



*The embedding of precarious employment in Ireland: stories of
workers from the South-East*

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SUMMARY

The embedding of precarious employment in Ireland: stories of workers from the South-East

Real-life narratives of the precarious employment of 13 low-paid and insecure workers located in the South-East region of Ireland form the basis of this thesis. This study examines the relationship between EU and Irish policies of social inclusion and their application to workers in precarious employment. The stories of the workers challenge the integrationist claims these policies that work is the best route out of poverty, as the narratives of the participants point to lives of strenuous effort to make ends meet when that work is poorly paid, of poor quality and insecure. The participants' stories also challenge the exclusionary claims of social exclusion; the workers are economically marginalised but not excluded from society's norms and aspirations. This collective case of the 13 workers in the South-East of Ireland leads me to conclude that there are a variety of responses by workers to their experience of precarious employment which are not fully represented in the scholarly literature.

The question "why do these workers continue to work in circumstances of precarious employment and low incomes?" emerges as a key concern within the thesis. The thesis argues that the explanation for their continued engagement with work is the inter-relationship of two closely connected ideas: a worker identity and the concept of a master narrative of work. The participants in this study identify with and show a strong moral commitment to work within a universal master narrative based on the belief that paid work is inherently good, irrespective of the nature of that work and the level of reward achieved. The thesis concludes that the social inclusion model of worker activation being pursued by the Irish state will lead to the embedded precariousness of employment for workers who are committed to the idea of work but who will remain marginal and yet essential to the workforce.

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I wish to thank the 13 people who took part in my study. They trusted me enough to allow me access to important and often deeply personal stories from their lives. I wish to thank them for their willingness to participate in my study in the first place, for their generosity in the time they afforded me, for their kindness to me when we met, for their openness about their lives, for their insights into their world of paid work and for sharing their experiences of the Irish social protection system. I sincerely hope that what I have written in the following pages does justice to their stories.

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together is complete and they no longer have to hear 'Be quiet, Daddy's working on his PhD'.

Thank you, Anne for your love throughout the past six years and beyond. Without you this journey would not even have begun. With all of my love I dedicate this work to you.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIRO	All-Island Research Observatory
ALMPs	Active labour market policies
B&A	Behaviours and Attitudes
CCM	Critical Communicative Methodology
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CV	Curriculum Vitae
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair (former state employment support agency)
FIS	Family Income Supplement
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
EES	European Employment Strategy
EU	European Union
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
HACCP	Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point
HSE	Health Service Executive
HP	Haase-Pratschke
JLC	Joint Labour Committees
ILO	International Labour Organization
MUD	Moral underclass discourse
NCPP	National Centre for Partnership and Performance
n.d.	no date
n.p.	no page

ABBREVIATIONS

NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NUTS	Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFP	One Parent Family Payment
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
PtW	Pathways to Work
RED	Redistributionist discourse
SER	Standard employment relationship
SID	Social integrationist discourse
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VECs	Vocational Education Committees

CHAPTER 1

Mapping the landscape

INTRODUCTION

Your job is to go out and make a livin', you know. The last thing [pause] I don't know anybody who wants to be on social welfare. You know they just want to go out there and work and like you're talkin' about six euros a day more than social welfare.

(Michael)

Paid work is integral to the lives of Michael and the other workers who participated in this study. But as we shall see, for these workers employment is precarious, it lacks security with a knock-on effect on incomes and on many other aspects of their lives. The experience of precarious employment is not something new that has begun under twenty-first century capitalism; it has had a much longer historical trajectory (Quinlan, 2012). The circumstances of precarious workers also fall within broader debates about the nature of work in post-industrial societies (Sennett, 1998; Beck, 2000; Bauman, 2005; Doogan, 2009) and the role of the state's employment policies. The European Union (EU) has had paid work as a core element of both its economic and social inclusion policies since the beginning of this century (European Commission, 2000).

The primary focus of this thesis is to reflect on the experiences of 13 precarious workers in the South-East of Ireland and to contextualise their experiences within the intersections of the two policy areas of employment and social inclusion. In this chapter, in which I map out the landscape of my study, I will begin by addressing conceptual choices I have made in this thesis, specifically the concepts of precarious employment and social inclusion. I will then outline the aims of the thesis followed by how my personal interest in this area arose and then I will address the rationale for the study. Finally, I will summarise the remaining chapters of the thesis.

CONCEPTUAL CHOICES – PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

At the heart of the thesis are the concepts of precarious employment and social inclusion, the understanding of which will be explored in some depth in the following chapters. In this section I want to explain the conceptual ideas that I will use to help answer my thesis puzzles.

Precarious employment

There have been claims that paid work as we once knew it has ended (Rifkin, 1995; Sennett, 1998; Gorz, 1999; Beck, 2000; Baumann, 2005) coinciding with the emergence of globalised neo-liberal capitalism in the late twentieth century. This “end of work thesis” proposes that work plays a much lesser role in contemporary lives as we move towards an identity based on consumption instead of production. A concomitant feature of this new landscape is that work has become insecure (Doherty, 2009) although there are those such as Fevre (2007: 518) who challenges the idea that we are in ‘an age of insecure employment’. According to the end of work thesis the “new reality” of the late twentieth century globalised political economy was to utterly transform the nature of paid work and the role of the welfare state (Beck, 2000). The collectivism and social solidarity of the post-World War II Fordist settlement was replaced by individualism and the restructuring of welfare systems based on social investment.

