‘Desired’ Migrant Workers

An exploration of the concept ‘Hierarchy of Desirability’ through a study of precarious migrant workers

Sophia Dörffer Hvalkof
Aalborg University
M.Sc. Thesis, Development and International Relations, Global Refugee Studies
Student ID: 20171360
Supervisor: Steffen Bo Jensen
Submission: May 2019

Characters: 142.663

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to explore the concept 'hierarchy of desirability' which is taken as a proxy of the field of the postcolonial feminist perspective. The aim is to develop an understanding of what factors that are stressed, and what are obscured in the study of migrant workers from a postcolonial feminist theoretical standpoint. Three studies are used to assess the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability': Hans Lucht's study of male migrant workers migrating from Ghana to Italy, Guy Standing's exploration of the 'the precariat' and Arianne M. Gaetano's examination of the internal rural to urban migration of young Chinese women.

In reading Lucht's study, the theoretical lens highlights how migrant workers are marginalized by focusing on how raced social markers construct a hierarchical notion of 'belonging', but does not engage with their motivations for leaving and staying in precarious work which contributes to the notion of them as 'victims'.In reading Standing's study, the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' allows for a critical engagement with the notion of 'class' as a defining factor for 'precarious migrant workers' by drawing on how difference matters, but simultaneously, the emphasis on difference obstructs what defines 'precarious migrant workers'. In reading Gaetano, the lens is useful to view how the young rural women are constructed as 'desired' workers in the domestic work sector through a construction of a divide between the rural and urban population, and through ascribed gendered characteristics that are institutionalized, but the lens does not engage the women's lives before and after migration which, similarly to Lucht, obstructs the notion of agency and thereby questions Gaetano's argument of the young women's empowerment.

Based on the interaction between the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' and the chosen material, it is possible to argue that while the postcolonial feminist perspective offers valuable insight into how marginalization and discrimination is configured, it is necessary to pay attention to the inherent bias towards the contemporary labour market dynamics because this emphasizes migrant workers as exploited victims which obscures an understanding of how migrant workers find ways to cope and take advantage of the situation they are in.

Key words: Labor migration, migrant workers, 'hierarchy of desirability', precarious work, postcolonial feminist studies.

Table of Contents

"*… upward mobility turned out to be a rare occurrence, however, and millions remained stuck in the informal economy that they had helped to build, or drifting back and forth between the slums of the urban periphery and the impoverished rural hinterland, forming a vast stratum of precarious labour*".[1]

1. Introduction

Migrants are an important part of the workforce in economies worldwide. But unlike capital, migrant workers are seldom free to move around and are instead subjected to various regulations and restrictions that affect their opportunities in the labour market. In some instances, structural and social barriers can contribute to economic and social marginalization. Although labour market segmentation theory provides explanations for the demand and division of migrant labour, it is relevant to consider perspectives that can expand on these processes to contribute further to an understanding of the disadvantaged work positions of specific types of migrant workers in labour markets.

This thesis is based on a theoretical interest in exploring a way to understand the division of migrant workers in the labour market and what factors contribute to the marginalization of some within it. This interest has grown out of a dissatisfaction with explanations of the division of migrant workers that tend to focus on economic relations of demand and supply due to the persistent domination of neo-classical economic theories of migration. The focus on migrant workers as rational economic actors tends to fix migrant workers in a relationship understood through economic concerns and does not acknowledge the processes that contribute to inequality within the labour market. This conception of migrant workers precludes an understanding of how and why some are confined to low-skilled jobs in poor working conditions and are restricted from accessing more favorable positions in labour markets despite relevant qualifications. The explanations provided by neo-classical economics seem increasingly inadequate, because the theory constructs migrant workers as 'manageable' which implies a rational division of workers according to skillset and experience. However, this does not explain why some qualified migrant workers are forced to take low-paying and insecure jobs in different labour markets.

With its focus on inequality and hierarchical structures, the postcolonial approach seems well placed to offer an understanding of the subordination of migrant workers within labour

[1] Breman, Jan. (2013). *A Bogus Concept?.* New Left Review, p. 130

markets. In contrast to neo-classical economics, the postcolonial perspective offers an approach that challenges the cause and effect of the maintenance of migrant workers in disadvantaged positions in labour markets worldwide by focusing on persistent hierarchical structures that are created by the construction of social markers. As John Baylis et al. write, 'postcolonial' "signifies lingering colonial hierarchies of race, class, and gender despite the winding down of the formal colonial period".[2] 'Postcolonial' implies that the period of colonialism has had a lasting impact on economic, social and cultural spheres across societies. Following this emphasis on persistent relations of power, the use of migrant workers in advanced economies can be understood as a relation of exploitation wherein migrant workers are divided and ruled over by Western capitalist societies through the notion of specific migrants as inferior. People from former non-capitalist societies have been embedded in a relation of dependency in which people have become dependent on wage labour, resulting in "a pool of unengaged labour, available and ready to migrate to other countries".[3] As such, the postcolonial approach offers a way to explore marginalized peoples through a lens that puts focus on sociohistorical relations of power, and how social relations are embedded within relations of power that enforce hierarchical structures between groups of people.

The differentiation between specific types of migrant workers is expressed in various ways dependent on the specific social and geographical context. As Katharyne Mitchell et al. have argued: "In some geographic contexts one's gender, race, language, or nationality may be an asset leading to job opportunities, while in others these identity markers may marginalize one from accessing resources".[4] Specifically, feminist scholars have emphasized the importance of 'identity' and difference in the process of hierarchization of workers within the labour market. Drawing on the main idea "social difference organizes the world in concrete ways"[5] feminist scholars have emphasized the importance of 'identity' in the discussion of inequality and disadvantage within the postcolonial field.

[2] Baylis, John, and, Smith, Steve, and Owens, Patricia. (2017). *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford University Press, 7th edition, p. 175
[3] Pajo, Erind. (2008). *International migration, social demotion and imagined advancement: An Ethnography of Social-global Mobility*. Springer, p. 7
[4] Mitchell, Katharyne, and, Jones, Reece, and Fluri, Jennifer L. (2019). *Handbook on critical geographies of migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing, p. 3
[5] Bair, Jennifer. (2010). *On difference and capital: Gender and globalization of production*. Journal of women and culture in society, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 203

Contrary to the neoliberal claim that "variations in employment status are due to differing levels of human capital" [6] scholars within the postcolonial feminist field have emphasized that the division of migrant workers should not simply be understood through economic analysis but should be considered as a complex process wherein economic, political, social and cultural factors all interact and affect the process of maintaining specific migrant workers in disadvantaged positions within labour markets.[7] With the growth of international labour migration, employers have increasingly been able to pick from a so-called "inexhaustible pool of potential labour" in a growing global economy.[8] International migration has transformed the relations between employers and employees by providing a labour force that can be "hired, fired, and deported without regard to social reproduction".[9] Native workers are considered to have lost their monopoly on jobs because they have to compete with migrant workers. However, despite their qualifications and skill-levels, migrant workers increasingly take up "dirty" jobs in sectors such as agriculture, cleaning, care-work and construction.[10] Therefore, it is relevant to explore the processes that differentiate between migrant workers to better understand what contributes to the disadvantaged position of some in the labour market.

The scholars Linda McDowell, Adina Batnitzky and Sarah Dyer have called for "theoretically promiscuous work"[11] in the study of labour migrants to fully explore the factors that contribute to the division of migrant workers, and why some end up in low-paying and insecure work. Specifically, Linda McDowell has done extensive research into migrant workers' participation in the labour market and has argued that: "jobs are not neutral slots but are, instead, socially constructed definitions, created to attract differently raced and gendered workers, creating a hierarchy of desirability within the category of 'economic migrants'".[12] Based on Melissa Wright's study on 'disposable women'[13] McDowell draws inspiration from the development

[6] Castles, Stephen. (2011). *Migration, Crisis, and the Global Labour Market*. Globalizations, 8:3, 311-324, p. 315
[7] Castles, Stephen, and, Miller, Mark J. (2009). *Age of Migration: International Populations Movement in the Modern World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 25
[8] Lewis, Hannah, and, Dwyer, Peter, and, Hodkinson, Stuart, and, Waite, Louise. (2015). *Hyper-precarious lives: Migrants, work and forced labour in the North*. Progress in Human Geography, vol. 39 (5), 580-600, p. 581
[9] Lewis et al. (2015). p. 583
[10] Brooks, Ann, and, Simpson, Ruth. (2012). *Emotions in Transmigration: Transformation, Movement and Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan Limited, p. 52
[11] McDowell, Linda, Batnitzky, Adina, and, Dyer, Sarah. (2009). *Precarious work and economic migration: Emerging immigrant divisions of labour in greater London's service sector*. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 33 (1), 3-25
[12] McDowell, Linda, cited in, Lewis et al. (2015), p. 583
[13] Wright, Melissa. (2006). *Disposable women and other myths of global capitalism*. Routledge.

of a "theoretical toolkit from three epistemological approaches: Marxism, post-structural feminism and postcolonial theory" to explore how women in developing countries can be viewed as "embodied sites of exploitation".[14] Based on this, the notion of 'hierarchy of desirability' is developed within McDowell's work as a conceptual frame that focuses on how "embodied social characteristics" are used "in the production of difference in the labour market […] to include or exclude potential workers from particular types of employment".[15] 'Hierarchy of desirability' is used as a frame to explore the disadvantaged position of migrant workers through a combination of the construction of identity and difference and the institutionalization of hierarchies. Consequently, 'hierarchy of desirability' provides an interesting insight into how the wide field of postcolonial feminist perspectives engages with the issue of migrant workers.

Following this outline, this study is sparked by a theoretical interest in the postcolonial feminist perspective and aims to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this perspective in the study of disadvantaged migrant workers in the labour market. To engage with this wide theoretical field, the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' will be used as a proxy to explore what this field contributes with and what it obscures in the study of disadvantaged migrant workers.

Research Question

This study is sparked by a theoretical interest in exploring ways to understand the inequality and disadvantage of specific types of migrant workers, as well as exploring the structures that their relations and opportunities are embedded in. A postcolonial feminist perspective offers an opportunity to engage with these issues but can be challenging to operationalize due to the scope of this theoretical field.

The primary aim of this research is to explore the concept 'hierarchy of desirability' which is taken as a proxy of the field of postcolonial feminist perspectives. The aim is to develop an understanding of what factors that are stressed, and what are left out or obscured in the study of disadvantaged migrant workers from a postcolonial feminist theoretical standpoint. It is relevant to explore the scope of the postcolonial feminist standpoint because it promotes an

[14] Wright, Melissa, cited in, McDowell, Linda. (2008). *Thinking through work: Complex inequalities, constructions of difference, and trans-national migrants*. Progress in Human Geography, vol 32 (4), 491-507, P. 495

[15] McDowell, Linda. (2015). *The Lives of Others: Body work, the Production of Difference, and Labor Geographies*. Economic Geography, vol. 91, 1-23, p. 3

engagement with different explanations of the opportunities and restrictions that migrant workers face, and the forces that contribute to inequality within the labour market. Consequently, this study will be guided by the following research question:

How and to what extent can the concept 'hierarchy of desirability' inform our understanding of precarious migrant workers?

It is relevant to briefly present how the notion of 'precarious' is applied as an empirical field within this study rather than a theoretical concept. The notion of 'precarious' has been argued to be particularly relevant to migrants because they often "experience multiple forms of vulnerability".[16] In contrast to the notion of 'vulnerable' or 'insecure', 'precarious' simultaneously defines a condition characterized by uncertainty combined with pinpointing a position within the labour market. As Leah Vosko argues, precarious entails: "work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements".[17] As such, applying 'precarious' as an empirical field can guide the study to material that deals with the disadvantaged position of migrant workers which the concept 'hierarchy of desirability' is an attempt to explain.

The term 'precarity' has been used to describe the rise of flexible, temporary or sub-contracted work in the neoliberal economy.[18] The notion is therefore rooted in a neo-Marxist interpretation of the contemporary labour market that considers 'precarity' as a new norm within capitalist society. As Bridget Anderson argues: "The effect of precarious work… the flipside of the celebration of the 'work-life balance', when a person's economic productivity becomes the overwhelming priority".[19] The notion of 'precariousness' points to a position wherein work is a defining factor in a person's life. Therefore, applying 'precarious' as an empirical field supports a specification of material that presents migrant workers in a work-related context.

[16] Paret, Marcel, and, Gleeson, Shannon. (2016) *Precarity and agency through a migration lens*. Citizenship Studies, 20:3-4, 277-294, p. 280
[17] Vosko, Leah. (2010). *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 2
[18] Lewis, Hannah, and, Waite, Louise. (2015). *Asylum, Immigration Restrictions and Exploitation: Hyperprecarity As a Lens for Understanding and Tackling Forced Labour.* Anti-Trafficking Review, Special Issue, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking, No. 5.
[19] Anderson, Bridget. (2010). *Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers*. Work, Employment and Society. Vol. 24 (2), p. 304

The notion of 'precarious' grasps a specific condition associated with unstable employment in the labour market. As Rodgers and Rodgers argue: "precariousness involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability […] It is some combination of these factors which identifies precarious jobs".[20] Specifically, using 'precarious' as a theoretical concept would blur the exploration of 'hierarchy of desirability' by homogenizing the cause and effect of being in a disadvantaged position.

