

FLUIDITY OF BOUNDARIES

THE STORIES OF THREE POLISH MIGRANTS IN THE HAGUE



Karijn Nijhoff
Research Group Metropolitan Development
The Hague University of Applied Sciences

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Research Group Metropolitan Development
The Hague University of Applied Sciences
PO Box 13336
2101 EN The Hague, The Netherlands

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Foreword

Migration is not a new phenomenon, throughout the centuries people have moved for reasons as war, persecution, or religion. With the increase in global communication (data, goods, knowledge) there has been an increase in differences in standard of living (perceived or real), an important aspect of today's global migration flows. Labor migration has become an important part of global migration patterns.

In her earlier work Karijn Nijhoff (2013) described the migration stories of families that had settled in The Hague. She showed the importance of coincidence in these stories, where most respondents only planned to leave Poland, but did not have much planned for the steps following the departure.

Studying migrant groups gives us better insight in the complex patterns of integration and participation in an organized and regulated country as the Netherlands. Policy makers are continuously working on ways to improve the system of admittance and integration. Newcomers are searching in this web of rules, regulations, possibilities and opportunities to find a way to make a living. Flexibility, fluidity, and innovation are central in their search. And it helps to know the rules and regulations to find your way – even if the rules were meant to work in a different way.

In this booklet, the focus is on the stories of three Polish men in The Hague. The researcher, Karijn Nijhoff, has followed these men extensively and has recorded their migration stories in detail. We can read about their arrival, their experiences, their travels. We see a process of temporary and continuous, varied labor market participation. We can see a reality of different shades of gray. Integration, as defined by policy makers, can be a whole different process than the official descriptions prescribe.

The research group Metropolitan Development focuses on the experiences of inhabitants and professionals in the city of The Hague on different themes as security, youth, urban development. We aim to describe personal accounts of the daily interactions between the worlds of bureaucracies and the worlds that people experience. In this way, we want to contribute to urban debates on opportunities and barriers for inhabitants of this city. We also want to provide different departments of the University with stories and studies that can be applied to the professions.

Vincent Smit
Research Group Metropolitan Development

Introduction

This booklet contains the migration stories of three Polish men: Szymon, Tomasz, and Maciej. They were willing to discuss how they left Poland more than ten years ago, and what happened to them since. Szymon and Tomasz came to the Netherlands in 2004, Maciej in 2006. The stories of the men are told within the context of historical and contemporary typologies of migrants that have been developed. Dutch integration policy is used to look at different aspects valued by national and local governments.

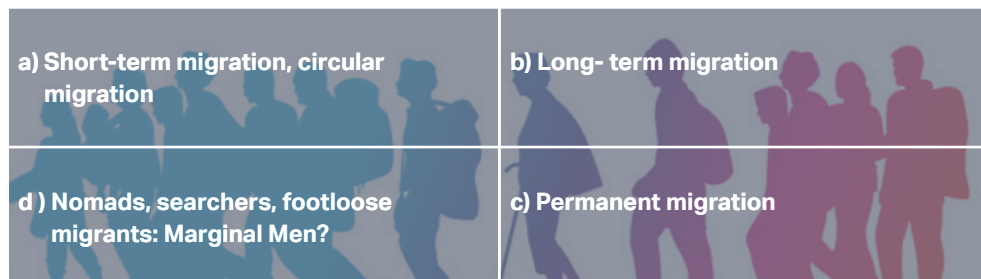
The men could be described as 'Marginal men', a term used by Robert Park in 1928. They live between countries and cultures and find their way on their own terms. Robert Park described the marginal man as: "He is the freer man, practically and theoretically. He views his relation to others with less prejudice; he submits them to more general, more objective standards, and he is not confined in his action by custom, piety, or precedents" (Park, 1928, p. 888).

Three stories are told here, and they serve as an example of the complex and intriguing ways migration and integration can take place. Their migratory careers are illustrative of many ways newcomers to Dutch and to The Hague society can adapt and participate¹.

Types of migrants

Recent typologies of intra-European Union migration are used to explore characteristics of today's Marginal Men. The inclusion of ten new member states in 2004, and two new member states in 2007, has generated classifications of Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants in the west. These different typologies are summarized in figure 1:

Figure 1: CEE migrants in the UK/the Netherlands: a schematic overview of the types



The typologies all include notions of attachments, ties, networks. Length or duration of migration, perceived or real, is also an important dimension. Today's assumption underlying the labels seems to be that all migrants want to be successful in a similar way: move to a new society, adapt to the new surroundings, acquire a stable job, and live a stable (predictable)

¹ For more information on the theoretical framework, concepts, analysis, and conclusions please contact the author at k.g.nijhoff@hhs.nl.

life. This might not be the view of the migrants themselves; the migrant might have a more opportunistic view of their migration. The migrant him- or herself might define their position in a different, more instrumental way. Grabowska-Lusinska (2008) used the term 'intentional unpredictability' to describe the motivations of migrants that do not seem to plan for a future in a certain country (of origin or destination).

This type of fluid migration, of intentional unpredictability, is possible in a setting where the institutional and legal barriers to migration are much reduced. The migration stories of three Polish migrants in The Hague, the Netherlands are used to illustrate experiences of 'marginal men' in today's society.

Integration Policies and Migratory Careers

Dutch integration measures and policies assume that there is a linear time line towards integration and assimilation. An alternative perception of integration is offered by Martiniello & Rea (2014): they use the term 'migratory career'. They define the concept to analyze the often more complex integration processes related to migration. Migratory career is built on Becker's career definition 'as a process of changing status or position' (1983) where not only structural aspects as legal status and the socio-economic path are considered but also more subjective norms as expectations of the migrant and their real-life experiences. Success is not only defined as success in the economic field but also by norms and values the migrant sets, and by norms and values of the receiving and sending society. The concept offers room for the diversity of individual migration experiences. This view on migration, integration, and participation can be linked to the concept of "Intentional unpredictability": the term is used to describe the motivations of migrants that do not seem to plan for a future in a certain country (of origin or destination). The label has been used to describe Polish migration to the west is general, especially for the start of migration (Szewczyk, 2014).

The interviews were conducted in English, in multiple sessions. Each story is introduced by a short sketch of how the respondents were contacted.

***ALL THE SAME(S)
ARE DIFFERENT***

Loesje

Szymon

We first met in 2009 when friends of his became our neighbors. I would attend some parties where he would be, he would come over for a barbeque at our place. He also would work with my husband when he needed assistance. And he would call my husband if he had a job opportunity. I would help him with his tax forms. Overall, we would help each other out with little things and the contact has remained steady but distant. In these interactions, fragments of his story emerged and a fragmented image of his migration history appeared.

If you hear the story of Szymon in an informal way, you would label him as a stereotypical young male migrant, working hard during the day, drinking in the weekends. He works the jobs he can get; he lives where ever it is cheapest. He has not learned Dutch in the years that he has been here, just some words to get by. He has been back in Poland for extended periods of time until his money ran out and he would come back to the Netherlands. His story can be labeled the story of the 'marginal migration': a man who is not connected to the Netherlands or The Hague, or to his country of origin, Poland. He is not 'integrated' if he would fill out an integration survey, he would not be seen as part of Dutch society.

Szymon's Story

I grew up in Poland, I was going to school till 20 years old, after that I moved to Italy, I stayed there for one year, after that I moved to France, to Spain, to Croatia, I traveled around, I worked in Italy, I was working in a store with shoes and one guy tells me– my sister was in Ireland and she tells me, if you want to come to me I will find you a job and you can stay in my house in Dublin. I said, ok, I come to you and then I meet one friend in Italy, a Polish guy, and he asks me if I want to come to Holland with him, then I have shorter way to Dublin. So I came with him, we go to Den Haag because he has friends here, and then I meet some people like Tymon and then I stay here, they found me work here so I called my sister and stay I won't come because I start here.

This is how Szymon started to tell his story in the first minutes of the first interview. It is typical for the way he talks: quick and in one 'go'. He does not take much time to breathe and wants to get through the story as quick as possible. Throughout the interviews, he talked about 'this guy' or 'that friend' and described people without giving much information. Similarly, he would jump from event to event. He tells his story the way he seems to experience it: fragmented with some chronology. The elements, the fragments are the important parts and the story line is less relevant.

Selling Crocodiles

Szymon started his migration history during his high school years: "I was 17 years old *and one guy told me 'you want to work for me', and I said yes, yes, and we went to Italy, sell some stuff on the streets*". The 'one guy' was his neighbor in his hometown asked him if he wanted to work for him. He went during summer break: he was still in high school so he did not move permanently. He would stay for the three months of summer break in Italy, later in France, Spain, and Croatia. He was selling toys:

They made toys. They bought a sponge, they painted a sponge, they took a wire and put a wire on the sponge and you move it, it looks like it is moving by itself, you sell the stuff at night, then you do not see the wire. [...] Production was about 25 cent in Poland and we were selling this for 5 euros. And it was a success for many years. They got a lot of money from this. [...] They were sprayed with fluorescent. And with the light from the lamp they were shining. And the people were interested, 'what is this, what is this?' Maybe I was selling 30 crocodiles per day, because they did crocodiles. The guy was saying for me it is three euros, you can have the rest, so that was 2 euro for me so I would have 60 euro a day. For three hours work and funny work. You see a lady and you move the thing around her and she jumps away like 'what is this', really funny. First in Italy and later he put his brother in Italy and we moved to France, Nice, Cannes, we were moving over the whole coast of Italy, then France, then Spain. All cities by the coast.

During these summer trips Szymon would stay at a campground with his co-worker, they had a small caravan to sleep in. He would go back for the start of school, and leave again the next year, to a different location. *"I was selling on the street. It was illegal but the police closed their eyes for this. After a couple of years they found that the wire was a little bit sharp and they wanted us to attach something on it. But I just worked with them for a few years, and then I came to Holland and started my life"*.

We talked about the steps he took before he made the move to Holland. When he finished high school he first started his own business in Poland, with the brother of the neighbor of the crocodiles, Victor. He opened a business, 'selling stuff on the market'; he borrowed money from his parents. They started in their home town but quickly moved the business to Cracow, his friend had family there. *"Because where I was living it was full of everything – because I live close to Warsaw and the stuff comes in through Warsaw. From a big Chinese company and we move to the south of Poland for a year"*. The business was not as successful as Szymon had hoped for and *"I meet my friend, I meet one guy, and I start to drink with him and he was my good friend. And he moved to Italy and we moved to Italy too."* But before he moved to Italy, he first went to France to sell crocodiles on the beach. He made a quick career change in France: *"So I was selling these crocodiles in a Lunapark. And one guy he said, are you Polish, and I said yes and he asked if I wanted to work there. We want a Polish guy, and I said yes. And so I stopped working for the crocodiles and I go to work in the Lunapark"*. He did that job for one month where he got paid 50 euro for three hours – enough to live off.

He met up in the south of Italy with his friend from Cracow, Leonek. He took a few crocodiles with him to sell and worked in the storage room of a shoe store. At first he slept on the beach:

In the beginning I was living outside, I was living on the street until the guy [his employer] gave me a house. I was eating because my friend was working in a restaurant, I would drink in the bar with my friend till they would close the bar at 6am and then I would go to the beach and sleep there. I would find a place close to the cemetery, nobody would complain. Never any problems.