This particular re-telling of the tale of work and welfare from the golden age of social democracy is contentious. It presents an almost “utopian” model of work and welfare that was based on a male bread-winner model and was thus highly gendered (Sainsbury, 1996; Vosko, 2010). In addition the transformational passing of the utopian model is disputed (Doherty, 2009; Doogan, 2009). Other scholars explain changes in work practices differently by using theories of dual or labour market segmentation, the defining feature of which is the division between primary and secondary labour markets (Reich et al, 1973; Kalleberg and Sørensen, 1979; Bosch, 2004; Emmenegger et al, 2012a; see next chapter)

Whatever one’s position within the academic debate about the nature of work there are significant numbers of workers, men and, in particular, women in the post-industrialised western world who experience precarious employment (Fudge and Owens, 2006; Vosko, et al, 2009; Standing, 2011) and are in need of the support of state welfare systems to maintain at least a minimum level of economic wellbeing. The concerns of the struggles of women and men in their working lives are not a recent phenomenon nor are they addressed only by academics in scholarly form. A popular and classic literature on work is represented in fiction by Robert Tressell (1912/1955) in his *Ragged Trousers Philanthropists*, by academic Arlie Russell Hochschild’s (1983/2003) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feelings*, and by journalists Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) who wrote *Nickle and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* and Polly Toynebee’s (2003) *Hard Work: Life in Low-pay Britain*.

As a concept precarious employment is not universally used. It is contested and not without limitations (Düll, 2003; Laparra et al, 2004; Vosko et al, 2009) but it does provide a useful conceptual framework to examine the employment relationship between employers and precarious workers. Precarious employment is used in this thesis as a relational concept and not one that defines the intrinsic nature of paid work. In other words, work is not necessarily precarious in and of itself but it

becomes precarious because of the relational conditions associated with that work; the employment relationship and the institutional arrangements on which these relationships are built. In fact precarious and non-precarious employment can sit side-by-side in the same work setting. All workers may carry out the same work but part of the workforce may enjoy decent wages and terms and conditions that are secure while others have low wages and less advantageous terms and conditions that are insecure. The latter worker experiences precarious employment while the former does not.

I agree with Vosko et al's (2009: 6) important observation that precarious employment does not denote 'a simple dichotomy or contrast in which precarious (insecure) jobs are juxtaposed to permanent (secure) jobs'. The idea of precariousness is much more complex than this and is better reflected as a multi-dimensional concept (Vosko et al, 2009). I use Rodgers' (1989) multi-dimensional conceptualisation of precarious employment as the basis of my theoretical analysis on that aspect of my study. Rodgers' (1989) four characteristics are based on temporality, lack of control over working conditions, lack of social protection and low levels of income.

Social inclusion

I chose social inclusion as a key analytical concept because it forms the basis of EU and Irish policy on poverty and unemployment thus bringing it to the heart of the debates in my thesis. Social inclusion, just like precarious employment, is a contested term and is closely related to the concept of social exclusion (Levitas, 2005; see Chapter 3 in this study). In my study I am critical of the limitations of social inclusion at theoretical and policy levels. However, because of its centrality at policy level I use it as an analytical tool to explore the challenges and the reality of inclusion and exclusion faced by the precarious workers in this study.

Other potential explanatory concepts include vulnerability (Holzmann and Jørgensen, 2000; Whelan and Maître, 2010a and 2010b) and new social risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2007). While both of these can arguably contribute to a better understanding of social inclusion and exclusion and indeed to precarious employment, they are also contested and complex concepts. Whelan and Maître (2010a: 504) write that vulnerability arises from the need to consider the dynamics of social exclusion over time and '[t]his involves a shift of focus from current deprivation to insecurity and exposure to risk and shock'. Vulnerability therefore extends our comprehension of social exclusion from the here and now to a longer perspective on the circumstances of those who are both regarded as socially excluded and those who may not be currently socially excluded but whose economic circumstances may make them vulnerable to social exclusion over time.

Taylor-Gooby (2004: 3) explains new social risks (NSR) as 'the risks people face in the course of their lives as a result of the economic and social changes associated with the transition to a post-industrial society'. During the post-war Fordist period

these risks were marginal due to the structure of work and welfare based on the male bread-winner model. Taylor-Gooby (2004) identifies these new risks as related to the labour market and the new economy. They include job insecurity, reconciliation of care responsibilities and the decline of trade unions (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Both Taylor-Gooby (2004) and Bonoli (2007) argue that welfare losses to individuals as a result of these societal changes define new social risks. This, according to Clement et al (2009: 242), is the 'common thread across NSR ... that people are not well protected against them by contemporary welfare states'.

