

FROM
SPROUTING
SEEDS TO
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FLOWERS

TRAJECTORIES OF POLISH MIGRANT
WORKERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

USING LIFE-HISTORY INTERVIEWS TO RE-EVALUATE
THE DEFINITION OF STRATEGIES AND TACTICS USED BY
MIGRANT WORKERS

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Executive summary

Trajectories of migrant workers are influenced by the types of agency they exert. In some situations, one might be able to follow their long-term plan, while in other instances one must resort to tactics to deal with obstacles. These different types of agency are the subject of this thesis. Next to that, this thesis critically assesses the definition of terms used in migration research such as upward mobility: how progress in the lives of migrant workers is valued. Focussing on agency implies a focus on movements made by migrant workers or their mobility patterns so to say. As this thesis closely looks at these mobility patterns of migrant workers, it fits the mobility turn. The mobility turn focusses on how movement (potentially) occurs, how it is enabled, and how it is blocked (Büscher & Urry, 2009). While the (potential) movement of people is an important part of this, the movement of “objects, information, and ideas” is also included (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p.99). All these different kinds of movements create social and material realities with which individuals interact. It is in this space for interaction where there is room for agency. As agency is relational, not everyone can behave similarly in comparable situations. Hence the importance of assessing different types of agency. The type of agency one can assert is influenced by the power one holds. According to Datta et al., (2007) migrant workers usually resort to short-term tactics to survive and are unable to follow long-term strategies. These tactics will most probably not lead to upward mobility, at least in the short term.

To assess what type of agency was exerted in a specific situation, it is important to understand the context in which decisions were made. Following Massey’s (2005) understanding of place-making, this thesis sees the trajectories of migrant workers as ‘stories-so-far’ (Zampoukos, 2018). Massey (2005) sees places as having a meaning: as being *spaces*. These meanings, however, extend the geographical location of the space and a specific timeframe. Looking at the trajectories of migrant workers as ‘stories-so-far’ entails acknowledging that the past, present, and future are related, and that to understand the choices made by migrant workers we need to understand the entire context in which they are made. In order to do this, I did fieldwork by working together with Polish migrant workers for one month in greenhouses in Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht. After this, I conducted life history interviews with six of my colleagues. This method enabled me to get an understanding of the experiences of migrant workers and put their stories into context.

Currently, some concepts used in migration research are based on an economic perception of the lives of migrant workers. Upward mobility is understood in economic terms: working hard and saving money should lead to economic prosperity (Delgado, 2007). Whether something is understood as strategic or tactic agency has to do with whether it will lead to upward mobility in economic terms. Since the enlargement of the European Union (EU), it has become easier to migrate for citizens of member states. Whereas formerly, migration was mostly based on economic considerations, migration can nowadays be motivated by different reasons such as adventure or freedom (Krings et al., 2013). We thus see the emergence of a different type of migration. However, this type of migration is still assessed by making use of concepts with a definition that fits the former forms of migration. This thesis shows that to truly understand Eastern European migrant workers’ trajectories, we need to be open to the importance of non-economic considerations. The personal stories of the participants that are discussed highlight the importance of this. Next to this, they show that in order to value the choices made by the migrant workers, it is essential to understand their past experiences and future goals. By seeing the trajectories of migrant workers as ‘stories-so-far’ and being open to the entire context in which they make decisions, we can start to truly understand these trajectories. The re-evaluation of the different types of agency and the understanding of mobility is essential in the attempt to allow migrant workers to have authority over the narrative that is surrounding them: to make sure that the theory fits the reality of migrant workers.

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Josje

List of concepts

<i>Afdeling</i>	Translates to 'department'.
<i>Bordje</i>	Translates to 'sign'. These signs are put in the trays that need to be gathered for distribution to make sure the next shift will pick them up, and the trays are included in the transport.
<i>Inboet</i>	Translates roughly to quality control. This department checks the quality of the plants after they have sprouted. This can be done either mechanically or manually and makes sure the clients receive complete trays of plants.
<i>Lijstje</i>	Translates to list. During most shifts, each team of workers received a list on which all the trays are listed that need to be moved. Trays can be moved to the quality control, or <i>inboet</i> , to a different Florensis location, to a different location in the greenhouses, or to distribution.
<i>Medewerker</i>	Translates to 'employee'.
<i>Opzetter</i>	The person in charge of the machine that puts all the trays on the conveyor belt during distribution shifts.
<i>Rapen</i>	Translates to 'picking'. It is a department of Florensis where the workers are picking the trays that are needed for the new order, or that need to be shipped to a different Florensis location.
<i>Uitzendbureau</i>	Translates to 'employment agency'.
<i>Voorman</i>	Translates to 'foreman'. The team leader of a team working a specific shift.
<i>Zaai</i>	Translates roughly to 'seeding'. The department at Florensis which fills the trays with soil and new seeds.

1. Introduction

We zijn betekenis gevende wezens, geen willoze slachtoffers van onze omgeving, geen onnadenkende zombies [...] We worden niet alleen gedefinieerd, we definiëren ook onszelf (Çankaya, 2020)¹.

In the quest of navigating life, there is a constant struggle between creating a space for oneself and one's identity, while being in constant contact with the outside world. At times, it might feel like we do not have much influence on how we are perceived by others, or the possibilities for our future dreams might feel limited. However, we are both defined by the outside world and defining ourselves. Çankaya points to the interaction, or friction, that exists between the individual and the system: the environment which the individual attempts to navigate. Acknowledging this interaction implies an actor-oriented approach (Long, 1990). In navigating life, not everyone can act the same in similar situations as everyone is situated differently *vis-à-vis* their environment. However, there are always different possibilities to act. When researching how others navigate life, it is important to consider this as it allows one to shed light on the richness of experiences in groups of people. It is thus important to look at how individuals attempt to navigate their lives, also in studying the lives of Eastern European migrant workers in the Netherlands.

In 2004 and 2007 the European Union (EU) enlarged from 15 to 27 member states. Most new accession states were Eastern European. This created an increase in migrant workers throughout Europe (Kahanec & Zimmerman, 2009), enabling a new type of migration; liquid migration (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). Liquid migration is characterized by fluidity and temporariness (Engbersen & Snel, 2013), meaning that migrant workers quickly move between European member states. The Netherlands experienced an increase of migrant workers due to EU enlargement as well, with most migrants stemming from eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania (CBS, 2019). Currently, it is estimated that about 500,000 Eastern European migrants are working in the Netherlands (SZW, 2021). However, this number is expected to be much larger in reality as temporary migrants from Eastern Europe are not required to register (SZW, 2021). Even though, officially this group of migrant workers should enjoy the same rights as Dutch citizens based on EU laws and regulations, they are seen as outsiders in Dutch Society (Engbersen, Snel & de Boom, 2010). In the Netherlands, migrant workers are mostly active in jobs where Dutch people do not prefer to work such as slaughterhouses, cool cellars, or agricultural jobs (Wolf, 2015). This implies that this group of migrant workers is often active in the lower segments of the Dutch economy (Wolf, 2015). This group of migrants regularly face obstacles such as non-transferability of skills – meaning that previous education or work experience are not acknowledged – or language barriers, which creates power inequalities *vis-à-vis* their employers or employment agencies. All these factors make it an interesting topic of research as migrant workers' experiences in the Netherlands differ from Dutch employees or highly skilled western European migrants.

Extensive research has been done on migrant workers in the social sciences. In migration research, mobility has been a topic of interest (Hui, 2016). Mobility research focusses on the movements of individuals, but also on that of information and ideas (Sheller & Urry, 2016). It looks at how individuals interact with their social and material environments: the process that Çankaya highlights in his quote. Because of liquid migration, intra-European migrants can move more easily between member states. Because of this, new mobility patterns emerged (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). In navigating life, individuals are constantly weighing the different possibilities to interact with their environments

¹ This is a quote from the Dutch book 'Mijn ontelbare identiteiten' about the quest of Çankaya of his identities and the creation of them. Roughly translated to English it says "We are meaning-giving beings, not mindless victims of our environment, not thoughtless zombies [...] We are not only defined, we also define ourselves".

(Long, 1990). The same can be said for migrant workers: while there are some structural forces at play – such as the fact that they are confronted with power inequalities with their employers – there is still room to navigate these forces. While the larger patterns of movement are studied through a mobilities lens, agency informs the interaction with the environment. As not everyone can act the same in similar situations, different types of agency exist. Datta et al. (2007) distinguish between having a long-term effect on one's life course – strategic agency – and having to rely on short-term survival tactics – tactic agency. The distinction between the two is informed by power. Datta et al. (2007) argue that because migrant workers are less powerful, they must resort to tactic agency in most cases. Constantly changing one's course of action, instead of following a stable long-term path, is seen as something negative as it could indicate a loss of control over one's path.

Previously, migration mostly occurred based on economic motivations, while currently, migrants choose to migrate for non-economic reasons as well (Krings et al., 2013). However, concepts used to study the trajectories of migrant workers are still based on this economic understanding of migration, such as tactic and strategic agency. This can lead to problems with understanding the experiences of migrant workers. This thesis aims to incorporate the contexts of migrant workers' lives and their experiences to comprehend choices made during their stay in the Netherlands by taking a long-term approach. A long-term approach attempts to look at whole trajectories of migrants, instead of focussing on one aspect of a trajectory. Trajectories of migrant workers are 'stories-so-far' (Zampoukos, 2018), meaning that the stories of migrant workers are not finished during the time of the research. Their stories are ever-changing. Where Massey (2005) sees places as having fluid meanings being affected by different people and places over time, the concept of 'stories-so-far' expands this to the trajectories of migrant workers. To understand the choices made by migrant workers, the past experiences and future goals of those migrant workers need to be assessed. Past experiences incorporate those prior to migration, and those after having arrived in the new host society. Taking a long-term approach and seeing the stories of migrant workers as complex stories that are still in the making allows migrant workers to construct their own narratives. It is about understanding their experiences and their reasons to make certain choices. While Datta et al. (2007) suggest a binary definition of the two types of agency, the reality in which migrant workers find themselves and the constant interaction with their environment might make it more difficult to interpret their trajectories by making use of an either-or category. By centralizing the experiences of migrant workers, this thesis attempts to close the gap between theory and the lived experiences of migrant workers. Therefore, main research question of this thesis is:

How do the types of strategic and tactic agency used by Eastern European migrant workers fit in their overall trajectories?

In order to answer this question, I did fieldwork at Florensis. Florensis, a Dutch company based in Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, grows a wide variety of plants and distributes them in multiple European countries. While most office workers are Dutch, the production department is dependent on migrant workers, especially during the two peak seasons –spring and the end of summer. To experience what it entails to be a migrant worker in the Netherlands, I worked the same shifts as the migrant workers for a month. During this month, I gathered data about their day-to-day lives and their experiences at Florensis. During the second part of my research, I conducted life history interviews with six participants. Life history interviews allow the migrant workers to construct the narrative about themselves by providing them with the authority to tell their own stories (Miles & Crush, 1993). During the interviews, the participants and I created timelines of their life, spanning from the years prior to migration to their future. This approach enables an understanding of the experiences of migrant workers from their perspective. By discussing the timelines with the participants, it became clear how they experienced moments of im/mobility and how this relates to the agency of migrant workers. The aim of this thesis is to understand what strategies and tactics migrant workers employ to navigate living in the Netherlands.

1.1. Outline of thesis

The stories of migrant workers are constantly (re)constructed through their own actions and through interactions with their environments, or so-called social and material realities. Realities here do not imply hard truths, social and material realities imply how migrant workers interpret their environment: their lives in the Netherlands, but also the ties to their home countries. These realities influenced their decision to migrate, decisions made and those still to be made, and the future goals of migrant workers. It is in the interaction with their surroundings that they have room to exert agency. The experiences of migrant workers in navigating their lives in the Netherlands are thus central in this thesis. The following sub-questions serve to answer the main research question.

What is the importance of the overall strategies of migrant workers?

What is the difference between strategies and tactics?

How does flexibility relate to the ability to navigate their lives in the Netherlands of migrant workers?

The first sub-question investigates how overall strategies inform the trajectories of migrant workers. It is thus about the extent to which migrant workers can follow their dreams or aspirations when navigating life. The second question focusses on the different types of agency: Does the duality posed by Datta et al. (2007) fit with the stories told by the migrant workers or is it more difficult to distinguish between the two types of agency. The last question expands on this discussion as it assesses the role flexibility can have in the trajectories of migrant workers. As migrant workers are constantly navigating the ever-changing environment in which they find themselves, flexibility could be a useful tool for navigation.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is discussed in the following chapter. Here, the mobilities turn in migration research is discussed, which leads to a discussion of terms used to study migrant worker such as upward and downward mobility, and the two types of agency. Next to that, the 'stories-so-far' framework is explained in more detail.

Chapter three discusses the methodology used. As the aim of this thesis is to enable migrant workers to partially construct their own narratives, methods of participant observation and life history interviews were used. Participant observation allows the researcher to fully submerge oneself in the research subject, or the environment of the research subject (Aktinson & Hammersley, 1998). This enables the researcher to comprehend the context, gather specific data, and build trust for the second part of the research (Aktinson & Hammersley, 1998). Life history interviews are used as this allows participants to tell *their* stories (Miles & Crush, 1993). During the interviews, the participants and I created timelines of their trajectories allowing me to understand their experiences from their perspectives.

Before the empirical part of the thesis, the context of the fieldwork is discussed in Chapter four. This entails the context of migrant workers in the Netherlands. Next to that, a detailed explanation about Florensis, the position of migrant workers in the company, and the type of work they are doing is given.

Chapters 5 to 9 form the empirical part of this research. To structure the different stories of the participants and colleagues, the analogy of a journey of a plant in Florensis is used. This thesis starts with the *seeding* process, which focusses on how the migrant workers decided to move abroad. For flowers to bloom, the seeds need to sprout. In the *sprouting* chapter, the factors that influence whether a migrant worker stays for an extended period are discussed. Most migrant workers arrive with the idea of staying for just one year but end up staying longer (Ryan, 2018). In the chapters

'Growing' and 'Cool cell' the different types of agency are discussed, and the difference between the two. The first of these two chapters focusses on instances of strategic agency, while *cooling* exemplifies instances of tactic agency. However, by strategically making use of tactics, some migrant workers can work towards their dreams. This makes the binary definition of the two concepts difficult to sustain. Their stories continue until the last chapter 'Distribution and destination' which looks at their future aspirations and how these inform choices made by them.

In the conclusion, a discussion to the sub-questions is given and the research question is answered. By taking a long-term approach and allowing the migrant workers to construct their own narratives, it becomes apparent that currently the actions of migrants have been valued from a privileged position. What might be undesirable for one, might not be undesirable for someone else. It is important to be sensitive to the experiences of individuals, and the context in which decisions have been made, to *understand* those same individuals. To acknowledge migrant workers as meaning-giving beings, and stop seeing them as mindless victims from their environments as Çankaya (2020) would state it.

1.2. Introduction experiences of a temporary migrant worker

Due to the set-up of my research as partially participant observation, I experienced what it entails to be a migrant worker for one month. To incorporate these experiences in my thesis, almost every chapter is accompanied by a subchapter about my experiences as a temporary migrant worker. Doing participant observation allowed me to leave my everyday life environment and submerge myself in the everyday lives of my colleagues, at that time, my 'fellow' migrant workers. I try to live by the idea that you learn most outside of your comfort zone, and this thesis once again showed how true this is, and how important it is for me as a person to see what other people experience with whom I would otherwise not be in contact with. These sub-chapters focus on how I experienced the specific parts of the process as a migrant worker, but also how I walked through similar stages as a field researcher. As it was my first experience doing fieldwork, this thesis helped me see and value research that is being done differently. It showed me the importance of understanding the perspective of those about whom you are writing your research. Even though researchers in the social sciences can focus on marginalized or underrepresented groups, does not mean the privileged position of most researchers does not seep through the research unintendedly. By writing these subchapters, I take you, the reader, with me on my journey of being a migrant worker and doing fieldwork. All in all, this research has taught me to critically look at the entire context of what it is that I am studying.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1. Liquid migration and the new European mobility space

According to Bauman (2004), the world used to be characterized by a more solid form of modernity, whereas currently, we are experiencing liquid modernity. Previously, stability and security prevailed, but liquid modernity is characterized by instability and insecurity (Bauman, 2004). Essentially, liquid modernity entails a constant and rapid change to which human beings must adapt to remain included (Bauman, 2004). Globalization is one of the forces that enabled the change from solid to liquid modernity (Bauman, 2004). Due to globalization, patterns of movement changed. Engbersen and Snel (2013) argue that during the era of liquid modernity novel forms of migration emerged. Due to the creation of the EU and the corresponding freedom of movement that is granted by European citizenship, intra-European migration grew. Because intra-European migration became legal for citizens of member states, it became easier to move between different EU countries. After EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, East to West migration replaced previous South to North migration patterns (Krings et al, 2013). This novel form of legal migration is called liquid migration (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). Liquid migration is characterized by its temporary and flexible character (Engbersen & Snel 2013): EU citizens can easily work abroad for one year and then move back home or move to a different country. It is not a coincidence that this liquid form of migration exists in liquid modernity. Bauman (2004) argues that flexibility is important in adapting to constant change, and it is precisely this flexibility that characterizes liquid migration.

The concept of liquid migration allows one to understand the new types of migration that exist in liquid modernity. It is a systemic, or macro, approach, looking at how the system influences the movement of people. Where macro approaches look at trends or structures, micro approaches research “the level of operating or acting units” (Long, 1990). Long argues for an approach to combine these two: how structural forces enter the “life worlds” of individuals and how these individuals mediate the structural forces (Long, 1990, p.6). An actor-oriented approach acknowledges this interplay between structures and individuals, or the macro and micro (Long, 1990). With the actor-oriented approach, the patterns of movement become a topic of interest. As it is through movements that individuals mediate structural forces: Certain patterns of movement become possible, while others remain unattainable. An example of an actor-oriented approach is that of Krings et al. (2013) as they look at individual motivations for migration. Because of the creation of the EU a “new European mobility space” emerged (Krings et al., 2013, p.88). What is important to note here, is that Krings et al. (2013) not only look at the mobility patterns, or patterns of movement, but also the motivations for migration, and mobility patterns in the host society. Traditionally, migration is perceived to be caused by high unemployment in one country, and employment opportunities in a different country (Krings et al. 2013). However, the new European mobility space enabled migration for a multitude of reasons, including adventure or wanting a new lifestyle (Krings et al., 2013). By focussing on the motivations to migrate, Krings et al. (2013) highlight the heterogeneous character of the group of legal migrants. The heterogeneity is exemplified by the different motivations to migrate: Some choose to migrate based on economic motivations, while others are looking for a sense of freedom. An actor-oriented approach is sensitive to the heterogeneity of the stories of migrant workers. Because of this, it enables migrant workers to construct their own narrative. As patterns of movement are central in studying migrant workers, this research is situated in mobility research.

2.2. Mobility approach to migration studies

At the beginning of this century, the mobilities turn in social science replaced the focus on space (Sheller, 2017). Previously, in the spatial turn, there was a focus on “the relational analysis of space” (Sheller, 2017, p.624): how different places were connected to each other. Part of this followed

Massey's argumentation focussing on different "*movements* of capital into and out of place" (Sheller, 2017, p.624). It is not surprising that this focus on the movement of capital steadily grew to a focus on the movement of people because next to capital people also move into and out of spaces. This change in focus led to the mobilities turn. The mobility paradigm mostly focusses on how mobility (potentially) occurs, how it is enabled, and how it is blocked (Büscher & Urry, 2009). This sparked an interest in how different types of movement "make social and material realities" (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p.99). An important shift in attention between the two turns can be found in how the environment with which individuals interact is understood (Vigh, 2009). The spatial turn saw the environment as solid, meaning that individuals *move* in an environment where the conditions remain the same (Vigh, 2009). The change of focus on mobilities included a change in this perception of the environment. How individuals interact with their social and material environments was seen as "movement within movement" (Vigh, 2009, p.420). Individuals find themselves in an ever-changing environment and they must respond to the occurring changes while anticipating possible future changes (Vigh, 2009). The interaction with the ever-changing environment is called social navigation (Vigh, 2009). In migration research, the mobilities turn implies a focus on how migrants move, where to, and what the implications are on their experiences (Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley, 2012). While one could assume that the mobilities paradigm mostly focusses on the movement of people, it also includes the movement of "objects, information, and ideas" (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p.99). To understand how mobility influences the experiences of people, it needs to be acknowledged that those experiences are not only affected by touchable things, but also by immaterial things. What is important to note is that mobility is related to power: differences between possibilities to be mobile exist on an individual level (McMorran, 2015). Massey called this the 'power geometry of space-time compression': "Some [people] are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (1994, p.149). How one responds to the environment or social and material realities, they are confronted with, is affected by power. Not only of the individual itself but also of other individuals surrounding them. The ability to be mobile for one might imply the inability to make use of that same opportunity for someone else. Differences in mobility thus exist on an individual level, making it interesting to focus on "how people characterize their own mobility and fixity" (Rogaly, 2015, 529). Thus, it is especially interesting to approach research on migrant workers through this angle.

In migration research, the mobilities turn implies this focus on the individual. When focussing on the individual, it becomes interesting to research how migrants move and where to. This angle is known as the spatial dimension (Rydzik et al., 2012). Krings et al. (2013) focus on individual motivations to migrate, taking these experiences in account and therefore, making it possible to understand these mobility patterns at an individual level. Besides a focus on motivations to migrate, the mobilities turn in migration research considers the experiences of migrants after their arrival in the host societies (Rogaly, 2015). All these movements and experiences combined are so-called "migrant trajectories" (Schapendonk, Liempt, Schwarz, & Steel, 2018, p.212). Focussing on trajectories entails looking at different types of mobility, including everyday mobilities and immobility. Everyday mobilities are movements made daily, such as the act of taking the metro to go to work or walking to the grocery store (Doody, 2020). Because mobility depends on the mobility of others and the social and material environment, interest grew in the concept of immobility or fixity (Rogaly, 2015). Part of the trajectory of migrant workers are also those moments of fixity, of not being able to move (Schapendonk et al., 2018). These moments are also part of the social navigation of migrants: They form part of the interaction between individuals and their ever-changing environments. Taking a mobilities approach when studying migrant workers allows for a focus on individual experiences while acknowledging the impact of social and material realities on those experiences. What is important to note here, is that in taking this approach it is critical to be sensitive to the fact that the same circumstances may be experienced differently by different people (McMorran, 2015). It is exactly in this understanding of the mobilities turn in which I situate my thesis.

