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Mobile livelihood: temporariness, indifference and flexible subjectivities in the industrial site

Introduction

Development investments are often perceived in public discourse as economically desired or imagined as a driving force of modernisation and important vehicle for progress and political economy of the state. However, such understandings are often limited in the scope of development possibilities and, importantly, deprived from nuanced, contextualised and localised knowledge. After all, the relationship between development investments and local communities is always an intricate one. It includes diverse and multidimensional mutual impacts and often produces rather unintended consequences of various valence.

Nevertheless, development investments and modernisation processes, in which the global meets the local, seem to be a fundamental aspect of the contemporary world. By creating frictions, tensions, but also various collaborations, they transform localities and reveal the multi-layered context of the contemporary itself. According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016: 16), the local transformations driven

by global forces are “best understood as challenges to reproduction: people across the world have to renegotiate the ways in which they sustain themselves economically; their right to define who they are is under pressure, sometimes resulting in crisis of identity; and the physical environment changes in ways which sometimes indicate that contemporary world civilisation is ultimately unsustainable” (Eriksen, *ibid.*). Thus, the contemporary is a complex phenomenon with intricate interdependencies and existing entanglements of various social, cultural, political and economic realms. Government and business, culture and politics, nature and science, all of them merge together producing various global assemblages and impacting our local lives, experiences and practices (cf. Ong and Collier 2005; Fortun 2012, 2014). As a result, it might be argued that we now live in a time of uncertainties, which must be dealt with; a time where the future looms large in the present, but cannot be fully explored and comprehended.

The interconnectedness of the contemporary world had a significant impact on anthropology and the ways it conceptualises local communities, global and local entanglements as well as on ethnographic approach in exploring them (see Amit et al. 2000; Fortun 2001; Gupta 1998; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Holmes and Marcus 2006; Mintz 1998; Tsing 2002, 2005). Therefore, “localities”, “regions” and “communities” have become places understood not in their physical and geographic sense as bounded and delimited, but rather as spaces of complex flows of social, cultural, economic and political matter (Olwig and Hastrup 1997).

In the following chapter, I attempt to move beyond traditional static idea of local community and focus on the mobility of construction workers who temporarily reside in the commune of Dobrzeń Wielki in Opole region (southwest Poland). To put it more precisely, I focus on the specific mobility in the industrial site, that is, on labour workers contracted to work on the construction of two new blocks of the Opole Power Plant. The Opole region is already a well-recognised research site, mostly due to role of the power station and the exploration of its impact on the lives of local inhabitants

(see Rauziński 1988; Łuszczewska 1993; Lesiuk, Rauziński and Soldra-Gwiżdż 2000; Rosik-Duleska and Kusz 2009; Soldra-Gwiżdż 2009). The construction of the Opole Power Plant spans from 1973, when the decision to build it was made, to 1993, when it was finally opened. Thus, it is an interesting period of changes and transformations not only in the political economy of the state, but also in the local community's perception of the power plant. The initial anxieties among local residents towards a power plant construction plans gave way to rather neutral or even positive valorisation of it. One of the reasons for this lies in the economic development and its social understanding and perception. But also, due to power plant the region has gradually become one of the richest communes in Poland with low unemployment rates. As a result, the power plant is now a familiar and important marker in the socio-cultural landscape of local community.

The initial construction of the power plant included an influx of people and the arrival of new inhabitants in the local community. The newcomers (engineers, electricians, labourers), for whom the officials designated new apartment blocks in Dobrzeń Wielki, came from different parts of Poland. Today, however, they are already "rooted" in the local community fabric. After all, migration inflows and outflows are rather common in the history of the Opole region. Many researchers representing various approaches and disciplines (sociology, demography and economics) explored the region, highlighting such aspects of migration as employment and unemployment, the inflows and outflows of social capital or migrants' investments in the local market (see Jończy, 2003, 2006, 2010; Heffner and Rauziński, 2012; Heffner and Solga, 2009; Solga, 2009). Thus, it has been argued that migration and mobility phenomena in the Opole region have had a significant impact on various socio-cultural and economic aspects in this area resulting in labour activities and entrepreneur initiatives.

