

## **Beyond Nationality: Dispatches from Immigrant Workers in the Global City**

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**Abstract.** Research on migration policy, social structures and labour market dynamics underlines the persistent vulnerability of immigrants in the labour market of contemporary western societies. However, little attention has been paid to the diverse manners in which these factors overlap in the life of migrants moving within the same origin and destination settings. This article examines the case of Brazilian-born migrants working in Amsterdam, drawing on the analysis of statistical data, policy documents and fifteen life stories. It starts by explaining the aim of the research and the choice of origin and destination units. Findings are organized according to four key elements: legal status, gender, year of arrival, and occupation. It is argued that these elements comprise increasing differentiation mechanisms and provide an improved notion of what is at stake for migrant workers dwelling in the global city. The main conclusion is that international borders are undergoing a significant reorganization in their daily operation, in particular due to concomitant changes in migration law and flexibility strategies in the labour market. Reinforcement of distinct categories of migrants, expansion of rights for relatives or civil partners of European Union citizens and increasing pressure over undocumented workers require future research to consider whether migration policy is being replaced by a global order of human selection owing more to social and economic profile than nationality.

**Keywords:** *labour, law, gender, city*

### **Introduction**

The situation of immigrants in the labour market of contemporary western societies has raised considerable soul-searching since the works of Castles and Kosack (1972, 1985) or Piore (1979). Recent reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006, 2007, 2008a) suggest that the increase in transnational flows did not alleviate the vulnerability of labour

migrants. According to these reports, 12.4% of the workforce in OECD countries by 2005 had been born abroad. After a decade of continuous job growth in most western European countries, by the mid-2000s the unemployment rate remained significantly higher for immigrants, the largest differentials being found in Scandinavian countries, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Another common development is that foreign-born workers show a higher incidence of temporary work. This happens in most of the OECD countries without an apparent correlation with the share of temporary work in the total labour force. Non-European migrant women are found to be in particular disadvantage concerning unemployment, temporary work, or socioeconomic downward mobility.

While there is a substantial amount of research on migration policy, social structures and labour market dynamics attempting to account for the vulnerability of ethnic minorities, little attention has been paid to the diverse manners in which these factors overlap in the life of migrants moving within the same origin and destination settings. Tensions between a heterogeneous society and a regulated labour market should not be understood as clear-cut or stagnant, and heterogeneity in this case comprises more than just nationality or ethnicity. Year of arrival, gender, family composition, legal status and variation across occupations are some of the core issues warranting further attention in the examination of how migrant workers negotiate their position in the labour market. Pursuing these question marks means “digging in the penumbra of master categories”, to use the famous expression of Sassen (2005). Empirical qualitative research is especially required if one is to “consider that part of having a vigorous public sociology is that we can work at theorizing with our publics, accepting that they also can theorize – can see, and may indeed see what we cannot see, because we are blinded by the enormous clarity of our theories” (Sassen, 2005: 403).

In this article, the case of Brazilian-born migrants working in Amsterdam is examined. Analysis results from a research project conducted in 2008 covering statistical data sources, policy documents and life stories collected from fifteen migrants (for a whole view of the project, see Author, 2011). The selection of both origin and destination countries was careful. Various studies undertaken in the Netherlands indicate that risks raised by atypical work practices such as temporary contracting, spurious self-employment or the informal economy fall especially hard on immigrants coming from outside the European Union (Van Ours and Veenman,



1999; Tjeldens et al., 2006; Berkhout et al., 2007; OECD, 2008b). In particular, migrants show a lower degree of capacity to cope with discontinued professional trajectories (Bijwaard and Veenman, 2008). Additional interest stems from the fact that the Netherlands has been often regarded in international policy-making as providing a model of employment to be emulated (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997; European Expert Group on Flexicurity, 2007, European Commission, 2007a, 2007b).