2.3. Mobility and agency in migration

By incorporating individual experiences, agency becomes an important concept. In this thesis, agency is understood as being relational. This means that the agency of an individual is always expressed and enabled in relation to a social field (Zampoukos, 2018). The agency of a migrant worker is seen to be restricted by institutions, authorities, and other social beings they are surrounded with. While these factors do affect the possibilities to exert agency of individuals, structure does not force migrants to move. There is always room for agency. Agency thus affects the im/mobility of migrants: being able to assert agency can influence everyday mobilities. Being mobile can be an active choice, just as well as staying fixed can be.

Mobility and agency both focus on how individuals move: in their daily lives or long-term. Both concepts are relational as well (Zampoukos, 2018). Even though both concepts are related, they do differ. Agency consists of “intentional, purposive and meaningful actions” (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011 as cited in Zampoukos, Knutsen, Kiil & Olofsdotter, 2018). Sheller and Urry describe the study of mobility as examining “different modes of mobilities and their complex combinations: corporeal travel of people; physical movement of objects; virtual travel often in real-time transcending distance; communicative travel through person-to-person messages; and imaginative travel” (2016, p.11). Mobility thus not only focusses on individuals, but it also incorporates the movements of objects, information, and ideas (Büscher & Urry, 2009). All these forms of im/mobility create the social and material environments with which individuals interact (Büscher & Urry, 2009). Environments that comprise how individuals experience their own movements, but also those of other people, objects, and information. This all influences how individuals perceive their surroundings and thus interact with them. It is in this interception of interaction where agency manifests itself. While the outcome of social navigation, the patterns of movement, are mobility patterns, the acts of how individuals navigate their surroundings are instances of agency. Agency is about the actions of an individual and can be understood as “exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn, implies the ability to transform these social relations to some degree” (Sewell, 1992 as cited in Van Ostaijen, Reeger, and Zelano, 2017). Agency is thus about the degree to which one influences how one interacts with their surroundings. To understand how migrant workers can make use of their agency, it is important to note that different types of agencies exist.

As agency is relational, not everyone in the same context can act in the same manner. How one can navigate their social and material environments is dependent on their position within these environments. These differences imply different types of agencies. Utas (2005) explains this as the difference between strategic and tactic agency. Strategic agency and the ability to strategize imply the capability to have some influence on the future, while tactic agency or applying tactics is more reactionary and a short-term coping strategy (Utas, 2005). Datta et al. (2007) recognize this as the difference between strategies and tactics; between having the power to determine one’s own path or not. The difference between these two types of agency can be understood through the concept of power: In a more powerful position, it is possible to have a long-term effect on one’s life course than in a marginalised position (Utas, 2005). Strategizing implies a more long-term influence on one’s life course, while tactics are mostly reactionary and short-term (Datta et al., 2007). With the different types of agency, Datta et al. (2007) point to an important issue in social navigation by migrant workers by showing that not everyone is can act the same in comparable situations. However, the duality posed between the two might be less clear-cut in reality.

Datta et al. (2007) argue that due to the multiplicity of challenges that migrant workers face, they mostly react to what is happening instead of following a long-term path (Datta et al., 2007). Their mobility is thus mostly negatively influenced by their environment, leaving no room for migrant workers to make use of their strategic agency. Instead of strategizing on their future path, migrant

workers mostly employ coping tactics (Datta et al., 2007). Datta et al. do note that some migrant workers can create a plan “to consolidate their long-term ambitions” (2007, p.426). However, these “accumulative tactics” (p.419) are not recognized as the ability to truly strategize as they are focussed on the short-term. Datta et al. (2007) recognize that new economic contexts – consistent with liquid modernity – require the development of new coping strategies. This would imply that as a liquid migrant, new strategies are needed to navigate the challenges of liquid modernity. Due to the constant and rapid change of liquid modernity that migrant workers are faced with, using short-term coping tactics could be a useful strategy. Vigh (2009) points to a similar dynamic by arguing that those navigating precarious environments must respond quickly to opportunities or obstacles they are faced with. The distinction made between tactics and strategies might thus be more complicated.

Aside from the fact that the distinction between strategies and tactics might be less evident, the use of the concepts is further complicated by the fact that both are grounded in an economic understanding of the trajectories of migrant workers. To show this, it is important to highlight the same dynamic in the use of the concepts of upward and downward mobility. Because the concepts of mobility and agency are related, the definition of mobility influences how agency is perceived. Downward and upward mobility are related concepts. Upward mobility is the idea “that anyone who works hard, obeys the law, and saves his money can get ahead” (Delgado, 2007, p.879) economically and socially speaking. It is thus the ability to create a better situation for oneself, or one’s family through selling one’s labour on the labour market. In a nutshell, it is the American dream: working hard will lead to personal progress (Delgado, 2007). Downward mobility is the opposite of this: despite efforts being worse off economically and socially. What is important to note here, is that upward and downward mobility are mostly understood in economic terms (Zampoukos, 2018). The economic situation of a migrant worker and their type of work is thus valued (and often compared) by the (economic) norm in the host country. Because of their supposedly marginalized position, Favell (2008) argues that migrant workers often experience downward mobility. This group of migrant workers often accept low-paid jobs where their previous education is not recognized and where circumstances are difficult (Erel & Ryan, 2019). However, how migrant workers *experience* their own trajectories might not be exclusively influenced by their economic situation. As stated before, non-economic motivations for migration, such as a sense of freedom or adventure, exist as well (Krings et al., 2013). Nevertheless, these motivations are not incorporated into the understanding of upward and downward mobility. The *goal* of migration influences whether someone experienced downward mobility. If the goal is to look for adventure, earn some money, and travel occasionally, unskilled labour might be the right way to achieve this goal. Whether migrant workers *experience* upward or downward mobility is influenced by the dreams they are chasing. However, the goals and aspirations of migrant workers can gradually change over time (Ryan, 2018), meaning that their *experiences* of upward and downward mobility might also change over time. The new European mobility space enabled the emergence of new types of migration, and subsequently, new mobility patterns emerged. These new mobility patterns should lead to a re-evaluation of our understanding of upward and downward mobility by incorporating non-economic factors. Downward mobility for one, might in fact be upward mobility for someone else.

These non-economic considerations of migrant workers do not only influence their mobility patterns, but also their agency. Social navigation, and thus the use of agency, is influenced by how individuals perceive their environments and what they deem the best option of interaction is (Vigh, 2009). In a rapidly changing environment, individuals “are constantly seeking to make the best of emergent social possibilities in order to direct their lives in an advantageous direction” (Vigh, 2009, p.423), meaning that migrant workers thus weigh different (perceived) options in an attempt to achieve their future goals. As this future goal can be non-economic, it is problematic to value the choice made by the migrant worker strictly in economic terms. Whether or not an action is a tactic or part of a strategy depends on what a migrant worker deems to be ‘an advantageous direction’. Next to that, it is argued that young migrant workers make use of ‘deliberate indeterminacy’ (McGhee, Moreh, & Vlachantoni,

2017). This strategy entails keeping one's options deliberately open enabling rapid responses to occurring possibilities (McGhee, Moreh, & Vlachantoni, 2017). In this instance, the long-term strategy is thus based on making quick short-term decisions. Datta et al. (2007) would interpret these actions as tactic agency, while McGhee, Moreh and Vlachantoni see it as a strategy to deal with living in a constantly changing environment. There thus exists discussion about whether a binary understanding of tactic and strategic agency fits the reality of migrant workers.

Migrant trajectories consist of mobility patterns and choices made by the worker itself. How one can interact with its environment is dependent on its position *vis-a-vis* this environment. In a more powerful position, the environment might be easier to navigate than in a less powerful position. Not everyone can thus make the same choices in the same situation, indicating the existence of different types of agency. Even though it is important to acknowledge the existence of strategic and tactic agency, the current binary understanding of the two might not fit the reality in which migrant workers find themselves best. Migrant workers are confronted with the rapid change of liquid modernity. The environment in which they find themselves is rapidly changing, which demands flexibility from them in their attempts to navigate it (Vigh, 2009). Next to that, the distinction made between strategic and tactic agency rests on economic assumptions, while migrants might base their decisions to navigate life in the Netherlands on non-economic factors. This thesis will look into the different types of agency and assess whether it is possible to have such a binary understanding as used by Datta et al. (2007), or whether more sensitivity is needed in using these terms. A holistic approach, based on the concept of "stories-so-far" (Zampoukos, 2018, p.50), will serve to do this.

2.4. 'Stories-so-far'

Every migrant has a different trajectory, and the richness of these trajectories can be uncovered by looking at individual stories, and looking at those stories from the perspective of migrant workers. To do this, it is important to interpret the experiences of migrant workers as "stories-so-far" (Zampoukos, 2018, p.50), which not only means a long-term approach but most importantly that the migrant's mobility occurs 'in-between' other life choices. Zampoukos' concept is borrowed from Massey (2005), and it sees actions as connected to the past, the present, and the future (Zampoukos, 2018). Massey (2005) understands space as constantly being constructed – constructed through people and different places. A former post-office might be transformed to a community centre in which Polish migrant workers meet every Wednesday evening for a Polish meal. Showing that through time and that depending on the people visiting, places change their meaning. This is a constant process, making the meaning of places fluid with change as an integral part of it (Massey, 2005). Translating this to the experiences of migrant workers means seeing their trajectories as fluid, open to change, and their experiences constantly being (re)created by the social and material realities they are surrounded with. Taking the concept of 'stories-so-far' as a framework for this thesis entails a focus on how past experiences, future goals, and the present affect the trajectories of migrant workers. Choices made in navigating their lives in the Netherlands are thus connected to both the past and the future.

In social navigation, the link between the present – what to do – and the future – to reach the desired goal – is given importance. However, how the different options to navigate are perceived not only depends on future desires, but also on past experiences. Especially motivations to migrate are important for this, as these indicate the dreams migrants are pursuing in the host society. The past and the present are thus strongly connected, just as the present and the future. While it is not possible to see the three as separate, this is not to say trajectories of migrants can be predicted. As Vigh argues that we are looking at "movement within movement" (2009, p.420). Trajectories are fluid and can change depending on changes in the environment with which the migrants interact, or on changes in personal circumstances. To comprehend the actions made, and the interpretation of

experiences it is important to look at *embeddedness*. Embeddedness is about migrant workers creating a feeling of attachment and belongings (Ryan, 2018). This is important in understanding how certain choices are made, and how future goals can change over time (Ryan, 2018). Embeddedness is influenced by “migrants’ experiences of engagement with the people and places that make up their social world” (Ryan, 2018, p.235). The experiences of migrant workers are largely influenced by their surroundings, both social and material. While embeddedness focusses on the present, it is strongly connected to the future as it influences the decision of migrant workers to extend their stay (Ryan, 2018). While the initial motivation to migrate is connected to the aspirations the workers aspire to achieve. Most migrant workers arrive with the idea of staying for just one year (Ryan, 2018). However, this future goal is often unconsciously modified during their stay (Ryan, 2018). The past, present, and future are thus important in understanding the trajectories of migrant workers. Seeing migrant workers as a heterogeneous group with a richness in experiences, necessitate the use of the stories-so-far framework. By seeing how the past, present, and future interact, we can begin to allow migrant workers to construct their own narratives. When being sensitive to the entire context in which migrant workers find themselves, it becomes important to critically assess concepts used in studying the experiences of migrant workers. This is to make sure the definition of the concepts fits with the realities in which migrant workers find themselves.

3. Methodology

Throughout my thesis, I will use an interpretivist approach. An interpretivist approach acknowledges the construction of reality; it sees reality not as something that is simply 'out there' to be grasped by the researcher, but as created through social relations of which the researcher is part (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Part of this approach is also acknowledging that I, as a researcher, influence the type of knowledge that is created as my positionality influences my interpretation of 'reality' (Denzin, 1998). Because of this, I aim to be as open as possible about my positionality and expectations. I will make use of the following research methods: participant observation, small-talk, and life history interviews. In the following part, I will explain the different methods and what data I attempt to collect by making use of them. Next to that, I discuss my positionality and the limitations of this thesis.

3.1. Participant observation

During the first period of my thesis, I made use of participant observation to obtain my data. This period consisted of four weeks of fieldwork at Florensis in Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht. Florensis is a company that grows a variety of plants and ships them throughout Europe. The plants are grown at a facility comprising various acres of greenhouses before they are shipped. More information on Florensis as a company is given in chapter 4.2. By working together with migrant workers in the Greenhouses and distribution centre, I gained an understanding of their daily lives in the Netherlands and their realities of working at Florensis.

Participant observation is an ethnographic fieldwork method aimed at the researcher submerging itself in the field under study (Aktinson & Hammersley, 1998). Next to 'hanging around', it is key to participate in activities together with the participants. By submerging oneself in the field, and in the experiences of participants, the researcher can gain "a greater understanding of phenomena from the point of view of participants" (Musante & DeWalt, 2010 p.ix). Participant observation allows a researcher to take on the roles of both an insider and outsider (Sluka & Robben, 2007). "As an insider, the fieldworker learns what behaviour means to the people themselves. As an outsider, the fieldworker, learns, experiences, and makes comparisons in ways that insiders can or would not" (Sluka & Robben, 2007, p.2). Thus, fieldwork entails continuously balancing one's status as both an insider and an outsider with the purpose of gaining relevant data for the research. The participant observation took part within the first four weeks of my research. During these weeks, I worked at Florensis like any other employee (i.e., migrant worker), meaning that my working hours, breaks, and relation with other staff were the same as my fellow migrant workers. By having immersed myself in this type of fieldwork for a sufficient amount of time, I could build mutual trust with the participants, and perhaps more importantly, gained an understanding of their experiences in the Netherlands.

My foremost goal during working in the factory was to obtain data about the work-life of employees. Next to that, I collected data about their personal lives. To do so, part of participant observation was doing small-talk with the migrant workers. Small-talk is part of the 'hanging around' method (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). This method entails that the researcher acknowledges the importance of simple conversations in the field for the research (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Small-talk can be used for multiple reasons including building a relationship with participants to gain access to a wider network of participants and creating a thick understanding of the context (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Through informal conversations with migrant workers at work, I created mutual trust and was able to build rapport by collecting all the data. The data I collected during small-talk served to understand the experiences of working in the Netherlands: their work-life at Florensis. As the experiences of the migrant workers extend beyond Florensis, I also collected data about their different life journeys before arriving there - their personal lives and their future aspirations. The experiences that sparked my interest were thus not restricted to a certain timeframe or place. Conversations about these topics

were informal and occurred during work or break-time. My fieldwork diary served to collect all this data.

Before starting my fieldwork, I studied Polish to connect with the migrant workers. Having learned some basic Polish sentences, allowed me to make a first connection on which to build a relationship further. However, as I was not fluent in Polish, my participants were mainly those migrant workers that can communicate in English as well. This has consequences for the type of data I gathered, on which I will elaborate further in chapter 2.5.

During the month of my fieldwork, I lived close to Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht. This enabled me to truly submerge myself in the Migrant workers' lives during the week. I lived in a rental apartment at a 15-minute bike ride distance from Florensis. Living nearby, positively influenced my ability to gain access to the migrant workers' community as it showed that I fully submerged myself in their lives. Next to that, it made it easier to travel to my shifts. Every week, I worked approximately four shifts on regular days and hours. Every Sunday, I started off my week with a night shift from around 10 p.m. until 6 a.m. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, I worked from 6 a.m. until 3 p.m. During these shifts, I encountered some regular faces from the night shifts, but I also met new migrant workers. I started my shifts at the main location in Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, but later in my fieldwork, I worked at the Dinteloord location as well. I received my working schedule two times a week, which is comparable to how migrant workers receive their schedules.

During the participant observation, I gathered six participants for the second part of my research in which I interviewed six participants using the life history method. To find these participants, I attempted to assess whether I established mutual trust and with the boundary condition of sufficient communication. The life history interviews took place during the second part of my research on purpose, as the first part of the fieldwork was focussed on building mutual trust. In consultation with my participants, the interviews took place at Florensis. This location was suggested by my participants, as they felt comfortable with the location. Therefore, this did not negatively influence my research. The participants felt free to speak about their lives, even though the interviews were conducted at their workplaces.

3.2. Life history interviews

After the fieldwork at Florensis, I interviewed six participants to broaden my data collection to include the personal lives of migrant workers, and their personal journeys more broadly. The interviews took place at Florensis in an enclosed space ensuring privacy during the conversations. Six long life history interviews were conducted by me, with all six participants separately. The interviews took about one and a half hours, which allowed for enough time to discuss all important aspects of the participants' trajectories. Life histories (LHs), or personal narratives are important to "reinstat[e] the marginalized and dispossessed as makers of their own past" (Miles & Crush, 1993 p.84). As explained before, Eastern European migrant workers are subjected to being part of a narrative that they themselves cannot control. Life histories are a useful research method as it opens space for diversity, and it problematizes homogenous categories as it shows different experiences of people (Rogaly, 2015). It is a method that allows the researcher to access not only what people did (not do), but what they wanted to do, what they believed they would be doing, and how they reflect on their actions (Miles & Crush, 1993). When doing life histories, it is important to allow participants to share their experiences. It is not about gaining access to the information that you as a researcher might find interesting; it is about the participant sharing events in their lives that they felt were influential. This enables you to access the events in participants' lives that were important to them, the reasons these events felt influential, and how they reflect on them now (Denzin, 1989). Through LHs, "important events and/or

turning points in the lives of the interviewees can be mapped over time” (Singh, Tebboth, Spear & Davies, 2018, p.5).

During life history interviews, it is important to ask open-ended questions and let the participant reflect on past and present experiences (Hubbard, 2000). The interviews focus on what migrant workers perceived as turning points in their personal journeys. Journeys imply their lives from before migrating until now, and their future plans and aspirations. Seeing the journeys of migrant workers as comprising the past, present and future is based on how Massey (2005) sees places as connected to the past, the present, and the future. For her, the meaning of places is connected to all three and they cannot be seen in a vacuum (Massey, 2005). This understanding can be extended to the lives of migrant workers: what they experience now, is connected to their past experiences and the future. We cannot understand people without looking at their past, present, and future, just as we cannot understand places in the same way. During these interviews, I focussed on the use of tactics and strategies of migrant workers, and experiences of im/mobility.

During the LHs, the participants created timelines of their trajectories. More visual methods in LHs emerged during the last decade (Bagnoli, 2009). Timelines help participants visualize key events that occurred during their lives (Bremner, 2020). The idea behind timelines is that it enables participants to recall certain events better since connections made by the brain are enhanced by the method (Bremner, 2020). It is possible to not think about events daily that did make a big impact on one’s life. By creating a timeline, these events are recalled. It is argued that timelines allow more “layers of experience” (Bagnoli, 2009, p.548) to be discovered - both by the researcher and the participant (Bagnoli, 2009). As creating a timeline of one’s life can be a difficult task, I asked the participants to think about what they wanted to put on the timelines before the interviews. Providing the participant with some time to create the timeline beforehand “may help participants retrieve, organize and express complex ideas, thus potentially increasing the accuracy and richness of their narratives” (Bremner, 2020, p.11). During the interviews, the different events the participants put on the timeline beforehand were discussed, while there was still room to discuss other events that came up during the conversation.

It is essential to be open about my positionality and be reflexive of the research process. Even though I interviewed my participants and gathered relevant data, it is *my* version of *their* stories that is told. Therefore, I need to be open about who I am and how that might affect my interpretation. For this purpose, I kept a fieldwork diary in which I wrote down my feelings and thoughts during the fieldwork. The diary did thus not only allow me to write down information about the participants during the fieldwork, but it also allowed me to keep track of how my emotions and sentiments might be influencing the fieldwork. Fieldwork diaries have been found important for research that reflects on the positionality and emotions of a researcher, especially in anthropological and sociological research (Browne, 2013; Punch, 2012). Sharing one’s own experiences during fieldwork might enable the reader to understand how the researcher has interpreted the data. Fieldwork diaries are thus important as the researcher’s own feelings can affect the interpretation of the world surrounding them (Punch, 2012). As my goal is to enable participants to co-create the narrative surrounding them, reflexivity and transparency are important concepts during my fieldwork and writing phases.

3.3. Ethical considerations

During every research, ethical dilemmas come up. Some general issues can be tackled beforehand, but others come up during the research and are specific to the research context (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003). This is especially the case in ethnographic research where the researcher is in direct contact with the research subject (Goodwin et al., 2003). “Thick ethical description” is needed to understand ethical issues that come up with qualitative research (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005, p.157).

Because of the fact that ethical issues come up in every research, it is important to be open about these issues to improve future research with regards to these issues (Huisman, 2008). During my research, some ethical issues were tackled beforehand – the issue of receiving consent for example –, while other issues – regarding confidentiality and exploitation – came up during the research process.

During my meetings with Florensis before the start of my fieldwork, we discussed the issue of consent. To make sure the migrant workers trusted me, I decided to communicate beforehand that I would be joining them as part of a research. Even though this could negatively affect my research – as some migrant workers might keep their distance as they might be uninterested in being part of the research – I decided it was more beneficial for building mutual trust between myself and the participants. Prior to my weeks of field research, the coordinator of Covebo communicated about my presence as a co-worker and researcher. Because this was already communicated, I decided I did not need to share this information every time I encountered a new colleague. Nevertheless, I was honest in conversations with colleagues about my presence there. While at times this information did create a gap between me and my colleagues, I could overcome this gap in most cases by showing I was there to work just as hard as them. My colleagues were thus informed about my presence as a researcher and could decide based on this what they wanted to share with me in conversations.