The evidence in this study points to a similar conclusion as that arrived at by Clement et al (2009). As with the concept of vulnerability, new social risks can help advance our understanding of the context of social inclusion and exclusion and precarious employment. However, based on the puzzle I have set out to explore I do not believe their use as conceptual alternatives to social inclusion would enhance our knowledge of the lives of the precarious workers in this study. Furthermore, the rhetoric of policy discourse at EU and national level in Ireland for a number of years has been and continues to be that of social inclusion (European Commission 2000; European Commission, 2010; Department of Social Protection, 2016).

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of this study are to:

- co-construct a narrative of precarious employment with a group of 13 Irish workers;
- contribute new knowledge to the understanding of precarious employment in Ireland;
- contribute original knowledge on the relationship between precarious employment and the policies of social inclusion in Ireland;
- explore the usefulness of the meaning of the concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion as they relate to precarious employment and employment policy.

MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE STUDY

Precarious employment is not something new that has just suddenly arrived in the past three to four decades. I can remember it as a well-established practice amongst employers for whom I worked in late 1970s/early 1980s, in my first jobs as an adult. One was in a hotel, which had a core staff, of which I became one after a short stint as a temporary night-porter; then I became a barman on full-time hours. That work only lasted for a short-time before I decided to go to London to seek something better returning to my home town to work in a factory a couple of

years later. The factory job was permanent and pensionable and regarded locally as good as a job in the civil service. I was regarded as one of the fortunate ones at that time. In both the hotel and factory there were a core staff and then there were casual workers. In the hotel the casual workers were mainly women who were brought in to wait tables for big events like weddings or as were then popular, dinner dances. In the factory there was a particular period in the year when the workforce nearly doubled as demand for the product it manufactured and sold reached its peak. The casual workers, all men, got about three to four months of well-paid work before going back on the dole or to their farm holdings. Between times the casual workers waited and hoped that they might get one of the elusive full-time permanent jobs that occasionally became available. But the majority never got one of these jobs and returned year after year to fill the annual quotient of labour.

In the mid-1980s I spent a second brief spell in London and although I was a qualified social worker by this time I decided to try something new. I entered the world of precarious employment. It was short-term, lasting only a matter of four months, but it was a difficult time, and I knew that with my qualification I could always go back to social work if I needed to, which is what happened at the end of this sojourn in London. My first experience of precarious employment was very short-lived, one day. I had gotten a trial with a tele-sales operator in a room with three telephones, tables and chairs and nothing else somewhere in a building in Kilburn. I was to sell advertising space on a one-page calendar for the following year (this was January!) to local businesses. Of course I sold nothing and my ego was completely battered by the responses I got from my unsolicited calls. I went home shattered that day and I decided never to return – my career in tele-sales was over. It took a couple of weeks to get another job and I was short on money and living with a very kindly aunt and my cousins.

Through the boyfriend of one of my cousins I got my next break, on the building sites. I was supposedly self-employed and sub-contracted myself to a building company, but in reality I was a go for, unqualified to do anything except sweep up, which I think I was pretty good at, and I would have been a danger to myself and those around me if I had tried to do anything else. Health and safety was not given the same importance in those times. There I met Irish navvies who had spent a lifetime on these sites and many looked the worst for wear from years of extremely hard work, separation from home and in many cases alcoholism. But they were decent and generous men who took pity (even if they did not understand me) on a daft young graduate who had a possible career that they could not even dream of. By the time I had come to the end of my second “contract” on the building sites a social work job came up back in Ireland and I gladly took it. My short stint as a precarious worker was stressful, poorly paid and very uncertain. I was happy it had ended.

I remained conscious of the working conditions of others after my own brief experiences of precarious work and I have often wondered how so many workers

keep going in the face of precariousness and the untold difficulties that accompany it. I also noticed over the years since that more and more people appeared to be in precarious employment, from family members, friends and acquaintances, colleagues and beyond. Since I began my research into this area I have learned that precarious employment is widespread. I thank my thesis supervisor Mary Murphy for helping me to see the light when she introduced me to Guy Standing's (2011) *The Precariat*, an intriguing, controversial and exciting account of precariousness and it gave me the impetus to embark on the research which informs this thesis.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Although there are disputes about the nature of paid work there remains one pertinent truth, work is still central to people's lives (Bain, 2005; Kalleberg, 2011). Work provides for most people the financial means to meet every day and future need; it is significant in the formation of identity and sense of self; it is a basis for friendships and social interactions (Bauman, 2005; Doherty, 2009; Kalleberg, 2011). As we shall see in the following chapters paid work is of great importance to the 13 people who participated in this study. Yet, these workers face enormous challenges including the struggle to: make a living from their work; have a say over the organisation of their work; have control over their work time; and have access to relevant and effective regulatory and social protection supports (Rodgers, 1989). The rationale for this study is bound up in the consideration of these four challenges and in the 13 workers' capacity to confront, manage and address them in their daily lives. There is a lack of qualitative and quantitative research on precarious employment in Ireland (Doherty, 2009; Loftus, 2012; Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015) and this study aims to add to the existing research; to tell stories of Irish workers' experiences of precarious employment; to explore the Irish state's social protection policies for workers in precarious employment. The following three points summarise the rationale for this study.

