relations in Germany." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 19, no. 3: 446–60. doi:10.1080/09585190801895528.
- Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie. 2022. *Monitor Arbeidsuitbuiting en Ernstige Benadeling 2020-2021*.

- Den Haag: De Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie.
- Neilson, Brett, and Ned Rossiter. 2008. "Precarity As a Political Concept, or, Fordism As Exception." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (7-8): 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408097796>.
- Neilson, Brett. 2019. "Precarious in Piraeus: On the Making of Labour Insecurity in a Port Concession." *Globalizations* 16 (4): 559–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1463755>.
- Noller, Peter. 2003. "Gefährdungsbewusstsein: Erfahrungen und Verarbeitungsformen beruflich-sozialer Gefährdung in Leiharbeit und befristeter Beschäftigung". In *Leiharbeit und befristete Beschäftigung*, edited by Gudrun Linne and Berthold Vogel, 47 – 56. Düsseldorf : HBS.
- Nowicka, Magdalena. 2018. "Cultural Precarity: Migrants' Positionalities in the Light of Current Anti-Immigrant Populism in Europe," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 39, no. 5: 527–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2018.1508006>.
- OECD. 2014. "Is Migration Good for the Economy?" *Migration Policy Debates*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. 2024. "Temporary employment (indicator)" Accessed on 21 May 2024. <https://data.oecd.org/emp/temporary-employment.htm>
- Ong, Aihwa. 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making. Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States." *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5: 737-762.
- Overbeek, Henk. 2002. "Neoliberalism and the Regulation of Global Labor Mobility." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 581 : 74–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049708>.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris. 2017. "Two endings of the precarious movement.", in *Mapping Precariousness: Subjectivities and Resistance*, edited by Emilian Armano, Arianna Bove and Annalisa Murgia, 137-148. London: Routledge.
- Parsanoglou, Dimitris, Glykeria Stamatopoulou and Maria Symeonaki. 2023. "Stepping Stone or Trap? Contextualising Precarity as a Sector and Age Phenomenon in the Greek Labour Market." *YOUNG*, 31(2), 161-184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088221139391>
- Paus, Eva A. 1994. "Economic Growth through Neoliberal Restructuring? Insights from the Chilean Experience." *The Journal of Developing Areas* 29, no. 1: 31–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4192411>.
- Pendenza, Massimo, and Vanessa Lamattina. 2019. "Rethinking Self-Responsibility: An Alternative Vision to the Neoliberal Concept of Freedom." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(1), 100-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218816827>
- Ramírez, Catherine S., Juan Poblete, Sylvanna M. Falcón, Steven C. McKay & Felicity Amaya Schaeffer.

2021. "Introduction. Toward a Politics of Commonality: The Nexus of Mobility, Precarity, and (Non)citizenship." In *Precarity and Belonging: Labor, Migration, and Noncitizenship*, edited by Catherine S. Ramírez, Juan Poblete, Sylvanna M. Falcón, Steven C. McKay & Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, 1-16. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Richard W. Mallett. 2020. "Seeing the "Changing Nature of Work" through a Precarity Lens." *Global Labour Journal* 11 (3). <https://doi.org/10.15173/glj.v11i3.4138>.
- Rodgers, Gerry. 1989. "Precarious Work in Western Europe: The State of the Debate". In *Precarious Jobs in Labour Market Regulation: The Growth of Atypical Employment in Western Europe*, edited by Gerry Rodgers and Janine Rodgers, 1-16. Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies.
- Rousseau, Denise M. 1995. *Psychological contracts in organizations: Understanding written and un written agreements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.
- Rousseau, Denise M., and Kimberly A. Wade-Benzoni. 1995. "Changing Individual-organizational Attachments – a Two Way Street". In *The Changing Nature of Work*, edited by Ann Howard, 290 – 322. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ryan, Richard M., and Edward L. Deci. 2001. "On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being." *Annual Review of Psychology* 52(1): 141–166. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141>.
- Rybnikova, Irma. 2016. "Employee Voice and Silence in Temporary Agency Work." *German Journal of Human Resource Management* 30 (3-4): 287–309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2397002216649897>.
- Schilling, Hannah, Talja Blokland, and AbdouMaliq Simone. 2019. "Working Precarity: Urban Youth Tactics to Make Livelihoods in Instable Conditions in Abidjan, Athens, Berlin and Jakarta." *The Sociological Review* 67 (6): 1333–49.
- Sluiter, Roderick, Katerina Manevska, and Agnes Akkerman. 2022a. "Atypical work, worker voice and supervisor responses." *Socio-Economic Review*, Volume 20, Issue 3: 1069–1089. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwaa022>
- Sluiter, Roderick, Katerina Manevska, and Agnes Akkerman. 2022b. "The Impact of Network Ties on Worker Voice." In *Employment Relations as Networks: Methods and Theory*, edited by Bernd Brandl, Bengt Larsson, Alex Lehr, Oscar Molina, 99-122. London: Routledge.
- Standing, Guy. 2011. *The Precariat : The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Strauss, Claudia. 2024. "Small Work Pleasures and Two Types of Well-Being." *Economic Anthropology* 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sea2.12314>
- Van Assche, Annelies, and Rudi Laermans. 2022. "Living Up to a Bohemian Work Ethic. Balancing Autonomy and Risk in the Symbolic Economy of the Performing Arts." *Poetics* 93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2022.101683>.
- Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work : Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394723>.
- Wieland, R. and Grüne, P. 1999 . "Psychische Belastungen und Beanspruchungen bei Leiharbeit – Risiken und Chancen einer expandierenden Arbeitsform". In *Zeitarbeit – ein Wirtschaftsfaktor*, 99 – 113. Verband Deutscher Sicherheitsingenieure e.V., Leipzig : VDS.
- Worth, Nancy. 2016. "Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34 (4): 601–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775815622211>.