On the other hand, much has been said about the choice of national units in the study of migration and the underlying subscription to a sort of uncritical statist sociology (Sassen, 2001; De Genova, 2002). One of the complexities in the study of migration is that countries, usually perceived as the units in which migrants move, no longer exist in the conventional sense of economic entities (Miles and Satzewich, 1990; Reich, 1991). The selection of a particular origin country nonetheless presents two critical advantages. First, much of the legal framework can be held fixed, illuminating sources of variation around it. Second, if it is true that the concepts of national economy and national society deserve great suspicion, the process of migration is often shaped by collective strategies and networks, many of which revolve around imagined communities. By circumscribing observation to one single country, it is possible to explore the distribution of opportunities and risks within this group and question in empirical context whether a group actually exists.

The following sections are organized according to the key elements emerging from the empirical research: legal status, gender, year of arrival, and occupation. In the concluding remarks, it is argued that these four elements comprise increasing differentiation mechanisms and provide an improved notion of what is at stake for migrant workers dwelling in the global city.

### **Legal status**

While ranking 8<sup>th</sup> in the top nationalities of migrants applying for a temporary permit in the Netherlands, Brazil ranks far lower in the top nationalities of applicants for a permit of unlimited time (data supplied by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics and Department of Immigration and Naturalisation, 2008). Still, Brazil is the source of a fast-growing national minority in the Netherlands. Based on official numbers, the extensive report by Bijl *et al.* (2005) and consultation with institutional representatives, the number of Brazilian nationals living in Dutch

territory can be cautiously estimated at 17 thousand.

According to law, all procedures for regular migration must be initiated at the Dutch Embassy or Consulate in the migrant's place of residence. This requirement exists since the guest worker regime of the 1960s, but it was only in the period of 1998-2002 that became mandatory in practice. Asylum applicants constitute a distinct category as they can be granted a residence permit without the right to participate in paid employment. The general rule implemented in 1974, the period of the ban on migration in various European countries (Sassen, 1999), is that a non-European Union citizen can only be recruited in the Netherlands after the employer proves there is not any applicant holding European Union citizenship who shows the same ability to perform that particular job. In order to do so, the job vacancy must be advertised in the public employment services. The status then granted to the migrant worker is temporary. During the first few years, it must be renewed periodically under the requirement that the migrant has a continuous source of income to cover living and health costs. Afterwards it can be replaced by a permit of stay for unlimited time.

The obvious difficulty of going through the bureaucratic procedure, officially designed to protect the regional workforce, has never been a pacific political issue. Not to mention the discontent of migrant representatives about the existence of the whole law, some political parties and business representatives grew increasingly critical of its application to *all* non-European Union citizens. If highly qualified migrants cannot make their way in when employers need them, it is claimed, this may bear heavy consequences for the "new strategic goal" of the European Union to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (European Council, 2000). In 1998, an exemplary legislative update in the Netherlands introduced a distinction between *arbeidsmigrant* (Dutch for "labour migrant") and *kennismigrant* ("knowledge migrant"). This distinction is based on the income of the migrant. If the income declared by the employer is higher than a given amount (at the time of writing, 45.495 Euros gross per year for a migrant over 30 years of age or 33.363 Euros gross per year for a migrant younger than 30), the migrant is entitled to the status of knowledge migrant. In this case, the employer is not required to prove the better abilities of the migrant over applicants holding European Union citizenship. Additionally, the migrant does not need to pass a "civic integration examination" assessing personal knowledge of Dutch society and language as required to labour migrants before being allowed to



move to the Netherlands. This distinction between two types of immigrants has been echoed by the European Commission's proposal for a Blue Card meant to extend and standardize the privileged conditions for "third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment". In May 2009, agreement by all Member-States came in the form of a Directive, from which Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom are though excluded.