The lack of research on precarious employment in Ireland

The first reason for carrying out this study is to add to the academic research available on precarious employment in Ireland. Amongst Irish scholars there are a small but growing number of contributions to this debate. Doherty's (2009) article, 'When the working day is through: the end of work as identity?' questions the end of work literature. He uses case examples, including some workers whose jobs are precarious, to support his contention that the end of work thesis is over-stated and lacks a credible empirical base. O'Connor's (2009) chapter is a review of literature and policy on precarious employment in Ireland in the context of the European Employment Strategy but does not include original research. Loftus (2012) completed research for the Mandate Trade Union using a survey by Behaviours and Attitudes on the experience of retail workers of the impact of the recession. Courtois and O'Keefe (2015) explore precariousness amongst academic staff in higher education. The findings from Loftus' (2012) and Courtois and O'Keefe's (2015) research are very much in keeping with the international research literature

on precarious employment and shall be explored in more detail in Chapter 3. Other important contributions to Irish academic literature on precarious employment and related issues since 2012 include work by Boland and Griffin (2015), Doorley (2015), Murphy and Loftus (2015), O’Sullivan et al (2015), Murphy (2015), Collins and Murphy (2016), Murphy (forthcoming) and Wickham and Bobek (2016).

To tell stories of Irish workers’ experiences of precarious employment

The second reason for carrying out this study is to give “voice” (Elliott, 2005; Riessman, 2008) to precarious workers by narrating the experiences of 13 workers in precarious employment. The literature referred to in the previous sub-section engages with the debate on precarious employment and in Doherty’s (2009), Loftus’ (2012) and Courtois and O’Keefe’s (2015) work original research with workers who are in precarious forms of employment is used. However, the added value from my research is the extensive use of narratives to convey the position of workers, to detail the challenges they are faced with and how they deal with those challenges. This voice of precarious workers has little exposure in policy discussions about work and it is hoped that the narrative approach will go some small way to redress this void.

To explore the Irish state’s social protection policies for precarious workers

My third reason for undertaking this study is to explore the social protection support available to precarious workers from the Irish state. The idea that paid work is the best response to tackling poverty (Levitas, 2005; Moran, 2006; Murphy, 2007) is apparent in the alignment of the European Employment Strategy and Europe’s social inclusion policies under the Lisbon Strategy 2000 and its successor Europe 2020. However, there is a great deception at the heart of the EU and Ireland’s social inclusion policies: that paid employment leads to social integration. For instance, in Ireland there are a number of blockages to realising this goal for precarious workers: the state provides poor protection for workers (Hendy, 2014); the welfare system is suspicious of and finds it difficult to deal with precarious workers, particularly those who are on unpredictable and changeable hours (Citizens Information Board, 2012; Murphy and Loftus, 2015); the social protection system is less than generous (Murphy, 2010); training and education provision does not suit the needs of precarious workers despite the commitments under social inclusion policies to improve the human capital of workers (Moran, 2006). Of course, even if education and training were available, there is no guarantee of good quality work as a number of well-qualified participants in this study demonstrate; a feature of the new economy (Shildrick et al, 2012).

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structured into nine chapters and the following is a brief summary of each chapter beginning with Chapter 2 through to Chapter 9.

Chapter 2

This chapter – ‘Understanding the narrative of precarious employment’ – is the first of two chapters informed by the theoretical and research literature. The aim of this chapter is to present the literature on precarious employment as the first of two theoretical baselines for my thesis. I begin by exploring the origins of precarious employment and its historical specificity, on which there is no agreement in the literature. I outline Rodgers’ (1989) definition of precarious employment as it touches on the key elements that are common in the majority of explanations of precarious employment. I also use Rodgers’ understanding of precariousness for my analytical framework in Chapters 5 and 6. A range of relevant themes are touched on in this chapter including globalisation, the extent of precariousness and identifying precarious workers.

Next, I turn to the developments in the broader political economy to assess its role and influence on the notion of precarious employment. In the section which follows I summarise a number of international research studies carried out on precarious employment using Rodgers’ (1989) framework to explore the influence of this form of work on the well-being of workers. In the final section of this chapter the focus will be on precarious employment and Ireland, including a summary of relevant studies. I discuss a number of topics related to precarious employment, such as the standard employment relationship, atypical work, job polarisation, weak institutional support for workers and low paid work, in order to make sense of precarious employment in Ireland.

Chapter 3

The aim of Chapter 3, ‘Constructing precarious employment in Ireland through policies of social inclusion’, is to explore my second theoretical theme, of social inclusion. For ease of presentation I divide the chapter into two. The first part is about social inclusion and the second is about the EU and Ireland’s strategies for employment. I begin by examining the closely related theoretical concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion, outlining the origins of the concepts and considering the definitions offered in the literature. As with precariousness there is no agreement on the meaning of these concepts among scholars but social exclusion and inclusion continue to be used even though there are reservations about their use (Levitas, 2005; Daly and Silver, 2008). Two theoretical frameworks on social exclusion are presented in this chapter, Silver’s (1994) three paradigms and Levitas’ (2005) three discourses of social exclusion which inform my own analysis later in the thesis. The policy framework for social inclusion policies in Ireland is also set out.