He could leave his bag with clothes in a friend's car. He could move into a house owned by his employer: *"He gave me the house, everything. I was living for free then. But there were a lot of mice. [...] So one day I was at home for the siesta and I woke up and saw like 20 mice on the kitchen table. The money was shit, the house was shit so then I moved here [to the Netherlands]"*. He was paid a 100 euro a week, *"I spend my money every weekend in discotheques every Friday, Saturday. And then I was without cigarettes, without food. But the guy he did not pay me enough so he would get me breakfast or something"*. He knew many Polish people there; they mainly worked in the market or for restaurants. Wages were low in the south of Italy but the cost of living was also very low.

Moving to the Netherlands

Because of the low wages and the bad housing, Szymon wanted to move. He had a sister living in Dublin, Ireland who told him she could find him a factory job and invited him to come over. He met a guy in Italy:

Yah, I meet Pawel. I see this guy one hour. I never met him, I was working with other Polish guy. And I said I want to move from here, it is not good for me, the money is bad, I don't like. And he says, this one guy is going to Holland, do you want to go with him? Maybe you can go together. So I say why not. [...] We make an appointment after one week I see this guy maybe one half hour and after one week we go together. He has friends in Holland, I could go with him, and later I could go to Ireland. [...] Got out at Hollands Spoor² and we went to his friend's house. And we did not have money for food. So I got a sofi-number³ and a bank account. So I could get phones, if you have a bank account you can buy phones. So I took maybe four telephones, then I sell and then I have a 1000 euro. It was different back then, one day you could get different phones, for different companies, for free. You have a subscription but you never pay that, I never paid for one bill. As soon as they were blocked I would throw the card away and sell the phone. [...] My sofi-number is from 2004 so it was around then.

² One of the two main railway stations in The Hague

³ Dutch social security number

He explained that it was really easy to get a social security number:

I was with a guy and he, at the belastingdienst⁴ in front of Hollands Spoor, we made an appointment and after one week I went there. I did not even speak English then, my friend did that. I don't know how he did that for me, he talked to the woman. I don't know. Even now you need some type of paper, you need a permit from the job now. Then he just said I worked for an uitzendbureau⁵ and I gave the name of some uitzendbureau and they gave me the sofi-number.

He could stay in a house with friends of the guy he left Italy with, and he supported himself by stealing food and drink. After two weeks he met Tymon:

I was walking on the street and I steal some stuff, some food, you know. And I meet Tymon in the street, he was walking his dog. We talked and we drank, I stole some wine. And he asked me if I wanted to go with him to a house, and he put me in a house and I asked if I could sleep there. They said yeah, yeah, but you have to pay some money. So I say I bring some money. So at night I go get some bikes and I get some bikes, then I had a house.

He stole the bikes to sell them. He did not have a job for about half a year and would steal for a living. *"Yeah, we would go to Rotterdam, everywhere and steal some clothes. In Rotterdam, in shops. No houses. We would be with two or three friends, or I go by myself. So I steal one jacket, I sell it for 50 euro and I have food for three days or so."*

He tried to work legally, he worked for a week in the greenhouses through a temp agency but by the end of the week the owner of the agency did not pay him. When he came back later, the agency was gone. He got the address through other Polish people; they were all working for the same agency, and living in the house he moved into after he met Tymon.

With a new place to live in, he found new friends, Tymon and Old Tortilla⁶. *"Then I started stealing with Tortilla. Because he covered me, he was fat, and I could put my stuff [the motions that he could hide the stuff under the jacket of Tortilla]".* Tortilla and Tymon were working in construction⁷ but *"It was winter time, there were not so many jobs. They were all working black at the time."* His routine was *"I first ask, do you want some clothes? Do you want a jacket? OK I will bring you a jacket. There was a Polish shop near my house. We could drink beer there, one lady, she was cool, she would let us drink in the back, so you know many people that come for a drink, you meet a lot of people like that."* He would steal for people he met there but he mostly stole food and drink: *"So I have food, I have drink, I can live."* *"And then later, after a couple of months, they took me to the job with them. They would*

4 Tax office

5 Temporary employment agency

6 A nickname. His younger brother is called Young Tortilla

7 'Metsel- en voegwerk': masonry and jointing.

get bigger jobs and they would take me to help them." He stopped stealing because he got caught one time too often: *"Ja, they caught me a few times, they caught me five times and then I stopped stealing. Because then I had a court case in Amsterdam and they told me that if they would catch me one more time, I would go to jail for one month. Then I said, ok, I will stop the stealing and I will move back to Poland. And I never stole from that time."* He stopped the stealing and started working for Tymon. He did not make the move to Poland, he just said that for the court case.

Tymon was working black at the time, he started his own business not much later, and Szymon could work for him in black, making about 80 to a 100 euro a day. He would live in different houses in The Hague, always in a room by himself. They worked in The Hague for about a year and then they found a renovation job in Rotterdam where they could live in the house while fixing it. He started out as a driver for Tymon, who has no driver's license. They worked in Rotterdam for about a year as well.

Squatting in Amsterdam

Szymon's next move was to Amsterdam:

We lived together in Rotterdam for free, fixing the house. Then we went to the store and we see a group of punks and I am eating a kebab. One of them has a dog and he is coming and I give him some of the food. And the dog eats my kebab and we start talking to them. [...] Tymon was punk and they are all punks together. And they say, they are coming with five crates of beer, one of them has a birthday today, so they say you want to go to a party with us? And why not. And then we follow them and we go to the kraakpandhouse⁸. And we party there with them and we meet other people there. It was a very huge house.

This group had an address in Amsterdam that could be a squatter house; Szymon went there and joined the squatters for three years. He lived there with ten people in an old factory, outside of Amsterdam.

When we first came to the factory there was a lot of copper. It used to be [a factory with] with phone lines, there were a lot of telephones. There was anti-storm everywhere, lines, and big cables. The first three months we did cables every day, maybe we took away 5 tons of copper. Big cables, later smaller cables, maybe we made 20.000 euro from the cables. I would drive, I would take the van, with a half ton of copper, and I open the back for the guy and he says no, this copper is stolen. So I would move to another point, I speak with a different guy, in Diemen, and he says ok, I will buy, we make a deal, he pays a little lower and he buys the stolen copper. Half a ton was like 2000 euro.

He would borrow the car from one of the people in Rotterdam; they did not want to drive with that amount of stolen goods. When the copper was gone, he started a weed plantation with one of the other people that lived in the squat, Antonin. Antonin was a very good talker and approached some people at a party, asking if they wanted to invest some money. They agreed, they brought the plants, Szymon and Antonin made sure the place was set up.

We give them place, they bring the stuff and that is what we did for three years. Sitting in the house. [...] We lived there with maybe ten people. Me and my friend got the money, the others lived there for free and we give them food and drink. We had many plants. 1500 plants. It was a good time, the best time in my life that time. Because we had a lot of money. When the plants were small, we would go to Spain for one month, as the plants get bigger, we come back to Holland and we cut the plants. We then get the money, go to Italy. And we go back, and we travel. We buy cars, we buy clothes. Money for free. [...] 5000 Euro a month: 10.000 per two months. The Dutch people did everything, they would just pay us. They just bring 10.000 every time, 10.000, 13.000, 7.000, depending on the weed.

They would not have to do much work, and would sit in the house and play games. Some of the other squatters would do even less. There were three Dutch girls that would live there and had about 300 euro a month. There was an Italian man and woman and a French guy, they were selling hard drugs in Amsterdam (and using them). Besides Antonin and Szymon, there were two other Polish guys who *"did nothing. We pay their food because they are staying in our house. We buy two crates of beer every day and food."*

The squatting period ended because the owner of the factory wanted to reclaim the property. He offered them 10.000 euro to leave, which they accepted. They had heard of another property where a similar story had happened, the squatters did not accept the money and tried to stay but were evicted by court order. So they decided it was better to take the money. He moved to a different squat in Amsterdam for three months, working odd jobs but mainly spending the money he still had. Then he went to Poland for a bit and when he came back to the Netherlands he did not move into a squat: the law had changed by then and *"After the police would come, and would tell you, you broke into this house, you break this window and then you have to go to prison. And I go to jail one time because of this kraakhouse. So then I went back to renting houses, I worked for Tymon again, moved back to Den Haag."*

Moving Around

After Amsterdam, he moved to The Hague, worked for Tymon and rented a house with Tortilla. His friend Milek comes: *"He came from Poland and then he went to my friend in Gouda but my friend could not find work there for him. So I went to an uitzendbureau and I asked if they had work. They did so he started working here."* When Milek moved to The Hague, he moved into the room with Szymon, Tortilla had his own room; they also had two dogs in the apartment. Working for Tymon was good; he got paid regularly and did not have to work too hard. *"Ja, it was not bad, you know, I had a car, Tymon give me a car, he pays*

me some money, not all the time. It was not like we did not have money for food. Milek was working, he was working for six euro an hour but we always had money."

At one point, two female friends of Milek came to visit. Szymon was in Spain at the time, and when he came home, he had two girls staying in the room. They lived there for two months, tried a job picking strawberries. They quit after a few hours, and called Szymon who came to pick them up: *"They just left work and called, yah, we are in the middle of the street, can you pick us up? So I told them to take the train. 'No, no please come and get us'. So I went there and picked them up."* They did not work any other jobs, and when the mother of one of the girls came to visit, they went back to Poland with her.

Milek was working for the uitzendbureau for a few weeks and then found a job in construction. *"Milek was working with Tymon's friends, from his city. Also builders from Poland. They would always pay and pay, but in the end they did not pay him 800 euro or something. He asked for it all, they say, but they told him, next week, next week. And then his car broke down and they told him he had no job anymore because he had no car anymore."* Pretty soon after that, he went back to Poland for the winter and Szymon joined him: the masonry work he was doing for Tymon is seasonal and there are very few jobs in the wintertime.

In the summer I work, in the wintertime there is no job here. So in the wintertime I went to Poland. I stay in bed, January, February. My mother has a big house, I go upstairs, the fridge is full. And after three months I go back. And I call my friend and he asks if I am doing anything. I say nothing, and he asks do you want to work, and I say yes. So then I started to work in a pancake factory. Pancake company. I made pancakes.

The factory was in Slidrecht, a city south of Rotterdam and he lived with his friend in Gouda. It is the same friend that he first sold crocodiles with, Marcin. Marcin was a neighbor in Poland, they grew up together. When Szymon left the crocodile business, Marcin stayed. Later he was selling lighters in France, also during the summer. So when the season ended, he called Szymon and asked him if he could help him. When Marcin first came to the Netherlands he started to grow weed for another friend. This friend had been arrested for fighting in the street, drunken disorderly conduct, so Marcin took care of the plants for him. Afterwards, he started to grow his own. At the time that Szymon called him he was working in the pancake factory and found an opening for Szymon. It was his first legal job and he worked there for eight months. He went back to Poland when he had about 3-4000 euro saved up and he stayed there for half a year. He wanted something else, the work was monotonous: assembly-line pancake making. He also wanted to avoid paying a lot of taxes, so he had to leave the country for a while. He made about 17.000 euro in the eight months (after taxes) and to his surprise got another 2500 euro in taxes back a year later.