The knowledge migrant status is especially available to workers in the top professional layers of technological and scientific occupations. The case of Paulo, one of the respondents in my empirical research, is especially interesting. The international software company he works for offered him the option of moving to the Netherlands either under a posted worker contract or through the knowledge migrant procedure. It was very difficult for him to calculate the impact each of the options would have on his income. First of all, he was moving into a new position in the company; then, the company has a different pay grid for every location; dollars had to be converted into Euros; taxes were charged in a different manner. In the end, he decided to go for the knowledge migrant status because it was something "more real, it sounded more like I was really moving here, not like a temporary thing".

On the other hand, migrants who intend to work on a self-employed basis must submit a business plan in advance to Dutch authorities, which can either accept or reject it under certain parameters of economic solidness. In fact, it may be more difficult to find one's way through migration law by working for somebody else than creating your own small enterprise. Street shops, language schools or handicraft import services have bloomed among migrant communities in Amsterdam. In the case of Alexandra, for instance, her first earnings in the Netherlands came from informal work in a flower greenhouse. Before that, she had had a very hard time making a living as a hairdresser in her hometown Teresina. The opportunity at a Dutch greenhouse was definitely an improvement, even if she felt it was quite a tiring job when she would be unexpectedly required to work for 16 hours in a row. She is better off now spending 12 hours a day at her own flower shop.

The system is very complicated. Getting credit is very complicated. And there's a lot of bureaucracy, all of it in Dutch, and you go to services where they make sure they don't speak English. Getting the opening license is difficult, because they want to know what experience you have, what training you have... I had experience of working with flowers, that was something. Then you go to the... *verkoophandel*...

the chamber of commerce, and they will tell you whether it's possible or not. I recently started a course on agriculture and flowers... although I now stopped it because I don't have the time for it. But it's important because they are very demanding and will not be giving you the permit if they think you're going to go bankrupt. It's the survival of the fittest. (Alexandra)

For Alexandra, survival became a bit easier after she married a Dutch man. The result of this was not only the simplification of her legal residence status, but also a crucial helping hand with all the papers and bureaucracy required to keep the shop operating.

Engaging in a partnership or marrying a person who is legally residing in the Netherlands is a frequent channel for migrants to obtain the legal permission to reside and work. In 2007, it constituted 49.1 per cent of all applications for a temporary stay in the Netherlands (Department of Immigration and Naturalisation data). The partner or spouse assumes legal responsibility for any living and healthcare costs that the foreigner may not be able to take up. In order to do this, the sponsor must prove sufficient continued income for at least one year before the application is submitted. In the current law, unlike earlier, migrants in this situation must also pass the "civic integration examination" on Dutch language and social norms.

Once granted, the permit enables migrants to reside and work in the Netherlands for three years, after which they can apply for a renovation of the temporary permit on their own or apply for Dutch naturalisation. During the first period, the partner is free to withdraw from the role of sponsor by own initiative. The foreigner must then leave the country. This is a significant source of vulnerability for migrants under partnership status, as shown in the lifestory of Sara. She had recently completed her university graduation in Business Management in São Paulo when she decided to visit some friends in Europe, relying on money saved while living with her wealthy parents. She fell in love with a Dutch man she had just met. When she said she would like to extend her stay, it was her boyfriend's father who became the legal sponsor for Sara's permanence in the Netherlands.

But after a while our relationship started to wear off, and I wanted to break up. And my boyfriend threatened me, he said: "If you break up, I'm going to the police and you'll be deported." It was really a very traumatic situation for me. And I saw how easily that can happen, as it does so often. Yes, I was here because I was with him, but I didn't want to go away because I was being expelled. I didn't want to go home.