The European Employment Strategy (EES) is then outlined and analysed as it is inextricably linked with social inclusion. For EU policy makers, poverty and social exclusion are tackled by social inclusion, which primarily conceived of as engagement in paid work (Levitas, 2005). Three important aspects of this

relationship are also explored in this section, activation, flexicurity and quality of work. This is followed by a discussion on Ireland's employment strategies within the context of the EES. In the final section in the chapter I question the meaningfulness of the concept of social inclusion due to the problems around definition and the lack of convincing evidence that its use adds to our understanding of poverty (Lister, 2004). Moreover, I also raise the issue, which will be developed later in the thesis, about how these social inclusion and employment policies may lead to an embedding of precarious employment for workers on the margins of the workforce, such as the participants in this study.

Chapter 4

I begin with an outline of my chapter on methodology which I have called 'A methodology of engagement – using narrative inquiry'. This chapter covers the material relevant to the methodology I used in my study and begins with a socio-economic context of the South-East of Ireland. I then present my research design question before addressing a number of important themes beginning with the research question and key debates. My methodological approach, narrative inquiry, is outlined and includes: definition; approaches to narrative inquiry; narrative and social change; and narrative and the interview. I then turn to the recruitment of and engagement with the research participants and this section includes sub-sections on sampling, a section on the participants who took part in the study, how I recruited the participants and the theoretical underpinnings of my interviews with them. In the next part of the chapter I recount how I went about the task of data collection and analysis. I then turned to the essential matter of ethics. In any research project the researcher must address questions of credibility, the theme of the final section in this chapter.

Chapter 5

In this chapter – 'Contextualising precarious employment through first order narratives' – I present the stories of five workers' experiences of precarious employment through three individual accounts and one from a couple. The aim of this chapter is to give the reader a first-hand account of the nature of precarious employment through the narratives of these four exemplars. In this chapter I will use Rodgers' (1989) framework to explicate the essence of precarious employment. While each of the four dimensions apply to these and the remaining nine participants to a greater or lesser extent I use this approach to present the stories as a coherent whole (Bamberg, 2012). Shelley's story is about the dimension of time, Amy's is about work organisation, Neil and Grace's story is about employment protection and Larry's is about the economic dimension. These four themes reflect Rodgers' definition of precarious employment and they emerged organically from the stories of the five participants. This chapter is long as it allows the participants the space to present their stories of work in their own words and as a result there are extended extracts from my interviews with them. Their stories are insightful and

reflect the outcomes of the international research on precarious employment referred to in Chapter 3.

Chapter 6

Do the Irish state's social protection and employment policies provide security for the workers in this study? In this chapter we move to what Elliott (2005) calls second order narratives to further investigate the stories of the workers in this study. 'Narratives of paid employment: a turn to embedded precariousness?' is the title of the chapter and in it I use a thematic approach in recounting the narratives of the participants. The key themes of interest in this chapter are how the workers interpret their interaction with policies of social inclusion, the state's welfare and education and training systems. I divide the chapter into the following themes, flexicurity, activation, human capital and quality of work to track the workers' experiences of these elements of social inclusion/employment policies. I again use extensive quotes from the interview transcripts to give a sense of the stories and their importance for the participants. The Irish welfare system, its apparent anomalies, unfairness, delays and rigidity are recounted as are stories about the education and training system and how this group of workers have not benefited from the promise of education for life.

The themes addressed in this chapter are at the centre of social inclusion policies and challenge the prevailing policy perspective on flexicurity, activation, the development of human capital and quality of work. In conclusion, I argue that instead of practically improving the lives of the workers, the findings from this chapter point to a protection and employment regime that encourages and even facilitates precarious employment (Greer, 2016).

Chapter 7

Why do precarious workers persist with their work for what appears to be very limited, if any, financial gain? In this chapter - 'Identity and the master narrative of paid work' - I explore some possible explanations to answer the question of why precarious workers continue their engagement in poor work (Shildrick et al, 2012). I do this by touching on two different but related themes: identity and work; and master narrative of work. Earlier in this chapter I referred to the centrality of paid work in people's lives, where it is argued that it provides an identity (for example, Beck, 2000; Kalleberg, 2011). Moreover, according to Bauman (2005) there is a moral dimension to work; there is a value in working and getting paid for it. The long held morality that 'to work is good, not to work is evil (Bauman, 2005: 5), feeds into a contemporary master narrative about work. In this chapter there is a section on the meaning of the master narrative as a conceptual device used to help us understand the participants' commitment to paid work. In the final section in this chapter I reflect on insights gleaned from the master narrative of work as it applies to the experiences of the participants in an effort to understand why these workers continue to work for what is very limited material return.