Therefore, the region is often described as "emigration region" having close transnational ties and connections with Germany, which is the most popular destination among Poles living in the Opole

region. However, today there are also new migration trends emerging. The ongoing construction of new blocks of the Opole Power Station is one of the biggest state-funded investments in Europe and it attracts migrant workers and professionals from different parts of Poland as well as Ukraine and Belarus. Most of them stay in the region just temporarily, facing various migratory dilemmas of different nature. Thus, having been contracted for specified tasks and time, migrants “muddle through” the precariousness of their work, multiple subcontracting and flexible employment. Labourers’ mobile practices, which I explore here, are then interesting examples of contemporary livelihood strategies. Moreover, their mobility is a significant aspect of the wider context, in which a big industrial initiative reveals the complex interdependencies between different scales of the global, the national and the local imaginaries of modernisation, mobility and flexibility.

When I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork in the winter of 2015 and 2016, the power plant, located in the village of Brzezie, was administratively a part of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. However, on January 1, 2017, against the will of local inhabitants, the commune was divided and the Brzezie village, including the power plant, was administratively assigned to the city of Opole. It was a political decision, which met with a strong resistance from the local inhabitants manifested in demonstrations that took place in Dobrzeń Wielki and Opole. In 2016, people began to fight for the commune’s unity; apart from the protests, they also organised meetings and public consultations, and wrote letters and petitions to be heard nationwide. For many inhabitants, the one and only reason for – as they call it – ‘annexation’ was the income tax generated by the Opole Power Plant.

Therefore, the context of my fieldwork was rather intricate. On the one hand, the local community was preoccupied with the grassroot struggle for their autonomy; on the other, the ongoing construction of the new blocks of the power plant has generated an influx of labour workers, shifting every few months. In this chapter, I explore and attempt to problematize mobile livelihood of labour

workers and their strategies, which to a certain degree are similar to James Clifford's (1997) idea of "dwelling-in-travel." First, I introduce the context and predicaments of conducting an ethnographic fieldwork at the industrial site and surroundings, which also cast light on labourers' everyday routines. Next, I examine the temporal and spatial aspects of labourers' mobility as well as their daily strategies of living 'between shifts' while residing temporarily in the local community. It leads me to some critical reflections on popular understandings of development processes and relationships between mobility, work and labour in late industrialism (and neo-liberalism), with all the unintended consequences that it produces.

Fieldwork at the industrial site

The drive from Opole to Borki takes about 20 minutes. The bus stops in front of *Biedronka*, a newly opened supermarket with budget groceries, cosmetics, cigarettes and alcohol. It is quite a popular store in Poland, often called *Biedra*, which sounds similar to Polish word *bieda*, meaning poverty. It was midday when I arrived, and the store was rather empty. Only a few men, dressed in dungarees were wandering in the aisles and some elderly locals looking for discount products. I bought some necessities and made my way towards the Opole Power Station, which is in the nearby village Brzezcie. While passing through the railway crossing, I saw two chimneys looming up in distance and producing enormous clouds of steam. The closer I got, the more industrial the landscape was, saturated with construction cranes, scaffoldings, long rebar spacers and huge blocks of reinforced concrete. And hundreds of labourers, scattered around the vast area of the construction site.

I was struck by the size of the power plant, its industrial surroundings and work-organised landscape. It was an awe-inspiring sight with coal piles, industrial infrastructures and warning signs all over. I was heading towards the main entrance, where next to it, there is a hotel - transformed into workers' hostel during the

ongoing construction – and my field accommodation. Overall, I spent a month living there. It was a short, but rather intensive time, with many labour workers coming and going. There was quite a turnover in the hostel depending on what construction work was needed at particular time. But there were also workers residing in the hostel for a few months. It was a specific, rather isolated space, away from the residential buildings, with few dozen shared rooms and a bar on the ground floor, which became my main site of research observations, inquiries and collaborations. All the staff employed in the hostel (cooks, cleaners, bartenders and receptionists) were women, and most of them of Ukrainian origin.