And I had met another Dutch man by then, and he suggested me: “I will guarantee your stay...” And I said: “Look, I don’t want any more of this, I mean, I was guaranteed, now you guys can *unguarantee* me if you want, I’m leaving!” But all this left a strong mark on me... the vulnerability, and how easily a Dutch person can determine your future, do you see? (Sara)

The procedure for family reunification with children is the same in the sense that the person who is legally residing in the Netherlands is responsible for ensuring means of support. When reaching the minimum age for employment, descendants are then allowed to work in equal conditions with Dutch-born citizens. In the current law, they must opt between Dutch or Brazilian nationality at the age of 21. This consideration is likely to be influenced by developments in legislation in and out of the Netherlands. Lili came to the Netherlands as a minor when her mother married a Dutch man and the main reason why she recently decided to obtain Dutch nationality is that it will simplify mobility especially across the wealthiest nations. This can be said to be a significant achievement as she would like to pursue an international career after finishing her university studies in Business Management.

If I take my Dutch passport, I can even be a beggar on the street but if I want to live in England today I can, you see? Just because I’m an European citizen. And being Brazilian I must prove a million things and ask for a thousand documents and pay a thousand Euros and go through so much trouble before I can just move to another country! For me, that’s not very cool. That’s the only advantage for me, otherwise... That and being able to enter the United States without a visa. Entering the United States is a pain. It’s terrible now. (Lili)

Some European Union member states further allow descendants of national citizens to apply for a passport based on the *jus sanguinis* principle, although the maximum degree of familiarity with that ancestor may differ. The nationalities most frequently obtained by migrants born in Brazil seem to be Portuguese and Italian. These countries not only apply the *jus sanguinis* principle in a more extensive way than other states like the Netherlands, but they also have long migration links with Brazil.

## Gender

According to data from the Brazilian Consulate in the Netherlands, 69 per cent of the Brazilian-born people living in Dutch territory by 2008 were women. The predominance of women has been on the increase at least among documented

migrants, as observed for other contemporary migratory flows (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Castles and Miller, 2003). In 1999, 66 per cent of all the newcomers from Brazil registered by the national public survey were women; in 2005, this proportion was 71 per cent. An interesting remark when comparing the statistics over this time span is that, both in 1999 and 2004, half of the male newcomers were not registered by the end of the first year of stay. Among women, a proportion of 75 to 80 per cent was still living in the Netherlands after the first few years. This is probably related to the higher propensity of migrant women to engage in a legally registered partnership or marriage with a legally resident citizen. Does it mean that men constitute the great bulk of undocumented migrants then? There are no signs pointing towards this hypothesis. Research has shown that Brazilian women also have a significant presence in the undocumented flow, often earning their living as domestic workers or in the sex industry (Piscitelli, 2008).

Regarding the participation of women in the formal labour market, it is important to consider that the Netherlands shows the highest rates of part-time employment in the European Union. The fact that part-timers are predominantly women and mothers gave rise to the concept of one-and-a-half-earner family model (Yerkes and Visser, 2005). A recent report by Hagoort and Goedhuys (2008) and my own fieldwork suggest that many households with at least one Brazilian person go along the same pattern. The debate about lifestyle options versus employment deregulation is certainly still on the table. Notwithstanding the general impression that the low female participation in the labour market may be intertwined with the low quality of jobs more easily accessible to women, it is reasonable to think that causal effects may work the other way around as well. When confronted with poor working conditions, women will more easily withdraw from work — household finance allowing — than going into troubles to improve their situation, either by negotiating terms with the current employer or looking for a more gratifying job. At the same time, it does not seem that difficult for employers to find a female worker to replace the one who left.

Naída completed two university graduations in Philosophy and Fashion Design in São Paulo. Her first job in the Netherlands was as a personal assistant of a company executive. She was paid by the day, and later worked full-time in several retail shops under temporary contracts. There have been long periods of unemployment in between, especially since she had a child from her marriage with a Dutch man.





I've always put a strong demand over myself to do something. My husband never charged me with anything, he supports me all the time, he never said I had to work, also because we've never experienced any situation when we were actually short of money, he earns more than enough for us to have a good life... I think the pressure up to a moment was so huge, my own pressure, that I would accept any work and subject to anything that would come, you know, anything that would allow me to say: I'm working, I can take care of myself. (Naída)

### **Year of arrival**

The prospects of a secure income-earning stay in the Netherlands are substantially different than in the past. Especially striking is the account of Diana, who started working in Amsterdam as a schoolteacher in 1973.