Chapter 8

In this chapter – ‘Social inclusion or embedded precariousness?’ – the issue for consideration is the policy of social inclusion and its meaning and application for the precarious workers who have participated in this study. I demonstrate, through an application of the core elements of social exclusion – multi-dimensionality, cumulative disadvantage and the relational – to the experiences of the precarious workers, that the lives of the workers are not reflected in these constructs. I contend that the workers are confronted with poor quality work and poor pay leading to economic marginalisation rather than social exclusion (Shildrick et al, 2012). Irish government and EU social inclusion policies offer little to improve the lives of the workers with the focus of these policies on economic competitiveness rather than addressing inequality and inequity in economic and labour market policies. The policy approach is deeply ideological and entrenched in a neo-liberal world view (Dukelow, 2015), the application of which requires workers marginal to the workforce to ensure flexibility for improved profitability (Byrne, 2005). I argue that precarious employment is a necessary feature of neo-liberal political economy and that policies of social inclusion are necessary for the integration of marginal workers into an unequal labour-market. The end result, I contend, is embedded precariousness.

Chapter 9

In the final chapter – ‘Concluding thoughts: time for new beginnings for some old stories?’ I reflect on the insights I have gleaned from the 13 workers who participated in the study and highlight what their narratives have to offer sociology and the administration of social policy. These will include the implications of precarious employment for workers; the re-elevation of poverty as a defining concept; and social protection for precarious workers. I also reflect on my contribution to the literature on precarious employment and social exclusion and inclusion.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding the narrative of precarious employment

INTRODUCTION

I think the way people are lookin at it is, “you have a job count yourself lucky. You have a job”. I couldn’t see much bein changed at the moment. Maybe in years if things do get better there might be some changes. But I just think the line of work I’m in anyway I don’t think it’s ever goin to change. I think it’s always been the same. Ehm and that’s just the way it is.

(Amy)

Amy is a participant in this study who works in retail and her astute observation rings true; precarious employment is neither a new phenomenon nor one that is likely to disappear anytime soon. Precarious employment is currently, as Prosser (2015: 1) describes it, ‘a topic *en vogue*’. He continues, ‘not only is the economic crisis perceived to have swelled the ranks of workers affected by the phenomenon, but precarious work has received burgeoning academic interest in recent years’ (Prosser, 2015: 1). Precariousness has much deeper and longer roots, however. Although it has become ‘increasingly a defining feature of many national economies’ (Gibb, 2009: 16) the phenomenon is characterised by Quinlan (2012) as a revival of a labour market structure from an earlier historical period, the nineteenth century.

Precarious employment can be described as ‘work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements’ (Vosko, 2010: 2). However, there is a lack of universal agreement on the terminology used to describe this phenomenon in the industrialised world (Düll, 2003; Barbier, 2011). Gibb (2009: 17) suggests that the discourse used is contextual, linked ‘to different political and economic contexts’. He continues “[f]lexible” is most common in the United Kingdom (UK), “contingent” in the United States (US), and “atypical” is used in the EU’ (Gibb, 2009: 17). In the Australian context the word “casual” is the preferred term (Tucker, 2002). The common feature of the terminology is its representation of the fracturing of what is known as the “standard employment relationship” (Rodgers, 1989: 1; see also Bosch, 2004), where workers no longer fit into what was regarded as the established post-World War II norm of the employer-employee relationship (Vosko, 2010) and instead engage in ‘non-standard employment’ (Gibb, 2009). Yet, the standard employment relationship was never universal as Vosko (2010) informs us; there were always workers on the fringes of the workplace.

The association of precarious employment with Anglo-Saxon countries, including Ireland, has a long history, as Quinlan’s (2012) research shows. For example, he

refers to an intervention by Daniel O’Connell in the House of Commons in 1846 on the dire circumstances of Irish labourers during the Great Famine.

[T]he agricultural labourers of Ireland suffer the greatest privations and hardships; that they depend upon precarious and casual employment for subsistence; that they are badly housed, badly fed, badly clothed, and badly paid for their labour; that it would be impossible to describe adequately the sufferings and privations which the cottiers and labourers and their families in most parts of the country endure.

(*HC Hansard* 17 February 1846 vol. 83: c1052, cited in Quinlan, 2012: 8)

This reference to the early nineteenth century experience of precariousness demonstrates the resilience of precarious employment, a feature of modern capitalism (Kalleberg, 2009; 2011). Some of the earlier forms of precariousness may have altered or have disappeared but much has remained the same. According to Quinlan (2012: 16-17) ‘the parallels are striking. There is the growing use of subcontracted self-employment, temporary or casual labour and of home-based and remote work. Other parallels include the concentration of vulnerable groups, like foreign workers, in precarious employment’.

The transformation of the global economy since the mid-1970s has challenged the notion of the standard employment relationship and brought with it increased precariousness across workplaces worldwide (Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011; Arnold and Bongiovi, 2013) in both the global north and south (Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016). The recent economic crisis has added to the changes that have taken place with greater numbers in precarious employment across Europe (McKay et al, 2012; Prosser, 2015). Yet, as Peck and Tickell (2002: 384) observe ‘[t]he process of neoliberalization ... is neither monolithic in form nor universal in effect’ and Ireland has developed its own neo-liberal trajectory (Dukelow, 2015; Murphy and Loftus, 2015).