The construction workers, all men, with whom I discussed various issues, such as livelihood, mobility and socio-economic conditions, came mainly from different Polish regions (Mazovia, Silesia, Lesser Poland or Subcarpathia). But there were also a few workers from Ukraine and Belarus. Most of the workers were employed in small or medium private construction companies that have been subcontracted for specified tasks by the main building contractor *Mostostal*, which supervised the whole power plant expansion. They worked in welding, masonry, carpentering or as rebar workers. There were also specialists and engineers, who visited the hostel's bar, but their accommodation was often in the Opole city. Since their work shifts (day or night) lasted sometimes even 12 hours, from Monday till Friday (but often also Saturdays, depending on the work plan and progress), they had very limited possibility to interact with the local community. One of the few opportunities to meet with the local residents was grocery shopping in the nearby *Biedronka* store or *Tesco* located a little bit further in another village.

In other words, their day-to-day life was rather constrained to work regime and off time, which they usually spent in the hostel. Some of them, mostly the young ones, hanged around in the hostel's bar and lounge after work, playing pool, video games or slot machines. Others went straight to their rooms or to the kitchens, where they prepared meals, watched cable TV or skyped with their families. During the weekends, some of the workers visited Opole's

night clubs, however, most of them went back to their hometowns, wives and children. There were neighbours from one of the Lesser Poland's villages or even families working together at the power plant's expansion; I met cousins, father-in-law and son-in-law and working side by side. Labourers from Ukraine and Belarus stuck together, but there was no friction between them and the Poles. The only "complaints" I heard from Poles was that the Ukrainians worked too hard "making us look like slackers." There were stories about Polish lads brawling because of regional differences and the "holy war" between two cities, Warsaw and Radom. But otherwise, they all hanged out together, killing time between shifts.

I must admit that in the very beginning it was a rather difficult field in terms of group access and rapport or even a sense of acceptance. As one would expect, it was a very "masculine world" in a rather traditional sense of the word. Thus, bragging and joking about masturbation were daily occurrences. Most of the bar's talks and chit chats concerned work (conditions and contracts), the pros and cons of long-distance relationships and who, when and how much has won and lost by "investing" in the slot machines. The talks about something else, on the other hand, were not so demanding, especially when a stranger like me is asking the questions. However, after a few visits in the hostel's bar and lounge, I managed to get to know some of the workers well enough to discuss with them their mobile lives and work-related issues. In achieving a sort of legitimisation, which enabled me to hang out with the workers as a researcher (rather than a journalist as I was initially perceived), I am more than grateful to one of the bartenders, Blanka from Ukraine, who at the beginning played the role of my gatekeeper. It was thanks to Blanka that we were able to break the (masculine) ice and talk more about life experiences and imaginaries.

Temporariness, indifference and flexible subjectivities

The context of construction workers' lives trajectories and work experiences, their high mobility and social and cultural practices reveal a significant interplay between flexibility, (spatial) indifference and temporariness. It shows particular ways in which existing global forces of social, economic and political matter, are entangled in local lives and produce specific livelihood strategies among some of the working class.

Most of the labour workers I spoke with at the power plant industrial site were very experienced migrants having worked at various construction sites not only in Poland (Wrocław, Szczecin, Warszawa) but also across Europe (Germany, Belgium, the UK). For many, the abiding high mobility and short-term work contracts became their livelihood strategy. By moving from site to site, they became accustomed to specific way of temporal dwelling ("dwelling-in-travel"). Such protracted mobile practices, which usually result from work opportunities, problematize the very idea of livelihood and its understanding in popular imaginaries. After all, the term "livelihood" usually is "to be thought of in economic terms" (Olwig and Sørensen 2002: 3). It is particularly true in case of migration and mobility phenomena, which too often seem to be explained in economic push and pull factors. However, as Karen Fog Olwig and Nina Sørensen (*ibid.*) point out, the notion of "livelihood" implies also other meanings, such as "course of life," "life time" and "kind or manner of life," which most definitely problematize the common use of the term and indicate "a historical shift in the definition of livelihood from an emphasis on the cultural and social to a stress on the more economic, material aspects of livelihood." Thereby, "various forms of livelihood" practiced and conceived by different migrants should be explored "in particular ethnographic and historical contexts, and the local, regional and more distant spheres of activity that these livelihoods imply" (Olwig and Sørensen 2002: 4). Thus, mobile livelihood becomes a product of existing global and

local interdependencies. Its contextualisation and problematization enables us to explore particular aspects of the contemporary since “the ways people make a living put an equal emphasis on habitus and habitat, on mobile livelihood practices connecting different localities. By studying movement from the point of view of mobile livelihoods that both define and cut across a range of social, economic and cultural boundaries, it is possible to explore critically the topical units and forms of movement that may be of relevance in migratory movements” (ibid.).