I went to work and naturally you always have to fill in a number of forms, and they always ask your nationality. I put my Brazilian nationality. And nobody ever noticed! I started working, and three or four months later I told the school I was going to quit the job... and they picked up my file, we were looking through it, and they discovered I was Brazilian and that I was working illegally because I didn't have a work permit! Nobody had ever told me I needed a work permit, and I never thought about it either. At that moment they filled in all the paperwork so that I could have a work permit. (Diana)

When marrying a Dutch citizen shortly before this event, Diana had not applied for Dutch naturalisation because "it was not necessary to make the decision right then, I could make it later on". It was precisely in 1974 that she decided to obtain the Dutch nationality, "and naturally since that day this was never a problem again".

Conditions over time did not change simply for migrants. They changed for some migrants more than for others. Beatriz came to the Netherlands in 2003 within an exchange program established between a Dutch university and the university in Rio de Janeiro where she was working as a researcher. By the end of her period as a visiting scholar, she had fallen in love with a Dutch man. Their engaging in a civil partnership solved the issues about to erupt from the immigration office, although she had to spend five months back in Rio de Janeiro sorting out all the required papers and waiting for the final permit. She is now the mother of a 2-year-old boy with dual citizenship. Her current activity combines academic research, a part-time position as the coordinator of a community project and voluntary work in a local institution.

As shown by Jeffery (2001), the set of rights attached to European Union citizenship and indeed the concept of European Union citizenship itself is an extension of the rights established earlier for the movement of workers in a purely economic sense. Nowadays carrying European Union citizenship means full waiving of the regularisation procedure, but this was not the case until a few years ago. João was able to secure his stay in the Netherlands in 2003 by applying for a Portuguese passport thanks to one of his grandfathers, who was born in Portugal and migrated to Brazil in the 1940s. However, he was only allowed to legally settle down in the Netherlands if he had at least a part-time employment bond. He found a job in a cleaning company. It is noteworthy that, despite holding a university diploma in Political Science from the University of Brasília, João has worked as a cleaner to the present day.

On the other hand, Rafael has not been able to get a residence permit in the Netherlands so far. Like many other migrants, one of his priorities is to keep living costs as low as possible so that a substantial part of his earnings can be sent over to his parents and child back in Rio de Janeiro. He is also saving money to visit them in the near future, but he is concerned about border controls and the possibility that he may not be able to re-enter the Netherlands. Chances of getting a legal permit to reside and work are not too bright at the moment. “Marriage is the only way”, he tells me. “There is no other way; through work it is just not possible.”

Another undocumented respondent, Tomás, also told me about his concern for the recent proposal to introduce a visa requirement for Brazilians visiting the Netherlands as tourists, as well as the application of the European Union Directive on Return of Illegal Immigrants.

And there is a new law. In order to leave Brazil, you need a health insurance that didn't use to be mandatory. I mean, these are small changes that make it a bit harder. Still, I know how it works, so...! Even in the immigration services – I came through Paris this last time, I already came through Paris I don't know how many times, five times or something, Paris always used to be smooth. This was the first time they really stopped me, searched me, talked to me... They did a lot of things, to know if you are contradicting yourself or something. (Tomás)

Having a health insurance in the Netherlands, a retirement fund or a written housing rental was always out of reach for undocumented migrants. Nevertheless, opening a bank account or making a mobile phone yearly contract



used to be simple, Tomás says. Now companies will often require social security and fiscal identification, only given to those with a residence permit.

## **Occupation**

It has been commented that the same culture giving paid work a core position in social relations accepts a sharp value hierarchy of activities and production systems, linked to the perceived continuum of high-low skilled occupations (Beck, 2000; Sassen, 2007). At the same time, migrants come from regions where duties and rights regarding work may not have the same social and institutional centrality, and personal prospects or expected time of stay may be yet other crucial elements in their sense of entitlement (Portes, 1995).