Back to The Hague

In 2012 he came back to The Hague, working odd jobs again through his network connections. He would work in landscaping through a Canadian friend and he would work as stratenmaker⁹ with Marek, a Polish friend who has his own business. He met Marek because he is a friend of Michal and Michal is a friend of Old Tortilla.

Michal is in that group of people, Young Tortilla, my friend who has a Polish shop, it is a group of people and Michal is one of them. Tymon also is a friend [of that group]. Tortilla is from the same city, from the same town as Tymon, they know each other from that town. And my friend has a Polish shop so everybody comes there, you know.

After a few weeks, he heard of a different opportunity through a friend, Lech:

I was in Poland half a year on vacation and then my one friend comes out of prison, I know this guy. And we were drinking in the street and he asked me 'where do you live now?' I say Holland. And he said, maybe I want to go to Holland, and I said you can come with me. I bring him here. He started working, he is a smart guy, and he put his name on a Polish website. There is a website that if you have no job where you can put your name and what you can do and so then you wait if there is a job for you. So he did that and they call from the raffinaderij, in Europoort¹⁰, and the need two people to work there. He starts to work there and I start to work there. I started work in September. Because for three month I did paper work, I was working during the day with Marek, but I had to do exams. I got a car and then I was working for two months. In January you have no job there, you have to wait till February, I met some people in the raffinaderij, good guys, I talked to them and they told me to talk at this shipyard when I asked them if they knew of some job.

At the time, he also was contacted by Leonek, the friend from Cracow and the south of Italy. Leonek found Szymon on facebook and asked if he could come with him. Szymon told him to bring 300 euro, he borrowed 500 euro from his mother so could pay the first month rent, without having to pay a deposit. Leonek moved in with him, but he did not last long.

He made some business of cars, to buy cars and sell them. But then he said, ok I have one woman, she is going to work for me, he called the woman, the girl, she came to Holland and we found her a job. Then he took her pin card and he had the money. Yes yes. After this, he looked on the website for work, the Polish website here, Niedzila¹¹, you know. He went to work, some heavy jobs,

⁹ Road worker, brick layer

¹⁰ Refinery in the harbor of Rotterdam

¹¹ <http://www.niedziela.nl/> People can place adds for free, there are different categories where people advertise for goods or services. The site also gives access to a different mode of transportation. There is a

some sloopwerk¹², you know, and something fell on his hand, from the ceiling, they put him in the hospital, they put him in gips¹³ and he cannot work anymore. So he went to Poland and he got 8000 euro or so [...] He sent me a photo with the money like this (shows he made a hand fan of cash), saying I love Holland.

Leonek had to start working because the girl told him after a few months she was done making money for him, she was working in the fruit industry, through a temp agency. According to Szymon, the agency was not completely legitimate, it changed names often.

We have one uitzendbureau right here, next to a Polish shop. Before there was, they changed the name also. And again, you know after months they changed the name. I don't know how they do it. They changed the name but the uitzendbureau is in the same place. And ja, they don't pay vakantiegeld¹⁴ there, it is bullshit you know, because they get it for you, but they pay straight you know, seven euro an hour so if you want to work you go there.

So Leonek brought over one girl, and when she refused to work for him anymore, he brought over another girl. She was supposed to make money for them as well, but she never did. She is Szymon's girlfriend now.

When he found the job at the refinery, he moved to a different place. He lived in Scheveningen, near the beach but did not like the landlady. Friends from the apartment in Scheveningen, Brygita and Teodor, bought and remodeled a house in a different part of town; he could rent the spare room. They needed the money and the company: *"They don't like to stay together, they want someone else there. They have maybe been together for too long."* His girlfriend went back to Poland during that time:

She went to work; she had to because she had to visit her son [in Poland, where her son lives with his father's family]. And then I check her wallet and there is a 100 euro. One of my friends he told me that you can get a ticket at the embassy. [...] You have to say that you have a kid in Poland that you have to go back. So we went to the embassy and she asked about the ticket, she said she has no money to go back, and they just bought her a ticket online and printed it for her. [...] They have to bring you back to your country. You just tell them that you live on the streets, or that you worked all day but the uitzendbureau did not pay you...

Polish company that offers door-to-door transportation for very cheap. But individuals also offer a seat in a car, or ask for a seat in a car on that website.

¹² Demolition work

¹³ Plaster; cast

¹⁴ Holiday fee, part of wages that gets payed out separately.

They did ask her a lot of questions to check her story and you do have to pay the embassy back. The ticket was about 70 euro and she has three years to pay them.

Before she left, she had an issue with a temp agency; they were not paying her the money they owed. They had to go back several times and explain that she was moving back to Poland. They finally did pay her but when she went back three months later, they remembered her name and told her she could not work there anymore. She now works for a different temp agency, in the flower industry. It is the same temp agency the other girls (Milek's friends) worked for but under a different name. While they are not fair in paying full wages, they pay 7.50 euro an hour after taxes which is a good rate for a temp agency (for work days of nine hours). *"Many Polish people work for the uitzendbureau and wait for their money. Sometimes the uitzendbureau is closed and then people stand in front of the door waiting for their money."* Most of his friends have had this happen to them.

It happens many times. You never have your money on time; sometimes you don't see the money. Depends. A Dutch guy will take you to work and they don't pay you. They don't pay the Polish guy who brings three people to work with him and then he can't pay. [...] They [the uitzendbureau] take people to work, they don't pay them and then they change the name of the uitzendbureau.

Interviewer: But this one is still there? With a different name?

They paid for Milek. Five euro or something. Also for the girls, when they came to work in the strawberries. When they don't want to pay, my friends come and tell them they have to pay.

Szymon has been working at the shipyard for three months now and he likes it. *"I did ventilation today, all day with one friend. We put a pipe up – it is a one hour job but we could take all day to do it. Talking, walking, it is a very nice job."* He is upset he has to work there through a temp agency. *"I want to start my own company because if I can, they will pay me 25 euro per hour. My friends have this, you need to be registered. They have their own companies and get a 1000 euro per week. Me, I get about half of this because I do not have my own company. Because I work for an uitzendbureau and because I am not registered."* The shipyard only employs people through these two constructions (registered self-employed or via a temp agency).

He is working there with Young Tortilla, the brother of (Old) Tortilla. When Szymon just started the job he asked him to work with him because he has a car, and that is how they came to work together. The shipyard is in a smaller village near Rotterdam¹⁵, hard to reach by public transportation. Szymon does not have a car: he bought a car before from Lech when he started the refinery job, for 200 euro. He then exchanged the car for a better one – he paid 400 euro for a car that was worth 500 euro because he also traded in his car. He drove this car for a few months but before long he had 680 euro in parking tickets on the car. It was cheaper to not claim the car back than to pay all the tickets. *"I don't have a car now, I wait. I want to get a car with Dutch license plates. The police took my car because I did not pay the*

15 Krimpen aan de IJssel

tickets, I did not pay the parking. Three parking tickets and they put me in a klem¹⁶. [...] I called them, and they told me I have to pay 680 euro. The car was 400 euro [laughs]". Young Tortilla has a family, he has a young child with his girlfriend and he has lived in the Netherlands for about 12 years. Before he worked at the shipyard, he was laying floors, especially parquet. Since he has started his own business before, he is paid differently than Szymon and earns about a 1000 euro a week at the shipyard. Old Tortilla went back to Poland: their father died not so long ago. He also had to pay back taxes but Szymon does not know the details.

He lived with the couple for three months. He moved when his girlfriend went back to Poland, he wanted to help out the people who had just spent a lot of money remodeling. But they kept on asking me to stay longer because they need the extra money. They work in the greenhouses, picking bell peppers: *"You are working six months out of the year... The government pays you for the time. Temporarily. Depending on how long you were working. When the job starts again you go back to the peppers."* After Szymon moved out, Lech moved in, he also knew the people. Szymon now lives in Scheveningen again; he rents an apartment with his girlfriend.

Settling down?

They live in an apartment they rent from a woman who owns several houses in the area. She does not ask for a deposit, which makes renting more affordable. She also accepts weekly rent payments. But there are downsides as well:

This week I already moved three times, in one week. That woman is crazy, you know. She tells you the house is rented so she puts me in a different one. And then after three days she says 'ah, this house is rented I put you in a different one again.'[...] She says it is because I did not pay deposit, you did not pay deposit that is why I move you. If you pay a deposit you can stay in one place. *You think that is true?*

I don't know. This woman is taking the psychopills you know. [...] I pay weekly all the time. But she gave me another house, in Scheveningen. Near the casino, big house. Whole house. She wants me to paint it. I don't have to pay a deposit then but I have to paint the whole house and then I can stay there. But I don't like to work after work.

He wants to move to a smaller house, a small apartment for him and his girlfriend. *"Maybe I am going to look on Marktplaats¹⁷..."* He tries to find housing that is more stable but he has a hard time paying rent regularly. He also wants to be able to register with the municipality at the address: this is a requirement to start your own business. She is telling him he can work off the money for the deposit, he wants to take his work hours of the rent. So he will look for a different place and heard the following: *"[...] now I go to the bank, because last time I opened an account, they say, if you have three months where you have 1500 euro, you can have credit. So maybe I can get 1500 so I can go to Marktplaats, rent a normal house and pay borg¹⁸."*

¹⁶ Wheel clamp

¹⁷ Marktplaats is a Dutch equivalent of e-bay

¹⁸ Deposit

He likes the job but is still ambivalent: he wants to make more money. He will try to be hired as an independent contractor at the shipyard but he would like to make more than a 1000 a week. He heard from Leonek now works for an international company in England. He lives and works on a ship for three weeks and the company pays for all costs – he estimates that Leonek can bring 5000 euro home from that three week trip. He is also considering working on a platform:

You cannot go longer than two weeks, after two weeks you have to come back because else you freak out. My friend told me, I was working with Maciej [co-worker at the refinery who told him about the shipyard job] and one more guy and the guy you know, he was flying there many many times and he was saying, the men are crying, they want to go back home. When you go to the kantine¹⁹, it is on the sea, and everything is shaking, the glasses, plates are shaking, the lamp.

Another plan is to start his own business as a builder: he heard you are exempt from paying taxes the first three years that you have your own business. So he would stay for two or three years doing that. A stable job is not his dream, making a lot of money is. His family owns a piece of land in Poland, from his grandfather. He would be able to have a big part of it because his aunt does not have children. *"I have a lot of ground in Poland. Maybe I can build something, you know? Maybe I can build five car garage or something and then rent. Something like that."* It is near a big city so it could bring in good money. He saw the example in Zoetermeer²⁰, where a friend of his rents a garage: *"he rented a big garage and it costs a 1000 euro. One garage. And I build five... And a garage you don't need a lot of money to build. Just place is important, if you have the ground."* He is not there yet, because he does not want to live in his mother's house and he does not have a sum of money to start building with.

When he was taking care of the weed plants, he made a lot of money. When he is asked if he would do that type of job again, he doubts. He certainly would not grow plants in Poland.