Right before the interviews, I chose to walk through the ramifications of participating in the interviews with my participants. They knew that the interview was being recorded, and that the data was used for my thesis. Next to that, I discussed the possibility of withdrawing from the research at any time. If one of my participants would choose to do so, I would not use their data in my thesis. Withdrawing would also be possible after I showed them some draft versions of my chapters. Sharing the draft versions allowed me to ensure the participants recognized themselves in the research, but I will come back to that later in this chapter. Because of the mutual trust that existed between the participants and me, I chose not to create physical contracts. This because, this did not fit the type of relationship that was built. When doing ethnographic research where personal bonds are created, consent bonds can become a difficult subject (Huisman, 2008). Next to that, consent forms do not eliminate all ethical dilemmas faced when doing research (Huisman, 2008). Because of these reasons, I decided to orally walk through a consent contract and asked my participants if they agreed to everything.

Another important ethical aspect of ethnographic fieldwork is confidentiality. Confidentiality is about hiding the participation of people in research (Surmiak, 2018). It should thus not be possible to know whom the participants are through reading the research. This can be especially difficult in small communities (Surmiak, 2018). Even though many Polish migrant workers live in the Netherlands, the community of Polish migrant workers at Florensis is relatively small, especially during the offseason. Therefore, ensuring confidentiality was a difficult task. During my research, I used several methods to ensure confidentiality. I used acronyms in my fieldwork diary so that only I understood which colleague said what and I used numbers instead of names for my participants. Next to that, I made sure to handle all the data during my fieldwork and the later stages of my research confidentially. It has to be noted that some issues regarding confidentiality did come up during my fieldwork. As all my colleagues knew each other relatively well, they knew with whom I was speaking the most. This could negatively affect the confidentiality of the research, as my colleagues were aware of who was mainly giving me data. Because the interviews took place at Florensis, it was clear to my colleagues and other Florensis employees with whom I was doing the interviews. Even though I did not share information from informal conversations or interviews with others, the fact that my participants were known could negatively affect confidentiality, especially with sensitive subjects (Surmiak, 2018). However, I made sure to ask whether my participants were okay with this – which they were – and they even discussed their participation openly with their colleagues. This shows how ethical issues can differ depending on the context. As my participants felt comfortable and we did not discuss subjects that were deemed too sensitive, it did not form an issue that it was known who participated in my research.

In writing ethnographies, the researcher receives authority over the stories of the participants. Essentially, exploitation can occur when the data that is gathered through mutual trust exclusively serves to further the researcher even though the research is based on the principle of reciprocity (Huisman, 2008). "Reciprocity [...] is based on the belief that researchers and participants are equal and that the research should be mutually beneficial" (Huisman, 2008, p.374). Reciprocity is related to the conviction that reflexivity about power and positionality in research are important (Huisman, 2008). Even though a researcher might have the goal of creating an equal power balance with participants, this might not be true as most interactions during the research serve the researcher more than the participants (Huisman, 2008). Eventually, after having finished fieldwork, the researcher will finish their research while the participants will remain in the same reality.

Exploitation was one of the issues I personally struggled with most during my research, and it was something I did not anticipate. While my fieldwork was based on the idea that working together with the migrant workers would put me on an equal footing with them, it was also part of attaining my MSc degree. The struggle I felt during the research is best described by the following quote from Huisman: "As much as I wanted to be on the same plane as my participants, the desire was overshadowed by the reality that I was doing this work in part to elevate my status and career" (2008, p.380). While I was building genuine relationships with my colleagues, I knew that the main reason for my presence was my research. By remaining open about the motivation for my presence there, I reduced the possibility of my participants feeling exploited.

Another aspect of exploitation in ethnographic research is the fact that because of the mutual trust and built relationship, participants view you more as a friend than a researcher (Huisman, 2008). Because of this shift in perception, participants may share more stories than they would with someone whom they merely view as a researcher. On the one hand, this is part of this research method. On the other hand, it is essential to make sure the participants do not feel exploited. In order to do this, I decided to share parts of the research process with my participants. By sharing the draft chapters of the research, I gave them an opportunity to read the stories I used. In the case they felt the stories to be too personal to be shared in the research, they could ask me to omit certain details. None of the participants asked me to omit certain details. Nevertheless, this was a useful approach to make sure the participants supported the outcome of the thesis.

Because I struggled so much with the question of exploitation during my fieldwork, I made sure to do the stories my colleagues and participants told me justice. By giving 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) and being open about the arguments I make, I give the reader the possibility to generalize and value the arguments made. The struggle I experienced during my fieldwork, translated into a certain openness during my writing process. This shows how ethical dilemmas faced during the fieldwork influence the rest of the research process.

3.4. The Field

According to Katz (1994) doing fieldwork is about constructing boundaries. Boundaries "between the research and everyday life; between 'the fieldwork' and doing fieldwork; between the 'field' and not; and between the 'scholar' and the subject" (Katz, 1994, p.67). 'The field' and consequently doing fieldwork, is thus more than studying what occurs at a physical location. However, it does start there. Physically, my research field was situated at the Florensis locations at Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht and Dinteloord. These are the two Florensis locations at which the Covebo workers are dispatched. Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht is a relatively small location, with around on acre of greenhouses, cool cells, distribution lines, and offices. Dinteloord is a distinctly bigger location with 6,5 acres of greenhouses, small distribution port, and a few offices. As Florensis granted me access to do my research at their

company, I gained access to the community of migrant workers working there. Exemplifying the first boundary between what constitutes the “field” and what not.

Even though most of my research took place at these Florensis locations, the research field, extended these physical locations. My fieldwork included my Polish colleagues at Florensis. It included their lives in the Netherlands: their experiences here and their possible future plans. Important to note here is that this both extends the boundaries of the physical locations of Florensis and extends the timeframes of their stays in the Netherlands. To understand the experiences of migrant workers in the Netherlands, it is important to understand the context. These contexts include their lives in Poland prior to arriving in the Netherlands, and their current connections with Poland – albeit through family, friends, or their regular holidays to the country. Next to that, the context includes a wide variety of experiences: Not only their experiences at Florensis, but also at other companies, their living situation, and their overall experiences of living in a foreign country. This approach to fieldwork is connected to Massey’s view on places and place-making (2005). Massey understands places as spaces: places with meaning. This meaning is derived not only from the place as one encounters it at one instance (Massey, 1995). They derive their meaning from their connections to different places – through people or history for example – and different times. Therefore, even though my fieldwork took place at Florensis, the ‘field’ includes the lives of my colleagues through time, their connections to other places and people, and the connection of Florensis to other places and people – including for example the employment agency Covebo.

Even though my research field was situated in the Netherlands, it was distinctly different from my ‘normal’ everyday life. This had to do with the location and the social setting, but also the fact that my everyday rhythm was very different. Since I worked most shifts at Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, I decided to rent an Airbnb in Zwijndrecht. Because of this, I was able to make a distinction for myself between my research and everyday life. During my fieldwork, I often felt that I entered an unfamiliar segment of Dutch society. For example, on the road to and from my nightshifts, I mostly encountered Polish license plates. This shows that the field is more than a physical location. Through fieldwork, I gained access to a new segment of Dutch society; that of Eastern European migrant workers.

3.5. Positionality

The research ‘field’ can thus be seen as fluid as it extends a physical location and specific time. Viewing the field as a fluid entity implies that I, as a researcher, also influence the field, and with that my research findings (De Vries, 2012). If someone else were to conduct my research, they might encounter different data and interpret the same data differently. Reflexivity is important to understand the ramifications of this. Reflexivity entails “paying attention to oneself as an active and involved observer and participant, rather than as an impartial recording instrument” (Townsend, 1999, p.88).

Being a participant of your own research as a researcher implies that your experiences and world views influence the interpretation of data. A reflexive process is important in uncovering some of the hidden preconceptions that influence data gathering and interpretation (Solbue, 2011). To challenge myself about my own preconceptions, and thus consider the influence of my “past experience and socialisation” on the research (Solbue, 2011, p.821), I listed my conscious preconceptions and started discussing this with some acquaintances that are working with eastern European migrant workers prior to my research. By doing this, I not only became aware of some of the hidden preconceptions but directly started challenging them by becoming familiar with some personal stories. Right before starting my research, I met with my neighbour – a Polish woman who moved to the Netherlands almost 30 years ago – to discuss my research. We talked about my preconceptions and Polish culture. Next to that, she taught me some Polish words and Polish norms of behaviour to connect with my

participants. Understanding some Polish norms of behaviour was important to understand the context in which I would find myself during the research. Even though a reflexive process is important in research, it cannot overcome the effect a researcher has on the data and its interpretation.

Being open about who I am is important in a reflexive process as it enables the reader to understand my data interpretation (Dodgson, 2019). According to Dodgson (2019), it is important not only to be transparent about the researcher as a person but also about the discrepancies between belief systems and the power dynamics between the researcher and its participants. I am a twenty-seven-year-old female, I have an affinity for language which made it relatively easy for me to pick up some Polish during my fieldwork. I am relatively small for a Dutch woman, and I have dark hair and blue eyes. The fact that I am Dutch influenced the perceived power dynamics. At Florensis almost all people in higher positions are Dutch, while most Polish people do un-schooled work. Merely the fact that I am Dutch made people think that I was overqualified for this job. Undoubtedly, this influences the interactions between me and my colleagues. Next to that, my fieldwork took place in a male-dominated environment; from a group of around 35 colleagues, only four are women. During my fieldwork, I encountered a difference in gender beliefs between me and my colleagues. On the one hand, this gave me an advantage in gaining access as everyone respected the fact that I worked just as hard as my male colleagues. On the other hand, it was a disadvantage as I was not included in the get-togethers my male colleagues had in the smoking lounge. My colleagues and I are all roughly the same age, which made it easier to gain trust, as we understood the phases of our lives that we are in. Lastly, based on my appearance, most colleagues assumed me to be Polish. This was also an advantage in gaining access. During my fieldwork, I was mostly approached in Polish by my colleagues as they expected me to be Polish. The fact that my colleagues expected me to be Polish, made it easier to make an initial connection and start a small conversation.

Your positionality thus influences the access you gain as a researcher. During the research, I was constantly balancing being an insider and an outsider. Traditionally, being an insider is understood as having some sort of ties with the research participants; being part of their community (Sherif, 2001). More critical scholars have challenged this view and understand being an insider or outsider as having less clear-cut boundaries and being more fluid (Naples, 1996). Naples (1996) understands 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' as being constructed through a process between the researcher and the researched. Being an insider or outsider is constantly negotiated, and therefore, the researcher can move through these two different statuses. One might assume that due to my nationality I was always considered an outsider. However, this differed per situation. One example of this is that since I worked in a male-dominated environment, it was easier to connect with the girls as they perceived me more like an insider. How I interacted with my colleagues also influenced whether they perceived me as an insider or not. In social interactions, I had to be aware of the consequences of my actions regarding my access. For example, not speaking Polish made me an outsider in certain situations. Doing the same work, on the other hand, made me an insider. As most Polish guys saw it as their job to make sure they did the heavy lifting, I needed to accept this help to remain an insider, as it is a sign of my understanding of the behavioural norms. While in my everyday life, I might be more inclined to refuse this help. Balancing the lines of insider-outsider is an intricate issue in doing ethnographic fieldwork. However, as it is beyond the subject of this research, it will not be discussed in more detail. My positionality influenced my research; sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. The following section will go into the factors that negatively influenced my research.

3.6. Limitations

There are some limitations to this research with regards to the set-up, my positionality, and the participants I chose to interact with. As discussed before, as a non-Polish speaking woman I gathered specific and at times limited data. This is not to say that if I were a Polish-speaking male researcher, I

would have gathered all the data available since one is always excluded from some aspects of its research subject. I could only communicate with my English-speaking colleagues – and later, through them with some of my non-English speaking colleagues. Most of the English-speaking colleagues learned English on the job and were roughly the same age as me. They were working in the Netherlands for several years already. The experiences of these people differ from those that are here for the first time, and those that have been coming to the Netherlands for decades already. During my interviews, many participants told me that when new people arrive at Florensis, they receive a contract only for one season. This means that they should return to Poland after four or five months, except if Covebo asks them to return for a second season. New workers not only experience more insecurity regarding their position in the Netherlands, but they might also decide to leave because they do not like it. In order to get a more complete understanding of the experiences of migrant workers in the Netherlands, it is thus important to include these stories as well. Next to that, some of my colleagues were around 50 years old and were working abroad for decades. Unfortunately, this group could not speak English, and as they were almost exclusively working night shifts it was more difficult for me to interact with them. During the night shifts, most conversations with colleagues took place during the breaks. However, during these breaks, it was clear who wanted to interact and who preferred some alone time in the late hours. Most of my older colleagues either choose to sit in the smoking lounge where it was more of a male get-together or isolate themselves from the environment. Therefore, it was difficult for me to interact with this group. While I did learn bits about their stories, I choose not to include these in the research as I was not able to gather sufficient information about them during the fieldwork period to create a complete understanding of their experiences. My interactions with non-English speaking colleagues took place with another colleague as a translator. This could influence the responses that were given, even though I suspect this not to be the case as the migrant workers usually knew each other's personal stories. Therefore, this thesis reflects the experiences and trajectories of young English-speaking migrant workers who are living in the Netherlands for several years, and that arrived here after finishing their education.

Next to that, as I limited my field to Florensis, I excluded the experiences of migrant workers that work for different companies. As Florensis granted me access to conduct my research, it can be argued that the situation the migrant workers face there is relatively better than at other companies that would not grant me access. Otherwise, the company probably would have denied me access. Speaking with the migrant workers, I discovered that at some other companies at which they worked the circumstances were worse than at Florensis. For example, the payment was low, the workload extremely high, or the physical circumstances. Despite this, the stories and experiences of my colleagues and participants are important as they do reflect the trajectories of more migrant workers.

4. Context Setting

4.1. Migrant workers in the Netherlands

Currently, it is estimated that over 500,000 migrant workers from other European countries live and work in the Netherlands (SZW, 2021). It must be noted that migrants active in jobs under six months a year are not required to register (SZW, 2021). The actual number of European migrant workers therefore probably exceeds the estimated number (SZW, 2021). The number of migrant workers in the Netherlands grew due to the creation of the European Union (EU) and the following enlargements. With the creation of the EU four free movements were introduced: goods, services, capital, and persons (European Parliament, n.d.). The free movement of people is seen as one of the cornerstones of EU citizenship, including the free movement of workers, meaning that:

EU citizens are entitled to:

- Look for a job in another EU country;
- Work without a required work permit;
- Reside in another EU country for work purpose;
- Stay there even after employment has finished;
- Enjoy equal treatment with nationals with access to employment, working conditions, and all other social and tax advantages

(European Commission, n.d., paras 1-2).

In principle, this entails that EU citizens are free to move and work in another member state, while enjoying the same rights as the nationals of that member state.

In 2004 and 2007 the European Union (EU) enlarged from 15 to 27 member states. Most new accession states were Eastern European countries. This created an increase in migrant workers throughout Europe (Kahanec & Zimmerman, 2009). The Netherlands experienced this increase of migrant workers as well, with most coming from eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania (CBS, 2019). Currently, most European migrant workers in the Netherlands are from Poland (Statista, 2018), and working in the sector called 'professional services' (SZW, 2021). People working in that sector are active for an employment agency. They often work on the basis of temporary contracts for companies in different sectors (SZW, 2021). Therefore, it is difficult to discern the exact sector in which most migrant workers are active. In the Netherlands, migrant workers are often active in jobs where Dutch people do not prefer to work such as slaughterhouses, cool cellars, or agricultural jobs (Wolf, 2015). This can be due to the high amount of physical labour that is requested from employees, irregular working hours, or difficult circumstances (working in cold storage in a slaughterhouse for example). Often these types of jobs are accessible to unschooled workers. However, this does not imply people have not enjoyed some type of education back home.

Zooming in on the Dutch agricultural sector, the importance of migrant workers for this sector immediately becomes clear. It is an important sector for the Dutch economy, being the world's second biggest exporter of agricultural products only after the US (Siegmann, Quadvlieg & Willimas, 2020). The sector offered employment to almost 30,000 full-time jobs for the non-regular labour force (CBS, 2020). The non-regular labour force consists mostly of seasonal workers as more employees are needed during harvest (CBS, 2020). Even though the non-regular labour force can include Dutch national citizens, "migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) form the bulk of the agricultural labour force" (Schneider et al., 2020). When studying Eastern European migrant workers in the Netherlands, the agricultural sector cannot be ignored.

4.2. Florensis

Florensis is one of those companies in the Netherlands for which migrant workers are an integral part of their business. The company was founded in 1941 under the name 'Hamer Bloemzaden' in Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht (HIA) (Florensis, n.d.). It is a second-generation family company, and currently has branches in different parts of the Netherlands, the EU, and Eastern Africa. The company is specialized in plant breeding and grows over 3,000 different varieties (Florensis, n.d.). Most of these plants are transported all throughout Europe, where they can continue to grow to full plants and cut flowers. As Florensis makes use of greenhouses, it has two seasons. The first season, which is the busiest, starts in February until the beginning of the summer, around June or July. The second season starts in August and ends in November.

As a company, Florensis is involved in all the different steps of the process of breeding plants. From improving the varieties through research, to innovative solutions to grow the plants more sustainably. More obviously perhaps, also from growing the plants to preparing them for transport. This means that Florensis employs a wide variety of workers; those that are office based and those that are hands-on involved in the production process. In total, Florensis has over 2,000 employees. However, most of the migrants working for Florensis are not included in this number, as they are under contract at an employment agency. As most other agricultural companies, Florensis relies on seasonal workers in the harvest season(s). For this purpose, Florensis cooperates with employment agencies. One of these is Covebo. During my fieldwork, I was in contact with workers from this employment agency. Covebo is a Dutch company, currently active in multiple Eastern European member states. Next to Covebo, Florensis makes use of other employment agencies depending on the location where they will work and the department. Covebo workers are active in the production side of Florensis. This means that they are mostly responsible for the physical work for which no education is required. The positions that do require more elaborate education are fulfilled by Florensis workers.

The number of Covebo workers present at Florensis every day depends on the workload. Florensis creates an estimation of workers needed based on the upcoming transport, and the status of flowers in the greenhouses. During high season, this can amount to 95 workers a week. While during low season – during which I did my fieldwork – this number drops to around 40 workers. Not only does the number of workers drop, but the hours most workers are scheduled significantly drops as well. The Covebo coordinator communicates the planning to the migrant workers every Wednesday for Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and on Friday for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Ideally, this planning would remain the same. However, as changes can occur in the growing process of the plants or the transport schedule, the planning is often adjusted during the week. During high season, the migrants often work at one department exclusively, while during low season they work at multiple departments at different hours. Covebo employees work at Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, or Dinteloord. In both locations, the Covebo workers work in different departments: zaai, tray handling, inboet, rapen, and distribution. I will shortly discuss each department below.

Zaai

This department focusses on seeding the new flowers. Florensis makes use of special trays, with little holes in which a machine first puts the soil and later the seeds. Different flower varieties grow in different trays, with different numbers of flowers. Ranging from 160-588 flowers per tray. These trays are patented by Florensis, making them the only ones in the industry working with these re-usable trays. The zaai department is located only at Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht.

Each seeding machine is operated by one migrant worker. During the season four of these machines are used. For the more delicate flowers that grow in special trays, a small team of migrant workers fills

the holes in the tray with a special mesh that keeps the soil firm together and fertile. This step of the process is done by hand, after which a machine fills the mesh with soil and seeds.

As I worked at Florensis at the end of the season, this department was relatively quiet. Seeding is mostly done at the beginning of the season when all the orders come in. Therefore, only a small group of migrant workers was present at the department to put the mesh in the trays. Most of time, the machines were not used.

Tray handling

Tray handling (TH) is a physically intensive department. It is done both at Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht and Dinteloord. Most of my shifts were at TH. Working at TH entails that you are re-organizing the plants in the greenhouses together with a team. Quality control, which only consists of Dutch workers, checks the growth process the plants are making and decides whether the plants must be relocated to a different part of the greenhouse. In these different parts, temperatures and humidity can be higher, or lower. This re-organization is important as the plants need to be a specific size when being transported to the buyers.

During a TH shift, you work on lists, that everyone calls '*lijstjes*'. These '*lijstjes*' state the plants that need to be re-organized: the number of the plants, their current location, and where they must go to. Plants can either go to *inboet*, where their quality is checked or to a new location to stimulate or stop their growth. One foreman from Florensis keeps track of everything that is being done; he is the lynchpin between the quality control of Florensis and the Covebo workers.

Together with your team of the day, you pile 200 trays onto one pallet, or put trays down from the pallets on the ground. You carry the trays per four or five – trays weigh between 1 and 3 kilos – and most of the shift is spent bending down. This makes it a physically intensive job – the extremely sore muscles after the first shift made this clear. During my first TH shift, my colleague warned me for the pain in my legs and but the following day. He was right, the next day, I could barely walk anymore. It took me some shifts to get used to this work. In the summer, the job is even tougher due to the high temperatures in the greenhouses.

I usually worked with a team of four to six people, and we relocated 6,000-14,000 trays. These numbers are much higher during peak season, but when this is the case usually over ten migrant workers are present.

Inboet

As stated before, at *inboet*, the quality of the plants that are growing is checked. Trays are sent to *inboet* right after the seeds sprouted. Seeds that did not sprout are thrown away and replaced with seeds that have sprouted. This is an important part of the process, as it ensures that clients receive full trays of plants. It is also a time-consuming job, as some trays contain almost 600 plants.

The check at *inboet* can be done mechanically or manually. When the check is done manually, it is done by workers from Turkey. They either work at an assembly line, or they walk through the greenhouses to check specific plant batch numbers. As the women working here are not from eastern European countries, I have not worked at this department.