The experience of the respondents exposes the disadvantage of migrants working in particular sectors, namely cleaning, domestic work and construction. Although the occupational distribution of the Brazilian population in the Netherlands is unknown, statistics (OECD, 2008a, 2008b) and local experts suggest these are professions occupied by a considerable number of them. The same can be said about the lower segment of jobs in retail, tourism and agro-industry. Occupational disadvantage is intertwined with the definition and distribution of tasks, the balance of control and autonomy, the internal structure of the firm and the role of trade unionism, among other things.

In the words of respondents, technical skills are constantly identified as being easier to “bring” from Brazil than any other type of skill because they are more independent of the social or cultural context in which they are exercised. This trend can be observed both in the formal and informal economies. Rafael told me certainly his experience doing painting work in Rio de Janeiro helped him find work in the construction sector upon arrival in the Netherlands, because “the methods, the techniques of painting are equal in the whole world, it doesn’t make any difference if it’s here or in Brazil”. “A tooth is a tooth in any part of the world”, Fábio told me. Yet, this did not mean he would be able to get his diploma in Dentistry validated by Dutch occupational authorities. He is currently working as a hygienist. Christiane also had her diplomas rejected by Dutch authorities after studying for 9 years and working for 20 as a doctor and homeopath in Brazil, a time during which she frequently came to Europe for scientific events. Since homeopathy is not recognized as a medical specialization in the Netherlands, she is

able to work as self-employed under certification of the Dutch Association of Homeopaths. The fact that her degree in classical medicine was not recognized though makes her feel as if she works, in her words, “out of the system”, since she can not prescribe things like medical exams to her patients. She is now considering trying to validate her diploma in another EU member state where “the process may be easier”, such as Portugal.

Those who worked or graduated in the fields of humanities, social science or arts feel this experience has been of very limited value in their trajectory. Naída, who worked for ten years in the fashion industry in São Paulo and holds two university diplomas, is not able to specify the huge number of rejected job applications in the Netherlands. She ended up taking her work of magazine covers, which she initially thought to be her greatest asset, out of her curriculum vitae submissions.

Although oversimplified comparisons should be avoided, it is interesting to look into the case of migrants dealing with flexible contractual arrangements next to the case of undocumented migrants. The most extreme case may be the one of Lili. To support her living costs through university, she has been working for two years now in a call centre under an “Agreement for Temporary Employment” through a recruitment agency, which determines that the employment relation may be terminated unilaterally by any of the parts with an advancement notice of 8 hours.

It's not exactly a contract, what you have with the agency. It's weird. It's a paper where you sign that they basically own you! It says you're going to work for a company they arranged for you, that everything is done through them, that they pay the salary, that they earn a certain amount over what you do, bla-bla-bla... But it's not a fixed contract, you know? It doesn't mention any end, it doesn't mention any period... It has the name of the client company and it says I work there. I signed it a long time ago and I didn't even look. Moreover, I'm sure I lost it somewhere. (Lili)

The employment relation for undocumented workers seems to vary just as much, and it is difficult to assess security. Sometimes, like Rafael in the construction sector, you are dependent on a phone call from your regular employer asking if you are available the next day. But Rafael has developed a personal bond with his employer, who is not expected to contact a different worker for the same

service. Tomás has been working as a cleaner for the same employers for several years. There has never been a single piece of paper with their signatures on it, but their employment relationship has resisted the two times Tomás was detained by the police and deported to Brazil.

While the improvement of conditions in occupations in which migrants are over-represented remains far from social and political awareness in part because these occupations are considered unskilled or even unworthy, a parallel assumption permeates the self-perception of workers. They often avoid any struggle for the improvement of conditions on the grounds that what is wrong is not the current working conditions they are granted, but rather the existence of the job itself, or at least the fact that they are the ones doing it. The relevance of mentality and ideology in the workers' sense of entitlement is discussed elsewhere (Author, forthcoming; see also Lautier, 2003; Anderson, 2009).