Following this outline, this study will apply the notion of 'precarious' as an empirical field because it can guide a search for material that focuses on disadvantaged migrant workers. 'Precarious' is useful as an empirical field because it specifies a condition within the labour market that points to an experience of being disadvantaged. In contrast, applying 'precarious' as a theoretical concept would obstruct the exploration of 'hierarchy of desirability'. Simultaneously, 'precarity' as a theoretical concept runs a risk of homogenizing differences between people that are in precarious work conditions. Consequently, an exploration of 'hierarchy of desirability' is supported by applying 'precarious' as an empirical field because the term relates to a condition of disadvantage within the labour market specifically experienced by migrant workers.

2. Methodology

In this chapter, an outline of the research design of this study will be presented which will include a description of how the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' will be deconstructed into three statements to operationalize it within the analysis. This will be followed by a presentation of the chosen empirical material which includes three studies that will be used to assess the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability': Hans Lucht's study of male migrant workers migrating from Ghana to Italy, Guy Standing's exploration of the 'the precariat' and Arianne M. Gaetano's examination of the internal rural to urban migration of young Chinese women.

Research design

The research design for this paper follows that of a theory testing case study. Since this study is an exploration of a theoretical standpoint it is essentially deductive in its approach.[21] The

[20] Rodgers, Gerry, and Rodgers, Janine. (1989*). Precarious Jobs in Labour Market Regulation: The Growth of Atypical Employment in Western Europe*. International Labour Organisation. P. 5
[21] May, Tim. (2011). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. London: Open University Press, 4th edition, p. 30

main aim of a theory testing case study is to explore existent theory via a case. Løkke and Sørensen argue that this type of design can assess a theory's "relative value in terms of strengths, weaknesses, boundaries, and other relevant dimensions".[22] In other words, the case becomes instrumental to investigate the "explanatory power" of the theory.[23] Three concrete cases are therefore presented with the aim of assessing the scope of the theory, the theory's applicability and its usability. As May writes "the case study becomes 'receptacle for putting theory to work".[24] The cases chosen for this study are therefore not the main objective but facilitate and support an exploration of the scope of 'hierarchy of desirability'. Similarly, to Creswell's 'instrumental case study', the researcher "focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue".[25] This study is concerned with the strength and weaknesses of the postcolonial feminist perspective in understanding migrant workers in the labour market.

The concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' is derived from a theoretical foundation. As such, the concept is not a theory in itself but relies on a 'theoretical toolkit'. Therefore, the concept will be deconstructed into three main statements to point out the main theoretical arguments that the concept draws on. Doty and Glick's definition of 'theory' serves as a recipe for the deconstruction of the concept. As they write, 'theory' is: "a series of logical arguments that specify a set of relationships among concepts, constructs or variables".[26] Based on this definition, the concept can be theorized by identifying its main arguments which point to the theoretical causalities. As Løkke and Sørensen write "Several levels and elements of the same theory, or rather the pattern that the theory constitutes, can be evaluated through multiple propositions".[27] The concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' will be constructed as a theory by deriving three statements from the conceptual framework to construct an analytical frame. The following three statements relate to the causalities within 'hierarchy of desirability':

1. *Processes of social categorization construct intersecting gendered, raced and classed identities which influence the precarious position of migrant workers.*

[22] Løkke, A., Dissing Sørensen, P. (2014). *Theory Testing Using Case Studies*. The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, Vol. 12 (1), 66-74p. 67
[23] Løkke, and, Sørensen. P. 73
[24] May. P. 223
[25] Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions.* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, p. 74
[26] Doty, and, Glick, in, Løkke and Sørensen. P. 68
[27] Løkke, and, Sørensen. P. 70

2. *Migrant workers are restricted in negotiating their social characteristics which limit their ability to contest their position within the labour market.*

3. *Processes of differentiation are institutionalized and contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on 'desired' characteristics.*

The three statements each represent a main theoretical argument found within the concept that relates to the overall notion of 'subjectification'. The first statement points to the process of *social categorization* within the concept and how migrant workers are ascribed specific social characteristics that can be used to include or exclude them. The construction of social characteristics is expanded upon via the second statement that emphasizes the notion of *performativity* and how migrant workers actively take part in the process of differentiation by negotiating social characteristics. The process of subjectification and negotiation is situated within relations of power which forms the basis of the third statement and highlights how *institutionalization* influences the maintenance of migrant workers in precarious work. In this sense, *social categorization, performativity* and *institutionalization* each make up a component within 'hierarchy of desirability'. To support an engagement with the three statements, sub-questions have been derived from each statement and will be addressed in the analysis.

Løkke and Sørensen argue that "Theory testing using case studies relies by definition on theoretical sampling where cases are chosen on the basis of theoretical criteria".[28] The formulation of statements clarifies the foundation or theoretical criteria inherent within 'hierarchy of desirability'. Bent Flyvbjerg writes that the case study has been critiqued for "having a bias towards verification, understood as a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions".[29] Since the primary aim of this study is to investigate the scope of the concept 'hierarchy of desirability' it will engage with a very specific perspective. Taking Flyvbjerg's argument into account, it is necessary to question what is obscured within the conceptual lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' and be aware of the assumptions within this framework. By drawing on the empirical material, it is possible to support a mutual exchange in which the theory can add to the material simultaneously with that the material can be used

[28] Løkke, and, Sørensen. P. 72
[29] Flyvbjerg, Bent, in, Løkke, and, Sørensen. P. 72

to highlight what the theoretical lens obstructs. Thereby, it is possible to challenge the theoretical lens by making it look at material that have focused on the same point of departure, precarious migrant workers, but in which the perspective and explanations are different which leads to the presentation of different aspects than what the theory would focus on.

Importantly, the aim of this study is not to argue that the concept 'hierarchy of desirability' is the best tool to analyse migrant workers in precarious labour market positions. Rather, the aim is to engage with the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' and explore what the postcolonial feminist approach offers to this type of study. Thereby, this study adds to "a stream of cumulative research that refines and develops the knowledge of a field".[30] Overall, this study is an attempt to explore how the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' as a proxy for the postcolonial feminist field can be used, what it contributes with and what it obscures in the study of migrant workers.

Empirical material

In this study, the primary aim is to explore the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability'. Additionally, the notion of 'precarious' migrant workers has been applied as an empirical field to guide the search for material. Løkke and Sørensen suggest that: "When the number of theories and their propositions or 'variables' to be tested is small, multiple case studies are an obvious choice to investigate the boundaries of those theories in different settings".[31] Based on this suggestion, a number of case studies have been chosen to challenge the scope of 'hierarchy of desirability'.

Attention has been paid to studies that have covered different contexts. It is necessary to look at material in different contextual settings because different settings allow for a more thorough exploration of the scope of 'hierarchy of desirability'. Overall, the chosen material provides diverse accounts of migrant workers in terms of the approach to the study, the specific context, and migratory pattern. Each study provides a new way to expand upon the explanatory power of the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' because the material presents a similar starting point, precarious migrant workers, but differ in the way that this issue is configured. This represents three ways of putting the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' to work in different

[30] Løkke, and, Sørensen, P. 71
[31] Løkke, and, Sørensen. P. 73

empirical settings. An understanding of the strength and weaknesses of 'hierarchy of desirability' can be developed by supporting an interaction between the focus of the theoretical lens and what the focus is on within the material. This supports a way to look beyond what the theoretical lens is primarily focused on, and it is thereby possible to develop an understanding of where the concept can further our understanding of an issue, and where it cannot and why.

Hans Lucht focuses on the everyday experience of young men in the process of migrating from Ghana to Italy. Lucht's study provides an account of international migrant workers and their everyday experiences of working in Naples in Italy. In contrast to Lucht, Guy Standing provides a wider insight into different types of precarious migrant workers through an exploration of what he terms 'the precariat'. Standing stands out from Lucht and Gaetano because instead of an ethnographic account he provides an exploration of the concept of 'the precariat'. Thereby, Standing provides an opportunity to critically engage with the notion of 'precarity' as a term to describe migrant workers' disadvantage in labour markets. Arianne Gaetano's study provides another setting by specifically focusing on women in China. Inspired by Standing's own work on the Chinese labour market in some of his examples, Gaetano offers a more detailed account of this specific region. Gaetano focuses on internal rural to urban migrant workers and specifically looks at young women. Gaetano differs from Lucht and Standing by providing an ethnographic account of women and by looking at migrant workers that move internally within their country of origin rather than migrating internationally to foreign labour markets.

Following this outline, this study establishes an interaction between the chosen empirical material and the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' to develop an understanding of the explanatory power of the postcolonial feminist perspective. The concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' is the primary aim, and the cases applied become instrumental to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the conceptual framework. To engage with the causalities within the concept, 'hierarchy of desirability' has been theorized by deconstructing the concept into three concrete statements that point out the main theoretical arguments found within the conceptual frame. The three statements will be used as a guideline in the analysis. The chosen material shares the same starting point, precarious migrant workers, but comes from three different contexts providing different configurations of this issue. This makes it possible to challenge the argumentation within 'hierarchy of desirability' from different angles by

supporting an interaction between what explanations are offered by the conceptual framework and what is offered within the material. This interaction can develop an understanding of what the theory can see, what it obstructs and why.

3. Theorizing 'Hierarchy of Desirability'

In this chapter, 'hierarchy of desirability' will be deconstructed into the three main statements. For each statement, sub-questions have been derived to guide the exploration of the theoretical components in the analysis. The first section will examine the concept's basis in social constructivist theory and show how the construction of 'identity' through social categorization is viewed through the lens of the feminist notion of 'intersectionality' which leads to the formulation of the first statement. The second section will focus on how the concept is situated within a Foucauldian inspired framework by drawing on the work of Judith Butler and her notion of 'performativity' which leads to the second statement. The third section will outline how the process of subjectification is institutionalized and enforces a hierarchization of migrant workers which leads to the third statement. This chapter will end in a sub-conclusion in which the main theoretical points that lead to the construction of statements will be highlighted.

Initially, it is relevant to point out how 'hierarchy of desirability' has been referred to in different terms, and how the concept is related to labour market segmentation theory. Linda McDowell has referred to 'hierarchy of desirability' with the use of the term's 'eligibility', 'difference'[32], 'acceptability' and 'desirability'[33]. Essentially, each term refers to the notion of how social characteristics are given meaning and ascribed to individuals to hierarchically position them in relation to each other and to associate them with specific types of work. As such, each term refers to the same theoretical configuration and does not differ depending on what term is used. In this study, 'desirability' is used because the notion of 'desired' has been prominent in the work of McDowell.

'Hierarchy of desirability' is an expansion of labour market segmentation theory. Within labour market segmentation theory, workers are viewed as positioned within specific segments of the

[32] McDowell, Linda. (2015). *The lives of Others: Body work, the production of difference and Labor Geographies.* Economic Geography, Vol. 91 (1), 1-23, p. 2
[33] McDowell, Linda, and, Batnitzky, Adina, and, Dyer, Sarah. (2009). *Precarious work and Economic Migration: Emerging immigrant divisions of labour in greater London's service sector*. International journal of urban and regional research, Vol. 33, 3-25, p. 6

labour market based on their skills such as education and qualifications, as well as assumptions about their productivity based on nationality, skin colour, gender and other ascribed characteristics.[34] However, as Hannah Lewis et al. argue this theory does "not adequately explore why migrants per se are so prominent in low-paid, insecure work, especially when many are highly skilled and well educated"[35]. The concept 'hierarchy of desirability' is situated within labour market segmentation theory but further develops the emphasis on a combination of structure and identity; the connection between the construction and maintenance of segmented labour markets and the process of subjectification.

Social categorization

The concept 'hierarchy of desirability' is based on a social constructivist standpoint wherein meaning is produced rather than simply "found" in the world.[36] In other words, people ascribe meaning to things in the world that result in the categorization and production of subjects. As Stuart Hall argues 'meanings' "organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects".[37] What is at the center of the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' is how specific social characteristics are given meaning, how they produce difference between migrant workers, and how these processes of differentiation are maintained to position some migrant workers in specific types of work.

The process of social categorization ascribes meaning to people's bodily characteristics. According to McDowell, this process of differentiation is part of a labour market exchange wherein: "[p]otential employees are carefully distinguished from one another, not only by potential employers but also by clients or customers, on the basis of their embodied and social attributes".[38] In this sense, people are reduced to 'bodies' that signify the provision of a particular kind of service based on the social signification of ascribed characteristics. The ascribed characteristics should not be understood as distinct categories but as intersecting markers of differentiation.

[34] Samers, Michael. (2010). *Migration*. Routledge, p. 130
[35] Lewis, Hannah, and, Dwyer, Peter, and, Hodkinson, Stuart, and Waite, Louise. (2015). *Hyper precarious lives: Migrants, work and forced labour in the global north*. Sage, Progress in Human Geography, vol. 39 (5), 580-600 p. 583
[36] Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representation and signifying practices.* London, Sage Publications, Open Univeristy Press, p. 5.
[37] Hall, Stuart, p. 3
[38] McDowell. (2015). P. 8

McDowell draws on the feminist notion of 'intersectionality' to show how the process of social categorization draws on different and intersecting social markers that are dependent on the context. 'Intersectionality' can be understood as an "analytical sensitivity [which] think[s] about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power".[39] The intersectional perspective provides a framework to think about the intersection of social characteristics such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and class in the construction of identities. This framework is applied in 'hierarchy of desirability' to highlight the complexity inherent in the construction and fixation of different identities, and how specific identities can be used to exclude or include and affect the opportunities of migrant workers dependent on what is given meaning in specific contexts.