In Poland it is a big problem, if you have a 100 plants, you get three years. Like my friend. A friend of mine, with his girlfriend, was growing weed, just 100 plants. And three years. [...] Here you get a ticket. A ticket for the electric. Maybe you have to pay 3000 or 5000, depending on how much you grow. My friend last time, when they found him, they took him away, he did not even go to prison. They gave him a court case and he had a good advocaat²¹, maybe he spent 10.000 euro on everything, and he did not go to prison.

He is uncertain about the future; he would like to find a different, smaller house with regular rent and a regular landlord. He would like to start his own company so he can make more money for the same work. He is engaged to his girlfriend and they would like to stay in The Hague for a while:

19 Canteen

20 Smaller city near The Hague

21 Lawyer

Yeah, my girlfriend has work here, I have many friends here. It's ok for us.

But she has a house in Poland; do you want to go there?

What am I going to do in Poland? I need to make money... I need to have 50.000 euro then I can go there. If I have 50.000 euro I can maybe open some business. Now, what would I do?

Because when you were 17 and you first started traveling, what did you think you would do?

Ah, I just wanted to travel the world, you know. Maybe if I have money. Now I get a bit more money and I can fly anywhere.

He wants to make money and travel the world. He does not necessarily want a stable job, he already doubts about his job at the ship yard and when would be the best time, tax-related, to quit working there.

Networks

Throughout his adult life, he has been in different circles of friends and acquaintances. He first worked in Italy, France and Spain with his neighbors, Victor and Marcin. He lost all contact with Victor, last he knew, Victor was still selling crocodiles in the south of Europe. Marcin came to the Netherlands because of Szymon, Szymon helped him start up. Marcin found his way pretty easy, started to work and the pancake factory and was later able to help Szymon to get a job there. Szymon lived at his place in Gouda for a few months.

He moved to the south of Italy because Leonek was there: he met Leonek in Cracow in a bar and became good friends with him. Leonek knew of the job and helped him eat and drink when he first moved to the south. Leonek in turn, moved to the Netherlands because of Szymon, they rented an apartment in Scheveningen together where Leonek tried to have others (girls) work for him. Leonek went back to Poland after he was in a workplace accident.

He traveled to the Netherlands with Pawel, and lived in a house with him and two of his friends for two weeks. After he moved out, he pretty much lost all contact with them. He heard that Pawel was imprisoned because of dealing in counterfeit money. The couple they lived with for the two weeks, moved to Ireland, came back to the Netherlands and are working in the greenhouses. But he does not stay in touch with them.

When he moved into the house via Tymon, five other Polish men lived there. He lived in the house for about a year but never got really close to these men, they were all older than him. Some of them are back in Poland, one moved to the United States, and one is still living in The Hague, with a family now. He is still friends with Tymon, who now lives with his girlfriend and child in a different part of The Hague. He also is still in contact with Old Tortilla, who moved back to Poland. He works with Young Tortilla.

He does some jobs with Tymon from time to time, and for one of these jobs he got a bike as payment. *"So I was biking and the police stopped me, stopped me on the way, they knew it was stolen, they took the bike upside down and checked the number. They knew it; I don't know how they knew it was stolen."* They asked him how he got the bike, and he explained he bought it through a Polish website – he did not want to betray Tymon and made up a story. He had to go to court in October but he messed up the dates and went in November. *"And I... I walk to the door. It is closed, how can it be closed, I say. And they told me it was a month ago. And I don't know, if*

they control me now, if I maybe have something to pay. Maybe it is a problem now, if they control me." He is still not registered in the municipal records so they cannot trace him down that easily. The friend from Amsterdam, Antonin, is still in Amsterdam. Szymon accidentally ran into him on Kingsday (in April) when he was visiting the city with his girlfriend. Antonin has been in Amsterdam for about 20 years, mostly living in squatter houses. Before that, he lived in Spain, working as a street musician. He had the same job in Amsterdam, if he was not growing weed. Szymon started laughing when he tells about Antonin today: working an official job for the first time in his life, in the flower industry and living in a rental house, non-squat.

When he moved back to The Hague, he worked for Tymon again, lived in a house with Tortilla and had his friend Milek come over. Milek is now in Germany: he left the Netherlands after he lost his job because his car broke down. He worked in Poland for a few years, but wanted to move again. He met a girl, in Poland, and her father helped him find a job in Germany. He moved there and is making a decent living. He is looking for a house which is not easy with a Polish passport (and a black market job), so that his girlfriend can move as well.

He moved to Gouda to his friend Marcin, who is still working in the pancake factory and living in the town. Szymon worked with Marek who is a street maker, he is still in The Hague, working the same jobs. Most of that group is still in The Hague. His friend still has a Polish shop where Szymon shops every day: he can shop there on credit and pay later. Lech still works at the refinery but now lives in the house where Szymon used to live: with Brygita and Teodor. The couple still lives there but Szymon does not talk to them anymore *"Are you crazy? No, I don't want to. I don't want to see them ever again in my life. I will remove them from my memory."*²²

Szymon's network has changed over time, he has a few stable friends that come back in his story at different times: Milek, Leonek, the Tortilla brothers, Marcin, and Tymon. Other friends come and go: he loses touch for a while but then reconnects either because they need him or he needs one of them. His family, mainly his mother is a stable factor in the background. He talks about her throughout the story but mostly only when asked. In the early years of his migration, he would send a postcard now and then, there were no cell phones and there was no internet yet. Today, the contact with his mother is more frequent. She also supports him financially. She pays for his health care insurance and lends him money from time to time. The sister that lived in Dublin when Szymon moved to the Netherlands, now lives in China where she works as an English teacher. His younger sister still is in university, in Poland.

His mom helps him out with money from time to time. He borrowed money to start his own business, and more recently she gave him money for rent. When he had money, he would pay for her. *"I will give it back one day, you know. Before, when I had money from weed, I would give her lots of money."* His sister in China sends money home. His parents and youngest sister live in a bigger town now that the town he grew up in. When he would first leave, his parents would worry a lot but he did not listen to them *"My parents could not tell me what to do anymore since I was 12. They care a lot. But I would leave home, go to a store [for example] and come back three days later. There were no mobiles at the time, you know. What could they do?"* His attitude towards his mother is double, he wants to be independent, make his own choices. On the other hand, she helps him out. He also does not want his parents or sisters to visit him. He does not think his

22 When the recorder was off, we talked a little more about them. Szymon does not want to tell their story on tape.

mother would: she only goes on holidays on church trips: *"She goes to Italy with a pastor, pray, go to church. Where the church goes, she goes."*

Loesje

**FOR A WORLD
WHERE
NORMS
ARE NO LONGER
NORMAL**

Tomasz

Tomasz is a friend of a neighbor, I met him once or twice before. He worked with my neighbor at the house of my sister, painting, and he fixed my computer. I heard that he was hired for a company doing IT work – the painting job was not 'his profession' but a way to earn money until he would find a 'real job'. I heard that he was single, had been in the Netherlands for a long time, and had not made a career in his profession. Those were characteristics that qualified him to be interviewed. I did not know him or his stories beforehand which made it harder to be certain that he would be considered 'not integrated'. I did know his job history and that he did not speak Dutch.

Tomasz' story

Tomasz is from a small town of about 6000 inhabitants where he lived until he moved to the Netherlands. His primary school was in that town, for secondary school he had to travel to a bigger town nearby. He started secondary school when he was still in primary school, through an emersion program where children would pass exams of secondary school a year early.

We were doing 'zero' class before secondary and the last class of primary at the same time. And that was called alpha-program, it was created only for a few classes in the whole country, and it was focused around language. The first year was a zero class and we did like 15-16 hours of English, it was quite a lot. And so within that year I finished the whole program of four years.

He had to attend the school four days a week, and the fifth day he would be in elementary school. He was around 14 years old at the time and it was a lot of work, hard work. His secondary school years (high school years) were in the same school, he had to travel to the bigger town for the next four years. After high school, he went to university in Poznan, a private college²³. He studies computer science, communication, and business: it was a program of administrative management where he could specialize in computer science and business communication. He graduated when he was 24 and he moved: "straight to here". He moved for love: "I was going out with this girl for a few years and her family moved here. [...] Her mom was with somebody else at the time. So her mom moved, so did she, and her sister. So then I was here once or twice, and it was ok here, and so I moved. That was actually the only reason." He was lonely and he wanted to be with her. He had his degree but he did not try to find a job in Poland: "I could have stayed and tried, try to work it out. But I just didn't".

His girlfriend, Monika, was 21 at the time. She moved to her mother and stepdad, with her sister, in the Netherlands in 2004, a time where work permits were still needed. Tomasz does not know if she went to school in The Hague first or if she started working immediately. He also does not remember why she moved: she was 21 at the time and could have stayed

²³ Universities in Poland are run by the state, colleges are private universities. In the Netherlands (or in the US), the school would be considered a university.

in Poland. But he thinks that as a family, it was just easier to make the move, mainly for economic reasons. Tomasz elaborates: *"She joined her mother after a while. It was not that they all went at the same time. She stayed with her father and then I think we went together for a visit, just for Christmas, and then she moved here."* The sister was younger, around 10 years old. Today, she is the only one who still lives in the Netherlands. The rest of the family moved back to Poland. His best friend is also part of the family: *"First, he came here, and his father. I think he came just to see how it is, tried it out and started working. So then... his second wife and her daughters joined."* His best friend is the stepbrother of his (now ex) girlfriend, and was actually the first to move here, in 2003.

Tomasz moved in 2004 and lived with the family for about a month. They lived in a big apartment. He found work through people Monika had already met: *"Some of the jobs were in green houses. Some packaging of vegetables. And some jobs were more like with the maintenance of greenhouses. But all those jobs were really short, so I would not say I worked somewhere for over a month. In was on call, kind of."* He did not have much use for his English or his degree; he was mainly working physical jobs. *"And you don't speak so much during greenhouse jobs."* Through these friends he would find different jobs during that first time.

Tomasz did not work through temporary agencies: Polish migrants at the time still needed work permits. Nobody in the family had a work permit, the stepfather, the mother, and Monika worked through different channels. They were all registered with the municipality and the younger sister went to school. *"We were all registered. We could register at that time. There was no problem with registration. Getting a social security number, with a bank account, with registration for a house, there were no problems with that."* They just could not get a job the official way. It changed when the family started their own business, a little later.

Moving on

After about a month he and Monika moved to their own apartment, a place they shared with other tenants. He started looking for a job more suitable for his degree:

Yeah, I started looking. That was my mistake, I started looking for some proper job for myself but I heard quite a lot of negative opinions about the fact of me looking for a proper job. From people around, Polish people, and also from local people. [They said] you won't get it. So basically I lost my motivation. I started looking for a job straight up when I came. Because that was the most obvious thing to do. And after a while I just stopped.

He continued working odd jobs, in the greenhouses or helping friends (and friends of friends) for about a year. After a year, he and Monika broke up and he moved in with friends. They had been in a relationship for six years, five years in Poland, and one year in the Netherlands. It was around that time he also stopped working short term jobs in the greenhouses: *"I met quite a lot of people of course so I had some people that I could rely on more. So I started also working construction jobs and that was already through some friends."* He had a few people in his network that had their own companies:

At that time they could have their own companies already. And basically, if someone had something to do, I was working for them. Then for others. It was also changing. People were changing. But also I was never working fully – I always used to work for instance, two weeks, three weeks. And then I would use to have a month free and going somewhere. Come back, work a little bit more, again leaving.

