

## Narrative Thread Two

### Ultimate Wellbeing: Serving as a Ladder to Help Fulfil People's Needs

by Liesbeth Nonkululeko Kanis

"I didn't receive an invitation" says Amy when talking about her coming to the Netherlands. It was my own choice to move here." Amy, a young woman in her twenties, moved here as an international student from Iran. After completing her degree, she was granted a one-year highly-skilled knowledge migrant search visa. So, her journey to find a job in the Dutch labour market began. I chat with her about her experiences via video on zoom.

She compares migration to an earthquake where people's lives are completely shaken, and sometimes even ruined, and need to be built up again from the ground. In our conversation she interchangeably refers to herself as a 'migrant', 'immigrant', but then corrects herself and says 'expat'. Whatever the identity label, she makes it clear that she is willing to invest and embrace Dutch society:

"my goal is to stay, my goal is to contribute, my goal is to become somebody here, and when I have brought, you know, all my life experience, my savings, my energy, everything, it means I'm going to invest it here [*moves her hand down as a way of planting gesture*], so I am willing to contribute in a new society, and call it home.."

In a matter-of-fact way, she continues to share with me that since she migrated to the Netherlands her wellbeing has increased by 20%. I am making the maths in my head. Does that mean from 0% to 20% or from 100% to 120% or anything in between? I dare not ask her as she swiftly moves on and adds that the speed is not fast enough.

When asked what wellbeing means to her, she wittily responds: isn't the word self-explanatory? Well-being, meaning your *being is being well*, is in good condition in all aspects. Not just physically, but also mentally. This makes sense to me, and I wonder why I have never considered it from such an obvious angle.

Her own lived experience of what she shares is nonetheless rather different. Her wellbeing has been greatly impacted by her employment. Not only the lack of it and frantic search for it, but also the stress that comes with it and the exclusion and marginalisation she experienced through it. Or as she puts it herself:

"This is what it is, because of your background, and yeah, I have many, many a times felt as a minority, and eh, also sometimes I have felt that my voice, you know, just have to be nipped in the butt [*snaps with her fingers in front of her*], uhm because of again my background."

What makes her experience worse is that she felt marginalised by another immigrant, constituting a double-marginalisation: her voice, her aspirations were curbed and compounded her difficulties and impacted her wellbeing.

"when I wanted to explore you know those uncrossed ways, I was having a lot of difficulties, just because I was a female fellow migrant without anyone in the Netherlands who wants to achieve a lot of things.... And that was just like a pushback [*physically pushes her hands to the screen*]. In many workspaces, ok just [*pushes hands down*] hold down, you are not gonna get there soon."

In a casual conversation over dinner with another international student the

double-marginalisation also enters the conversation, although in a rather different light. Li-fan, a male in his thirties from Taiwan, is a PhD student in Intercultural Philosophy. Although he recounts a rather positive impact on his wellbeing of finding employment and his workspace:

“So far, I can say my institute is, in terms of mobility, gender, ethnic or national, related to my wellbeing, I don’t feel I have a problem, due to my background, I have an American supervisor, his approach is the same as mine in terms of intercultural philosophy. I feel very fruitful and lucky. So, it’s quite interesting.”

Nonetheless, he, also, in his work encounters double-marginalisation, but then for different reasons:

“So, we actually do not have a Dutch colleague in our department which is a shame... there are people who are interested, but no Dutch colleagues working in the intercultural philosophy domain. So, in Intercultural philosophy, we are already pretty marginalised. We are double-marginal, because I’d say because we do not even have Dutch people.“

Unlike Amy earlier, Li-fan only refers to himself in professional terms (MA student, PhD student, lecturer, intercultural philosopher). Could there be a difference in terms of gender or cultural preference or how you refer to yourself and identify therewith?

Both, however, agree that a “type of mutual understanding of each other”, especially in the workspace, is critical for one’s wellbeing. And Amy even takes it further, summing up what impact wellbeing has on society as a whole:

“I think when the wellbeing of individuals within the society improves, ah, and you know those needs, that I told you, are being fulfilled, then because it depends again on of course who we are talking about, but if actually that person will serve as a ladder for other people so that others also get to that fulfilment of needs”

Sighing, she concludes: “I really wish this was better perceived in the eyes of the people with whom I was interacting, but sometimes it wasn’t.”