'Race', similarly to gender, is viewed as a social marker of differentiation. 'Race' functions as a social marker that in the process of being given 'meaning' can function as a tool to maintain difference between people. 'Race' is understood as a marker of difference that is defined by the given historical and cultural context. As Stuart Hall has argued: "Race is a signifier which can be linked to other signifiers in a representation. Its meaning is relational, and it is constantly subject to redefinition in different cultures, different moments […] Hence, race is a floating signifier".[40] 'Race' as a "floating signifier" implies that social markers are dependent on the given social or historical context. Therefore, social markers are not predetermined, and are adjusted as a tool of power to regulate individuals. Social markers of differentiation can therefore be viewed as dependent on the context and can be expressed in various ways such as an individual's accent, religious affiliations, gender, age or other markers.

The notion of 'class' is further viewed as a main social marker of difference. As McDowell argues: "new markers of class identification such as weight, skin colour, accents […] are used to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable […] mark[ing] working class bodies as increasingly unacceptable".[41] 'Class' is understood as social signifier similarly to 'gender' and 'race'. Thereby, 'class' is not exclusively a structural position as a result of social mobility but is a set of social characteristics that can be ascribed to people to define them as belonging to a specific group.

[39] Cho, S. and, Crenshaw, K. W., and, McCall, L. (2013) *Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theories, application and practice*. Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 38 (4), 785-810, p. 795
[40] Hall, Stuart, cited in, Lentin, Alana. (2008*) Racism: A Beginner's Guide*. Oneworld Publications, p. 47
[41] McDowell. (2008). P. 500

As an example, Guðbjört Gudjónsdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir study of Icelandic migrants in Norway illustrates how an intersection between 'whiteness' and class contribute to the perception of Icelandic migrants as 'desirable' compared to other migrant groups in Norway because of a perceived racial belonging. 'Whiteness' is tied to assumptions about education and discipline which enforce notions of 'class' and Icelandic migrants as being 'hard working'.[42] This exemplifies that 'race' and 'class' intersect to construct a notion of specific characteristics such as level of education which can affect the individual's position in society or in the labour market.

Based on this outline, McDowell's concept 'hierarchy of desirability' consists of a theoretical component that focuses on how the process of social categorization based on gendered, raced and classed identities affects the inclusion and exclusion of migrant workers in specific types of employment. Consequently, the following statement can be derived from the concept:

Processes of social categorization construct intersecting gendered, raced and classed identities which influence the precarious position of migrant workers.

To engage with this statement, it is relevant to look at the subjectification of migrant workers. The following sub-questions will be addressed in the analysis:

- In what ways do the intersection of social markers such as race, class and gender help to explain the differentiation between migrant workers and their opportunities?
- In what ways can the notion of 'embodied labour' expand on the experience of migrant workers?

'Performativity'

Drawing on a Foucauldian inspired framework, 'hierarchy of desirability' focuses on the process of subjectification and how this is embedded in relations of power. Drawing on Foucault, McDowell argues that 'identities' are "continually produced and reproduced, made material through schemes of surveillance, discipline and self-regulation".[43] To develop this

[42] Guðjónsdóttir Guðbjört and Loftsdóttir, Kristín. (2017). *Being a desirable migrant: perception and racialisation of Icelandic migrants in Norway*. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43:5, 791-808, p. 804
[43] McDowell, Linda. (2008). *Thinking through work*: *Complex inequalities, constructions of difference and trans-national migrants*. Progress in Human Geography, 32(4), 491-507 P. 497

argument, McDowell draws on the work of scholars that have engaged with the notion of 'subjectification' including Judith Butler and Aiwha Ong.

McDowell argues that: "identities are multiple and fluid, (re)produced and performed continuously in various contexts in the everyday life".[44] McDowell understands the construction of identity as a relational process wherein expression of identity takes place dependent on the given context. Identity is not fixed but is continuously constructed and produced through social interaction. Specifically, the construction of identity is here understood as a process that is in constant debate with the immediate surroundings about what kind of expression is allowed and not allowed.

McDowell draws on Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity' to develop an understanding of how identity is regulated and negotiated. Based on Butler, McDowell argues that: "gender is routinely produced through a heterosexual matrix, a set of norms through which identity is defined". [45] Expression of identity is understood to be regulated through the construction of a 'normative framework'. McDowell argues that 'gender' is understood through a set of norms that operate by placing 'heterosexuality' as a hegemonic identity by which other expressions such as homosexuality are deemed 'abnormal'. Thereby, normative frameworks operate to police expressions of 'identity' by defining what is 'normal' in a given societal context. This construction and maintenance of 'normal' expressions function to construct measures of inclusion and exclusion. Thereby, migrant workers can be viewed to be measured within a normative framework that dictates what is 'desired'.

John Baylis et al. further clarify how expression of identity regulates and restricts individuals. Baylis et al. argue: "How gender is understood in social contexts – how, in other words, we are a*llowed* to do gender – determines who it is possible for us to become".[46] Regulation of expressions of identity is context-dependent. The process of 'performing' social characteristics is embedded within sociohistorical relations of power. The specific social context dictates the expression of identities, and what is considered as acceptable or 'normal'. In this sense, individuals find themselves within specific normative frameworks that dictate what it is

[44] McDowell. (2008). P. 491
[45] McDowell. (2008). P. 497
[46] Baylis, John, and, Smith, Steve, and Owens, Patricia. (2017). *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford, 7th edition, p. 270

possible for them to achieve based on their ascribed characteristics. In other words, as Michael Samers argues, labour migrants must "'play by the rules' and 'look and dress the part'".[47] In this way, the process of social categorization becomes a tool of power that can dictate migrant workers' ability to negotiate their social identity. The ability to control how people are represented can result in the power to exclude or include specific types of people. Migrant workers can be understood to be confined within normative frameworks set by the given society which allow or restrict them from accessing specific types of work based on what they are perceived as.

The process of categorization is situated within regulatory frameworks. As Butler argues: "regulatory power produces the subjects it controls […] power is not only imposed externally but works as the regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed".[48] Subjectification is here understood to be a mutual process wherein normative notions of appropriate expressions of identities are internalized and reproduced by subjects or individuals themselves. People thereby define themselves according to hegemonic notions of identity, and in the process, reinforce the notion of what is and is not appropriate.

Additionally, Sarah Ahmed's work on 'whiteness' provides an interesting example of how the social construction of being 'white' can affect people's opportunities. Ahmed argues that the notion of 'whiteness' "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space, and what they 'can do'".[49] 'Whiteness', in a similar way to 'gender' or other social markers, can be used to hierarchize individuals according to specific normative frameworks. Being 'white' is situated within a racialized framework that produce 'whiteness' as the norm against which people negotiate their identities. Being 'white' is in this sense represented as a neutral identity that can be a tool to scrutinize specific types of people that do not fit into the category of being 'white'.

Processes of exclusion and inclusion dictate people's ability to negotiate social characteristics. Beverly Skeggs argues that: "different systems of inscription and interpretation may operate in simultaneity and in contradiction […] people can use the classifications and characteristics of race, class or femininity as a resource whilst others cannot because they are positioned *as*

[47] Samers. (2010). P. 131
[48] Butler, Judith. (2011). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge, p. xxix
[49] Ahmed, Sara. (2007). *A phenomenology of whiteness*. SAGE publications, vol. 8 (2): 149-168, p.

them".[50] Skeggs points to the issue of having the power to negotiate one's social identity. Migrant workers can be viewed to be in a process of negotiating their position within the labour market by being situated within a constant process of 'performing' identity. However, in the process of negotiating, migrants are limited by wider structures of power that dictate what it is possible for them to become. This affects their ability to negotiate their position because specific social characteristics are ascribed to them and that dictates who and what they are.

The notion of 'Other' plays a role in the process of maintaining a specific representation of migrant workers. Drawing on Butler's work, McDowell further argues: "normative heterosexual identities are maintained through the policing of hegemonic performances and the shaming of 'abnormal' performances, through a process of Othering".[51] The construction of social markers of differentiation relies on the presence and maintenance of a contrasting 'Other'. The emphasis of the notion of 'Other' situates the theoretical lens within the postcolonial approach and the work of Edward Said, where the 'Other' is viewed as in contrast to 'the Self' in his study 'Orientalism'.[52] The 'Other' is situated within a place that is open for exploitation in relation to the 'Self' viewed as the Western world. The concept of 'Other' is applied in the theorization of hierarchical structures and the reinforcement of domination over specific groups. The process of 'Othering' is central to the process of subjectification in which raced, gendered and classed identities can operate as tools to define and restrict individuals, positioning individuals as inferior to a superior 'Self'. In this way, the process of negotiating expressions of 'identity' is situated within relations of power. 'Power' can therefore partly be understood as the ability to classify and ascribe social characteristics which include or exclude people.

Based on this outline, 'hierarchy of desirability' suggests that migrant workers perform specific characteristics that are viewed as desirable to advance their opportunities within a given context. However, the process of negotiation is embedded within wider structures of power that influence and restrict the migrant workers in negotiating their social characteristics which affect their opportunities and the choices they can make. Consequently, the following statement can be derived:

[50] Skeggs, Beverly. (2004). *Class, Self, Culture.* Routledge, p. 3
[51] McDowell. (2008). P. 497
[52] Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Migrant workers are restricted in negotiating their social characteristics which limit their ability to contest their position within the labour market.

To engage with this statement, it is relevant to look at factors that result in inclusion and exclusion of migrant workers. Therefore, the following sub-questions will be addressed in the analysis:

- In what ways are migrant workers restricted in negotiating their position?
- How does the notion of regulatory frameworks explain the position of migrant workers?
- In what ways do the process of 'Othering' affect migrant workers?

Institutionalization

McDowell argues that the construction of difference is "produced and maintained through practices that operate at and across different spatial scales […] practices include ideological assumptions, multiple regulatory systems, structures of power and domination and spoken and enacted everyday practices in multiple sites".[53] The construction of difference is understood to be produced and maintained through multiple levels of power. Differentiation takes place at an individual and a structural level wherein social markers are ascribed and used to define, regulate and restrict individual's access to specific social arenas.

'Hierarchy of desirability' is informed by the work of Aiwha Ong and her notion of 'cultural citizenship'. Ong argues that: "legal citizenship is merely one form of human protection. Marginalized peoples are excluded from an environment of rights".[54] Legal citizenship does not ensure an individual full access to rights within a given society. Ong points out that other factors contribute to limiting the access to a specific social context. 'Cultural citizenship' is understood by Ong to be: "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation state and civil society. Becoming a citizen depends on how one is constituted as a subject who exercises or submits to power relations".[55] Based on the notion of 'subjectification', Ong argues that 'cultural citizenship' is based on cultural and social markers that include or exclude people in a given society. As she further writes: "hegemonic ideas about belonging and not belonging in racial and cultural terms often converge in state and non-state

[53] McDowell. (2008). P. 496
[54] Ong, Aiwha, cited in, Brooks, Ann, and, Simpson, Ruth. (2012). *Emotions in Transmigration: Transformation, Movement and Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 80
[55] Ong, Aiwha. (1996). *Cultural Citizenship as subject-making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States*. Current Anthropology, Vol. 37, No. 5, p. 738

institutional practices through which subjects are shaped in ways that are at once specific and diffused".[56] Ong draws on the Foucauldian notion of 'disciplinary regimes' which is also found within the work of Butler. Institutional structures are considered to support the hierarchization of specific types of migrant workers through categorization such as legal entitlements and work permits. Additionally, this process of categorization is tied to the construction of cultural and social norms that include or exclude people based on social characteristic that dictate notions of 'belonging' in a given society.

Drawing on Ong, 'hierarchy of desirability' understand the process of subjectification on an individual and structural level. Institutionalized structures of differentiation are expressed in entitlements such as work permit and citizenship which serve to produce and maintain hierarchical structures of 'desired' individuals. However, legal entitlements do not guarantee access to all levels of society. Based on ascribed social characteristics, people can be affected by other restrictions that are constructed through regulatory frameworks configured by cultural and social norms. Different entitlements in combination with social markers such as language, skin colour and gender position migrants in hierarchical structures wherein intersecting characteristics fluctuate as an advantage or disadvantage dependent on the context.

The presence of specific types of migrant workers reinforces the construction of 'desired' characteristics in the labour market. As McDowell et al. argue: "the very availability of migrant workers with specific characteristics constructs labour markets increasingly dependent on migrant workers".[57] Drawing again on the notion of subjectification, migrant workers are viewed in a mutual process of reproduction through which migrant workers construct and reproduce the 'desire' for a set of characteristics. In this sense, what is in 'demand' in the labour market is produced and reproduced by employers and the presence of specific types of migrant workers.

As an example, Allan Findlay et al. have shown how migrant workers reproduce the image of the 'good worker' in the process of trying to get a job: "By acting and presenting themselves according to their interpretations of what recruiters and employers want, migrants serve to

[56] Ong. (1996). P. 738
[57] McDowell et al. (2009). P. 9

reinforce dominant understandings of the attributes that constitute the good worker".[58] In this way, migrant workers are viewed as being part of the process of differentiation by reproducing the notion of the 'desired' characteristics in the interaction with employers, organizations and institutions. In this sense, migrant workers reinforce hierarchical structures of more or less desired migrant workers in the process of performing what is constructed as 'desired' or 'appropriate'.

Based on this outline, migrant workers situated within a hierarchy based on social characteristics that are constructed and reproduced within relations of power. The process of hierarchization takes place on an individual level through social interaction, and on an institutional level through legal entitlements. These structures of differentiation serve to hierarchize migrant workers and contributes to fix some in precarious work. Consequently, the following statement can be derived:

Processes of differentiation are institutionalized and contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on 'desired' characteristics

To address this statement, it is necessary to look at different forms of institutionalized differentiation. Therefore, the following sub-questions will be addressed in the analysis:

- How do legal entitlements affect the position of migrant workers?
- In what ways do the notion of 'belonging' affect migrant workers?
- Is it possible to identify a 'desired' type of migrant worker?