One does not need to cross the state border in order to migrate. There is a blurred line between migration and mobility, and the strategies and practices of the workers I got to know at the Power Plant construction site are in many ways similar to those constructed by many Polish migrants across Europe, with whom I collaborated previously (see Pawlak 2015; cf. Goździak and Pawlak 2016). In both cases, there is a tendency to use the spatial mobility as a vehicle for “making a living;” “living here but working there” is a common expression used by the mobile workers to explain their strategies of mobile livelihood. However, moving beyond narrow economic understanding, one can also notice the emerging contexts of indifference, temporariness and flexibility, which altogether become a crucial component of habitus constructed within the specifics of global and local entanglements. In other words, mobile livelihood of labour workers is embedded in a wider set of constructed, yet simultaneously objectified and externalized dispositions (Bourdieu 1984) that are acquired during life and mobility between different construction sites. Therefore, the combination of the social position of the construction workers and the context of migrating itself leads to the production of similarity within a habitus and, subsequently, to mobile livelihood strategies and practices that fit within the logic of this habitus.

In other words, the habitus of labourers, working in different industrial sites, is constructed in the context of work-driven sojourns, flexible employment and dwelling experiences. It is a habitus of high mobility in which time, space and flexibility are expressed and

practiced in a specific way. In the case of construction workers in the Opole region, who follow mobile livelihood and travel across Poland to different construction sites, and whose contracts of employment are rather short-term and task-specific, the strategies of daily life seem to be rather interesting. There is a sense of ambiguity in living this kind of life. Many of the workers with whom I spoke about it, pointed out that it entailed both a sense of feeling “at ease” as well as frustration and fatigue related to the idea that “one should work in the place where one dwells.” However, having been working for several or more years in different sites in Poland, they constructed a life strategy in which mobility plays a crucial role.

There is an interesting idiom which describes mobile livelihood, indifference, flexibility and the feeling of temporariness of my informants and which was used by them on several occasions. For example, on one evening, there was a dozen of us downstairs in the lounge. I was playing two-on-two pool and chatting with players, while the rest was standing next to slot machines and watched how others tried their luck. At some point, a wife called one of the workers and wanted to discuss some family issues. They only spoke for a few minutes since he ended the conversation quite annoyed and said out loud *mam wyjechane*. Now, *wyjechać* means *to leave* and *wyjechane* is a slang word for *not being bothered*. Thus, the double meaning of *mam wyjechane* expresses both, the physical absence (not being there) as well as specific state of perception (not thinking or caring about something right now). It is thus an interesting expression of being temporarily dis-embedded from daily intimacies and re-embedded in the context of work-driven sojourns, schedules and activities. Therefore, the habitus driven by indifference, temporariness and flexibility is a result of construction workers’ agency, work experiences and mobile strategies created within a wider structure of industrial processes. It has a significant impact on their understanding and experiencing of time, practicing flexibility as well as negotiating space and place in a protracted mobility.

There is a complex relationship between collective and individual experiencing of time, which often reveals the existing frictions

between different rhythms of different global, national and local scales (see Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013; cf. Wallman 2004). However, in case of construction workers, there is also a sense of time, which may be understood in terms of being “in the meantime;” that is, between one contract and another, sharing the same time with people, whom we do not necessarily know or interact with. It entails different rhythms of “institutionalized time” (work schedules and assigned tasks) as well as “waiting” (for the next work shift, for the end of work shift, for the weekend trip to the hometown) and “time passing” (during the work, after the work) (cf. Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013). However, experiencing time as “passing,” “waiting” and being “in the meantime” is not only related to the context of work schedules, obligations and dwellings at the construction site. It is also an important aspect of construction workers’ livelihood. Often I was told that living from one job order to another was quite difficult, demanding and frustrating. Being between jobs and waiting for a contract to come brings economic uncertainty and traps workers into precarious work. Thus, for my informants, the expansion of the power plant meant a longer employment and a sense of (temporal) stability in their mobile livelihood.