The aim of this chapter is to engage with the contemporary international and Irish literature on precarious employment. This is done with a view to creating an epistemological baseline for the analysis of the research participants’ narratives later in this thesis. There are a number of elements in the discussion that follows in this chapter. The first is to establish a working understanding of precarious employment because, as already alluded to, it is not a concept that is universally agreed upon (Düll, 2003; Barbier, 2011). Precarious employment does not exist in a theoretical vacuum and in the second section the concept will be explored in the context of the global political economy (Kalleberg, 2011; Standing 2011). At the core of this study are the life stories of precarious workers and in the third part of my discussion the literature on the social and economic wellbeing of precarious workers will be reviewed (Pocock et al, 2004; Haniff and Lamm, 2005; Bujold and Fournier, 2008; McGann et al, 2012; Burrows, 2013). These international studies on the social and economic wellbeing of precarious workers will thus provide a roadmap for the interviews with this study’s participants.

Finally, the fourth element of the discussion will focus on precarious employment in Ireland. As noted above the notion of precarious employment is not new to Ireland and indeed has a long history (Quinlan, 2012). What is new is the attention it has received since the economic crisis at both academic and political level with increased academic output and policy interest (Doherty, 2009; Loftus, 2012; Courtois and O’Keefe, 2015; Murphy and Loftus, 2015; O’Sullivan et al, 2015). The political, regulatory and institutional dimensions of employment policies and practices impact on the nature of paid work in all countries but there are distinctions in how these are constructed, dependent on the variety of capitalism pursued in a specific country (Lallement, 2011; Prosser, 2015). In this final section the part played by these policies and practices and the extent to how they may or may not have influenced the development of precarious employment in Ireland will be examined.

UNDERSTANDING PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

In the introduction to this chapter, Vosko’s (2010: 2) description of precarious employment was used: ‘work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements’. These characteristics are at the core of an understanding of precarious employment. However, as we have already noted there is no general agreement on the concept. It is the aim of this section to develop an understanding of precarious employment using explanations proffered by Standing (2011) and Rodgers (1989).

Developing an understanding of precarious employment

There are certain features of precarious employment that have become recognised as core elements of the concept. Central to this is that precarious employment is primarily linked to labour insecurity. Standing (2009: 37; 2011: 10) offers a comprehensive understanding of labour security when he identifies ‘seven forms of labour related security’, outlined in Box 2.1.

Rodgers (1989) provides a more succinct explanation of precarious employment under four dimensions – temporal, organisational, social and economic – which to a large extent incorporate Standing’s seven forms. The identification of these four aspects of precarious employment allows for a broad understanding of the concept and provides overarching themes for its analysis. Importantly, Rodgers’ explanation allows for an analysis that takes the idea of precariousness beyond the workplace to the intersection of the economic and social spaces. However, Rodgers (1989) provides only a limited explanation for each of his four elements of precarious employment, which are set out in Box 2.2 below. Yet, his conceptual framework has been a significant influence on academic papers and studies on precarious employment since its publication in 1989 (Tucker, 2002; Hanniff and Lamm, 2005; Fuller, 2009; Vosko, 2010; Grimshaw et al, 2015). Because of its acceptance and use in the international literature I will also use Rodgers’ (1989) conceptual

structure as the basis for my analytical framework of the interviews carried out for this research.

Box 2.1 – Standing’s (2011: 10) forms of labour security under industrial citizenship

Labour market security – Adequate income-earning opportunities; at the macro-level, this is epitomised by a government commitment to “full employment”.

Employment security – Protection against arbitrary dismissal, regulations on hiring and firing, imposition of costs on employers for failing to adhere to rules and so on.

Job security – Ability and opportunity to retain a niche in employment, plus barriers to skill dilution, and opportunities for “upward” mobility in terms of status and income.

Work security – Protection against accidents and illness at work, through, for example, safety and health regulations, limits on working time, unsociable hours, night work for women, as well as compensation for mishaps.

Skill reproduction security – Opportunity to gain skills, through apprenticeships, employment training and so on, as well as opportunity to make use of competences.

Income security – Assurance of an adequate stable income, protected through, for example, minimum wage machinery, wage indexation, comprehensive social security, progressive taxation to reduce inequality and to supplement low incomes.

Representation security – Possessing a collective voice in the labour market, through, for example, independent trade unions, with a right to strike.

Rodgers (1989) is careful in his explanation of precarious employment as he points to the ambiguity of the concept. He says that ‘an unstable job is not necessarily precarious’ and that it is a combination of the factors in his explanation of precarious employment that lead to this state (Rodgers, 1989: 3). The work of many scholars since Rodgers confirms the complexity and ambiguity of the idea of precarious employment. Particular forms of employment are more likely to be precarious than others although according to Bowles and

Box 2.2 Rodgers' (1989: 3) definition of precarious employment

Precarious work is work that deviates from what has become the norm of regular, secure, permanent wage work. There are four dimensions to this: temporal, organisational, social and economic.

Temporal

'[T]here is the degree of certainty of continuing work. Precarious jobs are those with a short time horizon, or for which the risk of job loss is high. Irregular work should be included here too, insofar as there is uncertainty as to its continuing availability.'

Organisational

'[T]here is an aspect of control over work — work is more insecure the less the worker (individually or collectively) controls working conditions, wages, or the pace of work.'