Sub-conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown how the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' is based on three main theoretical underpinnings that all relate to the notion of 'subjectification': social categorization, performativity and structural differentiation. In the first section, it has been highlighted that 'hierarchy of desirability' is based on a social constructivist standpoint in which 'meaning' is ascribed. Situated within a Foucauldian framework, the notion of subjectification is understood to be interlinked with the process of social categorization wherein meaning is ascribed to specific bodily characteristics such as gender, race and class.

[58] Findlay, Allan, and, McCollum, David, and, Shubin, Sergei, and, Apsite, Elina, and, Krisjane, Zaiga. (2013). *The role of recruitment agencies in imagining and producing the 'good' migrant.* Social & Cultural Geography, 14:2, 145-167, p. 163

Socially constructed notions based on raced, classed, gendered and other social markers intersect and influence the inclusion and exclusion of migrant workers from specific types of work. This outline leads to the following statement:

Processes of social categorization construct intersecting gendered, raced and classed identities which influence the precarious position of migrant workers.

In the second section, migrant workers are understood as 'performing' desired social characteristics to negotiate their position within the labour market. The notion of what is viewed as a 'desired' characteristic is understood through the notion of 'regulatory regimes' which are based on the construction of norms within a given society. In the process of performing social characteristic, migrant workers indirectly reinforce notions of 'appropriate' or 'desired' workers to negotiate their position, while simultaneously being restricted to express identities that are deemed to not fit in. Regulatory regimes dictate 'appropriate' or 'desired' expressions of identity and ultimately dictate what opportunities migrant workers have. This outline leads to the following statement:

Migrant workers are restricted in negotiating social characteristics which limits their ability to contest their position within the labour market.

Migrant workers' ability to negotiate their position within the labour market is understood as restricted by 'regulatory regimes'. The regulatory regimes are embedded within wider structures of power that leads to processes of inclusion and exclusion based on the construction of 'difference'. Processes of differentiation lead to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on the construction of 'desired' characteristics. This final outline leads to the following statement:

Processes of differentiation are institutionalized and contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on 'desired' characteristics.

In the following three chapters, the three statements will function as a theoretical lens that will be applied to the studies of Hans Lucht, Guy Standing and Arianne M. Gaetano. Through the construction of this theoretical lens, the three studies will be used to assess the concept of

'hierarchy of desirability' by showing what the lens is able to engage with, and what it leaves out.

4. Hans Lucht's "Darkness before Daybreak"

In this chapter, 'hierarchy of desirability' will be applied to Hans Lucht's ethnographic study of Ghanaian migrant workers. Lucht's study of the migration of young male Ghanaians provides a detailed account of some young men's journey from the village of Senya Beraku in Ghana, via the Niger desert and Libya to Naples in Southern Italy. Drawing on the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', this chapter is divided into three sections where it will first be highlighted what the theoretical lens contributes with followed by a fourth section that points out what the lens obstructs. In the first section, it will be argued that the notion of 'embodied labour' provides an interesting perspective on how migrant workers are reduced to bodies that provides a service in Italy. The second section will highlight how the young Ghanaians have difficulty with moving out of their precarious position due to being restricted in negotiating their social identity. In the third section it will be argued that being undocumented can be viewed as a 'desired' characteristic that are enforced by institutionalized differentiation. This exploration will be followed by a fourth section where it will be argued that 'hierarchy of desirability' obscures the relative gains of migrant workers' and their motivations for accepting precarious work which confine the notion of migrant workers within a victim narrative. This chapter will end in a sub-conclusion that will summarize the main points found within this chapter.

Processes of social categorization construct intersecting gendered, raced and classed identities which influence the precarious position of migrant workers.

On the way to meet his friend and research assistant, Sammy, Lucht describes how he drives through the different neighbourhoods in Naples and how the view transforms from "the romantic Naples of postcards" to the "industrial wasteland at the outskirts of modern European cities, a *terrain vague* that one is happy to speed by".[59] It is on the margins of Naples that Lucht finds "the young African or East European prostitutes waiting in the long, yellow grass at the roadside"[60], a Romany woman standing by a group of caravans, and "occasional black guys on

[59]Lucht, Hans. (2012). Darkness before Daybreak: African migrants living on the margins in southern Italy today. University of California press, p. xv, (authors italics)
[60] Lucht, p. xv

bicycles moving slowly up and down the side of the road as cars sped ruthlessly by".[61] This description sets a scene that implies a boundary, or zone, in which migrants can be found. A structural segregation between the migrants that have come to Naples, and the rest of the Neapolitan population. Here, the categorisation of migrant workers appears manifested spatially as Lucht moves into the outskirts of Naples. Simultaneously, for the reader, an imaginative boundary is manifested between the dreamy coast of the Mediterranean where sun-tanned Italians reside, to the dirty and rundown outskirts of a former industrial coastal city that has lost its monopoly on jobs due to the influx of migrant workers.

Socially constructed boundaries are enforced through the construction of raced identities which influence the relations between the individuals in Lucht's study. As an example, a 'white' and a 'black' man hanging out together is assumed to be a "sexual arrangement" according to Sammy who further states: "Around here [..] why else would a white man take a black person to his room?".[62] 'Around here' implies a marked area in which people's motives are ambiguous. A boundary is constructed and used to divide the people within this area. A spatial divide is visible within the city in which the city margins are constructed as zones that consist of people that are only there to provide a service. People are reduced to their bodily characteristics that can signify to the passer-by what specific service this 'body' provides. In this way, it is on the margins of Naples, in the former industrial zones of the city, that people become 'bodies' that provide a service rather than individuals with desires of their own.

The sexualization of the migrant body is experienced by the men and the women. As the informant Benjamin says: "Sometimes they do go for our bodies".[63] Here, Benjamin refers to the not unusual sexual advances of men when the migrant workers stand on the roadside or roundabouts in the hope of getting an offer of a day's work. Lucht also experiences being perceived as a 'desired body' while walking along the same roadside. A man pulls up in his car, and opens the door as an invitation for Lucht to get in. Lucht describes the experience as "the uncanny sensation of being under threat, having one's person, or rather one's body, being sought after".[64] Lucht himself experiences being reduced to a 'body'. It is interesting to note that it is not only the young west African migrants that experience being 'sought after'. The

[61] Lucht, p. xv-xvi
[62] Lucht, p. xvii
[63] Lucht, p. 37
[64] Lucht, p. 43

notion of a spatial divide is enforced in which people beyond this point are 'bodies' that can be bought for a service. Here, it is an area that enforces ascribed meanings onto people's bodies rather than specific social characteristics. It is men, women, 'black' and 'white' that are perceived as service providers upon entering this area on the outskirts of the city. People are viewed as subordinate, because they are in this rundown area. Thereby, a notion of 'class' is enforced and ascribed to the people that inhabit this place as they are positioned as inferior and there to serve the people that pass by on their way to the city.

People's desire of their "bodies" is not exclusively presented in terms of a sexual desire, but also in terms of other services. In line with the notion of 'embodied labour' within 'hierarchy of desirability', the 'body' of the migrant worker in Lucht's study appears to be an instrument that can be bought and used in the way the employer sees it fit. As Sammy says to a friend when talking about his work in construction: "I am working with a Napolitano and he's using me very well".[65] Here, Sammy refers to himself and his body as a tool that his employer can use.

Migrant workers are restricted in negotiating their social characteristics which limit their ability to contest their position within the labour market.

The notion of 'performativity' provides an interesting perspective on how the Ghanaians try to negotiate their position in relation to employers. Lucht describes how the Ghanaian migrant workers try to imitate an African-American elite. As Lucht explains, the African-American identity is: "a status that meant having all the money and social and cultural capital the migrants were so desperately pursuing in Naples".[66] Here, 'hierarchy of desirability' is a useful theoretical lens because it allows for an exploration of 'race' and 'class' not as distinct categories, but as interlinked factors that construct different types of less or more desired identities. Being 'black' in Naples is in some contexts a social marker that results in discrimination and abuse but if, as suggested within 'hierarchy of desirability', it is combined with 'class' it can advance an individual's social position. Lucht explains that the African-American identity was desired by the migrants to the point that an informant made up a fake African-American girlfriend to impress an employer.[67] Following 'hierarchy of desirability', the informant is understood to 'perform' a desired set of characteristics to negotiate their social

[65] Lucht, p. 48
[66] Lucht, p. 52
[67] Lucht, p. 52

status. In this case, the migrant worker pretends to have ties to an African-American elite, because this is viewed as a signifier of a notion of 'class' in the eyes of the employer and the migrant.

The Ghanaian migrants, apart from not wanting to wear out their clothes when working, avoid dressing up because of the fear of being robbed. Lucht points out that: "this strategy of dressing down to avoid robbery, many believe, is part of the reason that immigrants are looked down upon by the Italians".[68] The migrant workers can be seen to perform the role of a stereotypical depiction of migrants as dirty and poor. The migrants partly do it to protect themselves to avoid robbery but it has a negative effect on their position within society. This reinforces the construction of migrant workers in an inferior position to the Italians, and their employers, because they 'dress the part' as being inferior by appearing to be ragged, dirty and poor. This dressing down supports stereotypical assumptions about the migrants. This process supports the construction of the migrant workers as 'Other' in an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. As Lucht further describes, the 'dressing down' results in a division when on the migrant workers for example take the bus: "Their appearance and odour, they believe, often reduces the chances of engaging in friendly conversation with an Italian passenger".[69] Dressing down to avoid being robbed reinforces the boundary between the migrant workers and the Italians. With 'hierarchy of desirability' in mind, this differentiation can be understood to be enforced by wider structures that make migrants vulnerable to robbery, because as undocumented workers it is risky to go to the police. Lucht further writes: "migrants' willingness to take an undesirable job and thus to position themselves in the lowest strata of society seems simultaneously to reveal something negative about their human qualities to the Italians".[70] The migrant workers indirectly reproduce the stereotypical image of 'the migrant' as poor and dirty which distance them further from the Italians.

Based on 'hierarchy of desirability' it is possible to expand on the constructed inferior position of migrant workers. A 'classed' identity appears to play a role in constructing people within this area of the city as inferior, a notion that is enforced by their perceived 'choice' to reside in the beat-down outskirts of the city and reinforced by their 'dirty' looks. The Ghanaians are positioned within an inferior position to the Italians due to perceived inherent characteristics,

[68] Lucht, p. 37
[69] Lucht, p. 72
[70] Lucht, p. 27

and they are indirectly forced to live up to this stereotypical image of them due to the fear of being robbed. The risk of robbery can further be viewed to be part of a cycle wherein the robbers know that the migrants are unlikely to go to the police, or that the police might not even care, so they see an opportunity to exploit the migrant workers due to their inability to act against them.

In Naples, there is a divide in the type of work that migrant workers do. Lucht writes that in Naples: "Each ethnic group focuses on particular jobs […] for instance, the Senegalese and Chinese migrants are the dominant ethnic groups when it comes to street selling, whereas the Ghanaians dominate in day-labouring".[71] Selling goods on the streets might be constructed as a skill inherent to the Chinese and Senegalese that could reproduce the notion of them as the best type of workers for the job. Lucht describes how migrant workers in Naples take up "'3-D jobs' – dirty, difficult and dangerous".[72] In other words, as the informant Benjamin says: "We do the donkey work, the jobs that cannot be done by themselves [the Italians] or by the machines".[73] According to 'hierarchy of desirability', attention to the construction of social markers can elaborate on the tendency of migrant workers to end up in the lower end of the labour market, and how social markers differentiate between the migrant workers. As an example, Norbert explains that: "they always pay us, the blacks, less than everybody else […] A Ukrainian will get 5 to 10 euro more for the same job".[74] Following 'hierarchy of desirability', draw our attention to the idea that the notion of 'race' can contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers. The construction of racial differentiation is here constituted in the unequal treatment between "the blacks" and the Ukrainians. Simultaneously, Norbert reinforces this differentiation by referring to himself as part of a group marked by a shared raced identity despite that the Ghanaians and the Ukrainians are all considered to be immigrants. Moreover, the differentiation between Norbert, a black migrant from Ghana, and the migrant worker from Ukraine can be understood to be based on processes of social categorization through which Norbert is positioned as inferior to the Ukrainians. 'Race' is emphasized as a factor that differentiates between Norbert as 'black', and the Ukrainian, and confines them within a hierarchical structure that results in unequal wages.

[71] Lucht, p. 26
[72] Lucht, p. 26
[73] Lucht, p. 27
[74] Lucht, p. 50.

Additionally, it is interesting to consider the role of 'whiteness' in this hierarchical configuration and how it plays a role in defining Ukrainians as 'belonging' more in Italy than Ghanaians because they are from Europe. However, the migrant workers are still considered to be in a somewhat similar position when contrasted to the Italian workers. Italian workers are positioned above migrant workers despite their relative level of skills. Here, the skillset of migrant workers, desired or not, is rendered irrelevant due to the construction of raced and classed identities that position them as inferior, or as 'Other', in relation to an 'us', the Italians. The construction of 'identity' is in this context enforced as a main factor in getting a job, and how the migrant worker is treated at work. 'Hierarchy of desirability' is useful theoretically as it provides an understanding of how the construction of social characteristics can regulate migrant workers opportunities.