Rapen

Rapen is the last step before the plants are transported. At HIA, rapen entails transport to the client, while at other locations it can entail a transport to Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht where the plants either continue to grow or are sent straight through to clients.

Again, *lijstjes* are an integral part of this process. These *lijstjes* are prepared by the distribution office and contain the batch numbers of the plants that are transported, the amount that is needed, and their location in the greenhouses. This shift often takes place before the distribution shifts at Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht. Which means that at HIA this often happens during the second shift, from 15:00 – 22:00. At the other locations this also happens at night, as the flowers also need to be transported to HIA.

Before the shift comes to collect the plants, a different shift will put yellow signs, or '*bordjes*' right next to the flowers that need to be collected. During *rapen* you are thus mostly looking at the number of the rows stated at the *lijstje* and in that row you are looking for the *bordjes*. As with TH, this work is also physically tough. After finding the *bordjes* all the trays need to be stacked and put on trolleys or pallets.

Distribution

The last step before the flowers are shipped to the clients is almost entirely done by migrant workers. Distribution shifts occur either at night – from around 10:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. – or during the day – from 6:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. During the night shifts, all workers are Covebo workers, except for one. Only the machine operator is a Florensis employee. Mostly, the operator is Polish as well. During my fieldwork, I met one Dutch employee doing the night shifts.

During the night shift, you prepare the trollies for transport, and you work at a production line. The work is comparable to order picking. The foremen put the stacks of trays on the conveyor belt. The technology of the conveyor belt is linked to the transport system. This means that the codes of the trays are scanned, and consequently the main computer knows where the trays need to go, and thus, on which exact place on what trolley they must be put. A number is printed on the tray, and the tray is put on a plate. The conveyor belt has 60 smaller conveyor belts, or exits, that go to a line of trolleys. The plate is scanned by the computer and then sent to the right exit.

Working at distribution entails picking all these stacks of trays up on the end of the conveyor belt, finding their location at the trolley and putting them there. During these shifts you are constantly looking at where new stacks of trays are arriving, walking there, and putting the trays in the trolleys. Physically this is tough work. For one, this shift entails that you are constantly walking. Next to that, you are carrying the trays, and often put the trays away at a very high shelf. At the end of the shift, all the trolleys have to be filled with the right trays.

The distribution day shift is organized differently. First of all, more people work on these shifts with a Florensis contract, including the distribution coordinators themselves. In this shift, migrant workers work more closely with Dutch workers than in other shifts. During this shift, the trolleys are prepared for transport, as at the end of the shift the orders are picked up by trucks. Again, as I worked at Florensis during low season, the number of trays for transport was low, meaning that there was no night shift before the day shift started. If this is the case, the shift starts with the order picking that is otherwise done during the night shift. If there was a night shift, the shift starts with attaching the correct packing list to the correct trolleys. After that, all the trolleys are scanned separately in a terminal to make sure the correct trays are on it, and no mistakes were made. The trolleys are then organized in front of the correct transport terminal, so they are picked up by the correct truck. This is all done by hand and considering that these trolleys easily weigh over 100 kilograms, it is a tough job. During my fieldwork, a new Dutch employee was hired at Florensis, but because of the physical aspect of the job, he decided to quit after two days.

Since Brexit, the trolleys with the UK as destination need to have a plant passport printed at the individual trays. During high season, this means that three migrant workers are responsible for putting the stickers on all the individual trays.

Lastly, after all the trolleys are prepared for transport, this shift puts the yellow *bordjes* in place for the shift that will pick up the trays for the next transport round.

Next to Covebo workers, Florensis makes use of different employment agencies for (migrant) workers. These workers work at different departments, such as the cleaning of the trays or the cleaning of the pallets. During my fieldwork I did not work at these departments, nor could I speak with these workers. As these workers are hired through a different employment agency, the Covebo workers are not familiar with them and have not lived with them.

5. Seeding

Seeds necessitate care and fertile soil in order to grow and bloom into beautiful flowers. For the plants at Florensis, this is no different. Therefore, the first step of the journeys of the plants at Florensis is the seeding process. During this first part of the process, the trays are filled with soil and seeds and are watered. This is done mechanically, after which Florensis employees move the plants to the greenhouses. The amount of soil, seeds, and water necessary vary per plant. Some plants necessitate copier shreds to enhance the growing process. For each plant, the seeding process thus looks differently.

My research on migrant workers also commences at this first part of the process. For migrant workers, the seeding process indicates the part of their journeys where they were still living in Poland. Before coming to the Netherlands most participants were either in school, or already working at a job in Poland. In the years prior to migrating, some participants were already relatively sure they would be moving to a different country to work. For others, this was not the case. In this chapter, I will go into the years prior to migration, the reasons for migration, and the migration process.

It is important to take a long-term approach to comprehend the experiences of the migrant workers and the strategies and tactics used by them. In long-term approaches, past experiences of people are incorporated in order to understand their present experiences and future plans. This understanding is guided by Zampoukos' notion of 'stories-so-far' (Zampoukos, 2018). While this concept is based on Massey's understanding of places as "stories so-far" (2005, p.71), Zampoukos connects this to migrant workers. Instead of seeing places as relational and their meaning(s) fluid (Massey, 1995), Zampoukos "denotes people's trajectories rather than those of places" (2018, p.50). As relational beings, people respond to their physical environments, as well as their social environments. This chapter will focus on what is seen as the past in the trajectory of migrant workers: the years prior to migrating. Incorporating the past in the analysis allows for a long-term approach which puts the stories of the migrant workers into context.

Researching the past implies determining the motivations to migrate. In the new European mobility space, it has become possible to migrate based on a multitude of reasons (Krings et al., 2013). How a migrant chooses to migrate and based on what considerations influence their trajectories in the Netherlands. It is important to incorporate the motivation to migrate when trying to understand the trajectories of migration. Whereas upward mobility is currently valued in economic terms (Zampoukos, 2018), the *experiences* of migrant workers should be considered as well. When someone chooses to migrate with the aim of experiencing a sense of freedom, they experience upward mobility differently than someone who solely migrated to earn a specific amount of money.

The importance of the past immediately became clear to me when doing fieldwork. To understand my colleagues and their choices made, I had to understand the context of their stories. Understanding how someone grew up, and how they have been making decisions all their lives is essential to understanding the stories they are telling you as a researcher. Taking the time to understand someone's past is important in interpreting data. Without understanding someone's past, I would value the stories told through *my* (past) experiences. Understanding someone's past experiences is important in gaining a holistic understanding of their trajectory.

5.1. Introducing the participants

Six participants will guide us through their personal journeys as migrant workers in the Netherlands. Just as different types of flowers necessitate a different type of care to bloom, migrant workers' needs differ based on their aspirations and dreams. To get a better understanding of these differences, the

six participants with whom I conducted life-history interviews are introduced. These participants have a more central role in my research than other colleagues, due to the intensity of our contact. The stories of my other colleagues are contextualized in the text itself. The introduction provides background information about the participants, which helps with understanding their experiences. Different names are used in order to ensure anonymity. During the thesis, the term participant is used to refer to this group of migrant workers, while the term 'colleagues' includes those migrant workers with whom I interacted during my fieldwork but did interview.

Kacper

Kacper is a 30-year-old man and grew up in a small village in Poland. During his technical education in Poland, he moved to the United Kingdom to finish the practical internship of his study. After having finished middle school, he started working as a so-called *Golden Hand* in Poland. A *Golden Hand* is a type of carpenter. When his former boss decided to move to the UK to work, he decided he would start working abroad. He moved to the Netherlands eight years ago. He lives with his girlfriend, Roza. While they are looking for private housing, they are living in a shared house provided by Covebo.

Roza

Roza is a 29-year-old woman and Kacper's girlfriend. She also grew up in a village in Poland, close to the village where Kacper grew up. She finished her practical education in management and engineering in Poland. During her study, and after having finished it, she worked at a company in Poland making computer chips. She decided to move to the Netherlands five years ago in order to be together with Kacper.

Pawel

Pawel is a 25-year-old man who also grew up in a village in Poland. He did not complete his high school education. He decided to start working in Belgium to earn money and finish his high school in the subsequent year. However, due to familial circumstances, he ended up not finishing his high school education. He moved to the Netherlands in 2018 and currently lives in a house provided by Covebo.

Zofia

Zofia is a 30-year-old woman who grew up in a city in Poland. After high school, she studied cosmetology at university level. Right before starting this degree, she met her current husband. He was already working in the Netherlands for Florensis at that time. In order to spend time with her boyfriend, she started working in the summers in the Netherlands. After having graduated from university in 2014, she decided to move to the Netherlands. She currently lives in a house owned by her and her husband. Her husband has a contract at Florensis, while Zofia has a contract with Covebo.

Marek

Marek is a 27-year-old man, he grew up in a city in Poland. For his practical education, he went to culinary school. After graduation, he worked in a restaurant. After some years of working there, he decided to quit and move to the Netherlands. He was already together with his girlfriend when he moved to the Netherlands in 2016. She followed him two years later. Marek has a contract at Florensis as a distribution operator. Currently, Marek and his girlfriend live together in a rented apartment.

Kaz

Kaz is a 27-year-old man, he grew up in a city in Poland. He finished his practical education in 2013 and decided to move to the Netherlands right away. As the youngest in his family, he followed his brother and sister who were already living abroad at that time. Prior to moving to the Netherlands, he

spent two summers working here. He met his girlfriend in the Netherlands, and they are currently living together in an apartment that they bought. Kaz has a contract at Florensis.

5.2. The big move

As can be seen in the short introductions of six of the participants, every migrant has a different story to tell. The backgrounds of the migrants differ, as do their reasons to migrate. Due to the opening up of the European mobility space, it has become easier to migrate (Krings et al., 2013). Whereas Van Ostaijen, Reeger, and Zelano (2017) argue that labour is now commodified because of this – essentially seeing the creation of the EU with the four freedoms as an expansion of capitalism – most participants saw the ability to migrate as something positive. Even though one could argue that EU enlargement has made people vulnerable to being exploited in foreign labour markets (Van Ostaijen, Reeger & Zelano, 2017), my colleagues saw it as a possibility to create a better future for themselves and their families. Moving to the Netherlands was seen by most as a form of upward mobility. They had a lack of faith regarding finding a suitable job in Poland on which they can build their future.

“In Poland if you really want to have a good job, you need [...] to have big back; you know what I mean? [...] friends, family [...] Then it is much easier, because then they will push you also” (Interview Kaz, Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, 23-11-2021)².

Education and career in Poland

As said before, it is important to look at the years prior to migrating. Some participants moved to the Netherlands right after having graduated, while some first started their careers in Poland. In Poland, it is not common to start working during high school at the age of 16. Therefore, most people I spoke to have their first job abroad. The idea that money is earned easier outside of Poland is something my colleagues learned early on. While it is not common to work in Poland at the age of sixteen, it is more common to work outside of Poland during the holidays at that age. For example, Kaz started working in the Netherlands at the age of sixteen. Others first attempted to build a career in Poland despite the more difficult circumstances of needing the right connections and having to accept a low salary. All these factors influenced the motivation to migrate for the participants and my colleagues. As stated before, different motivations to migrate can lead to different migration trajectories.

Kacper was lucky enough to find a job as a *Golden Hand* in Poland after finishing his practical education. He worked for an acquaintance of his neighbour who was a self-employed carpenter, and his income was substantial for Polish standards. Even though he was only a *Golden Hand* for one year, this showed him that it is possible to make a good living in Poland. Following Massey’s argument (1995), the past, present, and future are connected. The idea of spatiality, which captures “the reflexive, mutual conditioning that occurs between objects and subjects” (Hirsch & Stewart, 2005, p.262) can thus also be used to understand how the past, present, and future are connected and under the scrutiny of interpretation. Past experiences of migrants, influence choices made in the present, and thus future paths. Kacper’s experience of being a *Golden Hand* and being able to make a good living in Poland can be an explanation of why he approaches his time in the Netherlands as temporal: A way of attaining the means to create a sustainable future in Poland.

Experiencing a successful career in Poland does not directly implicate a desire to return and build a career in Poland. Marek started working in a restaurant after having finished his practical education. Following a dispute with his boss about his wage, he decided to quit. Even though cooking is his passion, he decided he needed a break from working in Poland. Up until now, he has not returned and

² Unless stated otherwise, all quotes took place in Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht

is not planning to return soon. Rather, he would open a restaurant in the Netherlands in the future. Similar experiences, therefore, do not necessarily lead to the same long-term plans.

All other participants started their careers in the Netherlands. Looking at the different educational backgrounds of the participants, statements of upward or downward mobility can be made. However, I think it is important to incorporate the motivation for migration in this. It might be more fitting to value upward and downward mobility differently. Currently, it is valued in economic terms (Zampoukos, 2018), meaning that for someone with a university degree a move to the Netherlands and doing un-schooled work is interpreted as downward mobility, while for someone with no education at all, this is not the case. Although previous education and careers are important to consider when looking at the experiences of migrant workers, they should not be determinant in valuing their stories. As economic reasons are no longer the only motivation to migrate, it is important to broaden the understanding of upward mobility.

Connection to work abroad

In order to understand how the 'seed' of migrating was planted in the heads of my colleagues, it is necessary to look at how they familiarized themselves with working abroad. The stories that were told by friends, family, or acquaintances can influence the motivation to migrate. Therefore, it is important to understand whether migration was seen as something common or not. All my colleagues explained that moving abroad to work was seen as something normal. They argued this was because of bad economic situation in Poland. Some participants were already familiar with working abroad through people close to them. In deciding to move, these stories can have a big influence. When being surrounded by people that moved to Western Europe to earn money – or their stories – a decision to move might feel easier (Hiebert, 2009).

At only 16 years old, Kaz was the youngest of all the participants when he temporarily moved to the Netherlands to work. As the youngest of his family – and with his brother and sister already working outside of Poland – it was a natural step to move abroad to work in the summer holidays. For him, it was already clear that it was a logical step to earn more money.

“Every vacation [...] in the summer, I always come to *the Netherlands* to work. For four or six weeks. I was still sixteen years [...] I can also find work in Poland [...] but there I also don't get so much as here [money]. And I was looking some job. Four weeks, six weeks. Only for vacation, to get some money” (Interview Kaz, 23-11-2021).

Most other participants did not have close relatives living outside of Poland. However, most participants mentioned that their friends worked outside of Poland. Sometimes permanently and sometimes only during the summer when the demand for migrant workers is often high due to harvest season.

“Because before a lot of my friends in holiday they also go to Germany [...] And everybody that [goes] there, and they said they got really nice money. And [I was thinking] maybe in the future we will go there and spend long time over there” (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021).

Planning the move

Historically, social networks have been important in Polish communities (White & Ryan, 2008). White and Ryan (2008) argue that the communist era has been important for this, as through social networks people could often attain goods they needed. This deficiency of trust in the national government can also be explained by the constant shifting of borders of the country (White & Ryan, 2008). Because of

this, inter-communal bonds strengthened, as these bonds were one of the few things that remained constant in everchanging circumstances (White & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, trust in family and friends exceeds that in governmental institutions (White & Ryan, 2008). These social networks can influence certain decisions, like being open to migrating for example. The role that social networks play in the move becomes clear when looking at the final preparations to move. While stories might be important to plant the idea in someone's head, they might choose to go on this adventure independently rather than following someone in their social network.

After having decided to move, the next step is arranging everything for the actual move. How people come in touch with an employer or employment agency abroad influences where they end up and under what circumstances: it directly influences their experiences. Even though historically social networks mostly influenced decisions to migrate, nowadays employment agencies exist that partially replace the need for the social networks in the migration process (White & Ryan, 2008). Some colleagues and participants encountered an employment agency and moved independently, while others were able to attain a job through their social networks.

Some participants moved independently, with the help of an employment agency, while others made use of the connections in their social network. This is also known as "chain migration"; a term coined by Hiebert denoting that the move of one person in a social network ignites migration plans with others (2009). One exemplary story of this is that of Pawel who moved to Belgium in 2017.

"My first idea I'm talking with my friends for going to another country to make quick and easy money. So, one time, my mother went to the baker shop and met the neighbour there. They were talking, talking, and the person who is selling [...] He had another [job] for going to Belgium to harvest apple and pear" (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021).

Pawel could thus migrate due to his social network. After finishing his education, he wanted to start a higher-level education. However, he failed some courses that he needed in order to do this. Therefore, he decided to work and "make quick and easy money" (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021) to try to attain those points again the next year. His goal when moving was to earn some money to buy a car and to return home to continue his education. When his mother told him about this job, he immediately went and trusted that the job was genuine. However, finding a job through a social network does not necessarily imply the job is good.

The guy tells me; everything is all right. But when we come there, we working with no paper.

JN: *Okay, so it is illegal?*

Hmmm yeah, yeah... Illegal [...] We living on this one big hangar [...] And I live with Poland people, Romanian people, and we living 50-60 people something like this [...] in the morning we wake up, go for the bus, go for the garden. Don't looking if it is sun or raining. Always working outside" (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021).

Pawel's story shows the importance of social networks in the decision to migrate and the destination. However, it also shows that even though trust in these social networks is high, this does not always translate to good work circumstances.

Other participants moved independently from the outset of their migration journeys. After deciding to move to the Netherlands to work, Kacper and Marek both encountered Covebo online. When Kacper's boss in Poland decided to move to the UK, Kacper had the opportunity to move with him and thus make use of his social network. However, Kacper decided to not make use of this opportunity: "he offered me this job, but it was really far away. Before, I was on *pracsis* [practical internship] from school and I decided I don't like that country" (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021). This quote shows that in deciding the destination, migrant workers exert agency. Kaz and Zofia also actively decided on their

destination countries, as for them Germany was not preferred due to the history between Germany and Poland, while the UK would be too far away. In migration theory, this type of agency is called “migrant agency” (Christensen, Hussein, & Ismael, 2017, p.220). This concept refers to migrants’ decision-making process and their ability to do this in situations of change (Christensen et al., 2017). It is thus a type of social navigation specifically used by migrants. Marek also decided that he wanted to move to the Netherlands, and then found Covebo online. On the Covebo website, Marek found a job just for three months which he deemed perfect for his situation.

Directly I said to them; I will come for three months and no more. Because I want to look around for a little bit, create some peace in my mind. [...] After that, back to Poland as a chef. But that hahaha.

JN: *Hahah went different than expected.*

Yes, a little bit different than expected (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

Marek and Kacper both encountered Covebo online and migrated quickly after having found an employment agency. Both initially had the goal of staying temporary, one season or one year. However, this goal changed over time, since they were still working there during my research. This is a commonly found tendency when studying the trajectories of migrant workers (Ryan, 2018). Overall strategies thus change over time; this is important to consider when looking at the tactics used by the migrant workers.

Roza and Zofia both made use of their social networks for their move. What is important in their stories is the fact that social networks can change over time (Gill & Bialski, 2011). Both had connections with people working abroad, either during the holidays or permanently. Zofia had a close connection, as her roommate worked in Germany with her mother during the holidays. For them, these connections did not convince them to move. It was the fact that they both were in a relationship with someone already living in the Netherlands. Roza met Kacper in September 2013, when Kacper started working his second season at Florensis. They got into a relationship and almost four years later she decided to make the move and follow Kacper even though she had a job in Poland. Roza thus moved in order to be close to Kacper. Where Kacper first had the goal of working in the Netherlands for one year and then returning, their goal when Roza came was to stay longer to earn enough money to buy a house in Poland: “We have must build this house, and go to Poland” (Interview Roza, 8-11-2021). Zofia met her boyfriend when she started university in 2011. Two months after they first met, she decided to visit him in the Netherlands and work for some time before starting college.

Because I think in August in 2011, I went to Holland. For two months [...] It was the first time to go to holland.

JN: *To work or to visit your boyfriend?*

Both. We told my grandmother hahaha, that it was only for work before studies, because you know. But it was both (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021).

Even though her roommate was working abroad during the holidays, it was her boyfriend who convinced her to come to visit him and work.

Even my friend [...] she was working every summer with her mother. In Holland [...] They were picking strawberries [...] they were laying in the field and just [clicks her tongue]. And she wanted to give me the job, but I decided to go to my boyfriend (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021).

Visiting her boyfriend and working, was her first experience working abroad. During the three years of college, she visited the Netherlands on multiple occasions to visit her boyfriend and to work during the summer and winter holidays. Even though she regularly visited the Netherlands, she did not yet plan to move here after graduating.

“I didn’t think about it [...] After college I thought I would come here only for a year. But during the college I didn’t think about it [...] Cause I didn’t plan, ever, to move here, to Holland. [...] Never crossed my mind in my whole life. And here I am. It is only because of my boyfriend haha” (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021).

While Roza’s story shows one of migrating with a clear goal – to be with Kacper and earn enough money to buy a house -, Zofia’s story shows a less clear path. It was clear to her that she wanted to be with her boyfriend, however, with a less clear goal. The motivation to migrate directly influences the type of goal a migrant worker is pursuing. Even though it is not possible to see motivations to migrate and aspirations as separate – as both form an intrinsic part of the experiences of migrant workers – it is important to understand what the motivation to migrate was and what the future goal is. To value the trajectories of migrant workers correctly, we must be open to non-economic considerations to migrate. While a trajectory might not fit the traditional understanding of upward mobility, it might be experienced as upward mobility by the migrant workers themselves. Therefore, it is important to start seeing upward mobility as including those routes that are *experienced* as upward mobility by the migrant workers themselves. For some, this implies that upward mobility includes those actions that lead to economic upward mobility, while for others it would include those actions that lead them to experience freedom or adventure. After the idea of migrating was planted in the heads of migrant workers, and their motivations for migration have become clear, the next part of the process starts: sprouting.

6. Sprouting

After the seeds are put in the soil, it is now time to wait for them to sprout. There is relatively little one can do to influence this process but make sure the right circumstances are created. Still, some seeds sprout, while others do not. The seeds that do not sprout are thrown out by quality control after which new already sprouted flowers will be used to fill in the empty holes in the trays.