It was a fluid network where different people would come and go. Tomasz would also leave from time to time, to travel. He would work, save up money and use the money to go to southern Europe, the Mediterranean.

He cannot easily put numbers or a chronology to this period. He does not think of his life that way, he sees a more complex pattern. For example, he would work through his network contacts, when asked how many people he worked for, he answered:

It was quite a lot of people [that he knew] actually. I mean, it is hard for me to say, it has been a few years, I have met many people, and often people were coming and going. So I cannot give a number. But I don't know, let's say, five to ten friends that were here all the time? So they were better friends, others not."

Through his friends he would work on a project base, mostly in The Hague but they had assignments in Rotterdam and Amsterdam as well. He learned the skills on the job; he had never worked in construction before. He would do different parts of construction:

Basically [I did] almost everything. The only thing I was not doing was plasterwork. That was the only thing. I could do electricity, plumbing. Usually it was bigger groups. There were people that were plumbers; that were electricians. So you would work with them and learn it. And all those jobs, it is nothing crazy. You don't need to have any crazy knowledge about it. It is just logical things, and also the work itself is nothing complicated. So for me it wasn't, it did not take me much time to learn everything.

His friends always had work for him when he needed it. He started making about 10 euro an hour, under the table for most projects. He increased his earnings to 12 euro an hour and later to around 15-16 euro an hour. It was mainly for Polish people but he also worked for a small Dutch company: he was referred to them through friends. Because his jobs were mainly through his friendship networks, he hardly ever had problems with payments. Once or twice did he not get paid his full wages. He does not remember exactly, but it was when he worked for a small Dutch business:

I was doing some painting. I was asked through a friend who was working for a Dutch company. And he got this job from another Dutch company. And I did not know this person, never worked with him before. And I got most of my money, only towards the end, this guy who was taking the project, he did something wrong, there was some misunderstanding so the owners did not pay all and so we did not get paid in full.

He did not try to get the money, about 200 euro: he did not think it was worth his time since he received most of his pay. It was a small company, hard to reach so it would take a lot of effort to achieve something. He does know of others who did not get paid correctly: *"I know many of these stories, how people are used. But no one ever goes anywhere with it. They are not treated the same way, the migrants, the Polish people."* And he also heard stories of others, Bulgarians working under even worse pay conditions a few years ago, when they still needed a work permit. They would work for 3.50 euro an hour, in construction and in the green houses. But they did not stay: *"So I suppose when they came, they were cheap, but I don't know how the quality was. I suppose it was not so good. So the Polish stayed."* He realizes that he started out as a novice; he had to learn on the job. But most of the people teaching him were schooled in their trade. They were professionals in Poland already. And, as he mentioned before, he does not think it is the most complicated work. *"All those are simple things. You know, electricity, I learned that in primary school. It is simple."* His main point is that you have to be precise and careful.

His schedule depended on the duration of the job. Sometimes he would work for two weeks, sometimes he would work for three months. He would travel when he was not working but at times, he would just stay in The Hague. He never had any money issues: *"See I am not a person who... I am easy with money. When I had it, I had it. When I didn't, I didn't. I was always managing myself, I always had my flat paid for, and I had money for food. Sometimes I had enough money left; sometimes I had more so I could go somewhere. It just all depended on the circumstances."* So if he had enough money, he would just go. He would not plan much ahead. As with work and friendships, he finds it hard to quantify his life: *"The thing is, I cannot... I have like all different periods, it was all mixed together. [...] All this like, working, travelling, staying here, meeting people here, meeting people somewhere else. It was all mixed, it was all entangled. So I cannot say, this was a time that I worked, this was a time that I did something else, for all this time I was mixing up things."* He would travel cheap, visiting friends in different countries. He also spent his money on festivals, in the Netherlands and all over Europe.

The break-up with Monika did signify a 'break: he changed apartments; he stopped working in the green houses and started working in construction. But he also made the choice at the time, to stay or to go back home. He stayed for no particular reason but he did realize that staying would mean that he would not get rich real fast or find a career. He stayed to see what would be next.

When he started in construction, his main contact was his best friend Arthur from Poland. They are from the same town and grew up together. Arthur is the stepbrother of Monika and moved to the Netherlands in 2003. He had his own place when Tomasz migrated, later they moved to an apartment together.

And in the mean time I was renting rooms, here and there, nothing crazy. And at some point there was this – I think it was one of his clients from before because he was also in the building business – he was fixing something in this house and the owner was, left the country, she decided to work voluntarily in Africa, so she left everything also, work and stuff. Anyway we were fixing something in her house, and then we were like, this is a really nice house; it would be nice to rent something like that. And we arranged the house for us.

They were able to rent the house, with Arthur's girlfriend and the brother of that girlfriend. Arthur and his girlfriend came to the Netherlands together; she was from a different small town in Poland. Tomasz stayed in the apartment until he moved in with his new girlfriend a year later. He often worked for Arthur, and he met a lot of people through Arthur. When he started to get more jobs himself, Arthur would also work for him. *"I had my own networks. It is not that they were giving me jobs, it was also that I was giving them clients."* He built up his networks in different ways. The most common way was through reputation: *"Because first of all, expats have quite good money. So they can afford. So they come to this country and they buy houses, fixing them up. Second, they don't speak Dutch, and they don't trust Dutch."* Tomasz explains that communication is an important factor for expats, and they look for someone who can relate to them. He feels that Dutch people are more distant. He did not just have new customers through word-to-mouth but also through small advertisements: *"I was working for the international organization, so even before I knew some people working there so I just asked to put some small adds on their internet. On their websites. So that is how we catch a few people and that is how it goes."* The people he would reach were often new in the country and did not know 'regular' ways of finding contractors. He would often work with Arthur, but if the jobs were too big, they would work with others as well. *"It was never a full time job. So sometimes it was three days, sometimes five days. Sometimes it was three weeks of nothing, so it was all different. And I was just filling this time."*

After he and Monika broke up, he moved in with Arthur and his girlfriend. The brother of the girlfriend also lived in the house. He did not just start working with and for Arthur; he also was a good friend. Arthur is not in The Hague anymore, he is now travelling around: one day he and his wife left everything. He had a company that was running quite well, they had bought an apartment. But they just decided to leave: *"They did not even sell everything. They things they could sell, they sold, the rest they just left. Even the house they left. They left it to the bank."* They were just in Ecuador, now they are in Greece. The group of friends Tomasz had was all enthusiast travelers, from different parts of the world. The brother also left, he had his own construction company, Tomasz worked with him from time to time as well, and he now lives in Belgium for a little while. Eventually he will move to Poland or Slovenia, Tomasz is not sure.

Free time and Friends

The time he was not working, he would either be travelling or be with friends in The Hague. He emphasizes: *"I did not come to Holland for work; I never came for that reason. And I just stayed. I had my friends here already."* His friends are the reason he stayed after the break-up with Monika:

It was also good here. You know, at this time in my 20s, yeah, I had lots of friends here, also from all over the world. It was a good meeting point; you could build up contacts here. I was fine, there was always something to do, always new people, and it was fine at the time. [...] I had quite a big group of friends, so we were spending quite a lot of time outside. They were mostly international people, and it was quite a spontaneous group. That was, we were basically meeting daily somewhere. Or there was something coming in the

city, or the beach. Always something. So basically, every day something was happening. So it was not boring here. And we had our places where we were going, it was mostly kind of squats. For example dinners at squats. We were going out for parties together, going out to the beach, to play some volleyball, Frisbee, or play some music or so. All the time, dependent on the weather.

The group consisted of people of different nationalities and of different careers. He did not know many Polish people other than the ones he worked with. *"It's... I mean, it is different people that have different interests. They speak languages, they have more international friends. They go to different places. Different groups, they don't mix with those, with other people, that are working construction people, working in houses."* Most of the people in the group were students; some were working, mainly in higher end jobs. They came in different ways to the Netherlands, to The Hague. He did not know many people (anymore) that were working in the greenhouses or other unskilled jobs. They would also live in different parts of town, not in the neighborhoods where you have a concentration of Poles or in neighborhoods where housing is cheap.

They live in that side of town. It is more reachable. Because if you live here [in Valkenbos], this side of the city, with mostly inhabited by people that work outside of the city by this side. So Westland. So mostly clean houses and all those kinds of jobs. This kind of people in this area. People who have office jobs or kind of corporate jobs, they are more on the other side because it is easier for them to reach.

He describes the group as some sort of separate international community in the city, a flexible group of (higher) educated workers and students. They are not like the expats or posted workers where they are sent by their company, and they do not have the money expats have: *"Yeah, that's more like it. No idea how it happened. You just meet someone, join them together, then they bring other people and so you end up in a group. Yeah, mixing all the time."* If he did not stay in The Hague, he would visit friends abroad. He would meet up with people that were in the south of Europe, that he met in The Hague. As a group, they visited festivals in different countries: *"We would also travel. But most, mostly when there were festivals. That was the, that was basically with the festivals, if we were travelling with a bigger group. Like we would go with 25 people to a festival. But then again, not going together but meeting together over there."*

Most of the people in the group were in their 20s, today, the majority does not live that lifestyle anymore. They are now spread out: some went back to their home countries, some moved to other countries. Tomasz explains that this shift is not just because people age: *"Most of my friends are a bit older so they are more stable in their lives. But then also, it is mixed. There are also younger people. The only think that I notice is that the people that are younger are not the same kind of, they don't look at it the same way as we did."* People in their 20s today do not seem to have the same options as people had before: *"As I see it here in the city for instance, before, some years back, there were many more places to go out, social places."* Not only are his friends growing older, the city is changing, Tomasz thinks.

There are more rules and regulations, it is harder to get licenses, and many places are shut. *"The only things that are left, are the pop culture things. Like really mainstream. All the things that were aside of the mainstream, they kind of disappeared. And I know many people that are not the mainstream. It is just done for here in the city."* He feels that choices are limited today, and it is much harder to find creative options in the city. He uses music as an example, and tells about the different places that were shut down over the years. He thinks there is no more room for experimental music anymore. Similarly, he sees this trend in other parts of the city, as with the different beach clubs.

You probably know de Karavaan. Or you may not know Karavaan. It is at the Zwarte Pad²⁴ and it is a site on the beach. And there were some nice places that were not mainstream but also not crazy alternative but just like in the middle. So some of the people were hanging out there, and there were some parties there this year. And there were undercover police and they caught some people with stuff and they took their license from the place. They shut down the place, so yeah. Chain reaction, everyone around got scared.