Norbert further explains:

"There's a certain Italian boy at our work site; he's an apprentice and he doesn't have any idea of how to do the work. I'm the one taking care of the work […] But at the end of the month, the boy will take, say, 900 euros, and I'll take about 600".[75]

Norbert is a professional welder and is helping the other workers at the site with various tasks. However, despite his higher level of skills he is positioned below the apprentice in terms of wages and in terms of the tasks he is asked to do. He is asked to clean out rubbish at the site and other practical things that is irrelevant to his skillset and might be more suited to a person who is doing an apprenticeship. Using the analytical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', this can be seen as an example of that the hierarchization of migrant workers is not primarily configured according to their skillset but is affected by the construction of raced or ethicized identities that differentiate between them and position them in terms of tasks and wages. Another example of this differentiation is exemplified by the informant Francis when he talks about his employer. As he explains: "The man respects us. He says that we, the blacks, are very hard workers. But there's still a difference; the whites get family allowances, whereas we, the blacks, because we don't have wives here, don't receive that".[76] Francis refers to himself as part of "the blacks" which stand in contrast to "the whites". The construction of raced identities is here used to

[75] Lucht, p. 50
[76] Lucht, p. 53

divide the group of migrant workers that work at the site. Moreover, this construction of difference according to 'race' is further enforced by the employer who ascribes inherent characteristics to the group of "blacks". According to 'hierarchy of desirability' this socially constructed boundary between the groups can dictate a reproduction of a desire for west-African migrant workers in construction, because of this constructed notion of them as "hard-workers" according to a raced social marker. Following this, 'hierarchy of desirability' expands on what factors that contributes to the differential treatment of migrant workers and is therefore a useful theoretical lens to highlight how social characteristics contributes to wage gaps and how migrant workers are restricted in using their qualifications.

Processes of differentiation are institutionalized and contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on 'desired' characteristics.

The Ghanaians are further restricted from using their qualifications due to institutionalized barriers. An interesting example is that Lucht gets offered a job as a fisherman during his time in Naples, but none of the Ghanaians do despite that they are all very qualified fishermen. They are not able to get work in this type of trade, because as an employer says, it is: "a job with documents".[77] However, despite that some of the migrant workers have work permits, many of the west African migrants still work as day-labourers. Having the skillset or right qualifications to do a job does not necessarily give access to a specific job, and the young migrants are in many cases still restricted from accessing specific jobs despite their skills. Here, the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' and the notion of 'cultural citizenship' is useful as it helps to highlight how a work-permit only provide one type of access to society. The migrant workers in Lucht's study might be restricted from working as 'fishermen' because they are not considered to 'belong' in Italy and can therefore not get a job because specific jobs are constructed as 'for' the Italians or Europeans. Additionally, the lens allows us to pay attention to Lucht's account of how the Southern part of Italy is impoverished compared to the North which adds to an exclusion of people from jobs that are not considered to be theirs to take. Lucht refers to Bruno Riccio who argues that: "Italy has become 'a model case' of the informal economy's power to attract 'an unorganized labor force prepared to accept any kind of working conditions'".[78] Lucht highlights that the Italian economy has become dependent on a flourishing underground labour market. From this, undocumented labour is institutionalized

[77] Lucht, p. 10
[78] Lucht, p. 25

and enforces a need for precarious migrant workers. Lucht further describes a "vicious circle" wherein migrant workers are kept in the underground economy. As he argues: a renewal of their legal status depends on legitimate work experience, which is in practice unobtainable".[79] Migrant workers are kept in the underground economy where they are used as a cheap workforce that take up the jobs that locals do not want or are not forced to take. Thereby, undocumented migrant workers are 'desired' compared to legal migrant workers, and this creates an institutionalized reinforcement of precarious work.

Applying 'hierarchy of desirability' to this study shows how Lucht's work can illustrate that being undocumented is enforced on an institutional and individual level as a 'desired' characteristic. As Norbert explains: "One thing I know is that if you're an immigrant and you don't have papers, your situation is very, very difficult. And even if you get a job, it will not be a normal job, because you're an immigrant".[80] Undocumented migrant workers become a type of desired employee because they can be managed easily according to the employer's needs. If there are disputes between the employer and the undocumented migrant workers, it is difficult for the migrant to go to the police or get help because they are not allowed to work or reside in the country. This unequal relationship leaves the employer in a superior position and makes the migrant worker vulnerable to exploitation. Lucht writes that employers have a "preference for certain ethnic groups because they believe them to be 'cheaper, more vulnerable and more docile'".[81] Employers ascribe specific characteristics to the different migrant groups based on a socially constructed ethnic marker. Being vulnerable can here be considered as a 'desired' characteristic because the employer can pay them less and manage them more easily. Applying 'hierarchy of desirability', being undocumented is enforced on an institutional level by making it difficult for migrant workers to keep a legal work permit. Undocumented is desired, because it forces the migrant workers in the underground economy which Italy is dependent on. It can therefore be argued there is an interest in maintaining migrant workers in precarious work as undocumented, because it makes maintains them in a cheap and flexible workforce. On an individual level, employers can more easily manage undocumented migrant workers, and in some instances, they can even get away without paying a salary because undocumented migrant workers have difficulty with exercising their rights due to fear of being deported. Moreover, migrant workers themselves indirectly enforce the

[79] Lucht, p. 30
[80] Lucht, p. 50
[81] Lucht, p. 27

desire or need for undocumented labour because they cannot get a job elsewhere and therefore have to take up work in the informal labour market.

Limitations

In applying 'hierarchy of desirability' to Lucht's study, a main element that is obscured is the lack of attention to migrant workers personal motivations or 'desires'. The migrant workers in Lucht's study appear to have their desires placed in the future. However, the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' does not present an adequate way to engage with the hopes, motivations, or 'desires' of the migrant workers themselves. The focus is on the 'desire' or demand of the employer, and the institutions, and how migrant workers are fitted in to these structures. This focus obscures a more thorough exploration of why migrant workers accept precarious conditions, and what they understand as precarious themselves. A night shift at a plastic factory might be viewed as a bottom end job that is dirty and difficult, but the informant Sammy says that that is "the dream all we guys have".[82] The lack of attention to the motivations or future desires of migrant workers provide a simplistic perspective on why migrant workers stay in a job or go to look for work despite knowledge of the conditions and risk of exploitation. As shown in Lucht's work, the desire of the migrant workers might be in the future in the shape of a house in Ghana, and they therefore accept the difficult and tiring work conditions due to their future desires. Therefore, 'hierarchy of desirability' lacks an acknowledgement of relative gains which contributes to reasons for why migrant workers come to look for work, and how they thereby reinforce the need for specific migrant workers.

Furthermore, a lack of attention to migrant workers own motivations enforces a victim narrative. The lack of perspective on relative gains obstructs the notion of 'agency' within 'hierarchy of desirability'. The lack of attention to the migrant's motivations support the construction of them as victims rather than active individuals that negotiate loss and gain in taking up work in the labour market. As Lucht points out: "Nevertheless, though the work might be unattractive, the steady income that such jobs generate seems to transform the lives of migrants who get them, as well as the welfare of their families at home".[83] With an emphasis on what the migrant workers gain from taking up precarious work, they can be viewed less as victims of a neoliberal labour machinery, and more as people that pursue the opportunities

[82] Lucht, p. 5
[83] Lucht, p. 54

available in order to gain a better future. Using 'hierarchy of desirability' as a tool can obstruct an understanding of agency and of how migrant workers understand their gains by being in precarious work. It is interesting to question whether the lens does not take this into account due to an inherent biased towards the consequences of neoliberal market dynamics. The lens tends to pay attention to aspects that highlights exploitation which serves to back up the postcolonial understanding of the exploitation of migrant workers from the outside Western neoliberal economies. However, as Lucht argues, the use of migrant workers can be considered as: "less as a case of exploitation of the worker within capitalist society than as a case of rich countries having no interest in the poor countries, and of people in poor countries rather than being exploited, finding themselves lost or cut off from the outside world".[84] Lucht's point can be used to scrutinize the inherent 'victim' narrative that dominate when applying 'hierarchy of desirability' to this study. The lens obstructs an understanding of migrants as individuals that act against a world that ignores their economic deprivation. 'Hierarchy of desirability' provides a valuable systemic view of the use of migrant workers but lacks insight when it comes to the everyday life experiences of migrant workers, and their motivations for leaving home and taking up precarious work.

Lucht's account of the odd relationship between the young Ghanaians and the human smuggling networks in Libya cannot be fully explored with the use of 'hierarchy of desirability'. Lucht writes that: "in many cases the smugglers organize the operation together with a connection man, who again leaves it up to selected migrants with seafaring experience to handle the boat. The Guan fishermen are sought after precisely for this reason".[85] The migrants with fishing experience, in this case people from the ethnic group Guan, get employed to drive the boats across the Mediterranean. Their pay is the crossing and a couple of seats on the boat that they can sell to others. 'Hierarchy of desirability' is not able to fully engage with this ambiguous form of work, because it lacks an appropriate language to deal with extreme types of work relations, specifically, relations of work that are driven by migrant workers agency. Moreover, it seems inappropriate to refer to human smugglers as 'employers' or terms trafficking networks as recruitment agencies. However, despite this lack of terminology and the degree of extreme exploitation, this type of relation still attracts types of migrant workers and regulate their opportunities. Thereby, 'hierarchy of desirability' seems to fit specific types

[84] P. xii
[85] Lucht, p. 130

of relations of work that are to some extent more formal, while ignoring others that are more ambiguous and where it can be difficult to decipher who initiates the work relation.

Sub-conclusion

In this chapter, the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' provides a relevant perspective on how to understand the marginalization of the Ghanaian migrant workers within Naples. Relying on the theoretical lens, the notion of 'embodied labour' and how migrants are reduced to their bodily characteristics adds an interesting point of view to Lucht's account of the run-down suburbs where migrant workers are exploited by employers and the occasional passer-by. Drawing on the theoretical lens, the notion of individuals being reduced to 'bodies' can be applied to understand how bodily characteristics are given meaning and ascribed to migrant workers bodies to signal what service they can provide.

The lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' provides a valuable perspective on the differential treatment of migrant workers which enriches Lucht's account of migrant workers in Naples. Specifically, the theoretical lens is useful in the example of unequal wages between the Ghanaians, Ukrainians and Italian workers. In this example, the theoretical lens is used to understand that the wage gap between migrant workers is linked to a hierarchization of the them based on raced markers of difference that is tied to a notion of the level of 'belonging' to Italy. This hierarchization renders the skillset of the workers irrelevant because the Ghanaians are positioned as inferior to the Italians. Consequently, the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' is useful to expand upon the marginalization that different types of migrant workers can experience, because it highlights the differentiation between Ukrainians and Ghanaians. This brings into focus the ways in which identities can be used as an advantage or disadvantage dependent on the context because the Ukrainians are positioned as 'belonging' in relation to the Ghanaians. Thereby, it is interesting to note that the lens could be useful in other contexts wherein different types of migrant workers are pitted against each other, because the lens engages with the notion of belonging and how this can contribute to hierarchization of migrant workers.

Relying on the theoretical lens highlights the differentiation between migrant workers in Naples and provides a valuable insight into how migrant workers are marginalized by emphasizing factors such as skin colour that contributes to their inferior position in the labour

market. However, the lens obscures an understanding of why migrant workers accept precarious conditions because their agency is partly ignored.

The lens hierarchy of desirability' maintains a focus on migrant workers within the labour market. Consequently, in reading Lucht's account, attention has primarily been on the young men's opportunities and struggles in terms of work in Naples. The theoretical lens does not support an engagement with the part of Lucht's study that focus the men's lives before entering Italy to work. The thorough account of the young men's motivations, and expectations upon leaving Ghana, and how their experience as fishermen benefit them in Libya when embarking on the crossing over to Italy cannot fully be explored with the theoretical lens. It leaves out the holistic view on migrants' lives that is one of the valuable insights that is gained from reading Lucht's study. As an example, Lucht's account of the demise of the fishing trade in Senya Beraku due to unequal competition with international actors, and how this motivates the young men to leave, cannot be adequately explored with 'hierarchy of desirability' despite it being a factor that motivates many of the young men to leave for Europe and thereby becoming part of the so-called 'pool of labour'.

Relying on the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' obstructs a view of the migrant workers' agency because the lens leaves out the part of Lucht's account that highlights how the migrant workers' are motivated to migrate. By leaving out the view of migrant workers' reasons for leaving their home, and their motivations for taking up and staying in in precarious work supports a victim narrative because the migrant workers appear to be victims exploited by the capitalist system. It is important to note that the lack of focus on the migrant workers' motivations, and their understanding of relative gains, makes a strong argument for 'exploitation' of the disadvantaged. However, this provides a simplistic perspective on migrant workers' role and how they indirectly support the demand for precarious workers because it is not possible to explore what gains the migrant workers consider when participating in precarious work. It is important to point out the exploitative conditions that migrant workers face, and how they end up in this type of work, but it is equally important to understand why migrant workers accept the conditions because this would provide a better understanding of how migrant workers indirectly support a system that exploits them.

5. Guy Standing's "The Precariat"

In this chapter, the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' will be applied to Guy Standing's study of 'the precariat'. Standing provides different accounts of specific labour market dynamics worldwide to argue for the development of what he terms 'the precariat', a new class that consists of precarious workers around the world. In the first section it will be argued that 'hierarchy of desirability' can be used to highlight issues of discrimination and marginalization which Standing cannot address fully due to the lack of attention on how difference matters within 'the precariat'. In the second section, it will be argued that in contrast to Standing's notion that migrant workers can choose to be 'visible' or not, the ability to choose a social identity should be questioned. In the third section, the theoretical lens will be used to argue that where Standing views legal entitlements as a way to gain access to opportunities, the lens helps show that 'legal' migrants can still be restricted from accessing better work opportunities. In the fourth section, it will be shown how 'hierarchy of desirability' obstructs a view of possible solutions to precarious work. This chapter will end in a sub-conclusion that will summarize the main points found within this chapter.