For migrant workers, the *sprouting* begins immediately after the move. The idea of moving abroad was already planted in their heads, and the move has been made. Even though some migrant workers might have the goal of spending multiple years abroad, they usually arrive with a temporary contract (SZW, 2021) – or a temporary job when they are working without a contract. The sprouting stage is a determinant factor in whether their stay is extended. Some migrants return to Poland after the sprouting stage, while others extend their stay even though they planned on staying temporarily. This stage is thus also important to understand how long-term plans are adjusted.

As discussed in the previous chapter, most participants' and colleagues' primary goal was to come for one season or year, make money, and then go back to Poland. This is commonly found in research focussing on the initial plans of migrant workers (Ryan, 2018). The temporary character of migration fits Engbersen and Snel's (2011) concept of liquid migration, where migration patterns are characterized by fluidity and temporariness. This is a short-term way to look at migration, as it tends to look at instances of working abroad. A migrant might move back to Poland after a few weeks or months, which can be seen as a textbook example of liquid migration. However, this can also mark the beginning of a longer stay, a more 'solid' form of migration. The sprouting stage is where these patterns become visible and this stage is thus essential to understanding the long-term trajectories of migration. Ryan (2018) discusses the importance of *embeddedness* for migrants. Embedding is seen as a dynamic process depending on different factors expanding different space-times (Ryan, 2018). Factors such as work environment, living environment, and social network influence whether or not migrant workers feel grounded in the host community at a specific point in time (Ryan, 2018). Motivations for migration influence the long-term goals of migrant workers. Ryan argues that "motivations for migration are multifaceted" (2018, p.240), and next to that "'may change over its course'" (Amit & Ris, 2013 as cited by Ryan, 2018, p.240). This depends on the level of embedding a migrant experiences, as this influences how they interpret their social and material environments. The sprouting stage – usually the first year or season – is the first-time migrants are confronted with the process of embedding. Changes in motivation often occur unconsciously and gradually (Ryan, 2018). With the changes in the long-term goals of migrant workers, changes in opportunities and obstacles they are faced with occur. This all affects the type of agency migrant workers exert in specific circumstances. Valuing something as strategic or tactic agency is dependent on the long-term plans of migrant workers. The (re)creation of long-term plans is dependent on an intricate process based on multiple factors. Migrants' first experiences in the Netherlands, their working and living situation, and the adaptation of their social networks has a great impact on how they further perceive their possibilities to interact with their surroundings. All these factors influence the social navigation of migrant workers as these factors highly influence the level of embeddedness (Ryan, 2018). Everything that occurs in the sprouting stage influences whether a flower will eventually bloom or not.

6.1. Sprouting as a temporary migrant worker

As opposed to migrant workers, for me, the sprouting stage was of a shorter character. As I worked at Florensis for only one month, I consider the first week as the sprouting stage. During this week, everything was new; the people, the environment, the working hours, and clearly the work itself. The first shift made the most impact on me. I prepared for my fieldwork for some time, but I was not sure what to expect. Whom would my colleagues be, would they be nice, and open? And how would I cope

with the work: would it be physically tough, mentally draining? All these questions ran through my mind the entire time. In the days prior to my first shift, I was in contact with the coordinator from Covebo. We talked on the phone, and she seemed very nice. We discussed the shifts of my first week, and she assured me that everyone knew I was coming, and they would show me around. She gave me the number of Kacper, who would open the door for me on my first shift.

The coordinator informed me the day of my first shift that I would start with a long night shift: from 7 p.m. until 6 a.m. This made me even more nervous; what if no one would talk to me and I would feel alone those eleven hours, and what if the work would be too strenuous. When I arrived at Florensis, I called Kacper. However, the connection appeared to be failing. Nevertheless, one of my new colleagues appeared at the door for me. “Kacper?” I asked him. “No,” he said, “in canteen.” I walked to the canteen and saw about ten men and one woman sitting dispersed over several tables and the smoking area. I had no clue who Kacper was, and I felt like an outsider. People were speaking Polish or minding their own business. I walked towards the woman and hoped the guy next to her would be Kacper. Again, I asked “Kacper?” “Yes” he said with a Polish accent. He started smiling and introduced me to Roza, who was sitting next to him. Kacper explained that he would show me around and that it would be a long shift today, wishing me luck. He asked if he wanted to have coffee, and we had a little chat. I felt a sigh of relief that he was so welcoming and nice to me. We made some jokes and had to begin right away.

Before working at Florensis, I thought I was a hard worker, but after this first night shift of eleven hours I *know* I am a hard worker. On Monday, I could not move a thing: my arms, my legs, everything was hurting from carrying the trays and putting them on the trolleys – often carrying them above my head. On Tuesday, I was introduced to TH. My muscles were still hurting, but I would be spending most of the day bent over to stack trays and putting them back on the ground. After one hour, my back was hurting so much, taking every possibility to stand straight for a few seconds. Pawel asked me where I thought I would be hurting most after work. I said that I thought it would be my back. He started laughing and said, “Everyone thinks it’s their backs, but it is this [points to the back of his thigh] and your ass hahaha” (Informal conversation Pawel, 5-11-2021).

Even though the work was physically tough, the people were nice to me. The entire week I felt accepted. Even though communication was difficult with most colleagues, they explained everything using their hands and we tried to make conversation in partially English and Polish. I was afraid that people would be suspicious of me, and although I had to reassure some people that I would not tell our boss if we did not work hard, I did not feel they were suspicious of me being there. After one week of working at Florensis, I looked forward to the second week. My muscles needed a break, but I felt happy to return and learn more and make deeper connections with my colleagues. While it was clear to me that I would continue after this sprouting stage, this is often not the case for migrant workers. In order to understand how migratory paths can change during this period it is important to look at the period just after arriving and the experiences in the first season.

6.2. Situation when arriving

Most of my colleagues and participants started to work at Florensis, without moving somewhere else first. Only for Pawel, this was not the case, as discussed in the previous chapter. The work that Pawel did in Belgium was physically demanding, and his employer did not provide him or his fellow workers with any type of contract. In Belgium, he lived on a farm in a big hangar with many people. Every day, they would go outside to harvest and after work return to the hangar. Even though the work was illegal, and no employment agency was involved, this can be compared to an all-in-one deal where employment, transport, and housing is provided through the employer (Wolf, 2015). For Pawel, the

situation was tolerable because “this is job only to make money” (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021). Even though the situation was far from ideal, Pawel tolerated it as it was part of his strategy.

Other participants also decided to move temporarily to make quick money. However, they did use an employment agency and ended up working at Florensis. All participants made use of an all-in-one deal with Covebo. Some arrived by themselves, others with a relative, and Roza and Zofia came to live with their boyfriends. Kacper and Marek arrived by themselves. A Covebo bus with other migrant workers picked them up in Poland and brought them to their new homes. For Kacper this was a bungalow in Moerdijk, where his new roommates decided to prank him when he arrived.

“We got one house and next to it a very small house [...] So, I know, I have to go to house number 11. And that small house was half of this. Over there they put a small *kaartje* with number 11. And I go over there and see the number and look inside and think; come on, where is my bed and everything and they are sitting next to windows and look at me. And I really cried [...] Everything was perfect for them for this joke. I remember it still so [...] For me it was a shock, for them it was funny” (Interview with Kacper, 8-11-2021).

This quote highlights the insecurity migrant workers feel when arriving. After a long journey, they arrive in a house full of strangers and need to prepare themselves for their new job. Everything is new, and as Ryan (2018) would argue, their level of embeddedness is low. They need to build a completely new life, far away from home. Therefore, it is not surprising that the primary goal of most migrant workers is to stay for only a limited amount of time. Before arriving, they are not sure what to expect, and the thought of returning home after a few months might provide migrants with a sense of security. Their experiences during their first months in the Netherlands are thus highly influential for the rest of their trajectories.

6.3. Experiences first year

The first impression that migrant workers have of living and working abroad is important to understand the trajectories of migrant workers. The experiences of migrant workers during this period are important to understand possible changes in long-term strategies. Next to that, it is also important how their work is valued by their employers, as sometimes dreams need to be adapted because of obstacles. As Ryan (2018) argues that the level of *embeddedness* is highly influenced by experiences at work, the living situation and environment, and the connection with the social network, we will discuss these three topics in relation to the experiences in the first year.

Working and living abroad

According to Ryan (2018), creating a sense of embeddedness influences migrants’ decisions to stay longer or return to their homes. It is during these first months that this sense of embeddedness is created. All the new experiences of the move made a big impact, so most participants vividly remember those first days. Living away from home, in a house filled with strangers can be scary as the above-mentioned quote of Kacper shows. For Marek, the first day at work made an impact and he experienced those same feelings as Kacper

Of course, I was a bit afraid. The first day [...] I arrived there and fifteen new people were sitting there. Everyone was looking like; why are you here, where are you from. Yes, that was a bit difficult (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

When moving to be (re)united with your partner, these experiences can be different. While everything is new, one is accompanied by their boyfriend or girlfriend. Zofia already worked at Florensis several

times before moving to the Netherlands when visiting her boyfriend. Next to that, she started working nightshifts at distribution. “If you work night shift, you have contact only with Polish people. And on the day shifts, there is a lot of Dutch people” (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021). Occasionally, a Dutch operator from Florensis is present, but most of the time a Polish operator is present. An operator is responsible for the proper functioning of the machine that is used for the distribution process. Mainly working with Polish co-workers, combined with Polish roommates can make the transition easier. Even though one moves abroad, the new environment can feel familiar due to all the Polish people.

Moving to be with your partner does not necessarily mean that a positive experience is guaranteed. Even though both Roza and Zofia were happy to be reunited with their boyfriends. Both felt they had to decide between options that were not optimal. “I have my work in Poland, or I can choose for Germany, or for Kacper. I take Kacper, haha” (Interview Roza, 8-11-2021). Making the move for someone else can perhaps make it more difficult to adjust. Marek’s girlfriend experienced difficulty when she moved to the Netherlands to be with him.

The first year was dramatic, really dramatic. Every time: ‘Yes, those people are bad’ etcetera. [...] It was difficult. Because she only had me, no one else. I tried to tell her ‘Listen, I came here as well, and I was alone. [...] Really alone. You have me now’ (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

Some participants were already familiar with living abroad because of previous work experiences or practical internships. For some, these experiences made it easier to adjust to the new environment. For example, Kaz worked in the Netherlands for several years during his summer holidays. Because of these experiences, he was already used to the Netherlands, being away from his family, and living with others. This can make it easier to embed oneself in the new environment. On the one hand, the social network is adjusted to long-distance relationships. On the other hand, it is due to the familiarity with a certain place. A physical environment or place is an important aspect of embeddedness (Ryan, 2018). Even though Kaz lived in a different part of the Netherlands before, he was used to Dutch cities and how to adjust to such new environments. In order to fully comprehend these first-year experiences, it is important to look at other aspects that influenced the process of embedding, such as the living situation of migrant workers.

Living with others

Upon arrival, all participants moved into shared houses provided to them by the employment agency. A home is important to have a stable basis: it is a place to come home to after a long day of work, hang out with your roommates and relax. Before arriving, the participants were not sure what the living situation would entail. For Pawel, this entailed a big hangar. For others, this was a Covebo house, which range from Bungalows and houses with around 20 roommates, to smaller houses with just a few roommates. When arriving with an all-inclusive deal, or something similar, migrant workers cannot influence where they end up living this first year. Living with strangers with whom you work can be difficult. Often, rooms in houses are assigned to migrant workers randomly, or on the basis of which shift they work. Or as Pawel said: “most *uitzendbureau* looking like that. Not for the persons, but looking for the head. You know what I mean; one bed, one person” (interview, 10-11-2021). This approach can have a negative influence on the experiences of migrant workers: “Sometimes we have really, really problems with people. We don’t make sleep. We work night shift; they work day shift” (Interview Roza, 8-11-2021). On the other hand, for some participants, it was a positive experience especially since it was their first time living on their own.

It was a good time. Because when I come from work, always there is someone there [...] I was alone, but I did not feel alone. [...] It was also my first experience of living alone. No mom, no dad, no brother [...] that was really good (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

Moving away from home and living with other (young) people creates a sense of freedom. This type of freedom can positively influence the decision of migrant workers to continue living in the Netherlands as it enhances the level of embeddedness that the migrant workers experience. Krings et al. (2013) highlight how currently migrants move for a multitude of reasons, including a sense of freedom. Even though the initial reason for migration was economic, the motivation to stay can be based on this sense of freedom. A motivation to migrate thus changes into a motivation to stay and that this motivation can gradually change. Embeddedness thus influences mobility patterns, which in turn influences the type of agency one exerts.

Family

“The first year it was really hard for me. We love to spend time with family. My momma, said please stop don’t go. But I have, I must” (Interview Roza, 8-11-2021).

Almost everyone I spoke with lived with their family back in Poland. Especially considering the economic situation in the country, this is a common practice. Therefore, it is not just the experience of living abroad, and living with strangers that have an impact on the level of embeddedness migrants experience, also the fact that they live far away from their families. Migrating impacts their social networks, and in order to experience some form of embeddedness in the Netherlands, it is important the social network of the migrant worker can adapt to the new reality.

In Poland, family values are important (Dryjanska, 2021). It is more common to keep living with your family during education, and in some cases after finishing education. This also has to do with the economic situation, as Kaz explained during the interview: “If you live, for example, with the mother or family. They pay for the house, maybe you help a little bit. But you don’t pay 1,000 Złoti for rent you know. So then, it is little bit better” (Interview Kaz, 24-11-2021).

Moving to the Netherlands can thus at times feel like leaving one’s family. This can make the move emotionally difficult and make it challenging to feel grounded in a new environment. Due to the seasonality of the work, almost all colleagues visited their families once or twice a year. Most holidays were dedicated to staying with their families in Poland. Even the participants that bought a house in the Netherlands and can therefore be regarded as more settled here, visited their families on a regular basis. While the traditionally strong family bonds in Poland can make it more difficult for migrant workers to settle in the Netherlands, the ability to visit their families on a regular basis can be important in changing migration plans to stay longer. Adapting to life in the Netherlands is adapting to a new rhythm of life: seeing new friends on a daily basis, while having to readjust the existing bonds.

The traditional Polish family bonds do show how migration, mobility, and agency are relational. Strong family bonds are an integral part of the social networks of migrant workers. Migrating implies having to readjust a relationship from living together, to living far away from each other. As Ryan (2018) argues, social ties are an important aspect for migrants in creating a sense of embeddedness. Embeddedness can influence one’s choices about staying or returning home. Family ties can influence the choices made by migrant workers concerning their long-term trajectories, and in this way influence their mobility patterns. This shows that the mobility patterns of migrant workers are not just influenced by the migrants themselves, but also by their direct surroundings both within and outside the Netherlands. Family back in Poland, or in other European countries, can influence migration trajectories. Therefore, it is important to understand the social networks of migrants.

6.4. Change of goals

As stated before, most of my colleagues planned to work in the Netherlands for only one season. During this first year, it will become apparent whether the initial migration goals remain the same or change. Most of my colleagues and participants already worked at Covebo for multiple years and planned on returning the following year. Because I worked with them at the end of the season, this image might be distorted as most new workers arrive during the first season – from February until June. It is also during this season that it becomes apparent whether they will return or not. Therefore, as I was working at the end of the second season – which is from August until November – most migrant workers that returned quickly – either voluntarily or involuntarily – were not around anymore. However, it is a commonly found tendency that migrant workers come for one year and extend their stay each year (Ryan, 2018).

For the migrants that return home during or after their first season, the sprouting phase looks different than for those who stay. However, this is not to say this stage failed for them. For some, the return might signal the end of their aspirations to work abroad, while for others, it might only put a temporal halt to this desire. Taking a long-term approach in researching migration trajectories is important as these patterns need to be included. One example of only a temporal return during the sprouting stage is the story of Pawel. A few weeks after arriving in Belgium his father passed away. Being the oldest son in his family, he decided to stay with his mother to support her for the following months. During this time, he decided to follow his original plan and start his education in September. Due to the timing of everything, the academic year already started, and continuing his education was not possible. Therefore, he decided to move abroad to work again. Having learned from his previous experience, he decided to find an employment agency this time. Even though this is different from his previous move, he still made use of his social network.

So, I am talking with friends, and they try to go looking for job. Not in Poland [...] And we have another friend, and he is working [in] the Netherlands [...] He went to a [...] *uitzendbureau* for this. So okay, we talking and going” (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021).

Pawel’s story shows the complexity of migrants’ trajectories, and the importance to know the entire context of their migration journeys to understand the choices made. While for Pawel, his return was caused by the sudden decease of his father, other migrants return as their contracts are terminated. When asking participants about their first season and whether they were afraid their contracts would be terminated, they all argued that decisions about this were based on performance on the job. With Marek, I discussed what type of people cannot come back after one season: “Those are people [...] that only come here for the *party*, not for work [...] They are people that come here for the fun, not serious. Because of that, they return” (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021). This quote illustrates that showing your capabilities and fitting into the image of Polish migrant workers as *good workers* (MacKenzie & Forde, 2009) influences one’s ability to use strategic agency and with that chase dreams. Fitting into the *good worker* trope comes naturally for some, which creates opportunities in their migration trajectories.

They always said to me; ‘Kacper they want you everywhere’. Because I am a good and hard worker. Because before, I work really hard, because I live in a village with my parents. We work hard so we got better life. I was prepared for this a little bit (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021).

Most participants gradually changed their long-term goals during this first year. Only for Roza, this was not the case as she decided to migrate in order to be with Kacper and together save for a house in Poland. The rest of the participants initially thought to come just a year.

For some participants, the process of changing the goal of their stay was gradual and took place almost unconsciously. After having left a good impression at work and being used to the freedom of living away from their families, the offer of staying another year sounded enticing. Ryan (2018) suggests that this often is an unconscious and gradual process, influenced by the level of embeddedness in the new context. However, it does not always occur in such a gradual manner. Kaz, for example, was quickly confronted with a choice of staying or going back to Poland. He migrated together with his brother-in-law to start working at Florensis. During the first few days, Kaz's brother-in-law was fired for starting arguments at work. His brother-in-law asked Kaz to return to Poland with him, while his colleagues – whom he had only known for a few days – asked him to stay as he was a good worker. Even though he was very young, he decided to stay on his own.

“I come with him [...] They fire him after three hours. So, for me it was also difficult. Because, we come together, and what now? I go with him? Because he said [...] ‘come with me [...] Don’t stay here’ [...] The guys [...] are telling me; ‘no, don’t go, stay. You are good *medewerker*, we don’t fire you, only him” (Interview Kaz, 24-11-2021).

In this case, Kaz was confronted to make a conscious decision of staying on his own or returning to his family with the only familiar face in his environment. This shows that decisions to stay are not always made unconsciously. Staying in that moment was a decisive moment in Kaz's migration trajectory.

The sprouting stage is important in the primary part of the process of embedding oneself in a new context. The process of embedding is not only dependent on the migrant worker itself – the experience of a new job, living on their own, etcetera – it is also dependent on its surroundings – the employer's experiences and changes in the social network of the migrant worker. Critically assessing the sprouting stage is important in taking a long-term approach to understanding migrant workers' mobility patterns, as it is during this stage that the first changes in long-term goals occur. As migrants are usually unable to bring their skills with them to their country of destination in a 'rucksack' as Erel states (2010 as cited by Ryan, 2018, p.241), the first year is important as this is the beginning of migrants acquiring new skills that *are* valued properly. As learning these skills is a gradual and at times unconscious process, the process of changing one's goals has the same characteristic. These skills influence the mobility opportunities faced by the migrants, and their prospects now might appear easier achievable in the Netherlands than back home. In many ways, migrants can thus be adapting to life in the Netherlands, which changes the type of agency one can exert. After understanding the dynamic process of mobility patterns, and changing one's long-term plans, we need to look at the different types of agency used by migrant workers during their stay in the Netherlands, and how these can be placed into context. Moving to the Netherlands and adapting to life here is a gradual process. The extent to which a migrant worker feels embedded in their new environment can affect the overall strategy.

7. Growing

There is not one set journey of the plants, each plant moves through the greenhouses differently. Some will stay in one greenhouse for a long time, others will constantly move. This is to make sure that the plants will not become too tall before transport or remain too small. As it is not always possible to predict the growing process beforehand, it is important to keep a close eye on the plants and react to how they are growing. This is the growing process.

For migrant workers, *growing* entails the part of their trajectory from their first season onwards. This chapter specifically focusses on migrant workers that stay in the Netherlands after their first season. Those who quickly return to Poland are excluded. By focussing on the migrant workers that are working in the Netherlands for a longer period of time, it becomes possible to research the agency they exert. By taking a long-term approach, mobility patterns become clear, and readjusted motivations for migration can be discerned. By understanding the context, it becomes possible to understand whether choices made fit into someone's long-term goals.

Datta et al.'s (2007) conception of strategic agency resembles the traditional understanding of upward mobility. Agency is viewed as strategic when a long-term goal is pursued. For Datta et al. (2007) a long-term goal is mostly a form of economic upward mobility: improved circumstances at work such as a raise or a promotion for example. Tactic agency is viewed as having to act to just "get by" (Datta et al., 2007, p.404). The two concepts have binary definitions: an action is either strategic or tactic. This chapter, first of all, investigates the possibility of broadening the understanding of what strategic agency is, and whether non-economic motivations to act should be included as well. The choices made by migrant workers during the growing phase will be assessed: Some will grow, get promoted, and receive a permanent contract at Florensis, while others will remain working night shifts and have temporal Covebo contracts. Instead of looking at upward mobility – in an economic sense –, I will look at whether their actions fit in their long-term plans. As long-term plans change over time, it is important to understand the context and the long-term goals the migrant workers had at that time. In the first year(s) a migrant worker might decline an offer of a promotion as the goal might still be to return to Poland quickly. This action can then be viewed as strategic agency. After a period of time, their aspirations might change, and the migrant worker might opt for different choices in similar circumstances. While the action differs, both can be seen as strategic agency. As different actions can be viewed as strategic depending on the context, the duality between the concepts of tactics and strategies is put into question. This chapter, looks into the need to broaden the understanding of strategic agency before going into the difference between the two types of agency. Like the previous chapter, the aspects that Ryan (2018) views as influencing one's sense of embeddedness are used. The working environment, housing situation, and social network will be discussed.