Tomasz sees this as a trend that has been going on for a few years. There are fewer options every year, and he feels that city government tries to get control over a group that is different, that did not adapt to the mainstream. *"Politics, they don't like not having people under full control. So yeah, taking away the freedoms bit after bit after bit."*

Tomasz' network is concentrated in a few people, with a lot of other connections he does not mention by name. The core is small, and few people are related to his migration or labor market story. Monika had a central role in the start of the migration, where he would live with her and work through her network in the first year. She was the reason he moved to The Hague. Her stepbrother Arthur plays an important role as well: Tomasz moved in with him when he was working with him in construction. They were good friends in Poland and they still are good friends. He was his main contact for work. There were others with or through whom he worked. There is only one other person that played a central part: a friend from Italy that moved to the Netherlands because of Tomasz. His story is related to Tomasz' shift in career. It is difficult for Tomasz to indicate who is part of his friends or inner-circle, who is part of the outer-circle and who is just a stranger. Most people that he knows are part of the outer-circle *"For me the circle is quite big. He is not a stranger"* (about a fellow Pole who lives in The Hague and who he met once).

Shifting careers

Tomasz worked in the greenhouse sector for about a year, off and on. He never had a continuous job there and he never worked through a temporary agency. He switched to construction after a year, where he was able to find jobs through friends. He could easily live of the money he made and he saved enough to travel a few times a year. Around 2007 he started applying for jobs in his field again. He would be in-between construction jobs so

²⁴ A small dead end street near the beach with different beach clubs. There are different strips of beaches on the coast of The Hague with beach clubs that are built up every year. Caravan is one of these.

he would have time to focus on a job search. He did have quite a few interviews but never find a job: *"So I would look for jobs, go on interviews but there was always something wrong. Or you need to speak Dutch, or you need to do this, or you are overqualified or you are not qualified enough. Always something."* He did not have any problems with the recognition of his diplomas: *"At these companies, they don't really care about it. As far as I know. They see that you have it, that you can do it. They just want to make sure you can do it. If you go for an interview they ask you questions and I just have to know the answer. So they knew straight away that I know."* There is some contradiction in what he says in the earlier: on the one hand you do not need diplomas yet over-qualification can be an issue. In the first quote he was illustrating that there are plenty of reasons to reject somebody, but they need not be the real reason. He was hired for an international organization²⁵ in 2007-2008. He had an administrative job, on a short contract. *"It was a short contract because that was the company's policy. They gave only six months contracts. And because that was through an agency. That was the contract."* In that office, the temporary contractors could not have contracts for longer than half a year. After half a year, he had to stop working there for half a year, after which he could come back again. He tried to get a contract directly through the company, avoiding the temp agency but it did not work out. So when his contract finished he had to search for a new job. *"My contract was finished. I was looking for some other jobs but that was the beginning of the crisis. That was then, 2008. So it was bloody difficult to get anything."* In 2008 it all stopped. Before the crisis he would get interviews but that stopped completely: *"Yeah, then it just all stopped. Especially for foreign workers. Because of the market of course, there is a local market, and then there is a market for people from abroad, for English speaking jobs. It all shrank."* He went back to working in construction: there was always something to do in that field of work. Construction work also was more difficult to obtain but he did not have high expectations from that sector. The Polish companies did not suffer from the crisis as much as the Dutch companies, according to Tomasz. He finds the Dutch companies less flexible than the Polish businesses.

He also started a computer business, freelancing as an IT-technician. *"This was if I was not working, it was with computers, it was from time to time. If there was no work in construction, it was a very popular job. And this was also changing all the time. At some point it was all together. So... I was working non-stop."* He would help people with their computer problems and quickly had a large clientele. His customers were mainly fellow-migrants. Word of mouth was one way his business grew, he also advertised on a website geared towards Polish migrants in the Netherlands, *Niedziela.nl*. He would combine the two jobs until recently but did not give up looking for a job in IT. He was able to work this way until the end of 2013:

And I was looking at the jobs the moments I did not have work, when I was free. When some project started I did not have time anymore to look for a job. So then I was busy with other things. So it was kind of... And at the same time I was still doing IT, so I was still in the business but for myself. So yeah, and recently before I got this job, it was the end of last year that, this, my way of finding clients, it stopped working. Somehow. Like it just became kind of dead.

²⁵ The specialized IT sector is pretty small so we agreed not to mention any specifics

I don't know the reasons, it just went quiet. So sometimes I was just very busy, and the end of the last year, it just kind of died. So I was .. yeah, I cannot be like that so let's find something. This is when I got this job.

He did not understand why there were less clients calling but it was a reason to apply for jobs in the IT-sector again. He found the job through a friend of his, a guy from Italy. He lived at Tomasz' place for a bit:

He was living in Italy, I was on holidays in Italy, I met him there, he was a good friend of my other good friend, so yeah, and we also became good friends there. He was, it was the beginning of the crisis, so he had his business there, it was going down, and he sold it, and then said why not move somewhere. And I told him he could stay around till he found a job. He was living at my place for a few months, and he found a job and basically that was the time I was looking for a job and he was still getting some offers here and there.

He would forward jobs to Tomasz so Tomasz could apply. He tells that this is common in the IT sector: you need to know the names, the specific companies that are hiring because they do not advertise. The Italian guy heard about the job because he had sent his resume to different companies when he just arrived in the Netherlands.

Tomasz now works for an international company as IT technician. He started in April 2014 in a branch of the company near The Hague. The company has offices in different parts of the world. In June he was asked if he could help out the office in Athens²⁶, they were short staffed and needed somebody to help out immediately. Tomasz said yes and spent a month working there. *"Yes, I had good contacts there, with the manager, and all the other managers. And the team. So they liked me there, and I don't mind Greece! So I said it directly, like if you can get me there, I will come. So yeah, they said they will do their best."* He is now waiting to see if the branch here will let him go, both branches want him to work for them:

There are a few reasons I suppose. There are two reasons why they don't want me to go. First I have proven that I can do the work, so they don't want to lose a good technician. And second, I have social skills which are not so common with IT technicians. So for me it is easy to have all the contacts with users. I can easily blend in and find a common ground with anyone. Within seconds. So this is kind of valuable, I think. And also, I am very precise, with that, I do my job very good.

He does not need to speak Greek to go there, it is an international job. This is another reason he is wanted in Athens, his English is good. The manager of the Athens branch has had problems before finding good IT-technicians that would be able to speak English. Tomasz does not think it will take long before he makes the step, the Athens branch is putting some major pressure on headquarters to make it happen. But even if it would fall through and he

²⁶ Not the actual city. The location was changed to ensure anonymity.

would have to stay at the branch he is now, he does not mind: he likes the job a lot. Interestingly, in the past Tomasz always travelled back to The Hague, even though he liked the Mediterranean countries. He never moved there because of the wages in those countries. The wages in the south of Europe are lower and even though the local costs are lower, you still need money to travel. It would have been very difficult to maintain his lifestyle in one of those countries. *"No I was never bothered. Over here it was easy. I could work for two weeks and then I would travel for a few weeks. And there I would be stuck in Greece. Stuck with work, and that is not really what I wanted. So it never happened. Now it is different because it is a different kind of job, and actually I am wanted there."* It is also different because he is now an expat, travelling for his company and being relocated by them. He receives the perks and benefits that come with that position.

In ten years I never went crazy to find something else [in IT]. I did not search hard to get a proper job, to get an office job. I was lazy about it. I never really wanted the office job, the cubicle job. In this one, I have a lot of contact with users, because I also do incidents. I am not stuck in front of a desk. This is exactly what I needed. Nobody asks me where I am going. This is exactly the part that I needed. Maybe it is good I never found anything before. Because getting stuck in front of the monitor for eight hours... I am still working with computers all the time, but I am moving. Now every day is different, different people every day, different problems that I come across. Different tasks that I am doing, some of them are repeating themselves but it is still not every day the same.

He already has an apartment set up: one of the people he helped with computer problems is from Athens and knows somebody else who rents out apartments.

The timing of the job switch is really good for him: most of his friends are settling down, there are still some in The Hague but he always talked about the group as something in the past. He confirms that people have moved and that it is hard to stay in touch with them. Going to Athens might change that: he already has a line of people waiting to visit him.

Family

Tomasz' parents are both teachers in Poland. They support his decisions, even when they do not fully agree with his choices. *"Of course they don't nag, and they probably knew that it was not that easy to find a proper job, in a strange country. They were happy that I was managing. And of course they wanted me to get something better because that is what parents do. Yeah, they are not the types that nag or moan all the time."* When we first talked about his family, he told he did not go back to Poland very often, maybe once every year and a half. Skype was a good way to replace the physical contact. So he does not use his vacations to travel to Poland, nor did his parents visit him in The Hague. He has one sibling, a sister who now lives in England. He is not sure when she moved or where she works, *"She finished some study. It was not university level but higher than high school. Lower than college. I don't really know because I was not there anymore."* From these first answers, it seems that he is not close to his family.

In later parts of the interviews, he elaborated on his relationship with his family and a different story appears. *"I have very close contact with my family. With my parents and with my grandparents. With my parents, we speak quite a lot, depending also how busy I am, sometimes I don't have enough time. But we Skype a lot."* From time to time, they will have the Skype connection on and they will be doing their daily routine while on Skype. That way he can easily share his life for a few hours at the time. He explains why they never came to visit:

My parents, no, they never came here. There was always something. During the year they can never come here because of work. They cannot take holidays. And in the summer it was or them going somewhere or me going somewhere. And for Christmas I was usually going back, or other time, I would go home for a bit. And for the past three, four years it was also not possible because my father had surgery. And since then he cannot travel that far. So yeah.

They would meet in third countries, all flying in from different directions. The Netherlands was just not interesting enough to visit; they would rather meet at a different place. His sister has visited him multiple times, just like he has been in England to visit her. He would consider going back sometime in the future but he is still ambiguous about it. He can do his work from anywhere in the world but he would like to live in a big city. If he would live in a bigger city in Poland, he might not see his parents more often than he does today. On the other hand, he talks about his parents' house:

I could, it would not be a problem to live there. If I have work, I can get something for myself, I can also move there. It would not be problematic at all to be with my parents. And there is the possibility to actually close a part of the house, part of the house is unused, which is big enough to make an apartment out of it, decent size.

LET ME BE

A CITY-ZEN

Loesje

Maciej

I had not met Maciej before the interview. I was referred to him by Szymon, who sent a text message: "This boy is for the book he said is ready for a meeting even today – phone number – I do not know his name, we call him Needle. Call him for appointment" I called him for an appointment and we met a week later in a lunchroom near his house. The preparation for the first interview was minimal: I did not know Needle and I wanted to hear some of his story before we would start the interview. We first talked for half an hour before I started the tape: I wanted to make sure his story would fit the profile. After a very pleasant conversation, where he already told me a lot of intimate details (his divorce, why his wife divorced him), I told him I would love to hear his story. We then decided to continue with the recorder on.

Maciej's story

Maciej starts his story at the beginning: he was born in a town in Poland, Ketrzyn:

It is not a village, it is called Ketrzyn. There is a name in German for it, where the Hitler had all the bunkers. You heard about the catastrophe about the Polish president? It happened on April 10, you know, and every time I go back to Poland there is all black flags, there is no party no nothing. That is my birthday. So if I celebrate I get mean looks, they think I am against everybody [laughs].

He tells the story with ease, and makes jokes in between. He seems very comfortable and he stresses throughout the interviews that I can use his real name, that he is not worried about people reading his story. I decided to change his name after all; Maciej is not his real name. I also slightly changed his wording: he uses 'you know' very frequently; this is left out in most of the citations.