Processes of social categorization construct intersecting gendered, raced and classed identities which influence the precarious position of migrant workers.

In his book, Standing argues that because of increasing market competitiveness, the promotion of labour market flexibility has transferred economic risks onto workers on a global scale, creating the 'precariat'. Standing argues that 'the precariat' is a "class-in-the-making"[86]. He writes that: "As inequalities grew, and as the world moved towards a flexible open labour market, class did not disappear. Rather, a more fragmented global class structure emerged".[87] The precariat consists of a distinctive socioeconomic group that is characterized by "common sense of insecurity"[88] as a result of insecure work opportunities, insecure social income and a lack of a work-based identity.

A main argument within Standing's work is the emphasis on global solidarity. As Standing argues: "the precariat does not feel part of a solidaristic labour community".[89] Standing sees the lack of solidarity amongst this group of workers as an issue because it creates competition

[86] Standing, Guy. (2014). *The Precariat: A new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury, p. 11
[87] Standing, p. 12
[88] Standing, p. 3.
[89] Standing, p. 20

within the group and contributes to insecurity. The precariat is viewed as a floating labour force who have no ties to a specific location, job or colleagues and are thereby susceptible to take what is on offer in terms of work. Based on this, Standing's emphasis on the precariat as a new class is an attempt to support a development of solidarity amongst workers than find themselves in 'the precariat'. Workers should recognize their similarities and stand together in order to fight for better working conditions. Standing draws on the organizational strategies of the traditional working class in arguing that a sort of labour union is still relevant for the precariat despite being a global class. Thereby, Standing provides an interesting point in terms of how to fight for better working conditions in a globalized labour market. The notion of "a global 'precariat'" offers a valuable reason for workers to unite against neoliberal market powers across the world.[90] Thereby, Standing provides a good starting point for the creation of a global labour movement by highlighting the unequal working conditions that workers around the world share despite having different backgrounds and being from vastly different parts of the world.

Drawing on the notions of social categorization and intersectionality found within 'hierarchy of desirability', a main issue that can be identified within Standing's work is the lack of attention to how difference matters. The application of the notion of 'precariat' as a class does not allow for a differentiation between people within this category, and how they are affected by, and experience precarious work in different ways. According to 'hierarchy of desirability', the construction of gendered, raced and classed identities determines what opportunities and restrictions people experience. Therefore, people experience precariousness in different ways. With a lack of emphasis on difference, Standing is unable to address root causes of economic marginalization because of the generalization of people embedded in the notion of 'the precariat'. The 'precariat' encompasses a wide group of different people across the world which Standing claims are a part of a new class formation distinct from the old notion of 'working class' and 'proletariat'. Standing's emphasis on the precariat as a global 'class' blurs a differentiation between precarious workers. Thereby, Standing ignores the issue of the division of workers within the precariat, and why some types of individuals within the precariat are more privileged than others. The lack of attention to this differentiation neglects an explanation for discrimination and economic marginalization within the precariat.

[90] Standing, p. 1

By applying 'hierarchy of desirability' it is shown that in Standing's work 'class' becomes the dominant social categorization. 'Hierarchy of desirability' is useful because it allows for a view of 'identity' as more flexible in contrast to Standing. 'Class' should be considered while paying attention to other markers of identity to fully understand the different constructions of precarious workers. With a focus primarily on 'class', Standing simplifies the cause and effect of precarious work and blurs the varying degrees of marginalization and economic insecurity that migrant workers can face. Thereby, by emphasizing the importance of how markers of race, gender and class intersects, it is possible to point out that Standing overlooks issues of privilege and marginalization within the 'precariat'.

Migrant workers are restricted in negotiating their social characteristics which limits their ability to contest their position within the labour market.

Standing argues that people within the 'precariat' participate in:

"a fragmented labour process in which varieties of the precariat have different entitlements and a different structure of social income. It feeds through into issues of identity. Natives can display multiple identities, legal migrants can focus on the identity that gives them most security and illegals must not display any identity, for fear of being exposed".[91]

'Identity' is here understood to be a process that the individual has control over to some extent dependent on their legal category. Drawing on the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', the ability to negotiate one's identity is considered to be restricted by the notion of normative frameworks that are constituted dependent on the specific context. Therefore, in contrast to Standing, legal and illegal migrant workers are not understood to necessarily have the ability to choose their most favorable expression of identity that can make them more or less be 'visible'. Dependent on the social context, migrant workers are subjected to specific norms that dictate what is 'acceptable' or what is made to be 'visible' in society. This can affect legal and illegal or undocumented migrants in equal ways, and thereby, legal migrants might have a set of rights, but they can be restricted in using it to their advantage based on ascribed social characteristics. Thereby, a 'black' legal migrant worker might have difficulty in using their qualifications to achieve a more secure position, as exemplified in the exploration of Lucht's study in the previous chapter, because being 'black' might be a social marker that results in

[91] Standing, p. 164

exclusion from specific types of work. By emphasizing difference, 'hierarchy of desirability' emphasizes that nuances are important to fully understand how some are in precarious positions despite their legal status.

When assessing Standing's work through the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', it becomes clear that it is necessary to scrutinize the categorization of migrants in terms of 'legal' and 'illegal' because being 'legal' does not necessarily allow migrant workers to choose the 'most secure' identity as implied by Standing. This assumption ignores that people can be maintained in the lower end of the job market despite legal entitlements due to different social markers that make them 'inappropriate' for some jobs. Thereby, 'hierarchy of desirability' is useful to apply to highlight that legal entitlements can still result in precarious migrant workers.

An example provided by Standing is that 29 percent of migrant workers who were deemed to possess "high skills" and granted Tier 1 visas in 2010 in the UK were doing unskilled jobs in the following years.[92] If applying 'hierarchy of desirability' to this example, it is possible to expand on how migrant workers, despite their high-skills and visa, are still found in the lower end of the labour market. Drawing on the theoretical lens, migrant workers' ability to access other job opportunities could be affected by their skin colour, accent or name, that could be deemed 'inappropriate' for certain jobs in the UK labour market.

Processes of differentiation are institutionalized and contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on 'desired' characteristics.

Standing mainly sees the construction of precarious workers as systemic. He points to different types of restrictive measures that lead back to an institutionalization of differentiation. The notion of 'denizen' is a main component within Standing's work in which he argues that: "the world is becoming full of denizens".[93] Standing applies the notion of 'denizen' to highlight that: "migrants are rarely stateless in a de jure sense; they are not expelled from humanity. But they lack security and opportunity for membership of countries to where they move".[94] 'Denizen' defines a person that lack access to rights, and in some cases, the right to claim rights. Standing applies the notion of 'denizen' to highlight how people within the precariat are excluded from different levels of rights such as economic, social and political rights which by

[92] Standing, p. 178
[93] Standing, p. 192
[94] Standing, p. 193

effect maintain them in a precarious condition. Standing uses the notion of 'denizen' to explore the differentiation between different groups of people. As 'denizens', migrant workers can be managed according to where they are needed because they are excluded from a range of legal and social entitlements. Migrant workers do not only "make up a large share of the world's precariat" but are in danger of becoming "its primary victims" because they are increasingly being positioned as denizens rather than citizens.[95]

The notion of 'denizen' includes different groups of people that are defined by their legal status including asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, temporary migrants with visas, and migrants with long-term residency. With the use of the notion of 'denizen', Standing provides a good understanding of how structural barriers are enforced and affect different people. The concept of 'denizen' is focused on the level of inclusion that migrants experience dependent on their access to different entitlements. Thereby, the notion of 'denizen' is a useful way to exemplify the hierarchization of migrant workers which is at the center of 'hierarchy of desirability'.

In the context of migrant workers who are granted a work permit and who are therefore formally allowed to pursue work opportunities, Standing argues that: "they may be relatively secure but face structural limitations on economic and social rights, for example, if they possess qualifications that are not recognized in the country".[96] Migrant workers are restricted in pursuing specific jobs because there is a lack of a mutual recognition of standards. Therefore, migrant workers are blocked from their occupation and must take up jobs in the lower end of the labour market. It is important, however, to consider the concept of 'cultural citizenship' which 'hierarchy of desirability' draws on to point out that different sets of rights do not necessarily ensure migrant workers access to a given society. Migrant workers are further restricted from accessing specific jobs based on normative frameworks that dictate whether they belong in a specific context. 'Hierarchy of desirability' therefore expands on Standing's use of 'denizen' by paying attention to the specific processes of differentiation based on social and cultural norms that extends beyond systemic differentiation. Migrant workers are not only restricted in using their skills due to lack of acknowledgement of qualification but are further limited through the construction of notions of 'appropriate' workers or notions of who are more

[95] Standing, p. 153
[96] Standing, p. 161

'entitled' to a job in a given context. Language, age, gender, race and other social markers might restrict a person from practising medicine and require them to work as a taxi driver because they are ascribed specific social characteristics that result in exclusionary measures. In this way, 'hierarchy of desirability' is useful to apply to the notion of 'denizen' to scrutinize the assumption that legal entitlements ensure an advantage for migrant workers in the labour market.

Limitations

A main argument within 'hierarchy of desirability' is that difference matters. As McDowell argues: "immigrants are differently received and socialized depending on their position within racial hierarchies, gender, class background and income/consumption patterns".[97] To McDowell, the construction and maintenance of difference between migrant workers result in that people are subjected to different degrees of precarious work. Attention to difference is important because it highlights the various ways discrimination and/ or marginalization is constituted. However, the emphasis on difference within 'hierarchy of desirability' simultaneously obstructs an understanding of how precarious migrant workers can be understood across their differences. Standing offers a compromise in his attempt to unite workers, and to support them in protesting their working conditions. In contrast, the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' contributes to a fragmented notion of precarious working conditions that creates distance between migrant workers' experiences. In this way, relying upon the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' runs the risk of creating endless intersecting categories that reinforce division between migrants.

It is interesting to point out the notion of identity politics and how it affects the understanding of precarious workers within the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability'. A dilemma is to what extent difference should matter, and how it is possible to acknowledge difference while simultaneously address ways to change the precarious working conditions of migrant workers. Drawing on 'hierarchy of desirability', attention to difference is important because it clarifies the maintenance of different people in marginalized positions in the labour market. However, in the acknowledgement of difference, it becomes challenging to point out what constitutes 'discrimination' and 'marginalization'. In this way, an overemphasis on difference within 'hierarchy of desirability' runs the risk of obstructing a definition of what disadvantage is and

[97] McDowell, Linda. (2008). P. 496

how it is tackled within the labour market. Thereby, relying on the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', the emphasis on difference and the multiple ways in which identity can be expressed obstructs an understanding of the similarities between migrant workers which contributes to a perceived division between them.

Sub-conclusion

In reading Standing's study, the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' allows for a critical engagement with how the notion of 'class' is used to singlehandedly define precarious migrant workers. Relying on the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', it is possible to argue for the importance of differentiating between the people that Standing claims as part 'the precariat'. In the attempt to emphasize 'the precariat' as a new class, the theoretical lens highlights that Standing generalizes between the different opportunities and restrictions that people within 'the precariat' face. Thereby, the theoretical lens is useful to argue that Standing appears to neglect a critical engagement with the notion of privilege and how specific groups of people within the precariat have better access to opportunities in contrast to others. Applying the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' it is stressed that to better understand the economic and social marginalization it is necessary to look at how different processes of inclusion and exclusion serve to differentiate between workers within 'the precariat' and this result in very different experiences of precarious work.

The lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' focusses on 'difference', but in reading Standing, it is relevant to question to what extent difference should be the main point of departure when trying to understand how precarious work conditions can be challenged. Standing provides a common ground for migrant workers through the notion of 'the precariat', and thereby offers a starting point for arguing for better wages and work conditions and provides a definition of a type of work that can be used to engage with this issue. In contrast, relying on the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' reinforces division between migrant workers based on a continuous production of intersecting categories that can be used to define precarious workers. In this way, the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' constructs a fragmented view of precarious work where it can be difficult to decipher what constitutes factors that contributes to discrimination and marginalization.

6. Arianne M. Gaetano's 'Out to Work'

In this chapter, 'hierarchy of desirability' will be applied to Arianne M. Gaetano's study of young women who migrate from their rural villages to the city of Beijing to find work in the informal service economy as domestic workers and hotel housekeepers. In the first section, the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' can be used to show how the construction of 'classed' and 'gendered' identities contribute to the vulnerable position of the young women. In the second section, through the notion of 'regulatory regimes' the theoretical lens is used to argue that the young women are subjected to notions of the 'desired' worker and the 'appropriate' woman which the women reproduce in their attempt to negotiate better working conditions. In the third section, the lens is useful to highlight how the *hukou* system and different women's associations are an example of the institutionalization of difference which serve to channel specific workers, in particular young women, into the lower end of the labour market in Beijing. The fourth section will highlight that the theoretical lens does not engage with the period before and after labour migration with the effect that Gaetano's emphasis on empowerment becomes questionable because the lens focuses on a point during the labour migration process where the women are most vulnerable. The chapter will end in a sub-conclusion where the main points will be highlighted before moving on to the conclusion where it will be discussed how the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' as a proxy for the postcolonial feminist perspective informs our understanding of precarious workers.