7.1. Growing as a temporary migrant worker

For migrant workers, the growing phase is an extensive process and entails multiple years. For me, however, the growing phase was shorter and more about growing into the role of researcher in my first participatory field research. It was about the experience of being welcomed into a new community, trying to fit in, and learning to adapt to the work. Of course, for me the growing phase was different as my long-term goal – writing my thesis – was clear, and I knew this would not change. I was thus sure of the temporary character of my experience.

After the first week, the sprouting stage was over. I worked every shift at least once, and I got to know some of my colleagues on a personal level. Next to that, my colleagues got used to me working with them. During the first week, I had to reassure most of my colleagues that I did not want to go home early and that I was there to do the same amount of work as them, their questions slowly disappeared

as they got used to me being there and working with them. However, this also marked a new phase in my journey as a migrant worker and researcher. When I got used to needing to reassure my colleagues less and less, I became aware of the fact that my behaviour had a big influence on me being included in the community or not. Working at Florensis – despite its heavy physical character – was relatively easy compared to the alertness that was required doing fieldwork. Being alert was needed in order to gain access: how did my colleagues interact with each other, and with me, when was it okay to ask questions about their experiences at Florensis, and when was it better to make conversation to get to know each other, or to just work together and not speak at all.

Even though I immediately felt included after my first day in some way, in other ways I did not feel included immediately. I was included in the sense that I belonged in the community of migrant workers compared to Dutch Florensis employees working in the offices. However, I felt less included in the community of Polish people due to the language barrier and having to get used to social norms. For me, the growing phase was thus about understanding the different levels of being included and maintaining a balance between being a researcher and a colleague or friend. Maintaining this balance required an alertness that was tiresome. Before starting my fieldwork, I expected the physical character of the work to be the most tiresome. However, it was this constant alertness, of being aware of how to act appropriately, and establishing connections that would lead to mutual trust. For me, the growing phase was thus more about growing into my role as a participatory researcher, and as a migrant worker.

7.2. Growing as traditional upward mobility

Parts of the trajectories of some colleagues fit in the perception of strategic agency as explained by Datta et al. (2007). During their first years after leaving their homes, they experienced upward mobility economically speaking. Most participants got promoted at work, found private housing, and created stability in their lives in the Netherlands. The following stories will exemplify what strategic agency would look like in the eyes of Datta et al. (2007).

Promotion at the work floor

When arriving in the Netherlands, migrant workers often start doing unskilled labour despite their previous education and work experience. Because of this, Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010) state that the new European mobility space enables the exploitation of migrant labour. My colleagues and participants had a range of educational backgrounds: from leaving high school to having finished higher education. Despite this, all migrant workers commence on equal footing. By showing a good work ethic the first season, the migrant workers can leave a good impression on the *voorman* and by doing so are able to return the next season. These good impressions are also important in attaining a promotion. For some, the first promotion occurs rapidly, while for others, the wait takes longer. Covebo workers can have different types of contracts. In the beginning, migrants have temporary contracts for a specific job: for example, three months' worth of work at Florensis. After some seasons, this contract can be extended in duration, and eventually, it becomes a contract of a specific number of hours for Covebo. Every new type of contract provides the migrant worker with an increased level of stability. Contracts get a longer duration, salary increases in some cases, and the terms under which it can be terminated become more stringent. Receiving promotion can thus be important in creating a sense of embeddedness.

Pawel and Kacper both experienced traditional upward mobility quickly. For Kacper this occurred during his first season when the *voorman* asked him to stay in the Netherlands during Christmas. By leaving a good impression of himself as a hard worker, Kacper could quickly create stability for himself in the Netherlands. In his second year, he began learning to become an *opzetter* and he knew he

would eventually become *voorman*. An *opzetter* is responsible for putting the trays on the distribution machine. This requires the migrant workers to accept a bit more responsibility before becoming the official foreman. Making these steps is paired with a higher wage. Next to that, it creates stability in a different way.

Because I have little bit easy job [as *opzetter*], because I stay here on the machine. And over there it is all the time hard working. And, this [...] means that 100% I be on the work. Because first must be *voorman*, next must be *opzetter*, and the rest work on the band (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021).

Becoming an *opzetter* and learning to become a *voorman* implies working more shifts at distribution, as during every shift multiple *opzetter*s and *voormannen* are present. Because of this, it is easier to work sufficient hours when the season is coming to an end. For regular workers, this is more difficult as the few available spots in night shifts are taken by *opzetter*s and foremen. Making it necessary to work at other companies for these workers.

For Kacper, this instance of upward mobility was based on a difficult choice: visit his family for Christmas or stay in the Netherlands and work. Even though celebrating Christmas with one's family is traditionally important in Poland, Kacper was aware of the consequences of his choice. "I have to make decision; or I come back [to Poland] and maybe not come back here, or I stay and maybe next year become *voorman*. So, I decided to stay" (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021). By consciously deciding to stay in the Netherlands and work during Christmas, he secured an improved position at work. This fits Datta et al.'s (2007) definition of strategic agency: Kacper made a conscious decision that positively influenced his economic situation and that improved his future position. The same can be said for Pawel, even though his decision was made less consciously.

After his first season, Pawel returned to Poland not sure whether he would return to Florensis. During this vacation, he was called by the Covebo coordinator to ask if he wanted to return. Upon his return, the *voorman* tells him he can teach him to become *opzetter*. For Pawel, this decision was made based less on the future prospect of becoming a *voorman* and earning more, and more on the stability it created.

If there is not work here, we go to a different company. But [...] everything is different. [...] If I go to another company; everything is nice, people is nice, work is nice [...] But later, I see on *salaris* [salary] they pay me at this company 7,72 euro (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021).

This quote shows that Pawel not only saved money to buy a car by accepting the promotion. He also worked more hours at Florensis and less at different companies where he was often not sure how much he would earn.

Even though Pawel and Kacper found themselves in a position where they could easily be exploited according to Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010), they made use of strategic agency to create stability. Essential for this was their ability to fit in the 'hard working' trope of Polish migrant workers and by doing so leave a good impression on their supervisor. Both weighted the advantages and disadvantages of their choice, and in doing so exerted strategic agency. What this example shows is that strategic agency can be based on a conscious decision, but also on a less conscious decision.

Adaptation of the social network

"Hey, Marek, today is the third month that you are in the Netherlands. You said that you would return after three months?" and I said: "Yes mum, you know, good money, good friends, and a

good life here. I will stay for another year.” And then I stayed for six more (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

As discussed before, it is important that a migrant adapts can change their social network after having moved abroad. Existing relationships need to adjust to remain functional despite the distance, and new relationships are created in the new social environments. For the friends and family that stay in Poland changing long-term plans can be difficult as this requires them to adapt every time the migrant worker decides to stay in the Netherlands for yet another year. Above mentioned quote from Marek shows this. His mother holds on to his original plan of moving away for just one season, while Marek is re-adjusting to life in the Netherlands and is changing his long-term plan. However, this is not to say that family in Poland cannot adjust to the new reality.

First my mother was really mad. She said: ‘Yes, Marek, first it was three months, one year, and now you have stayed there four years [...] Come back.’ But in Poland the situation is becoming worse and worse [economically speaking]. So, my mother told me: ‘You know what, stay there. The situation here is bad’ (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

A social network that is adjusting to life in the Netherlands is important for the growing stage. While embeddedness might appear to only occur at the place where the migrant worker lives, these relationships abroad are important for it to grow as well. It is thus not only about creating new social relations in the Netherlands, the ability of existing relationships to adjust is important as well.

Another example of how existing relationships adjust is when long-distance relationships are reunited when one of the two decides to move abroad as well. Kacper and Marek both arrived in the Netherlands by themselves. Both of their girlfriends moved to be with them a few years later. Zofia and Roza moved to the Netherlands for their boyfriends, with their relationship being the main reason they moved. For Kacper and Marek, their girlfriends arriving in the Netherlands enhanced their sense of stability with regards to their lives in the Netherlands. By arranging a contract for their girlfriends upon arrival, and making use of their strategic agency, both convinced their girlfriends to move. Social relationships are important in creating a sense of embeddedness for migrant workers (Ryan, 2018). An important type of relationship for the migration trajectories of migrant workers is a romantic relationship (Ryan, 2018; Ryan, 2015). Therefore, having a girlfriend who is living in the same country is an important aspect of the growing stage for migrant workers. By making use of their strategic agency, Kacper and Marek consciously created a situation that made it easier for their girlfriends to decide to move to the Netherlands.

Next to this, the creation of new social relationships is important to create a sense of embeddedness. To create some social relationships, one has to enter an unfamiliar environment, while other relationships emerge for example on the work floor. During one of his shifts at a different company, Kaz met his current wife. While this is important for his sense of embeddedness – they bought a home together and have a dog – this was less based on a conscious decision and more on coincidence. Other colleagues met most of their friends at work or in their shared house. When I asked Zofia about her social life before COVID, she explained that she often went to events organized for Polish people in Zwijndrecht. The relationships formed through these events, or the mere act of regularly attending these events, enhance the sense of stability the migrant workers experience and is therefore important for embeddedness. For me, this example highlights how I am an outsider to some aspects of Dutch society. Until that conversation, I had never been aware that events and parties exist specifically for migrant workers. As if my colleagues and I normally live in parallel societies while being in the same place. While I initially thought such parties might be a symptom showing that migrant workers did not want to fully assimilate into Dutch society because they might return to Poland in the near future, the opposite is true. Such events are important in creating a sense of embeddedness, and therefore are of value, especially to those who decided to stay in the Netherlands for a longer period

of time. Through these events, new relationships are formed, and migrant workers surround themselves with people sharing similar experiences. The trend of surrounding oneself with other migrant workers is found more often among Polish migrant workers (Nijhoff, 2017; Ryan, 2010). In order to feel at home somewhere, it is important to surround oneself with people that share similar experiences, as it is through these interactions that a sense of belonging is created.

An important aspect in the growing stage for migrant workers is thus the level of adaptation of their social networks. On the one hand, this can imply others adjusting to the reality of their loved ones having moved abroad to work – and in the case of romantic relationships eventually moving to be reunited. On the other hand, this can imply the creation of new social relationships.

Living situation

The living situation of migrant workers is important to create a sense of embeddedness. Not only can new friendships form through the sharing of a house, but having a safe environment is important for a sense of stability. After having adjusted to the realities of living in shared houses with colleagues during the sprouting stage, the growing stage is about creating a stable living situation. Having to constantly move between houses, might not sound advantageous for creating a sense of embeddedness, for some migrant workers the opposite is true.

Actually, I have, you know, one suitcase. So, if I go to Poland, I just take all my stuff. And when I come back here, I just [...] come to the new room, take of all clothes, and start again a new life in a new house [laughing] (Interview Kaz, 23-11-2021).

For Kaz, before being in a serious relationship, the flexibility of living in Covebo houses was important for him. Because of the flexibility, he could easily visit his family, and when coming back start a new experience of living in the Netherlands. This feeling was caused by the new environment in which he found himself each time. While stability might appear essential in creating a sense of embeddedness, a level of flexibility might thus actually be preferred by some migrant workers. However, this is dependent on other factors, such as being in a relationship. After having met his girlfriend, Kaz found that the flexibility no longer fitted their needs as a couple. Almost all my colleagues that are in relationships started living together in the houses provided to them by the employment agency. This was the first step before finding a private apartment. Zofia, Marek, Kaz and Kacper and Roza all live together with their partner. Zofia and Kaz bought a house for this, Marek is renting a private apartment with his girlfriend, and Kacper and Roza rent a room in a Covebo house. While Kacper and Roza's living situation might appear to fit more with tactic agency at first glance, I argue otherwise. This will be discussed in the next section. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at Marek, Zofia, and Kaz's paths as their current living situations fit more with Datta et al.'s (2007) traditional understanding of strategic agency.

Where Marek already was in a relationship when moving to the Netherlands, Kaz met his girlfriend when working in the Netherlands. As both he and his girlfriend lived in Covebo houses, they quickly decided to move in with each other. Soon, the circumstances of living in a Covebo house no longer fit their needs and therefore, they decided to find a private apartment. This decision was made consciously, since they wanted more stability. Fitting with their aspirations of creating stability in the Netherlands, this search for private housing is an example of strategic agency. For Zofia, the process looked similar. Whereas Zofia and her boyfriend first rented an apartment, Kaz directly bought an apartment together with his girlfriend.

Marek moved to a private house before his girlfriend joined him in the Netherlands. After some years of enjoying the sense of freedom and flexibility of living in a Covebo house, he decided to find an

apartment for himself and a befriended colleague. This is a sign of a certain level of embeddedness, as it symbolises an increase of this same level of embeddedness. During his time in the Netherlands, Marek formed new relationships that were solid enough to start living together in a private house. Next to that, this private house provided him with more stability and thus a higher level of embeddedness. After a few years, his friend moved out of the apartment, and Marek's girlfriend joined him. Subsequently, his life in the Netherlands grew more stable, and his sense of embeddedness was enhanced. For Marek, it was essential that his girlfriend moved to the Netherlands in order for him to start building a future here. "Of course, I think about the future. But I think that the future in Poland is worse. Here, I see a good future [...] In Poland, I do not. Here, I can grow" (Marek interview, 19-11-2021).

After being adjusted to living apart, the move to be with Marek shows how social networks can adapt to fit with his aspirations. Marek's story shows two instances of strategic agency enabling him to come closer to reaching his future dream of creating a stable life in the Netherlands. Stability can be intrinsic to create a sense of embeddedness: as it can make a difference between merely working in the Netherlands and having a life in the Netherlands. Creating a higher level of stability can depend on other factors outside of the living situation.

Creating stability

The processes in the growing stage that follow the traditional definition of strategic agency can be understood as providing the migrant workers with a certain level of stability. Getting a more secure contract, a higher salary, finding a private house, and having a social circle close to you are important factors in this. Stability can be a determining factor for migrant workers in deciding to remain working in the Netherlands year after year (Friberg, 2012). Factors that create a sense of stability for migrant workers are thus important in attaining a level of embeddedness. Friberg (2012) mostly focusses on the financial stability work can provide. Again, the importance of non-economic factors in this needs to be acknowledged. Stability can be connected to less tangible things; it can even be experienced as a sensation by migrant workers. "Here I have more *freedom* you know [...] I stayed here because of that. For the good life; not always looking for money, but a little bit easier life" (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

Living and working in the Netherlands provides Marek with a sense of freedom. In the Netherlands, he can experience stability due to his job and income. Even though the work at Florensis is unskilled labour and he finished culinary school in Poland, he experiences more stability and a sense of freedom through his current job. This shows that the traditional understanding of upward mobility is inadequate, as it does not incorporate the importance of such experiences. Moving to the Netherlands for unskilled labour and a precarious contract would be considered downward mobility (Zampoukos, 2018). However, Marek experiences it as a form of upward mobility as it provides him with a sensation of freedom and stability. Showing how important it is to be mindful of the experiences of migrant workers when valuing their actions.

While a certain sensation or emotion is difficult to witness from an outsider's perspective, other factors that are evidence of a certain sense of stability can be observed from a distance. For example, some participants had pets that they bought after some years of staying in the Netherlands. Zofia and her boyfriend bought a cat and a dog after having found private housing, Marek bought a dog together with his girlfriend after she joined him in the Netherlands, and Kaz and his girlfriend bought a dog right before moving into their own apartment. While buying a pet might seem insignificant, it can also be evidence of a stable life in the Netherlands. The participants with pets, all highlighted the dates on which they bought the pets when creating the timeline. This shows the importance that they attach to the pets. In houses of employment agencies, it is not possible to have a pet. Moving out of

the Covebo house can thus be an opportunity to buy a pet and create a more stable life in the Netherlands. Pets can be a sign of permanency as the participants with pets explained the pets kept them more grounded in the Netherlands. Going on vacation became more difficult after buying the pets, as they need to be taken care of when their owners are away from home. Even family visits can become more difficult, as it is no longer a case of simply taking the car and going. “Because now if we want to go places, we need to think what to do we do with cat, with dog” (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021). Next to that, as having a pet implies moving out of the Covebo house, it entails that the migrant workers pays rent all year, even when visiting family in Poland. The flexibility of living in a Covebo house is no longer available for them, and thus they stay in the Netherlands the majority of the year. “They [people with a private house] live over here and never go on Holiday. They always stay here. Sometimes maybe one or two weeks” (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021). Buying a pet is thus a conscious choice that enhances the level of embeddedness of migrant workers. When fitting the long-term goal of creating stability in the Netherlands, it can be seen as a traditional form of strategic agency. For both Marek and Kaz this was the case. For Roza the decision was still based on strategic agency, however, it deserves a more detailed explanation.

7.3. Broadening the concept of strategic agency

While previous examples showcase the more traditional – and perhaps straightforward – form of strategic agency, this type of agency can also occur in a less straightforward manner. In order to value these ‘less straightforward’ examples as strategic agency, and not as tactic agency, it is important to understand the context in which these actions occurred. For Datta et al. (2007) the ability to strategize is connected to actions focussed on the long-term. To be able to do this, coping tactics focussed on surviving should not be needed. These coping tactics, or tactic agency, are concerned with *having* to react on the short-term to ensure survival (Datta et al., 2007). In this understanding, attaining a promotion and eventually a permanent contract at Florensis would be evidence of strategic agency. When fitting with the long-term plan of a migrant worker, this is a form of strategic agency. However, it is not the only route migrant workers can take in attempts to achieving their aspirations. As long-term goals differ, so do the preferred routes of reaching them.

I always think about Holland as the place where I want to make [...] money. I never think Holland is the place where I will live. When I make the money [...] I don't think okay I can buy a piece of land in Holland (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021).

Kacper has a clear dream that he works towards: move into the house that he is building in Poland together with Roza. He sees the Netherlands as a place to make money, as a means to his ends. To achieve their goal, Kacper and Roza make choices that do not fit the traditional understanding of strategic agency. When discussing the possibilities of promotion with the distribution coordinators at Florensis, he surprised the coordinators by saying no. “And that was also surprise for *them*, why not. And I say I don't want to spend here all my life. And also, the money they give me, [...] I got [...] more on Covebo. So why should I do it.” (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021). The flexibility of the Covebo contract fits their needs better: Kacper and Roza mostly work night shifts and weekend shifts. Under the Covebo contract, these shifts are paid almost double compared to week shifts during the day. By working these shifts, Kacper and Roza can earn more money rapidly, and therefore, move back to Poland more quickly. While the uncertainty and instability that are paired with their contracts and the shifts they work on might appear as a form of tactic agency, it is actually a conscious decision based on their dream. Therefore, Kacper and Roza's story is a good example of the importance of broadening the definition of strategic agency. They live together, and both work night shifts, meaning that as a couple they have some level of stability as both have a different day-and-night rhythm than what is perceived as normal. For Kaz, working weekend shifts while having a girlfriend, was one of the reasons he wanted to have a contract at Florensis. This stability, however, would mean a decrease in salary for

Kacper and Roza as almost only Covebo employees work during night shifts. Therefore, not being able to decline the offer of a permanent contract at Florensis would have been a form of tactic agency for Kacper, while remaining fixed with regards to his Covebo contract is a sign of strategic agency.

When valuing the actions of someone else, living in a different context than one is familiar with, it is important to understand the context and the implications of certain choices of the lives in the individuals one is studying. Choices made by migrant workers are based on their aspirations, but at times are valued through the experiences of the researcher. The more stringent definition that Datta et al. (2007) hold about strategic agency is problematic as it leaves insufficient space for interpreting the context in which actions occurred. Having to move to a different country in order to earn a reasonable amount of money, while previous education might not be valued properly, might not be the preferred situation in which we *like* to find ourselves. However, this is the reality of migrant workers, and their experiences are based on this reality. While something might not be preferable for one, it might be preferable for the one actually living in that reality. By being open to understanding the context, and putting the experiences of migrant workers in perspective, it becomes possible to see and understand this reality.

When interpreting the trajectories of migrant workers, it must be noted that most migrant workers are young. Shortly after finishing their education, my colleagues and participants left their homes. These young migrant workers start building a life in the Netherlands, but just like more young people, they are unsure of what they are doing or want to be doing in the future. This coincides with the idea of *searchers* of Eade, Drinkwater, and Garapich (2006). Searchers are young migrants, often without a long-term plan. The term searchers does not implicate the quest for something, but more the absence of a clear goal towards which these young people are working. As this is intricate to deliberate indeterminacy, this is part of their strategy, albeit unconsciously.

We are more go with the flow kind of people. We are more like; okay what now. We don't plan ever. Even if we go on vacations, we don't prepare. We just go and see what is going to happen (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021).

This quote shows that most choices made by Zofia and her boyfriend fitting the growing stage were not made purposely to fit their long-term plans. Choices like getting pets and buying a house were made because they felt good at that time, rather than being based on conscious deliberation of what fitted their long-term plans best. Therefore, the choices appear not to fit the strategic agency category. However, the choices were neither based on a necessity to act in a certain way. Both actions can thus not be considered as tactic agency. Attempting to fit each choice in an either/or category neglects the human experience of migrant workers. Not every action is either consciously based on a future dream or based on the inability to act on this long-term plan. Basing actions on short-term desires does not necessarily imply an inability to act on long-term desires. It can simply be a way of reaching those short-term desires. Not having a long-term plan fits the strategy of deliberate indeterminacy that is often found with migrant workers (Eade, Drinkwater, & Garapich, 2006). Because of the young age of my participants, long-term plans might not be drawn out precisely. Flexibility might thus in fact be a strategy as it enables migrant workers to base decisions on short-term desires which they might value more. Understanding the context in which migrant workers make certain decisions highlights the difficulty of categorizing actions in an either-or category. The following chapter focusses on more examples that problematize the dichotomy between strategies and tactics.