### **Concluding remarks**

Important things changed since the guest worker regimes of the 1960s in countries like Germany, France or the Netherlands (Penninx and Roosblad, 2000). The role of the European Union has raised particular difficulties of assessment by social scientists. On the other hand, law is expected to play a strong role in the ability of migrants to negotiate their way through the labour market. The findings of the research covered in this article corroborate Anderson's (2009: 407) insightful view: "immigration controls are perceived as being sorting mechanisms, or more generally, a tap that is switched on and off depending on national interests. But they are moulds rather than taps, producing workers with certain types of relation to the labour market, and residents with certain types of relations to citizens and social institutions."

Examining the overlap of legal categories, social structures and labour market dynamics in the life story of migrants contributes to the characterization of important elements of differentiation such as gender, year of arrival, legal status, or occupation. If ever the institutional structure for the inclusion of minorities was homogeneous, a growing concern for policy-makers and immigrants alike has been about *which* of the migrants are welcome. Whereas Rafael wishes there was an extraordinary regularization period like it happened a few years ago in Spain so that a trip to see his six-year old son would not jeopardise his job in Amsterdam, for

software consultant Paulo it is demanding professional schedules with frequent 80-hour weeks and trips that make it difficult to visit his family. Qualitative evidence on the life of migrants is key in our understanding of what is at stake, as “the empirical details of these [new] social forms are also a window into the features of the current globalization phase” (Sassen, 2007: 99).

Two final considerations must be drawn. First, the position of migrants in the existing legal and social structures is related to various types of capital – not only educational or professional – they may hold or lack. The majority of Brazilians holding the legal right to reside and work in the Netherlands today obtained it on the grounds of family formation or European ancestry. Although these two channels are not inherently linked to the socioeconomic background of migrants and may therefore seem arbitrary as far as employment is concerned, there are some socioeconomic elements to it. Those who obtain a residence permit through partnership often meet this person while visiting a friend in Europe, backpacking, or living in another European Union member state; it is also not uncommon that the acquaintance occurs when the European Union citizen goes to Brazil for holidays or work. In other words, certain socioeconomic backgrounds make it easier for Brazilians to find an European citizen in their past or future family tree. Particular privileges in regards to the negotiation of working conditions are an apparent consequence.

Second, attention should not be paid only to borders between origin and destination countries, but also – perhaps chiefly – to borders between migrants regarding their legal rights and sense of entitlement. These borders are certainly not straightjackets or unchangeable over time, but they can be understood as producing compartments in which migrants resort to their variable capacities to negotiate living and working conditions. The suggestion is that international borders are going through a significant reorganization in their daily operation, in particular due to numerical and functional flexibility strategies in the labour market and changes in migration law. Reinforcement of distinct categories of migrants, expansion of rights for relatives or civil partners of EU citizens and increasing pressures over undocumented workers are some of the underlying evidence. Blue cards, red cards and pink cards may have existed for a long time under different names. Yet the trend is for these colours to get starker. Future research should therefore question whether migration policy is being replaced by a global order of human selection owing more to social and economic profile than nationality.

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## Acknowledgments

This paper results from a research project conducted by the author in 2008 about the employment situation of Brazilian-born migrants in the Netherlands. I thank the support of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology [SFRH/BD/61181/2009] and the Visitor's Programme of the VU University Amsterdam. An earlier draft of this paper was presented in the International Symposium of the European Council of Social Research on Latin America, University of Salamanca, 7-8 April 2011. I thank Martha Montero-Sieburth, Marc van der Meer, Sara Falcão Casaca, Sarah van Walsum, Apostolos Andrikopoulos, Jana Seppelt, Pedro Abrantes, Karin de Vries, Juan Amaya-Castro, Susan Legêne and Hannah Helmink for comments and suggestions.