Processes of social categorization construct intersecting gendered, raced and classed identities which influence the precarious position of migrant workers.

Gaetano interviews Qiaolian, a young woman who has been a former domestic worker in Beijing. She explains "I felt like a bondservant from the old imperial days".[98] Qiaolian was looked down upon by the family that she worked for, because with her rural background, she was considered to be inferior to the family from Beijing. Drawing on an exploration of the sociohistorical background of China, Gaetano provides an interesting account that focuses on how the past affects the contemporary labour migration of young rural Chinese women as they migrate from their villages to find work in Beijing. Relying on 'hierarchy of desirability', attention is paid to Gaetano's rich account of how specific sociohistorical factors affect the

[98] Gaetano, Arianne M. (2015). *Out to work: Migration, Gender and the Changing lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*. University of Hawai'i Press, p. 59

construction of rural young women as 'appropriate' workers for the urban service industry which simultaneously tie them to a subordinate position. Gaetano argues:

"Rural labor migrants are a symptom, and a symbol, of China's latest experiment in constructing a modern nation-state […] Diminishing returns to agriculture, decreasing land allocations, a large surplus labor force, and a high tax burden on agricultural households […] are key 'push' factors that have propelled peasants out of agriculture and villages since the mid-1980s".[99]

The Chinese government have pushed for people to leave the village life behind in favor of the city to 'modernize' China. Gaetano argues that the portrayal of 'rural life' is "considered mired in 'traditional' culture and behind the times or 'backwards'" in contrast to urban life which is considered "dynamic, forward-looking, 'modern'".[100] Relying on the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' it is possible to view this dichotomy as reinforcing hierarchical structures in the urban labour market. The migrant workers from rural areas are positioned as inferior to the urban population. Through a discourse of 'modernization', a vast labor force is constructed of young people from rural areas that are ready to migrate to the city to find work. Drawing on the theoretical lens, the notion of 'class' is enforced through ideas of rural life being 'backwards' or 'inferior' to construct the rural 'identity' as in need of being modernized. Young people are willing to migrate and take up work in the city to be part of the 'modern' urban population.

Female migrants from rural areas have become an important part of China's economy. As Gaetano further argues:

"migrant labor produces goods and provides services that help urban households to achieve the quintessential middle-class dream of the 'good life' […] The guarantee of a cheap and flexible female rural migrant labor force has been critical to reaching the state's goals of economic growth".[101]

[99] Gaetano, p. 25
[100] Gaetano, p. 3
[101] Gaetano, p. 25

Drawing on the lens 'hierarchy of desirability', 'classed' identities are enforced to direct female migrant workers from rural areas into the domestic service sector through the construction of the rural population as in need of being educated on 'modern' life. Domestic work is presented as a way for young women to be educated in modern life. Gaetano writes that this type of work is presented as a way to:

"relieve urban working wives and mothers of the dual burden of their reproductive and productive roles, enabling their participation in the (waged) labor force, and thus putting them on more equal footing to men […] domestic service as an occupation was touted as a means to raise rural women's relatively lower social status".[102]

By providing a workforce that can take care of the household, women from urban areas are encouraged to participate in the labour market. This division of workers serve to increase the overall labour force. Working in the domestic sector is viewed to benefit the young rural women, because the notion of rural village life as backwards and 'unmodern' contributes to constructing domestic work as an opportunity for the urban population to educate the rural women in 'modern' life.

Gaetano argues that "as domestic work is regarded by workers and employers not as skilled labor, but rather an extension of a woman's household role, it is wide open to newly arrived young women".[103] Relying on the theoretical lens, the notion of gendered identities is here relevant to understand how domestic work is constructed as for women. This type of work is viewed as a natural extension of women's role in society. 'Gendered' characteristics serve to construct this type of employment as natural to women which serve to channel young women into this sector. Since domestic work is not considered a profession it is low-payed, and this serves to further place women in a precarious position while living and working in the city because they are tied to their employer and have few options due to economic marginalization. In this way, the theoretical lens highlights the importance of how 'gendered' characteristics serve to influence the work opportunities that the female migrant workers in this study pursue. Gaetano adds that employers "viewed the occupation [domestic work] through older frameworks of servitude and apprenticeship".[104] Again, by drawing on the theoretical lens, the

[102] Gaetano, p. 15
[103] Gaetano, p. 61
[104] Gaetano, p. 59

social construction of domestic work as women's work serves to construct women in a framework associated with obedience and subordination. Thereby, the young women are subjected to notions of being inferior through the construction of domestic work as being an extension of women's perceived natural characteristics.

The lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' draws attention to the intersection of constructed identities. Gaetano describes that her informant Qiaolin "by dint of her origin, gender, age, marital status, as well as education and occupation, Qiaolin would occupy an inferior and marginal position in the urban labour market and urban society, and thus be quite vulnerable".[105] Drawing on 'hierarchy of desirability', attention can be payed to the intersection of different social characteristics highlighted by Gaetano. The combination of different social characteristics highlights the different factors that affect the marginalization of young rural women and gives a different perspective on the fact that the way in which 'rural' is made to matter is enforced by the women's age, that they are unmarried and other social markers of difference. However, it is necessary to note that Gaetano enforce the notion of 'rural young women' which becomes a category that she based her study on. Based on 'hierarchy of desirability' it would be possible to question whether married, young rural women would have other opportunities in Beijing. The theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' can expand on Gaetano's category of 'young rural women' because the lens allows for an inquiry into the various ways in which a 'young rural woman' can be constructed, and whether they would have similar opportunities in the labour market dependent on factors such as religious affiliations, or age.

Migrant workers are restricted in negotiating their social characteristics which limits their ability to contest their position within the labour market.

The theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' is useful to scrutinize how the construction of domestic work as for women is a way to control the construction the way to be a 'woman'. Gaetano writes that "Live-in domestic service especially was considered 'safe' because employers had oversight of employees both day and night".[106] Parents of young women prefer this type of employment for their daughters because the women can be kept under surveillance by employers. Of the same token, employers can use this arrangement to their advantage

[105] Gaetano, p. 2
[106] Gaetano, p. 73

because they can make use of the women's labour even more. Drawing on the theoretical lens, women are surveilled by their surroundings which regulates the women's behavior and movement. Gaetano further adds that "parents implicitly entrusted employers to supervise their daughters' moral development […] closely monitor their social activities and take appropriate disciplinary measures".[107] Parents' authority is extended to the employer to control and regulate the young women's development. The theoretical lens helps to show that the surveillance of the young women operates to control and regulate the women's behavior according to notions of being 'appropriate' women within society and restricts them from negotiating alternative ways of becoming a 'woman'.

The informant Shanshan says "Working in someone's house, you are restricted. If they say you can't go out, you can't go out. If you go out, you still have to worry, afraid that they'll get angry when you return".[108] By drawing on the notion of 'regulatory frameworks' within the theoretical lens, domestic work is viewed as a way to reinforce the women as specific subjects that can be controlled and regulated. Gaetano argues that the women "performed the role of 'model worker', exercising self-discipline to prove their capability and negate demeaning stereotypes and to win concessions from employers".[109] Drawing on the theoretical lens, the model worker is the ideal or 'desired' type of domestic workers. The lens is useful to illustrate how young women can here be understood to perform the characteristics of the 'model worker' to gain benefits at work, but in this process, they reproduce notions of 'desired' and 'undesired' characteristics of domestic workers which serves to restrict them and other young women in domestic work.

Following the theoretical lens, the notion of the 'desired' worker can be viewed throughout Gaetano's account to be defined by subordination, a genuine caring nature for children, good cooking skills, hygiene and tidiness. Relying on the theoretical lens, domestic work supports a reinforcement of a specific expression of 'femininity' that serve to regulate the young women as being 'appropriate' women. Domestic work regulates and reinforce specific ways of being a 'woman'. Moreover, the notion of subordination can serve to reinforce the position of women as inferior to men within society because, despite being wage earners, they work in a line of work that is considered degrading.

[107] Gaetano, p. 73
[108] Gaetano, p. 62
[109] Gaetano, P. 61

Hotel housekeeping is a type of work that confines young women within a similar restrictive framework as found within the domestic service sector, but is not stigmatized in the same way within society through notions of servitude. Hotel housekeepers work long hours and many works throughout the week which restricts migrant workers from having a social life beyond work. By drawing on the theoretical lens, attention is further payed to how hotel housekeeping includes both women and men but that gendered identities construct the type of work that the workers do within the hotel which result in a gender wage gap. Moreover, the migrant workers that work in hotel housekeeping are positioned as subordinate through policies that regulate their interaction with the different bosses and the guests.

Processes of differentiation are institutionalized and contribute to the hierarchization of migrant workers based on 'desired' characteristics

Applying the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability', the construction of 'classed' identities enforces a hierarchical structure in which young rural women are positioned as inferior to women from urban areas due to their perceived 'backward' rural identity. The lens allows for a combination of this constructed rural-urban divide with the institutionalization of young rural women as 'desired' domestic workers. Gaetano highlights how young women are channeled into live-in domestic workers through recruitment agencies.

The theoretical lens allows for attention to Gaetano's exploration of the Beijing Municipal Women's Federation which exemplifies how institutionalized structures serve to reinforce the notion of rural women as appropriate workers in the informal service economy. The women's federation is connected to different women's association in rural areas that function as recruitment agencies of young women. Drawing on the theoretical lens, domestic work is foremost constructed as women's work because this type of work is ascribed with gendered characteristics by being promoted through women's organizations. Gaetano argues that: "domestic workers do not control where they work or for whom they work".[110] The institutionalization of domestic work as women's work, places women in a marginal position in the labour market where their opportunities are restricted.

[110] Gaetano, p. 63

The Chinese labour market is configured through the *hukou* system which entitles people to specific types of jobs within the labour market dependent on where they are from in China. Gaetano writes that "the *hukou* based job distribution system still practiced in higher-end managerial or state-sector employment have ensured their [migrants] relegation to low-skilled jobs that most urbanites eschew".[111] Specifically, the *hukou* system differentiates between the rural and urban population by restring migrant workers from rural areas from taking up jobs higher-end of the labour market within urban areas. Drawing on the theoretical lens, the *hukou* system exemplifies an institutionalization of differentiation between the Chinese population based on socially constructed notions of the characteristics of people from rural and urban areas. This institutionalization of division of migrant workers serves to ensure workers for the lower end of the labour market by restricting rural migrant workers from seeking employment in other sectors.

Limitations

By relying on the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' the young women in Gaetano's study are viewed in relation to employers, recruitment agencies and their lives as domestic workers and hotel housekeepers in Beijing. However, Gaetano offers an interesting inside into how household dynamics change through the young women's migration experience which it is not possible to engage with when relying on the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability'. As Gaetano highlights the women "significantly raised their social stature amongst villagers and peers".[112] When not paying attention to the women's lives before entering into relations constituted by work, the lens points to the women's vulnerabilities rather than their agency which reveals an issue of whether labour migration can be viewed as contributing to the empowerment of the young women.

Applying the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' opens for a discussion of whether labour migration empowers young rural women in China. Gaetano emphasizes that the young women are empowered through the process of migration by providing a holistic account of how the women negotiate their choice of migration within the household, and how their social status changes upon return. Gaetano highlights a change from before the women leave their village to when they return. She writes: "migration significantly impacted rural migrant women's

[111] Gaetano, p. 21
[112] Gaetano, p. 96

perspectives and behaviours in regard to courtship, marriage, and family formation, as well as post-marital gender identities […] strengthens the position of the daughter-in-law […] and encourages nonnormative gender divisions of labor in the household".[113] By focusing on before, during, and after Gaetano is able to view the change in women's roles. In contrast, by relying on the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' the focus is on a point in the cycle where women are at their most vulnerable stage of the migration process. It is possible to gain a valuable insight into how and why women are in a subordinate position within the urban labour market, but again, it is not highlighted why women are willing to be subjected to humiliating conditions in the urban labour market. Thereby, as within Lucht's study, the theoretical lens constructs the young women as victims of a larger power structure that exploits them to gain profit rather than as active individuals that calculate the losses and gains of taking up work.

Gaetano argues that: "migration enables them to become wage earners, consumers, city-dwellers […] new roles that both augment and challenge their primary social identity and roles in the family and household as well as their marginalization in the labor market and urban society".[114] Gaetano highlights that through the experience of working in the city, the women gain a level of autonomy that they did not have before leaving the village. However, it is useful to draw on the theoretical lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' to scrutinize the notion of empowerment of the young women despite their new opportunities. As highlighted by the theoretical lens, while out to work, the women are subjected to various forms of disciplinary measures that restrict their lives in the city. Empowerment through labour migration should be questioned by highlighting that Gaetano to some extent generalize through the notion of 'young women' which leaves out a discussion of what power the women have in choosing for example how to spend their salary. However, Gaetano emphasize that empowerment should be viewed in the light of the opportunities of previous generations of women to show how the contemporary movement of the young women provides opportunities that previous generations of women did not have.

Relying on the theoretical lens, the women are viewed to internalize the Chinese modernization discourse that construct the young women as 'backwards' due to their rural background. However, as Gaetano argues "migration cannot be accurately explained as solely an

[113] Gaetano, p. 134
[114] Gaetano, p. 4

involuntary response to the demands of the developmental state".[115] Where the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' emphasize structure as the main factor that construct the women's desire to migrate for work in the city, Gaetano argues that the young women are able to see what they gain from this process and that this motivates them to go. Thereby, by applying 'hierarchy of desirability' to Gaetano's study highlights a dilemma of structure vs agency wherein it is questioned to what extent an individual has a choice.