During the growing stage, migrants settle in the Netherlands. Part of this process are experiences of growing in the sense of becoming closer to reaching their aspirations through strategic agency. What is important here, is the fact that we need to broaden the understanding of what strategic agency entails. Limiting this understanding to actions focussed on traditional, economically oriented, upward mobility, excludes the importance of deliberate indeterminacy and alternative long-term goals. For

some strategies, flexibility might be preferred. Datta et al.'s (2007) understanding favours stability over flexibility. Fitting with liquid, however, flexibility might be a means to achieve long-term goals. Next to that, most migrant workers are young when arriving in the Netherlands. This group of migrants often makes use of deliberate indeterminacy, which means "to keep one's options deliberately open" (McGhee, Moreh, & Vlachantoni, 2017, p.2124). It is not uncommon for young people to have no clear future plan, and thus act more on current desires. These desires can in these instances be part of some sort of a strategy: the strategy of attempting to live life without a clear path in mind. It can thus be difficult to categorize actions as either a strategy or a tactic. The difference between the two is sometimes blurry as more factors than merely economic ones affect the experiences of migrant workers. In order to begin to understand this, it is important to look at the entire context in which actions took place. As researchers, we need to be aware of the influences of our own experiences on our interpretations of the actions of our participants. What might not be a favourable action for us, in our situation, might be a favourable action for others depending on the context. Therefore, it is important to understand the past experiences, and future goals of our participants in order to put their present actions into context. However, broadening the definition of strategic agency is not to say that there are no instances of tactic agency to be found in the experiences of migrant workers.

8. Cool cell

Some plants stay in the cool cell before being prepared to go on transport. This occurs when the plants are growing too fast for their transportation schedule. In the cool cells, the temperatures are low, slowing down the growth of the plants. Temporarily stopping the growing process of the plants ensures that the plants have the perfect height when being transported to their destinations. During the growing process in the greenhouses, the plants are monitored. Some are growing at the right speed, while some are put in the cool cell at some point. Depending on the type of the plant and its date of transportation, a cell with a specific temperature is chosen. This action will be referred to as *cooling*.

For migrant workers, this step of the process is about temporarily taking a step back from growing in attempting to reach future goals. In the previous chapter, various examples of strategic agency are discussed. In this chapter, instances of tactic agency are discussed: choices migrant workers felt more forced to take. These choices can differ depending on the specific context in which the migrant worker finds themselves and their aspirations.

Even though I argue it is important to broaden the understanding of strategic agency as the traditional understanding of it reflects a privileged position, this is not to say there are no instances of tactic agency to be found in the experiences of migrant workers. Tactic agency are those choices a migrant worker feels forced to take. They might eventually suit their long-term goals. However, it does not reflect their strategy or current desires. Datta et al. (2007) see instances of tactic agency as coping mechanisms: “how powerlessness affects the strategies that international labour migrants might try to develop in an often-hostile labour market and society” (Datta et al., 2007, p.409). As in accordance with Utas (2005), tactic agency focusses on the short-term. Focussing on the long-term is reserved for those holding more power, or for those instances where the social and material environments of migrant workers enable them to exert some degree of power. Tactic agency enables migrant workers to ‘get by’ but does not explicitly enable actions leading to upward mobility. While tactic agency might lead to upward mobility in some instances, this is not consciously on the side of the migrant worker. In this chapter, I will go into those instances that can be understood as tactic agency. To clarify the difference between strategic and tactic agency, some instances where my participants and colleagues appeared to make use of tactic agency, but were in fact instances of strategic agency, are discussed. After that, I will go into the instances of tactic agency. While tactic agency is not a preferred way of acting for migrant workers, it is part of their experiences: it is a way of dealing with the obstacles they are faced with. Together with the instances of strategic agency, tactic agency shows the entirety of the migrant worker’s trajectories.

8.1. The cool cell as a temporary migrant worker

During my time as a migrant worker, I did not have *cooling* experiences comparable to those of the migrant workers. This was not only due to the duration of my stay but also due to my privileged position. Hearing the stories of my colleagues who felt forced to act in a certain way at times, or could not act in a way that they desired, making it instantly clear that I was in fact an outsider. Even though I was an insider with regards to the work I was doing, my experiences are hardly comparable to those of my colleagues. Even with regards to the communication with the Covebo coordinator and the shifts I worked; I was in a privileged position. During the week, I worked around four shifts. At the beginning of the week, I would communicate the days that I would be available with the coordinator. For migrant workers, this is not possible. Even though most of them had semi-fixed working schedules, meaning they worked the same shifts every week, they were never sure of their days off. Most of them explained how on their days off, they often receive a call from the coordinator with the question to work. When asking whether this was really a question, Zofia said: “Sometimes it was after 6 p.m.

and I got a call: “can you [work]”. Well, I don’t know if this was ‘can you’ or ‘go’” (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021). This shows that, with regards to work, I decided what my week would look like, whereas the migrant workers were dependent on the coordinator for this. Hence, my privileged position.

With regards to my research and the gathering of data, I did experience some instances of *cooling*. Doing fieldwork and constantly being sensitive to my environment with regards to how I *should* act in order to be included, trusted by my colleagues, and gather data, took a lot of energy. Every day I got home from work I felt mentally drained from being in an unfamiliar environment where I not only had to adjust to the new people but had to be aware of my position as a researcher. Next to that, the fact that the work was physically tough, and I was constantly shifting between working day shifts that started at 6 a.m. and night shifts that ended at the same time made the process tiring. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was genuinely happy when I saw on the schedule that I would be working with people I did not meet before. Towards the end of my research, when I was mentally and physically tired, I would open the schedule impatiently hoping to see some familiar names. This had nothing to do with my colleagues themselves, but with the effect that doing fieldwork had on me. Because of my mental state, during some shifts, I would decide not to wear the researcher hat and be either more withdrawn or focus more on having conversations about the interests of my colleagues than their migration journeys. In the instances where I would decide to be more withdrawn, this was because all colleagues I would be working with that day would be Polish and it would be difficult to communicate with them. Because of my tiredness, I would thus at times put my research partially on hold by not being constantly focussed on gathering data. However, I would still be working and having chit-chat with colleagues. With that, I was still building trust in order to gather relevant data in the future. This example therefore also shows that even though some actions might not fit the long-term plan, eventually, they can still help to achieve that same long-term plan. This tendency can also be found in the lives of migrant workers.

8.2. The cool cell as a part of the experiences of migrant workers

While in some instances, migrant workers can consciously pursue their desires or long-term goals, in other instances this might not be the case. Or at least, might not *appear* to be the case. Just as flowers cease to grow in the cool cell, the same can be said of parts of the trajectories of migrant workers. Fortunately, for some migrant workers, this is a temporary phase after which they can proceed with pursuing their dreams. However, this is not a smooth trajectory for every migrant, and some need to seriously change their strategies.

As said before, the migration stories of some migrant workers are cut short during, or shortly after their first season. One of the reasons for this is because they arrive on a temporary contract for the peak season, and after the season has ended there is simply no more work for them. Often, migrant workers are unaware of their limited stay and believe they can work for an entire year.

That is difficult [...] to find people only for the season. Covebo cannot say: “okay we have a job for you but only for three months, and then we have to look for another job or send you back” (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021).

Because of their return to Poland, this group of migrant workers experience *cooling*. After having returned to Poland, they must wait for a call from Covebo to return.

“You can go back to Poland and if we need you, we can call.” So, I go for *vacantia* [holidays] six or seven weeks, and I think nobody calls me. And then the Covebo coordinator calls me. And I’m back (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021).

For Pawel, the migration trajectory was merely put on hold temporarily. After a return to Poland, the employment agency contacted him with a request to return to the Netherlands. This is not uncommon. Shortly after returning, they can pursue their aspirations again by working in the Netherlands. For others, however, this phone call does not occur. This group of migrant workers returns to Poland and has to try a different strategy to reach their goals. Some other migrants might not even make it through their first season. A reason for this can be that the employment agency decides to terminate the contract. If the employment agency is unable or unwilling to find a new job, the migrant worker must return to Poland in just a few days. “You get [...] two or three days and they find you a different job [...] or [...] house. If they don’t find a different job or house, you have to go back to Poland” (Interview Kacper, 8-11-2021). In just three days, these migrant workers must return home, which requires a significant amount of flexibility from them. In a short period of time, they are confronted with the fact that they cannot act in accordance with their aspirations and need to readjust their plans. After having arrived back in Poland, this group of migrant workers needs to find a different way of reaching their goals. This phase of figuring out what to do next can also be considered part of the *cooling* process.

8.3. Tactic agency as cool cell experiences

Cooling also occurs for those migrant workers that remain employed in the Netherlands. Instances of *cooling* are experienced by migrant workers as standing still unwillingly, or as a setback. Where strategic agency might look different depending on the context in which a particular migrant worker finds itself, the same holds true for instances of *cooling* where the migrant worker resorts to tactic agency. To highlight this, examples are first shown that might appear to be an instance of *cooling* but are not experienced as such by the migrant worker.

While this thesis mostly focusses on migrant workers and their experiences in the Netherlands, it should be noted that for some migrant workers their move would fit the category of tactic agency more. My participants, and most of my colleagues, consciously chose to move to the Netherlands for different reasons. They were thus perusing a goal when making the move. However, this is not the case for everyone. Marek discussed the situation of his brother, who moved to the Netherlands to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. He lost his job as a truck driver in Poland and was forced to look for a job outside of Poland and move away from his family.

He was here for three months. The big corona crisis arrived and [...] he lost his job [...] He comes to another company, all the way in Friesland [...] But even though he was in the Netherlands, he was always looking for a job in Poland (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

Contrary to other examples discussed in this thesis, the move toward the Netherlands is an example of tactic agency, while the move back to Poland is an example of strategic agency. By moving back to Poland and working there, Marek’s brother pursues his long-term goal again.

Working environment

The definition of tactic agency in the working environment can vary depending on the circumstances. Datta et al. (2007), consider tactic agency as a coping mechanism forcing one to accept a lower-paying job, or a job under difficult circumstances. In essence, tactic agency forces migrants to opt for instability such as temporary contracts, or self-employment (MacKenzie & Forde, 2009; Vershinina et al., 2018). By looking at the power position of the migrant worker in a particular situation, and the long-term goals, it can become possible to distinguish a tactic from a strategy. In the work environment power disparities are often experienced by employees vis-à-vis their employers. To understand the power relation between migrant workers and their employers, Van Ostaijen, Reeger,

and Zelano created a typology of four “labour capital relationships” (p.6). According to them, migrant workers mostly experience greedy and exploitative relationships (Van Ostaijen, Reeger, & Zelano, 2017). These relationships are characterized by a low degree of power at the employee level, while their value of work is either valued properly or improperly. Both relationships lead to instances of tactic agency according to Datta et al. (2007) as a lack of power implies tactic agency. However, Van Ostaijen, Reeger, and Zelano (2017) argue that as agency is relational, these types of relationships are reproduced not only by the employer but also by the employee. Migrant workers thus have some influence on how they interact with their surroundings and are thus co-creators of their experienced reality. While the power disparity between the migrant worker and their employer might be undeniably present, we still need to consider the long-term goals of the migrant workers before determining something to be a coping tactic.

The first example is a complicated story. Marek worked as a chef in Poland before moving to the Netherlands. His move to the Netherlands was part of his strategy to earn money before moving back to Poland and continuing his career as a chef. This goal changed during his stay in the Netherlands, and currently, he is not planning on moving back to Poland in the coming years. At Florensis, he has made considerable steps toward his goals. However, during the interview he also discussed the fact that his big passion remains cooking and he applied for a vacancy for a chef at a restaurant in the Netherlands as well.

Of course, I have sent out some application letters to restaurants here [...] But then I came to the first interview and I did not speak one word Dutch. That’s why they said: “When you can speak Dutch well, we have a job for you” (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

Because of his language skills, he was rejected at the time. In this instance, working at Florensis can be seen as an example of tactic agency: Due to his position as a migrant worker, he is not able to work in the sector he desires. Despite this, staying at Florensis provided Marek with a level of stability that allows him to strategize towards his long-term goal. Nevertheless, he mentioned his dream is to open a restaurant. By staying at Florensis Marek gained autonomy that might enable him to achieve this goal in the future. While working at Florensis is an example of tactic agency, it can also be seen as an example of strategic agency, as it enables Marek to work towards his dream. Showing the difficulty with seeing strategies and tactics as an either-or category.

While his rejection at the restaurant forced Marek to stay at Florensis, he used his strategic agency to navigate his journey at Florensis, which positively influenced his trajectory within the company. Of course, this is not the case for every migrant worker. Kaz and Zofia were confronted with their less powerful position in Florensis, which forced them to change their desired trajectories within the company. From the beginning, Kaz worked at distribution during the day. Despite him working there for several years and his desire to become *voorman*, he did not receive a promotion. “Distribution was the only *afdeling* [department] with the same *voorman* the whole time [...] When I start here in 2013, *he*³ was already *voorman*. So, it was not possible to take his place” (Interview Kaz, 23-11-2021). This example shows that Kaz was unable to strategize his trajectory within the company, even though this was due to the fact that there was simply no room for a second *voorman*. Having a less powerful position, Kaz was dependent on whether a position would open before gaining more stability. Kaz staying a regular worker is an example of tactic agency, while it also led him to find ways to exert strategic agency and work towards his long-term goal.

Where Kaz’s search for a permanent contract at Florensis succeeded after experiencing difficulty to attain a promotion as a Covebo worker, this is where Zofia experiences the inability to strategize and has to resort to tactics. Even though Zofia and her boyfriend do not have a solid future plan, the fact

³ Name omitted for anonymity purposes

that he has a permanent contract and they bought a house and pets, shows that they have created a more stable life. However, Zofia still works for Covebo despite working at Florensis for many years. “I asked, but it is not possible for me to get a Florensis contract now” (Informal conversation Zofia, 07-10-2022). Zofia thus experiences difficulty in her efforts to attain a permanent contract at Florensis, forcing her to use tactics in her trajectory at Florensis. While working for Covebo, she has managed to create a level of stability for herself that other Covebo workers might not experience. She exclusively works for Florensis and no longer works shifts at other companies. Next to that, she was one of the only colleagues working with a Covebo contract that expressed she had a relatively stable work schedule. She usually only works five days during the seasons, and almost only on distribution day shift. This example shows the difference between tactics and strategies. Where a strategy is focussed on the long-term, tactics focus more on the short-term. Creating stability does not enable her to quickly attain a promotion. However, it does enable her to live a more stable life. Therefore, the above examples also show how tactics can be used to strategize, problematizing the tactic-strategy dichotomy.

Living situation

When looking at the difference between strategies and tactics of migrant workers, the focus is often on their work-life (Datta et al., 2007; MacKenzie & Forde, 2009). However, as the experiences of migrant workers are comprised of many different factors outside of the work environment, it is important to take these factors into account as well. One of these factors which I discussed with the participants is their living situation in the Netherlands; their household and neighbourhood (Ryan, 2018). As central factors in the experiences of migrant workers, it is important to consider instances of tactic agency in this area.

When coming to the Netherlands, migrant workers start living in houses provided to them by their employment agencies. All of my colleagues and participants had different stories about their experiences in these houses. As stated before, especially at the beginning of their trajectories, living in these houses provided the migrant workers a sense of freedom. However, this feeling ebbed away for most migrant workers after a while. Constantly having to adjust to new roommates, and even new houses several times a year costs a lot of energy. Because of this, some participants started looking for private housing despite still having a Covebo contract. Roza and Kacper still live in a Covebo house. This means that they share a single room in a house with other migrant workers. Being alone is not really an option in this situation. For some years, Roza and Kacper have been thinking about moving to a private apartment. Because of the costs and the difficulty to find an apartment due to their status as migrant workers, this has not yet succeeded. Them staying in a Covebo house is thus an example of tactic agency. Nevertheless, they attained some sense of stability in their housing situation by negotiating with Covebo. As a couple, they were able to move to a smaller house and choose their roommates. During their holidays they can leave their stuff in their room, meaning that they do not have to move to a different room or house upon arrival. Of course, this implies them having to pay rent during their holidays, but the level of stability it provides the couple is preferred by them. This shows that tactic agency can still be used to create a somewhat desirable situation.

Pawel’s moving history on the other hand does not show this ability to make somewhat effective use of tactic agency. During the interview, Pawel was unable to remember all the houses and roommates he lived with due to the fact he moved so many times. “I don’t remember, because [...] a lot of rotation” (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021). For a while now, he is unhappy with this situation, yet he could not negotiate a similar deal like Kaz and Roza. The instability outweighs the flexibility of living in Covebo houses for him for a while now, and he has been looking for private housing as well. However, what makes it more difficult to find affordable housing is the fact that he does not have a relationship and either must pay rent by himself or find a colleague with whom he can share a two-bedroom

apartment. During the interviews, the participants explained the difficulty of constantly having to move and having to adjust to new roommates. Due to the different work schedules, roommates can have, they do not know all of their roommates. Marek also talked about how he needed to be careful in the shared houses as he was afraid his roommates might take something from him. Next to that, Pawel talked about the fact that every time a new roommate arrives in the Netherlands, he must explain everything: from the work at Florensis to their communal house rules. For employment agencies, this is a convenience of having shared houses, while for the migrant workers it can take up a lot of energy of having to explain everything to new roommates a few times a year. As the living situation is important for the sense of embeddedness of migrant workers, *cooling* experiences in this domain can have a negative influence on their experiences here.

Having to exert tactic agency is part of most migrant workers' journeys. As is the case with strategic agency, it is important to be open to other factors influencing the experiences of migrant workers than merely economic ones. In certain situations, participants felt unable to act in accordance with their desires or long-term goals. Because of that, they had to exert tactic agency. In some instances, this can lead to opportunities and eventually help migrant workers in pursuing their goals. These instances problematize the dichotomy that is posed between strategies and tactics. However, in other instances, it is experienced as having to wait until a new opportunity arises. During the interviews, the participants mostly focussed on the work environment and living situation when discussing instances of tactic agency. This shows the importance of these two factors in their journeys. A stable work environment and living situation is important for their experience of embeddedness. Once again, this shows the importance of being open to non-economic factors.

9. Distribution and destination

Right before the plants leave the environment which they know so well it is time for distribution and destination. Here, the plants are collected from the different greenhouses and cells, at the different Florensis locations. They are organized according to order on trolleys and are taken to destinations throughout Europe. Even though the journey of the plants inside Florensis is over, their journeys will continue outside of it. Throughout the previous parts of the process, everything was focussed on making sure the plants would be in perfect shape right before distribution. The date of distribution – or so to say ‘end goal’ – has influenced their entire journeys at Florensis. The various stages of the plant’s journey demonstrate how the past, present, and future are connected: just as in the stories of migrant workers.

This chapter focusses on the future goals of migrant workers. Even though these goals have been discussed in some detail in the previous chapters, this chapter emphasises why it is important to look at the personal stories of migrant workers. We need to understand the past *and* the dreams the migrant workers are trying to pursue to understand the choices made by them. As Zampoukos (2018) states it, we need to look at the trajectories of migrant workers as ‘stories-so-far’. Migrant workers are not a homogenous group. Every migrant worker has their own story, its own experiences, and its own aspirations. The trajectories of migrant workers are affected by experiences throughout their lives, their future aspirations, and people residing in different places. Their stories, and experiences, are not static. Datta et al. (2007) make a clear difference between the ability to strategize and the necessity to use tactics. However, by acknowledging the complexity of the experiences of migrant workers, it becomes apparent that such distinctions are not clear-cut. What counts for one as a tactic, might be a strategy for someone else. And in some instances, tactics can lead to the fulfilment of a future dream. To show the complexity and richness of the stories of migrant workers, this chapter will zoom in on their current long-term plans. Emphasizing *current*, as these goals can change over time as well.

9.1. Distribution as a temporary migrant worker

For me, the long-term goal of working as a migrant worker was to write this thesis. My choices made during the fieldwork process were influenced by this goal, and so were my experiences. This final step of the process signified the end of my fieldwork and the start of the next step of my research process. During the last week of my fieldwork, I was preparing to interview some of my colleagues. It signified the end of my experience as a temporary migrant worker. All the experiences are part of this thesis: what I saw, the conversations I had, and how I felt. This all influenced not only the interviews with the participants but also influenced how I interpreted data.

The goal that I was working towards thus influenced my experiences in the present, but in some way also my future. Doing ethnographic fieldwork is an experience that you take with you for the rest of your life. Submerging oneself in a different environment allows one to truly look at the world around you from a different perspective. Working with the migrant workers allowed me to see a completely different side of living in the Netherlands. Seeing all the Polish license plates while on my way to a nightshift or on my way back home from it or hearing the experiences of moving to the Netherlands at the age of 18 without knowing anything about the country. It sometimes felt that my colleagues and participants lived in a different part of Dutch society that I never experienced before. They moved to the Netherlands at a young age, beginning a new life that first revolves around working and creating a new life rhythm from scratch. By working with them and building mutual trust, I gained more information and gathered a more complete understanding of their experiences. My own experiences of doing ethnographic fieldwork and being a temporary migrant worker are experiences that will influence the choices that I will make in the future.

9.2. Future aspirations migrant workers

Taking an actor-oriented long-term approach entails being open to the complexity of the different trajectories. During conversations with my colleagues and participants, I often asked relatively quickly about their future plans. Understanding this future plan allowed me to understand how they looked at their own situation and put their stories into context. It quickly became clear that this was a difficult question as it sounds like one should have a clear idea of what they want to achieve in ten years, and the steps needed to achieve this. Therefore, the question sometimes scared my colleagues. As most of my colleagues and participants are relatively young, I can understand this reaction, as I react the same when someone asks me about my aspirations. Attaining an understanding of the overall strategies and current desires of my colleagues required sensitivity. Therefore, I usually asked questions about whether they would like to attain promotion, or whether they would like to leave and be reunited with their families. By asking such questions, I got an idea of the goals of the migrant workers, without pressuring them to give a perfect step-by-step plan. What became instantly clear was the fact that all my colleagues had different plans and goals; some were clear, and some were unclear – albeit intentional or unintentional.