He was still very young, not in school yet, when his parents divorced and his mom moved to the west, closer to Berlin with her new husband, a policeman. It was still the time of communism and they could easily find a new home in a place close to Poznan. He tells that there were benefits in the communist system:

And in this time there was the amazing thing about the communism, they give you job, and they give you house. So we immediately had a house. It was an amazing thing like this, I have not heard about this in other countries. There were some benefits to communism, you know, living in communist country. Actually I only have good memories, after the corruption, you know, it was not so bad. Before that there were all kind of schools, exchanging, from Cuba, all kinds of tournaments, people from all over, from Czech, from Hungary, hanging out together, all nice things you know.

He had a happy childhood, his mom had two more children, two girls, and his dad had one more daughter. All the siblings are six years apart. At the time the school system in Poland

was different than today, and he explains that he stopped attending 'high school' at age 19: he was working towards a technical degree but realized after three years that he was not in the right place *"Yes. It was just like I did not know what to do; I could not find myself, what I really wanted to do with my life. My first job was a postman, I was a postman when I was 19, biking around."* He also took the job to help out the family: it was the early 1990s and Poland had just switched to a market economy, times were very difficult.

But after a while, when I felt a bit more confident, I moved to another city, to Wroclaw, a big city. And I work in the shipyard. But they kicked me out, for sleeping on the job. [laughs] It was winter time, and it was hard to work there in the winter, you know. But I found immediately a nice job in the movie makers, in the film makers industry.

He worked with them to make a rock movie for kids with a Swiss band, and he worked on the production of video clips for a Polish group. But he did not stay with one job too long: *"So that was for a while there. And what else... And I did another job also, jumping from one to the other, renovating the old opera, making the old elements, the gold elements. So I was always searching for something to do, work with my hands, I am kind of artistic. I have these kinds of skills."* In Wroclaw he met Hare Krishna in the street:

And I start reading the Bhaktivedanta, the Krishna words from 5000 years, and I was already vegetarian, you know, for years. I did not connect this with anything, it was my nature. And after a while I joined the movement, the Krishna movement. I become kind of, I shaved my hair, I went to India, I was in the school, the cooking school so I learned how to cook vegetarian. I learned all kind of verdic verses, memorizing them, learned how to play instruments.

He was 23 years old when he became Hare Krishna. He started to work with them, volunteer work to serve fresh meals to the poor. They also sold incense, books from India, books on yoga, a variety of items to make some money to maintain the temple. He travelled to India three times, and he also stayed in Switzerland and Germany with the Hare Krishna. His life was centered around the teachings, and he spend a good amount of time meditating. He lived that life for four years.

Moving to the United States

He met his wife and got married. She was younger than him, 19, and they divorced four years later. The marriage had been a struggle from the beginning, and ended because she got pregnant by another man. He does not tell too many details, but explains that both of them had affairs, and were not strongly committed. He was heartbroken and when his brother in law invited him to come to the United States, he went. His sister and brother-in-law moved there a few years earlier to try something new: *"He felt that he could not go forward in Poland at this time, do something that he really wanted. [...] For him this was actually good, he immediately found a job, have a good pay, a nice house. And he sweetened the road for me, for me it was much easier to get there, and meet the people and get introduced."* He helped him with a visa;

Maciej travelled on a religious visa to the US: *"As a yogi, like cook, you know this stuff. I was already involved for years in all kind of yoga courses, like breathing exercises, like courses where you see the aura, you know."* He moved in 1999 and it was not hard for him to find a job and a place to stay. Officially, he was not supposed to work, but it was easy to work around that. Things were easy when he arrived: *"Yes, yes it was completely different [than after September 11, 2001]. Everything was so easy, you know. I rented an apartment with a garden, three bedrooms, with air conditioning, and parking spot and I paid only like \$400. It was an amazing price you know, and I did not work hard to maintain the house."* Financially, things were easy, but he did have a hard time adjusting to the new situation: *"For the beginning I actually had a hard time. Americans seems to me are very cold and distant, and also the language did not remind me of the English that I had learned in school. And so I had kind of blocks to speak to people, to express yourself. So the first year was hard for me, you know."* He coped and after about a year, he really started to enjoy his life. He met a new girlfriend, a girl from Brazil, and he had a lot of people around him. They lived in Florida, near a National Park, where they would camp in the weekends. He held several jobs: he mainly worked in construction but he was also in charge of the yearly Christmas decorations in the local Mall.

Yeah, basically, that was my happy life in America, for those 6 years. And slowly, slowly, after Sept. 11, everything changed. Worse and worse, and I sent my papers to send some Green Card and they denied it. And there were no explanations, or anything, like different rules or something. My visa was over, I did not want to extend it anymore, and I already extended it once. And then my sister came over, another sister, and we decided to go to Poland, back, and my brother in law also wanted to go back at this time.

He and his girlfriend were not together anymore and nothing kept him in the US. He moved back to Poland in 2006. He came back to a different society: in the seven years that he had lived abroad, the country had changed. It was not what he expected and he left the same winter to work in London, England. A friend of his owned a business there, he asked Maciej to join him in England. Maciej tried but did not like it in London. It was winter, the weather was awful and he did not enjoy the atmosphere. He left after two months, and joined another friend to go to France. In Caen, Normandy, this friend was remodeling an old farm house for a Dutch woman. *"So I packed up again and I went to France. France was beautiful and nice, and I really loved it there. But the problem was the language, the French do not speak English at all, and I am not that smart to learn French in two weeks or something, so that was hard."* He decided not to stay in France when the job was done, because of the language problem, and he and his friend traveled back to Poland through the Netherlands. *"No, well, yes, we decided to go back to Poland through Nederland, but I found another job immediately when I came here, and I found a place to live automatically. So I figured I keep going with this situation. So I decided to make a step more, so I got my social security, sofi number²⁷, and I did my registration. Became a zzp'er²⁸."* He did not become self-employed straight away; he first worked through different temp agencies.

²⁷ Dutch social security number

²⁸ Self employed

Starting in The Hague

Maciej traveled to The Hague with his friend. They were on their way to Poland, but when they got to The Hague, they easily found a job: his friend as a truck driver, Maciej in the green houses and later in construction. He was traveling back and forth to Poland in the first months: *"Yes, but, but we were going back and forth to Poland all the time, and this was one time where... you know: if you leave at 6 in the morning you are here at four o'clock in the afternoon. Home you know, and in Poland. So it is not that far you know, it is not such a long drive."* Maciej did not only look for higher wages or an adventure:

I was looking for my acupuncture school. That is why I went to England first; I was also searching for the school. But I could not find the school like close to the place where I wanted to rent a house, you know. Everything was not the way that I wanted. And when I came here, I started searching for the school, and I found it in Amsterdam, I went for a meeting, and they accept me immediately even though I did not have all the papers I should have...

He was accepted at the Zhengzhou Open University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Amsterdam, but he did not start there till 2008. He first looked at a university in Utrecht, only to find out that their classes were partially in Dutch.

One trip he travelled with three of his friends. Two of his friends had lived in the Netherland before; they all had jobs in Poland but decided to go anyway: *"Actually, everybody had a job. Over there. But it's like, you know, opening up the gates and they just go for experience you know. Like me, I just wanted to go and wanted to start something extra."* He found the painting job through an advertisement of a temp agency on the website of *Niedziela*: *"With friends. I, we were like four guys that came from the same city. So they took us as a crew. Because we sleep in the same place, we shared the same car, so it was better for us and for them to take us as a crew, you know."* They had to paint about 300 houses, a job that took them well into the winter. They lived together in a house in The Hague: *"We kind of squat one house, in Den Haag. We had information that for four months nobody was living in a place, and three of us, we squatted. I was kind of no worry about nothing, playing football, smoking weed and playing football all day some days you know. I needed it, I needed to kind of free my mind for a while you know."* They were tipped that the house was not inhabited by 'a lady'. He needs to think back how he met her, and describes how he met people those days:

Ohhh... yeah, how did we meet her... accident you know, I don't remember. There is just too many... We called? A lot of addresses came from this website you know. There is many people that put some... you know. And it is so easy to make some *uitzendbureau*²⁹. Like, hey I need like, five guys, you know some? You are Polish.. And so they bambambam, and immediately they get like five euros from each guy for the hours you know. If someone smart... it is just easy money. And if you know some people, you know.

²⁹ Temp agency

They could not stay at the squat for very long and moved on to the next place, which they found in a similar fashion: *"We found another place, we met a girl, we were drinking beer in pub and she offered the room, for money and stuff. In downtown, so we took it."*

When the job was done, he went home for the Christmas holidays. He moved back to the Netherlands in the spring. He was able to find a temporary place through the Krishna community in The Hague, and soon found an apartment that he rented by himself. He had already opened a bank account, he had his social security number, and he registered at the municipality. He took these steps because they were either required by an employer or by the school. He did not learn Dutch, nor did he plan to: most people speak English and he manages fine in that language. He was able to find his way relatively easily:

I started working... I had a part-time job as a painter, when it was the season. And when the season was over, in October, I started working for this Turkish company, for the *reclamebureau*³⁰. *Belettering*³¹, I was doing all kinds of stuff, like sticking the letters to the window, and cutting stuff, light boxes, you know. Like all those things. And I work with this guy for almost a year and a half. Yeah.

He met the person because he painted the office next door:

And I had my car, the Audi and I had these scratches on my car. So, one time I cut a kind of design to cover the scratches make it seem like flowers and this and that. And the guy from this bureau, he asked me did you do this, this is cool you know, we do this all the time. And he was like, I watched how you work, and I see that you are very precise and in details, maybe you would like to work with us. And, uh, and I said, and I did the work for the beginning [finishing the paint job], and later I kind of came back and I said maybe I can try, you know.

The spring and summer of 2008 he had different jobs in construction, mostly painting houses. One of his friends had a lot of connections, and was called often for jobs: *"So he would call me, hey, I got this job and this job and in Delft, this whole house and this and that. So he really helped me. That was very kind of him you know."* So there were different ways in which he would find his work: through the website of *Niedziela*, through temporary agencies, and through friends. He started university in that same year, and had to study in the weekends. It was a busy time, with little time for his friends and his hobbies: playing music or traveling: *"I was doing my school you know. Every weekend almost you know, that is something also. No I did not travel, I wanted to focus, to be rested and have enough energy for the day you know."*

Hard times

In 2010 the job at the advertisement agency ended and Maciej decided to start working as an independent contractor. He started his own business:

³⁰ Advertisement agency

³¹ Applying commercial letters for storefronts etc.

So either I can do my own things, like wood work, paint you know. But seriously I was searching for a job in 'scenic production', you know. That is what I was doing in America, you make like, a say, octopus, huge, like a playground for the kids. Or I was making fake trees, they go to the water and you get all kind of life, which was for Disney parking in Orlando. I worked there, when I was in Gainesville, I worked for a company that did this, you know. Scenic production. You got all these big things, like big ducks, they are made from fiber glass you know. I was searching for this and I found it, a company but there is only one company in Nederland. But the guy is so slow in business, and they don't know what is going to happen, this and that...