In addition, while being mobile and temporary, construction workers are also quite flexible. Flexibility is often a result of their “dwelling-in-travel” and thereby has multiple meanings as well as it also shows their agency. To put it differently, in order to work, they need to be flexible and move between different construction sites and tasks. Moreover, labour workers also have to adjust to particular conditions and circumstances (housing arrangements, working conditions) resulting from their mobile livelihoods. It leads to experiencing space and localities, where they temporary work, in a specific, flexible, way. In different conversations and chit chats we had, my informants told me various stories of their work-related mobilities across Poland. Interestingly, they were referring not to cities or towns they sojourned and worked in, but rather to particular construction sites and building structures such as bridges, highways or skyscrapers. As if places were indifferent and defined

merely by the contracted working tasks. In a way, they practice hyper-flexibility which raises interesting paradoxes and questions as to how and in what ways flexibility is conceived under the regime of neoliberal capitalism.

In the public imaginary, the link between flexibility and mobility often translates into social and economic “promotion” and “prestige” (Salazar and Smart 2012: ii). After all, the existing neoliberal discourse presents flexibility as a rather positive trait, almost synonymous with freedom and change (Salazar and Smart 2012: ii). Being flexible means to have the ability and easiness to change and to be mobile. It seems, however, that in the same public imaginary, mobile construction workers are not a “driving force” needed for infrastructural development but rather “silent agents” of industrialisation processes, who often face exclusion, uncertainty and even exploitation. It seems to be at odds with neoliberalism, which in the 1990’s was imposed onto Polish society as a “scientific project” and the only solution to “socialistic predicaments.” As a result, it “has become a hegemonic discourse constantly reproduced at various levels of public life: in the media, in school curricula, in everyday conversations and reports and in scientific works” (Buchowski 2013: 31; cf. Buchowski 2001; Buchowski, Conte and Nagengast 2001; Dunn 2004; Hann 2002; Makovicky 2014). Neoliberal ideology produced “new subjectivities” through discourse of entrepreneurship and individualism (Makovicky 2014). Thus, in order to adapt to “modern reality,” one needed to be the entrepreneur of one’s own life, had to be open to any given opportunities and be as flexible as the free market. One needed to be prepared for change, uncertainties and risks since neoliberal capitalism does not attach people to places (see Sennett 2006).

It seems that labour workers, whose livelihood directly depends on being mobile and flexible are a “perfect match” for neoliberal agenda. They follow different economic opportunities and practice high mobility between various construction sites. They are flexible and adaptable to a given working condition and while experiencing temporariness at particular work sites and localities, they use a

strategy of indifference, which makes it more feasible to cope with mobility, flux and change. In other words, labour and construction workers whom I have met at the industrial site should not be understood in terms of traditional and static category of working class, but rather as neoliberal subjects governed by economic rationalisation. However, in the times when “accumulation by dispossession” seems to be a dominant, profit-oriented ideology, even their mobile livelihood and flexible subjectivities might be endangered.

Work and labour in late industrialism

My second field visit, in February 2016, coincided with the fatal accident that had happened in the construction site a few days before my arrival. One of the construction cranes, attached to the emerging structure of the new block, malfunctioned causing a tragedy. The crane’s jib broke down and two workers who at that time were inside the transport basket, fell down from approximately 80 meters. One of them died instantly, the other in the hospital. The whole construction was stopped, and 1,200 workers were evacuated from the building site. The investigation conducted by Opole’s District Labour Inspectorate, which focused on technical issues and workers’ work-time management and schedules, resulted in imposing stricter safety measures at the construction site as well as maintenance control. In the following days, some of the workers went back to their homes, while others (mostly Ukrainians and Belarusians) stayed in the hostel, waiting for work to be resumed.

This tragic accident obviously triggered many interpretations and ideas about “what” actually happened and “who” should be to blame. For example, I was told that during the evacuation, the number 1,200 did not correspond to the number written in the construction documentation, which indicated that there were 800 workers working at the site at the time of tragedy. Hence, for some of the workers, one of the reasons was “cutting the corners” and following “deadlines” and “milestones” instead of the safety measures.