As pointed out in the exploration of Lucht's study, the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' cannot engage with relative gains. This result in that when applying the theoretical lens, it is difficult to find an explanation for why the young women leave despite being aware that they will end up living precarious lives in Beijing. As the informant Yanmei explains "The elders in my village returning from work in Beijing said the city had lots of tricksters and bad people, people who wouldn't give you your salary or would cheat you… Because of what returning migrants said, my parents worried and didn't want me to come to Beijing".[116] Yanmei migrated to Beijing in 1996 despite being aware of the life and the work she would end up with upon arrival.

Sub-conclusion

In reading Gaetano's study through the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' attention is paid to her rich exploration of how sociohistorical factors influence the construction of young female migrant workers. The young women are constructed as 'desired' workers in the domestic service sector in Beijing. The construction of young rural women as 'appropriate' for domestic work is influenced by the *hukou* system that excludes migrant workers from specific jobs in the urban labour market, and through women's associations that promote domestic work as an opportunity for young women to become modern. The theoretical lens points out that the construction of a rural-urban divide serves to maintain a hierarchy in which the rural population is positioned as inferior to the urban population. The lens is useful to expand on how this construction of difference serves to divide workers into specific types of work, specifically, channeling young rural women into domestic work because through this work they can be 'educated' by urban households on how to be 'modern'.

[115] Gaetano, p. 45
[116] Gaetano, p. 28

The theoretical lens highlights that placing young women within the domestic service sector supports the construction of a disciplinary regime wherein the young women can be surveilled according to notions of being 'appropriate' women. Domestic work is viewed as women's work by being constructed as a skill inherent to women. Moreover, this type of work is associated with servitude and obedience. Drawing on the theoretical lens, young women are subjected to these notions because they are constructed as the desired characteristics of a domestic worker. Women reproduce this image of the 'desired' domestic worker through the process of trying to do a good job in order to negotiate better working conditions and wages with their employer.

Similarly, to Lucht's study, the theoretical lens does not address Gaetano's account of the period before leaving and upon return to the young women's villages. This leaves out a thorough account of how labour migration can be viewed as a process of empowerment of the young women, because of the change in their social status before and after migration. The notion of empowerment is viewed through the holistic account of the women's labour migration wherein Gaetano emphasize the change in social status and the opportunities they can see for themselves before they migrate and upon return. The theoretical lens focuses on the women in work which fixes the attention on what can be argued to be the most vulnerable point during the labour migration process. However, it is important to note that the emphasis on difference in the use of the theoretical lens points out that Gaetano's use of 'young rural women' is a generalization that should be scrutinized based on how the women's opportunities might be further restricted based on their religious affiliations, marital status and other social factors which emphasize that empowerment is relative. As highlighted in the exploration of Lucht's study, the theoretical lens does not engage with relative gains, because the lens maintains a focus on the interaction between the migrant workers and the labour market system. This focus prioritizes the way in which structures influence the young women's choice of leaving. Gaetano can be used to scrutinize the lens' focus on structure by providing an insight into the women's lives before and after work. Through the interaction between Gaetano's account and the theoretical lens, it is possible to highlight a dilemma of structure vs agency and to what extent an individual has a choice.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to assess to what extent the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' could inform an understanding of precarious migrant workers. Based on a theoretical interest in

exploring ways to understand the disadvantage of different migrant workers, the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' was taken as a proxy for the postcolonial feminist perspective that seems to offer an alternative to neo-classical economic theories of migration by combining the construction of difference and identity and the institutionalization of hierarchies. The aim of this study was not to argue that the postcolonial feminist perspective offers the 'right' way to look at migrant workers. Rather, the theoretical concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' was used in conversation with each of the three studies to gain a better understanding of what the postcolonial feminist perspective can contribute with to the field and where it needs to be developed or re-examined.

In applying the lens of 'hierarchy of desirability' to Lucht's study, we can see that the perspective enriched the account of how migrant workers experienced discrimination and marginalization in Naples. The concept's focus social categorization gave the opportunity to expand on factors that contributed to differential treatment between migrant workers by showing how ascribed social characteristics was used to construct notions of 'belonging' which affected the wages and tasks of the migrant workers in the study. Moreover, the concept's use of the notion of 'cultural citizenship' was able to show how the migrant workers, despite having work permits, could still be caught in precarious work by being excluded from higher end jobs based on social characteristics. The process of exclusion supported a construction of 'undocumented' as a desired worker because this type of migrant worker was considered easier to manage by the employers.

However, using the lens obstructed a view of the migrant workers' agency as it did not provide an adequate framework for examining the part of the migrants' journey before entering Italy to work. This obstructed a view of the migrant workers' motivations for leaving, and an understanding of relative gains of those migrants who endured precarious work because they could see the benefits of their work in the future. By not engaging with the migrant workers' lives outside of work, they were constructed as victims that were exploited for the benefit of economic growth. This posed the question of whether the postcolonial feminist perspective is inherently biased when engaging with precarious migrant workers in the labour market. Migrant workers appear to be preconceived as 'victims' of the capitalist system and neoliberal labour market through an emphasis on exploitation because of its roots in the postcolonial field. In this way, the postcolonial feminist perspective informs an understanding of precarious migrant workers that is useful to highlight the factors that contribute to exploitation, but in turn,

enforces a view of migrant workers as victims of exploitative structures by leaving out their motivations and 'desires'.

In applying the lens to Standing's study, it was possible to assess the wider notion of 'precarious' by engaging with his conceptual exploration of 'the precariat'. The lens was able to show how Standing used a systemic approach which did not expand on how 'legal' migrants could end up in precarious work. The lens' emphasis on the process of subjectification and the notion of 'cultural citizenship' was useful to show how 'legal' migrants could be excluded based on ascribed social and cultural markers which further supported the differentiation between the opportunities of people within 'the precariat'. Moreover, the lens was able to highlight that by generalizing between people within 'the precariat', Standing overlooks issues of the different ways in which discrimination and marginalization is configured. Applying the concept draws attention to aspects of precarious work overlooked in Standing's account, such as questions of privilege, and the notion of that some people can use social markers to their advantage, while others are restricted, which can result in measures of inclusion and exclusion from opportunities between people within 'the precariat'.

However, the lens obstructed an understanding of the definition of being 'precarious'. By drawing on the notion of 'intersectionality', the lens obstructed an understanding of what defined precarious migrant workers by suggesting multiple ways in which this is constructed. In this way, the postcolonial feminist perspective is useful to highlight the various ways in which ascribed social characteristics can contribute to exclusion or inclusion of migrant workers. But, simultaneously by highlighting difference, it is difficult to highlight what defines 'precarious' migrant workers. This points to an inherent issue with the use of the term 'precarious' because it through a catch-all effect makes it difficult to point out what is and is not 'precarious'. It is relevant to question whether the term is biased and essentially a term that is used to criticize any position of insecurity in the contemporary labour market.

In applying the lens to Gaetano's study, it was pointed out how the notion of 'classed' identities intersected with gender to divide and direct young women into the urban labour market. Through a notion of 'rural' life being backwards, the young women were directed into the urban labour markets, to become 'modern', thereby becoming a steady and young labour force. Moreover, the lens encourages this construction of difference to be examined as something institutionalized through women's associations that construct specifically domestic work as

women's work, and through the *hukou* system that restricts the rural migrant workers from accessing jobs in the higher end of the labour market. Thereby, the postcolonial feminist perspective is interesting because it provides an approach that engages with how power dynamics on a structural level influence on a social level to regulate people's lives.

However, the lens obstructed a view of the benefits that the women gain through the process of labour migration. As highlighted in the exploration of Lucht's study, the lens blurs an understanding of the young women's agency by not engaging with the period before and after they migrate to work. The lens does not support Gaetano and her emphasis on how labour migration empowers the young women, because it maintains a focus on the part of the women's journey where they are most vulnerable. This skews the examination by privileging a view of the young women as victims exploited by labour market structures. Reading Gaetano's account thereby highlights a dilemma of structure vs agency and to what extent an individual has a choice.

Drawing on the exploration of the three different studies, the concept of 'hierarchy of desirability' provides a valuable understanding of what the postcolonial feminist perspective offers in the study of precarious migrant workers. The postcolonial feminist perspective is useful to highlight how difference matters in the context of producing precarious migrant workers, and how migrant workers are maintained in the precarious working conditions through the institutionalization of difference. By combining the construction of and institutionalization of difference, the postcolonial feminist perspective offers a valuable insight into the various ways in which marginalization of specific migrant workers within the labour market is constituted and maintained.

However, the postcolonial feminist perspective runs the risk of reinforcing migrant workers as victims in the attempt to emphasize the various ways in which exploitation materializes. When drawing on the postcolonial feminist perspective to understand precarious migrant workers it is necessary to pay attention to the inherent bias towards the contemporary labour market system. This bias maintains precarious migrant workers as 'exploited' by the current system which obstructs an understanding of how migrant workers find ways to cope and benefit from status quo and how they experience empowerment within these structures.

Bibliography

Books

Baylis, John, and, Smith, Steve, and Owens, Patricia. (2017). *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford, 7th edition.

Brooks, Ann, and, Simpson, Ruth. (2012). *Emotions in Transmigration: Transformation, Movement and Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan Limited.

Butler, Judith. (2011). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge.

Castles, Stephen, and, Miller, Mark J. (2009). *Age of Migration: International Populations Movement in the Modern World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Creswell, John. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications, 2nd edition.

Gaetano, Arianne M. (2015). *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in China*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lucht, Hans. (2012). *Darkness before Daybreak: African migrants living on the margins in southern Italy today.* University of California Press.

May, T. (2011). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process.* 4th ed. London: Open University Press.

Pajo, Erind. (2008). *International migration, social demotion and imagined advancement: An Ethnography of Social-global Mobility*. Springer.

Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Samers, Michael. (2010). *Migration*. Routledge.

Skeggs, Beverly. (2004). *Class, Self, Culture.* Routledge.

Standing, Guy. (2014) *The Precariat: A New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury.

Vosko, Leah. (2010). *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wright, Melissa. (2006). *Disposable women and other myths of global capitalism*. Routledge.

Young, Robert J. C. (2003). *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Articles

Ahmed, Sara. (2007). *A phenomenology of whiteness*. SAGE publications, vol. 8 (2): 149-168.

Anderson, Bridget. (2010). *Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers*. Work, Employment and Society. Vol. 24 (2).

Bair, Jennifer. (2010). *On difference and capital: Gender and globalization of production*. Journal of Women and Culture in Society, vol. 36, no. 1.

Breman, Jan. (2013). *A Bogus Concept?* New Left Review.

Domosh, Mona. (2014). *Commentary on "The lives of Others: Body work, the production of difference, and labour geographies*. Economic geography, 91 (1): 25-28.

Findlay, Allan, and, McCollum, David, and, Shubin, Sergei, and, Apsite, Elina, and, Krisjane, Zaiga. (2013). *The role of recruitment agencies in imagining and producing the 'good' migrant.* Social & Cultural Geography, 14:2, 145-167.

Fox, E. Jon, and, Morosanu, Laura, and, Szilassy, Eszter. (2012). *The Racialization of the New European Migration to the UK*. SAGE, Sociology, 46 (4), 680-695.

Guðjónsdóttir, Guðbjört and Loftsdóttir, Kristín. (2017). *Being a desirable migrant: perception and racialisation of Icelandic migrants in Norway*. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43:5, 791-808.

Lewis, Hannah, and, Dwyer, Peter, and, Hodkinson, Stuart, and Waite, Louise. (2015). *Hyper precarious lives: Migrants, work and forced labour in the global north*. Sage Publications, Progress in Human Geography, vol. 39 (5), 580-600.

Lewis, Hannah, and, Waite, Louise. (2015). *Asylum, Immigration Restrictions and Exploitation: Hyperprecarity As a Lens for Understanding and Tackling Forced Labour.* Anti-Trafficking Review, Special Issue, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking, No. 5.

McDowell, Linda, and, Dyer, Sarah, and Batnitzky. Adina. (2009). *Precarious work and economic migration: Emerging Immigrant Division of Labour in Greater London's Service Sector*.

McDowell, Linda, and, Batnitzky, Adina, and, Dyer, Sarah. (2007). *Division, Segmentation, and Interpellation: The Embodied Labors of Migrant Workers in a Greater London Hotel*. Economic Geography, 83:1, 1-25.

McDowell, Linda. (2008). *Thinking through work*: *Complex inequalities, constructions of difference and trans-national migrants*. Progress in Human Geography, 32(4), 491-507.

McDowell, Linda. (2014). *The lives of Others: Body work, the production of difference and Labor Geographies.* Economic Geography, Vol. 91 (1), 1-23.

Mitchell, Katharyne, and, Jones, Reece, and, Fluri, Jennifer L. (2019). *Handbook on critical geographies of migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Ong, Aihwa. (1996). *Cultural citizenship as subject-making: immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the US*. Current Anthropology 37, 737–62.

Paret, Marcel, and, Gleeson, Shannon. (2016) *Precarity and agency through a migration lens*. Citizenship Studies, 20:3-4, 277-294.

Puratis, Violetta. (2011). *White, European, and Hardworking: East European Migrants' Relationships with Other Communities in London*. Journal of Baltic Studies, 42:2, 263-288.

Strauss, Kendra. (2018). *Labour Geography II: Being, knowledge and agency*. Sage Publications, Progress in Human Geography (1-10).

Rodgers, Gerry, and Rodgers, Janine. (1989*). Precarious Jobs in Labour Market Regulation: The Growth of Atypical Employment in Western Europe*. International Labour Organisation.