His father taught him the trade but he never got a chance to work in it in the Netherlands. He had to work in construction instead, to keep paying the bills:

You have to keep up in the rat race with others and if you want to rent your own place you have to have a regular income and pay all the bills you know. And slowly, I get into this machine you know. So that was going nice until four years ago when I started working in construction and I was working for three months and for one month they paid me and for the other two months they did not pay me because the company collapsed and they claimed bankruptcy.

He got caught up in a spiral of debt because he was not able to pay for some of his bills when he was waiting for two months' salary that did not come. He had spent money on transportation, on tools and materials. He worked there as an independent contractor, not through a temp agency or with a contract. The latter is very common according to Maciej: you do not sign a contract unless the job is long term and you know each other's work. *"And also the lawyer asked me, why don't you have the contract, you know. I said the guy promised me a contract, but he wants to see how I work, for the first... it is always like this, you don't get a contract immediately. You can easily use someone the way this works."* So when the company went bankrupt, he had nobody to turn to. He tried to work with a lawyer but that would have cost him a 1000 euro before the case would even start, something he could not afford. *"I got stuck with all kinds of bills and incasso³² from rent, from car, you know. I could not even pay apk³³ on my car because I was so broke. So from a couple hundred euro it grew to like 3000."* Bills that were relatively affordable soon grew into large debts that he could not pay.

And one day the police came and they knocked on my door and took me to jail. So I spend a couple of weeks in the jail for not paying the bills. And so I did this once and after a while they did this for a second time. They took me to court and tried to explain the situation and what happened to me and how the system did not help me with it.

32 Collection agency

33 Mandatory car test in the Netherlands

He was taken to jail twice because he could not pay the bills. He had to sell his car not only because he could not afford it but also because they expired his license because of the debt. He still had a Polish license. Because he was registered with the municipality and because he was working legally, as a zzp'er, the registration systems between the Netherlands and Poland were connected and he could not 'disappear'. He did not want to either: he was still attending the university and working on his degree.

My mother took the credit to pay for the school for one year, she paid the school. But that was the most important thing for me, to keep going to the school, you know. The bills can wait you know, this and that. Yes. So like a year ago they took me to jail for not paying all these bills you know. It was a stupid bill! I did not pay *apk* for my car, it was 26 euro because I did not have 26 euro. It is like ridiculous.

He is still kind of bitter about the whole situation: it set him back money wise but he also feels that the courts should have been more lenient. He was stuck in a situation that was not his fault, and he feels he was not helped as much as 'natives' would be helped in the system. He wants to clear his name:

But I think I am going to do my case again. With this company that did not pay me for work for almost two months. I was trying and now I think I can do it. I just pay the lawyer and do it, you know. It is going to help me to show the judge that it all added up, that it is coincidence, whatever. You know, together, I am not guilty in this one, I am the victim in this one, it just added up. But that's Nederland, eh, I met so many people that just ended up, in problems, you know. It is going to be a different situation if somebody can borrow you money but if you have no one, than it is just... then you are stuck you know. With the *boete*³⁴ en de *incasso*³⁵ it goes really fast and this is ridiculous. I went around the whole world, and I have never seen a country like this. Like, I paid a couple of bills in America and they ask you, you want to work for this or you want to pay? And if I don't have job and I immediately say, I want to work for this. And they give you a list and they say, make your one week work, for older people or handicapped people. And this is a good thing you know. But here – I asked like, can I pay in payments? NO. Can I work for it? NO. So, you know, bravo. Bravo. Very interesting way to think, money.

After this business went bankrupt, he had some difficult years. He had trouble finding jobs, and he just made enough to get by. *"Yeah, I was taking all kinds of things to catch up you know. Two day jobs, here and there. But this only took me, I had enough money to continue, you know, for food and going to school. And rent. I could not save up."* He took jobs in all parts of the country, and in different sectors. He was painting a bridge last year, near

34 Fine that is issues once one does not pay the original ticket

35 Collection agency

Schiphol: *"So we did this job you know and it was a 100 meters high. I could see Amsterdam, Haarlem, Schiphol, all of this. That was a nice experience actually, you know. Breaking all the fear. That was last year."* He was not really qualified to do work at that height but they needed a painter who could also speak Polish and English. He worked for different temp agencies. One job was for a well-known Dutch football player and trainer, in Scheveningen, where he did the paint work and fix some ornaments: *"That was like the only job that required some skills, I had to paint all kind of gold ornaments. So I had to fix those ornaments, like rebuild them, paint, you know, a couple of months, which was really a nice experience."*

He had to take odd jobs, some for a few days, others for maybe a bit longer, to keep an income. He did not seriously consider leaving, even after he finished his degree in 2013. His goal is to work as an acupuncturist and he thinks that there are more opportunities to do so in the Netherlands. He also could not just leave: *"Ah, yeah, but people who never register, zzp'er, never pay belasting, you know. So yeah. Maybe you can disappear and they cannot search you. But I already everything in black and white and all the papers and stuff, so I could not do that."* Even though the years between 2010 and 2014 were difficult, he managed to keep working and to keep an optimistic attitude. His dream was to open his own shop, a biological store where he could combine acupuncture and selling organic foods. He would like to work with people that struggle with addictions. Until he has enough money saved up, he will have to continue working in construction. Luckily, he found that the last months, work has picked up and he has been very busy. *"Now it is going good. Things really changed this year actually. Like you can say, like, I think the crisis is over, something like that. There is so much work, they are calling you from everywhere. So this one it is like 20 euro an hour. Some other jobs offer 15, 18, so you can pick the best ones."* Over the years, he also has learned new skills and raised his qualifications. He is able to work with different materials as wood and concrete, besides painting.

He is self-employed and uses different strategies to find jobs. He knows a lot of people, has good connections in the construction sector. He is also listed with a number of temp agencies: to maintain his self-employed status, he cannot work for just one company.

Networks

Maciej knows to a lot of people: in his spare time, he plays the guitar and works with different musicians. He plays in a reggae band, but he also has a small recording studio built in his apartment. He does not live in the same apartment anymore: he moved to a place near the Palace Gardens, close to the center of town. *"I took the penthouse on the highest floor. I have a nice view, I see horses in the park, and I have a nice view of the channel. Dutch people on Sunday they jog. It is at the end of the Elandstraat and you take a right, and you have the park and I am opposite of it. It is a very nice location; I have a very nice view."* He found the place through his network: the maintenance guy is Polish; he met him in a store where they sell Polish products. The store is now gone, but it used to be a place where people met and exchanged information, besides buying products from home. He knows musicians from different countries; he lets people use his studio to practice. His neighbor is a drummer from the Antilles, they play together a lot. Most of the people he knows, study at The Royal Conservatoire of The Hague. They play together, and he wants to record an album this fall. He explains that he knows a lot of people, but he has not so many

people that he can call his good friends: *"Friends? Yes of course, I met so many friends here, I met so many Italian friends. I make all these windows for Italian restaurants [points at the window of the lunchroom we sit in]. And a lot of musicians, from the school. Yeah, I mean, I know a lot of people but it is not that I got a lot of friends, you know. I know a lot of people, but I have a few friends only."* Through his music he also meets a lot of Dutch people, but he finds it hard to connect to them:

They open, open minded, friendly, but then, they always think they are different a bit you know. It is hard to get to their house. They don't tell you things they talk about among themselves you know. Like about foreigners. But the situation made them, all the immigration from Turkey, from Morocco. From the Antilles, Surinam, you know. Because I met a lot of guys from Spain, Aruba, Surinam, they feel the distance. Like we are never going to be like this, like them. They are never going to treat you this way, if there is a better job, they will look for a Dutch guy you know.

He thinks it is different in Poland because migration to Poland started much later. There is less tolerance for foreigners in Poland, he tells that there are always incidents with the mosques over there. He thinks it is more hidden in the Netherlands.

He also met his girlfriend in the lunchroom where the interview took place. The Italian owners used to organize different events, as poetry readings or small music gatherings. He met his girlfriend one of these times, she is French and works in the International Criminal Court. They have been together for two years now, but he does not seem sure about what she would want to do in the future. She has a five-year old son, the father lives in France. She gets stationed through her work, so she might move. But he explains that she enjoys her current position.

Future

Maciej wants to open a store and have his acupuncture business. That is what he dreams of, that is why he left Poland after he returned from the United States. When asked about where he would like to be in the future, he mentions the Netherlands but he is not certain: he would also like to go back to the US. He does not want to go back to Poland: *"To Poland? Uhm, I don't think so. No, that is not my place. I... like you get an astrology chart you know. This is not my place. I feel, like the United States that was a good place for me, that was the best place..."*

His family is in Poland, the sister that lived in the US moved back at the time that he moved back. He is close to them but does not speak to them often. He usually visits once a year, over Christmas: *"Yeah, I go to parents, I visit my parents, or visit my family in the north, near Lithuania. Yes. More lakes and nature."* He loves to visit, not just for his family, but also for the nature that surrounds them. They live in a big city but have easy access to parks and forests around them. He used to go back more often, but he is too focused on work these days to take time off in the summer. His parents have not visited him:

I did not have a place for them, to really accept them. Studio, studio. Compact, everything you know. You don't have this in Poland, an apartment is like two-three bedroom. And here everything is small, the price is high, everything is valuable, the space. Quite different in Poland, they build so many of these buildings in the communist time you know. So I, I did not have a place to accept my family here.

His sister did visit before; they met up in Amsterdam where she was because of work. But his sisters also have busy lives now, which make it harder to meet. They keep in touch via Skype mostly but he does not call often: *"Yeah, on Skype. You know, that can do. But I try to avoid all this, like discussions about how is your day. This is boring, it is better to come once in a while and enjoy and this time. Hanging around Skype and just to talk about anything."* He tries to keep his conversations real, and feels that they do not need to talk a lot to be close: *"But I don't need to. We always have a good time when I go there. [...] I think we already did so many nice things together, like traveling together, you know."* He is attached to his family but he does not visit or call often. He explains that he is not 'a good example': most people he knows visit often, go back and forth for important events. He does not do that, he feels that he grew up in a different environment where other values were stressed.

He wants to build a business and he thinks the Netherlands would be a good place to do so. That is his main reason to stay – but if he finds a different place, he might move there. He is trying to do some acupuncture work but he is too busy now:

People sometimes come. But now not often because I am so busy, I am busy with other things you know. No time. But eventually I want to start to do only this thing you know. Or at least focus on it. But this thing is an investment you know. I am not going to get any credit you know. For sure. But. And the kind of practice costs me at least 8000 to open you know, you pay 3000 for the borg. And to buy some medicine and tables and stuff.

He is optimistic about the future:

I realized that wherever you go you take your mind with you, and your karma. That is my philosophy. And, so, you know, I mean yeah, I could go back to Poland too, but I have lived there for too long. I want to see some, more than that. I have been all over everywhere, I have traveled all over, everywhere, cities big and small. And I always like to travel also. Nederland seems kind of surprising. Maybe all this hard time that I had maybe this is passed already, I am understanding the philosophy, the *belasting*, and maybe I can build up some faith that there is some, some, some intelligent people also, not only heartless, people just counting the money for everything. Yeah, but Nederland is also, they are kind of, they are interesting people. When you travel around the world, you meet a lot of people, lot of nations, and definitely Nederlanders are something.

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