Clear goals

A distinction can be made between clear and unclear goals. With clear goals, I mean those goals that stretch over a few years. Usually entailing an indication of the duration of their stay, and an indication of their living and working situation in the coming years. Again, the focus here is not only on economic factors but also on factors concerning the personal lives of migrant workers. I will first discuss the stories of participants with clear goals that are focussed on staying in the Netherlands. Afterwards, I will discuss the stories of participants focussed on returning to Poland. I have made this distinction as this is a determinant factor in decisions made by the migrant workers.

Remain living in the Netherlands

While it might be the case that in a few years or decades several of colleagues and participants are still living in the Netherlands, only two of my participants were vocal about their plans to do so. Both Marek and Kaz are planning on staying in the Netherlands for a long period of time. Having the goal of staying in the Netherlands led both participants to actively look for a certain level of stability. They were the only two participants with a permanent contract at Florensis. Because of this, both are living in private housing: Marek rents an apartment with his girlfriend and Kaz bought one with his girlfriend.

Here, life is better than in Poland. It is much, much better [...] That's why we came here [...] Here, I can see a good future. That I can build on something step by step. In Poland that is not possible (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021).

While both mentioned they might move back to Poland someday, they currently wanted to stay in the Netherlands as they experienced life here as having more opportunities to build a stable future for themselves and their girlfriends. Marek is focussed on growing within Florensis. Currently, he is operator at distribution, which means that he is responsible for the functioning of the machine during the distribution shifts. He followed extra courses in order to control the machine and he can repair it in case it experiences a malfunction. In a few years, he has grown a lot within the company. "My mother told me that when I DO something, I do it from the beginning to the end. Completely" (Interview Marek, 19-11-2021). This personality trait also becomes clear when looking at his aspirations. First, he is focussed on receiving a promotion at Florensis and possibly becoming an office worker. This would entail keeping track of all orders coming in and making sure the processes within Florensis align for the plants to be finished in time. Eventually, he hopes to follow his passion again: being a chef. After having created a solid basis for himself and his family, he hopes to start his own

restaurant in the Netherlands. Marek's choices are thus informed by his plans of creating this stable basis in the Netherlands and hopefully starting his own business here.

While Kaz also plans to stay in the Netherlands for some years, his plans are less clear. "Maybe, I want to come back to Poland, but really later when I am a little bit older. Forty or fifty maybe? Everything is possible" (Interview Kaz, Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, 24-11-2021). Because of the room for change in his plans, his plans are focussed on the near future. With regards to work, he would like to grow within Florensis: Acquire some extra courses to attain more responsibilities and learn Dutch in order to create more opportunities for himself. While he wants to marry his girlfriend and start a family in the Netherlands, he currently plans to return to Poland around retirement age. While he sees the Netherlands as a place to create a stable life for himself and his family, Poland remains his home.

What is interesting about their stories, is that both participants are planning on staying and thus creating a level of stability in the Netherlands. Part of this is the fact that both have bought a dog with their girlfriends. While there is currently not a lot of research done about the importance of pets, and the subject is also not discussed in the work of Ryan (2018), I want to argue that this reflects a certain level of embeddedness. A pet reduces the flexibility of its owner; they have to be taken care of and moving becomes more difficult. Therefore, I found having a pet to be a good indicator of whether someone is planning on staying in the Netherlands for a longer period of time.

Return to Poland in the near future

Having a clear goal does not necessarily imply a craving for stability. For participants and colleagues focussing on going back to Poland, flexibility was preferred as it enables them to reach their goals. During my shifts, I spoke to multiple colleagues that saw the Netherlands merely as a place to earn money after which they wanted to return home. And this return would preferably occur sooner rather than later. While this is often heard when asking migrant workers that just arrived about their plans (Ryan, 2018), I also heard this from colleagues residing in the Netherlands for a longer period of time. "Business is business, right now business is good in the Netherlands, but if business is good in Poland I will go to Poland" (Informal conversation with a colleague, male 27, 28-10-2021). Having a certain level of flexibility allowed this colleague to assess each year whether he still needed to work in the Netherlands, or whether he wanted to return to Poland.

When looking at the plans of migrant workers wanting to return to Poland, the story of Kacper and Roza is exemplary. Roza moved to join Kacper in the Netherlands after having discussed that they would only stay for a limited amount of time until they finished building a house in Poland. "Kacper said please just one year and then we finish. So, in one year we finish, maybe two years, we see [...] And then, go back to Poland" (Interview Roza, 8-11-2021). Currently, flexibility enables them to pursue their dream more rapidly. This is not to say, that they prefer flexibility over stability. After moving back to Poland, they are planning on starting a family and creating a business. A stable life is thus something they strive for, only not in the Netherlands. "I don't think okay, I can buy a piece of land in Holland [...] I only think, make money over there and back to Poland". Roza told me in one of our conversations during the break, that she cannot wait until she and Kacper get a pet. But that they will probably wait until they move back to Poland because that makes more sense for them. Again, this shows the role of pets in creating a stable life and a high level of embeddedness.

Unclear goals

While clear goals do not imply having a plan spanning over multiple years, there is a difference between these more short-term goals and unclear future aspirations. What can make the distinction a bit more complicated, and perhaps also redundant, is the fact that having unclear goals can be part of

a strategy. 'Deliberate indeterminacy' is a consequence of liquid migration in the new European mobility space (McGhee et al., 2017). This strategy is characterized by a "'temporary' and 'unplanned' character" (McGhee et al., 2017, p.2111). Especially the 'unplanned' part of this strategy is interesting since the 'temporary' part mostly reflects the plans of the migrant workers and not the actual duration of their stays. While Snel, Faber, and Engbersen (2015) argue that the temporary character is an intrinsic part of liquid migration, Ryan (2018) argues that most migrants arrive with the *idea* that their stay will be temporary but often end up staying for a long period of time. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the stories of those migrants with unclear goals, and how this strategy affects their decision-making.

The stories of Pawel and Zofia reflect deliberate indeterminacy most. Both participants had difficulties talking about their future goals. "We are more like 'okay, what now'. We don't plan. Ever" (Interview Zofia, 10-11-2021). Next to that, a lot of my colleagues did not have clear plans for their future and were taking it season by season. As my research focusses on young migrant workers, this is not surprising since migrant workers under the age of 30 are more likely to show high levels of deliberate indeterminacy (McGhee et al., 2017). During the interview, Pawel explained that he thought he might be returning to Poland in some years. "Haha [...] the future is very nice because this year I said two or three times: 'fuck this [...] bye, I go to Poland'" (Interview Pawel, 10-11-2021). For him, certain factors at work and his living situation were unsatisfactory. This leads to a lower level of embeddedness, meaning that he is less inclined to stay longer and more inclined to be deliberately indeterminate. The fact that making money is currently easier for him in the Netherlands, was a determining factor in deciding to stay for at least one more year.

While Zofia also showed deliberate indeterminacy, her story looks a little bit different from Pawel's. Zofia and her boyfriend have created a relatively stable life in the Netherlands. Together they have bought a house and pets. Comparing it to the stories of Kaz and Marek, one might suspect this to be part of their plan of staying in the Netherlands. However, this is not the case. Because it is not necessary to have a future plan due to the character of the EU, Zofia and her boyfriend can have a 'go with the flow' lifestyle. This indeterminacy can be due to their young age (McGhee et al., 2007). During the interviews, I got the sense that having an unclear plan not only provides the migrant workers with a certain level of freedom and flexibility, but it also enables them to circumvent certain decisions that would give them the feeling that their lives are set in stone. Comparing it to my own life, a long-term plan can be scary as it feels like you are forced in a certain direction by it, not knowing whether this is the right direction or not. Listening to the story of Zofia, I felt like we need to put their stories not only in perspective of their personal experiences. We also need to be mindful to the context of the age of the migrant workers, and the characteristics of the generation we are researching. Deliberate indeterminacy allows young migrant workers to have some time to think about what it is exactly they want to pursue. This can explain the fact that McGhee et al. (2007), found young migrant workers to show higher levels of deliberate indeterminacy.

Understanding the goals of migrant workers is important. Keep in mind that people have different goals, clear or unclear, and that those goals can change over time. Not having clear future aspirations, can be part of a strategy as well. Being deliberately indeterminate allows migrant workers to be flexible, react to current desires, and figure out what it is that they might want to work towards in the future. Understanding the future goals of migrant workers allows us to see their experiences as 'stories-so-far'. Past experiences influence the present, but future goals influence choices made in the present as well. Taking a long-term approach and being open to the entire context in which decisions are made, allows one to understand the types of agency exerted by migrant workers. Even though we live in a capitalistic system, we need to be mindful of the fact that migrant workers are more than economic beings, and therefore, we need to incorporate different factors influencing their experiences.

10. Conclusion

Even though I discussed the stories of Roza, Kacper, Zofia, Marek, Pawel, and Kaz until the last part of the process – distribution and destination – their stories are far from finished. They will experience much more instances of growing or cooling, and hopefully, all will pursue their dreams – whatever this dream might be. Even though their stories are not finished, they – and the stories of my other colleagues – enabled a better understanding of the lives of migrant workers. During this research, I looked at their stories in their entirety by seeing them as ‘stories-so-far’. This long-term, actor-oriented approach allowed me to highlight the importance of putting their stories into perspective, by taking the time to understand the entire context in which each migrant worker finds itself. Next to that, I assessed the definitions of concepts used when studying the trajectories of migrant workers. While it is acknowledged that EU enlargement has enabled a new, legal, form of migration and that this changed the specifics of the migration that is currently occurring, this has not led to a re-evaluation of concepts such as upward and downward mobility.

The main question of this thesis is: *How do the types of strategic and tactic agency used by European migrant workers fit in their overall trajectories?* To find an answer to this question, several sub-questions shaped the set-up of this thesis. These questions all focussed on different aspects of studying the trajectories of migrant workers. Seeing the stories of the migrant workers as ‘stories-so-far’ implied taking an actor-oriented long-term approach. This puts the actions of migrant workers into a much broader context of their experiences. An integral part of this framework is the link between the past, present, and future. This sparked one of the sub-questions about the importance of the overall strategies of migrant workers, or their long-term goal(s). What is meant by the fact that the past, present, and future are related, is that the experiences and choices made by migrant workers are influenced by their past experiences and future aspirations. This shows the importance of understanding the overall strategies of migrant workers, or to put it more precisely, to understand towards what goals they are working. However, not all migrant workers have an easily discernible long-term goal. Some of my participants had clear strategies; building a house in Poland or aiming for a promotion within the company in which they currently worked. For other participants, however, this was not the case. As I studied young migrant workers, this is not surprising as deliberate indeterminacy is a commonly found strategy (McGhee et al., 2017). The participants following this strategy tended to act more on current desires. However, this is not to say that their strategy is less important than the strategies of those migrant workers with a clear goal. The strategies of migrant workers influence how they interpret their social and material environment and how they consequently try to navigate this environment. Therefore, in order to recognise what type of agency migrant workers use, it is important to understand their future goals, and with that their overall strategies. As their future goals influence what the preferred action is, and what a coping tactic would be. The preferred action brings the migrant workers one step closer to their future goals. However, as deliberate indeterminacy is a recognized strategy, it becomes more difficult to discern a tactic from a strategy.

How migrant workers navigate and interact with their social and material environments is based on the type of agency they exert. As the name implies, strategic agency allows migrant workers to pursue their overall strategies. The goal towards which migrants work is informed by the motivation to migrate. As these motivations can be based on non-economic factors, there is a need to incorporate these factors when studying the trajectories of migrant workers. Migrant workers can have goals that are different from mere economic ones: they might be looking for adventure, a sense of freedom, or they might be aiming to move back to Poland or not at all. These overall strategies thus inform what a preferred mode of action is in a certain instance. If a migrant worker follows this mode of action, it is a sign of strategic agency. However, if a migrant worker cannot act in accordance with its overall strategy, they resort to tactic agency. Where Datta et al. (2007) look at whether a migrant worker is

able to achieve upward mobility – in a purely economic sense – by acting in a certain way, I argue that it is more important to look at the *experience* of the migrant worker itself. Upward mobility should not only be determined based on economic considerations. Even though migrant workers move abroad to earn money, they are more than mere economic beings. Upward mobility should include the desires and goals of the migrant workers themselves: whether something constitutes upward mobility for them.

To illustrate this, we can look at the example of attaining a permanent contract at the company where the migrant workers are employed instead of their flexible contracts at the employment agency. In Datta et al.'s (2007) view, not attaining a permanent contract is an example of tactic agency. Because of the less powerful position *vis-à-vis* their employers, migrant workers are not able to achieve a certain level of stability or upward mobility. However, one must look at the situation from the perspective of the migrant worker. For example, Kacper is more content with the flexible contract, as this allows him to attain his long-term goal quicker. It is thus part of his overall strategy. Unfortunately, this is not the case for everyone. Even though Zofia's overall strategy can best be described as deliberately indeterminant, she mentioned the fact that she would like a permanent contract. Even though her strategy is more based on current desires than future goals, she and her boyfriend have created a relatively stable life in the Netherlands. For her, a permanent contract would suit this situation best. As this is not the case, she resorts to tactic agency. By focussing on the short-term, she created some sort of stability in accordance with the employment agency. Showing how accumulative tactics can contribute to an overall strategy.

The strategy of deliberate indeterminacy that described the situation of both Zofia and Pawel best, is central in the third sub-question. By keeping the options open on purpose, this strategy allows migrant workers to be flexible. As said before, due to the constant changes the migrants are confronted with due to liquid modernity, flexibility can be a useful strategy. By keeping one's options purposely open, it becomes possible to quickly change strategies. Next to that, since EU enlargement has made it possible to easily move between member states, it has become possible to remain flexible as a migrant worker. It is not necessary to get a workers' permit or a visa. This means that EU regulations *allow* migrant workers to keep their options open and assess each year whether they like to stay. However, this is not to say that for each migrant worker, flexibility is a preferred strategy in navigating their lives in the Netherlands. Migrant workers with a clear future goal might prefer stability over flexibility, depending on their future aspirations. Even those with an unclear goal – by being deliberately indeterminant – might prefer stability over flexibility. While the strategy of deliberate indeterminacy *allows* migrant workers to be flexible and to easily change strategies, does not imply that the migrant workers make use of this possibility. For example, Zofia and her boyfriend have an unclear future goal and like to 'go with the flow'. However, their trajectories show that they have deliberately chosen for stability over the past year. While they are uncertain about whether they will stay in the Netherlands or not, they are creating a stable basis for themselves. Buying a house, having pets, and having a permanent contract all make moving a more difficult process. Nevertheless, the feeling of being flexible is important for the couple.

Next to the fact that flexibility can be a preferred strategy, it can also be used to deal with obstacles. In a situation where migrant workers must resort to tactic agency, flexibility allows them to use different tactics to create a somewhat better situation for themselves. Roza and Kacper's housing situation has changed over the past years. Even though both *prefer* private housing, they have not managed to find suitable housing and are still making use of the houses provided to them by the employment agency. In this situation, they have not made use of strategic agency. By smartly making use of the tactics, the couple has been able to create a living situation that somewhat fits their needs. By being flexible and reacting to the obstacles and opportunities they were presented with, they could negotiate their current living situation with the employment agency. They are living in the same house, can keep their room while on vacation, and are living with the same roommates all year round.

The difference here between strategic agency and tactic agency is the fact that the tactics are focussed on the short-term. However, this example also shows that some actions do not fit merely one of the two categories as the accumulative tactics fit the overall strategy of the couple.

Again, while flexibility is an important part of the strategies for navigating the lives in the Netherlands, it is not a preferred strategy for all migrant workers. Some migrant workers might prefer stability. For those migrant workers that make use of flexibility as a strategy, it is not to say that quickly reacting to what is happening is always part of their strategies. While flexibility *can* be part of a strategy, it can also be used in a situation where migrant workers resort to tactic agency. In some situations, migrant workers can strategically make use of different tactics, and in doing so continue to pursue their aspirations.

10.1. Strategic and tactic agency in overall strategies

After having dissected the most important aspects of the 'stories-so-far' framework, I will now take a closer look at the main research question. In order to provide an answer to this question, it is important to look at overall strategies. Overall strategies are the future goals or dreams of migrant workers. Sometimes, they are clear, but some migrant workers have unclear goals. Overall strategies thus differ per migrant worker, and it is not possible to say beforehand whether someone migrated solely based on economic considerations. Even two migrants that have migrated because of economic considerations, can work towards different goals. Next to that, goals can gradually and unconsciously change over time. Because it has become easier to migrate within the EU, migrant workers can gradually change their (initial) goals.

By looking at the overall strategy of a migrant worker, it becomes possible to understand what type of agency they used in a particular situation. As aspirations or dreams can change over time, the future goals the migrant worker had at a specific time need to be considered. This is because the goal the migrant worker had two years ago might be different from their current aspirations. Understanding the future goal is important as the present and future are related. Choices made by migrant workers are informed by the goal towards which they are working. Next to that, the choices made are informed by past experiences. It is thus not possible to comprehend choices made by the migrant workers without understanding the context in which the migrant worker finds themselves: their social and material environment. How they interpret their social and material environment is not only informed by the agency and mobility of other people, ideas, and institutions, but also by their own experiences and future aspirations. By taking a long-term actor-oriented approach, it becomes possible to understand this interaction between the system and the individual and take a closer look at the type of agency that migrant workers exert.

As stated before, strategic agency is about being working towards a long-term goal. Strategies are those actions that a migrant worker consciously made, and that enabled them to come closer to reaching their goal(s). Tactic agency, however, is exerted in those instances where migrant workers could not purposefully pursue their long-term goals. However, as shown above by strategically making use of different acts of tactic agency it becomes possible for migrant workers to create a desirable situation still fitting their aspirations. Datta et al.'s (2007) distinction between strategic and tactic agency is less clear in reality. Migrant workers have different past experiences and dreams towards which they work. Because of this, their present experiences and choices made in the present can differ. There is not only one path towards a specific future goal, different routes exist for which migrant workers can opt. Therefore, the binary understanding of what constitutes strategies and tactics does not do justice to the richness of the experiences of migrant workers. Whether an action enables migrant workers to reach their goals is not so much about whether it leads to economic upward mobility. It is more about whether it leads to a situation in which migrant workers experience

some sort of upward mobility, which might be non-economical in nature. Where Datta et al. (2007) follow an economic centred understanding of the terms, it is necessary to expand this understanding beyond mere economic considerations. Due to the new European mobility space, migration does not merely occur based on economic motivations. Therefore, we need to acknowledge the importance of non-economic factors in the experiences and trajectories of migrant workers. Looking beyond the scope of economic motivations to migrate is important in understanding the entire context of the experiences of migrant workers.

Concludingly, strategic and tactic agency are important concepts in understanding the experiences of migrant workers. Strategic agency allows migrant workers to pursue their overall strategies. In those instances where migrant workers use tactic agency, they are no longer able to pursue their overall strategies in a way that they prefer. However, what is a desirable action for one, might be undesirable for someone else. To value the type of agency a migrant worker used in a particular circumstance – and whether this fits their overall strategies – it is essential to understand the entire context in which the migrant worker finds itself. By doing this, we can allow migrant workers to take some authority back over the stories that are told about them. By understanding the richness of the trajectories of migrant workers, we can begin to see the heterogeneity of their experiences.

10.2. Conclusion as a temporary migrant worker

During my research, I experienced what it entails to be a migrant worker to some extent. I have lived the hours, the atmosphere at Florensis, how colleagues interact, and I got to learn their personal stories. Next to understanding their stories, my fieldwork experience taught me two things: my privileged position as a researcher, and the delicate task we as researchers have to do justice to the stories of others. Even though I worked as a migrant worker for a month, this does not equal the experiences of my colleagues and other migrant workers. In my case, it was clear that it would last only one month, and my livelihood was not dependent on it, while for migrant workers it is their life.

During my month as a migrant worker, I struggled with the fact that I would write my thesis about the stories of others. While I see the importance of this, I felt a responsibility that my thesis would represent the perspective of the migrant workers and that I would not essentialize migrant workers as being one homogenous group. The set-up of my research allowed me to do this. Additionally, it showed me the importance of doing this; of showing different stories and being mindful of the context in which research participants find themselves.

Sometimes, I would discuss some findings of papers that I had read prior to my fieldwork about migrant workers with my participants or colleagues. Usually, I did this in order to explain why I thought it was important to understand the everyday lives of migrant workers when doing research on this group. Often, my colleagues would express that they did not fully recognize themselves in certain findings. Even though I know research is never indicative of the experiences and lives of *all* migrant workers, I did find this disturbing. Therefore, I wanted to make sure that the stories that my colleagues and participants entrusted me with would not turn into research in which they would not recognize themselves. To achieve this, I tried to look at their individual stories in their entirety.

By understanding the entire context of migrant workers' lives, it becomes possible to represent their perspective instead of representing the perspective of a researcher. Again, what might be desirable for one might be undesirable for someone else and vice versa. When looking at the experiences of migrant workers, we need to be mindful that it is *their* lives that we are discussing. Even though a course of action might not fit your view of what would be preferable as a researcher, does not directly imply that the same counts for the migrant workers themselves. To come back to the quote with which I started this thesis, we need to be aware of the fact that through research, we define others.

By defining others, we influence how they are seen and how their lives are understood. As researchers, it is up to us to make sure we do not let the privileged position influence how we define others. Our research should be guided by factors that allow our participants to define themselves. To enable them to become the meaning-giving beings that they are, also in the research field. I am grateful to all my colleagues and especially to Roza, Kacper, Zofia, Marek, Pawel, and Kaz for sharing their unique personal stories with me.

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2017), 40-47.

Appendix 1: List of interviews

No.	Date	Interviewee
I-1	8-11-2021	Kacper
I-2	8-11-2021	Roza
I-3	10-11-2021	Pawel
I-4	10-11-2021	Zofia
I-5	19-11-2021	Marek
I-6	24-11-2021	Kaz