However, what is significant here is not merely the case of actual numbers and if they are correct or not; rather, it is the context of existing perils, risks and uncertainties within an industrial work place and ways in which they are experienced by the construction workers. The accident and its aftermath also produced fears and anxieties among the workers. Thus, the Ukrainians I met were worried about their salaries and health issues. There was one worker from western part of Ukraine, who did not want to report his finger injury to the employer, afraid that he would be fired. Another one asked me to explain how the convalescent leave works in Poland and to confirm that he was still eligible to be paid by his employer, a small building company subcontracted at the power plant's construction site. All of these anxieties lead one to reflect upon contemporary world and raise some questions about social, cultural, economic and political realms of work and labour.

Kim Fortun (2012, 2014) argues that we live in an era of late industrialism. It is a time when unknown and risky future encroaches upon the present. As Fortun (2012: 450) argues, "the future is anteriorized when the past is folded into the way reality presents itself, setting up both the structures and the obligations of the future. The future inhabits the present, yet it also has not yet come - rather like the way toxics inhabit the bodies of those exposed, setting up the future but not yet manifest as disease, nor even as an origin from which a specific and known disease will come. Toxics, like the future anterior, call on us to think about determinism, but without the straightforward directives of teleology." In late industrialism, the present and the future coexist in "discursive gaps" and "discursive risks," where the former emerge in yet inconceivable conditions, the latter, on the other hand, result from the strategies of experiencing and dealing with such inconceivable conditions (Fortun 2012: 452). In other words, late industrialism is a "modernist mess," an example of unintended consequence of "industrial theory of meaning and value" and "industrial language ideology" (Fortun 2014: 312), which produced particular "habits of mind, language, building, and

regulation in industrial order that privilege production, products, property” (Fortun 2014: 313).

According to Fortun (2012: 446), we entered late industrialism in 1984. It is a symbolic marker, but with real-life and disastrous consequences. On December 3, 1984, the world witnessed a “system failure,” when the 40-tonne tank “released its contents into the air of a sleeping city” of Bhopal in India (Fortun 2012: 446). It was a horrendous catastrophe that cost lives of thousands of people, with hundreds of thousands being exposed to chemical toxins. For Fortun, the Bhopal disaster was a climax in a shifting world, where old, industrial infrastructure begins to fail in both metaphorical and literal sense. Disasters result from “tight coupling between natural, technical, political, economic, social, and discursive systems, all of which are aging, often overwrought, ossified, and politicized. Deteriorating industrial infrastructure, landscapes dotted with toxic waste ponds, climate instability, incredible imbrication of commercial interest in knowledge production, in legal decisions, in governance at all scales - this is late industrialism” (Fortun, 2014: 310). Thus, living in times of late industrialism means to be living in worlds of uncertainties, which are created by ageing infrastructure, systems of deregulations and profit-driven risk taking at the cost of safety measures.

In her research, Fortun focuses chiefly on the complexity of relationships between environmental politics, ecological systems, toxins and human health, which reveal global entanglements being played out in local sites. They often lead to disasters and calamities, harsh living conditions and misery. But late industrialism is not only about the disasters happening around the world; it is also a broader perspective of exploring “things” which are about-to-happen. Uncertain futures, which are imagined, speculated and read through the signs and symptoms emerging in the present, evoke the existing risks and dangers. After all, before the collapse, there is always a “friction” and, just as in the case of starting the fire with wooden sticks, it might result in either “warming us up” or “burning us” (cf. Eriksen 2016; Tsing 2005).

Importantly, the emergence of late industrialism coincided with a radical shift in global political economy. It was a time of a rapid decline of “organised capitalism” (Lash and Urry 1987) and its transformation into the “late” or, as it is called today, “neoliberal” form (see Harvey 2005; Ong 2006; cf. Wacquant 2012). Thus, the end of “organised capitalism” meant that global political economy enters the era of post-Fordism, in which the relationship between work and capital is flexible, and the value of work and labour rather “disposable” and “redundant.” It is profit rather than work that is the core-idea of neoliberal capitalism. Industrial “order” of Fordist capital accumulation has been replaced by neoliberal “non-order” and market-driven deregulations, privatisation and speculations. According to Don Kalb (2014: 198-199) neoliberalism is a rather “messy” word, which “is now seen as simultaneously an ideological program; a set of governmental tools and instruments; the governmentalities, rationalities, and subjectivities emerging from the use of those tools and the ritualizations of the ideology; the alignments it makes with institutional traditions with a different origin, as in ‘neoliberal ngo’s and neoliberal human rights’; a convenient stand in for capitalism; and a period-concept marking out the properties that distinguishes our era from other periods, in particular the preceding world era of state socialism in Eurasia, welfare statism in the West, and developmental-statism in the South” (Kalb 2014: 198-199). Nevertheless, the transformation from “organised” capitalism to its neoliberal form has had a significant impact on various social, cultural, economic and political conducts. The “new” political economy produced a sort of world-spirit, in which neoliberalism “has become the archetypal multi-scalar concept, conjoining global structures and processes with regional and national level ones and all the way down to the intimate properties of personhood and sociality” (Kalb 2014: 198-199). However, neoliberalism might certainly be understood as an ideology driven by “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005), which reconfigures state and shapes political economy (Ong 2006). Such transformations are producing new social practices, cultural imaginaries as well as work and labour

relations. Thereby, according to August Carbonella and Sharryn Kasmir (2014: 4), the “world of labour” should be considered in “various stages of the making, unmaking, and remaking of class.” The existing dimensions of neoliberal changes and the production of new subjectivities “compel us to move beyond old antinomies in search of explanatory frameworks capable of making sense of the changing experiences of labor and all they mean for social and daily life” (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014: 4).

Neoliberalism and late industrialism make the future uncertain, precarious and, in some cases, even dangerous and life threatening. Whilst neoliberal reconfigurations of political economy loosen the livelihood certainties and introduce profit-oriented “accumulation by dispossession,” the context of late industrialism evokes the anxieties of working conditions and the questions of safety measures. Altogether, they create a risky environment where working force is dispensable. The case of construction workers, whose role in development initiatives is often neglected raises some profound questions about the impact of global forces (political decisions, economic turbulences) on the workers’ livelihood strategies as well as the ways in which mobility and flexibility intersect with modernisation discourses.

Conclusions

The Opole Power Plant seems to be strongly “rooted” in the local landscape of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. Its recent expansion fuelled new migration to the region and generated new economic initiatives. Thus, there are new retail chains in the commune as well as private accommodation designated mainly for temporary labour workers, who come from different parts of Poland as well as Ukraine and Belarus. There is a constant flow of workers at the construction site, which depends on their contracts and time-related tasks. However, there seems to be no deeper interaction between the migrants and the local community. For construction workers,

it is just *another* industrial site to which they have been either “assigned” or which they simply chose driven by economic opportunity. Thus, they are not interested in local affairs (such as partition of the commune) and do not engage in any local activities. To some extent, the construction workers residing temporarily in Dobrzeń Wielki commune are the embodiment of global entanglement of social, economic and political forces.

Labourers who construct a mobile livelihood and move between different industrial sites across Poland (and beyond) find themselves in a rather ambiguous position of being “here” and “there.” For many, it is an economic strategy which they follow for several years (or more), and which enables them to support their families. They are local, but only in places where they live with families; while working and residing at different industrial sites, they experience rather indifference, flexibility and temporariness towards visited places. Their mobile livelihood has been habituated and seems to become a strategy of “muddling through” the conditions of neoliberalism and late industrialism. Mobile livelihood creates a working context in which construction workers cannot be place-bound and change-proof. Rather, it imposes flexible subjectivities, which enable them to adapt to different working conditions and places they visit.

For the construction workers whom I have met at the industrial site, mobility seems to be a valuable resource. To be sure, most of them would prefer to commute daily rather than travel to work-sites, but it does not keep them from making the best of mobility *per se*. Thus, construction workers’ mobile livelihood, altogether with indifference, temporariness and flexibility, is an example of their agency, which shows different ways of dealing with the existing global forces and dependencies.

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