Social

'[P]rotection is of crucial importance: that is, to what extent are workers protected, either by law, or through collective organisation, or through customary practice — protected against, say, discrimination, unfair dismissal or unacceptable working practices, but also in the sense of social protection, notably access to social security benefits (covering health, accidents, pensions, unemployment insurance and the like).'

Economic

'A fourth, somewhat more ambiguous aspect is income — low income jobs may be regarded as precarious if they are associated with poverty and insecure social insertion'

'The elements involved are thus multiple: the concept of precariousness involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability.'
(Rodgers. 1989: 3)

MacPhail (2007) there is a growing trend towards precariousness across many areas of employment. Others also assert this position, most notably Kalleberg (2011) and Standing (2011). Broughton et al (2010), in their report on atypical work in the European Union, break down non-standard work. They include four elements: short part-time work; short fixed term contracts; employment without formal contracts; and zero-hours contracts. As well as these elements of non-standard work Tucker

(2002: 17) similarly categorises other arrangements such as, irregular hours or on-call work; seasonal, temporary or fixed term-contracts; self-employment; work undertaken as 'homework'; and work undertaken in the 'black economy' (Tucker, 2002: 17). But the variety of options for precarious work has multiplied in recent years with the developments of new work relationships based around the flexibilisation and casualisation of labour. These new forms include mini-jobs (Weinkopf, 2009), 'slivers of work' (Watt, 2010), multiple job-holding (McDowell et al, 2009), franchising (Fudge and Owens, 2006) mini-enterprises (Fudge and Owen, 2006), precarious self-employment (Fudge, 2006) and "If and When contracts" (O'Sullivan et al, 2015). Broughton et al (2010; see also Düll 2003) in their breakdown by employment sector found a range of employment fields where such practices occur, including: food industry, cleaning industry, care sector, health and social work, seasonal work in agriculture and tourism industries, services sector, public sector, and retail.

The standard employment relationship and precarious employment

Precarious employment is the 'antithesis' of what we have come to know as the standard employment relationship (SER) (Grimshaw et al, 2015:9). Bosch (1986: 165, cited in Bosch, 2004: 618-619) defines the SER as a 'stable, socially protected, dependent, full-time job ... the basic conditions of which (working time, pay, social transfers) are regulated to a minimum level by collective agreement or by labour and/or social security law'. Tucker (2002: 16) in her review outlines Whatman's (1994) criteria for standard employment which lacks the regulated dimension of Bosch's definition but adds elements omitted by Bosch: full-time (30 or more hours per week), in a permanent job (the expectation of continuing employment), regular hours, over the whole year, working for someone else, generally at the employer's premises. On the other hand non-standard employment refers to all work that falls outside of these criteria (Tucker, 2002).

The use of the term non-standard is not without its problems however, as Bujold and Fournier (2008) point out. For them and a number of other authors, there is a lack of equivalence between non-standard work and precarious employment, as the 'notion of precarious employment is broader than that of nonstandard work and its definition is more wide-ranging' and 'insidious' (Bujold and Fournier, 2008: 340). Tucker (2002: 2) also suggests that there is in fact 'no causal link, necessarily, between non-standard work and precarious work' (see also Barbier, 2011). According to Keller and Seifert (2005: 310) '[t]he degree of precariousness is dependent on the form and duration of the atypical employment'. The determination of precariousness is also related to the subjective factors of individual workers, so that for instance, temporary work that does not lead to financial worry is not precarious (Bujold and Fournier, 2008) although Standing does not agree with this position (2011).

The SER is described by Kalleberg (2011: 23-24) as a social contract that 'institutionalized the mutual expectations and obligations for work and employment

relationships held by workers, employers, and their communities. Workers received fairly secure and well-paid jobs in exchange for labor peace and productivity'. Descriptions of precarious employment are usually contrasted to this period of the Fordist and Keynesian norm, thus attributing to precarious employment the characteristic of an 'irregular phenomenon' (Arnold and Bongiovi, 2011: 14). Yet labour insecurity among certain categories of workers has historically been a defining feature of the relationship between labour and capital (Kalleberg, 2011) or as Rodgers (1989: 1) has put it '[p]recarious forms of work have rarely been absent from systems of wage employment'. The post-War phenomenon was historically therefore no more than an aberration rather than the norm in the social relations of production (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). The SER resulted from a specific set of circumstances featuring agreement between (male) labour and capital and the emergence of a supportive interventionist welfare state in the industrialised world (Vosko, 2010; Adams and Deakin, 2014). This consensus led by the Anglo-Saxon, liberal states came to an end in the mid-1970s.

Kalleberg (2011: 24-25) suggests a number of macro-structural causes led to the ending of the post-War consensus, which he inserts into the idea of Polanyi's "double movement", the struggle between labour flexibility and worker security. The extension of neo-liberal ideas resulted in a profound transformation, according to Kalleberg and Hewison (2013: 276) which include 'improvements in technology; rapid globalization; changes to regulatory regimes; and international competition in product, capital, and labor markets'. Kalleberg (2011: 26-31) identifies other factors that have had an influence on the SER - the expansion of the service sector and the ideological shift 'toward greater individualism and personal responsibility'. The relationship between employers and employees has also changed, according to Kalleberg (2011) who argues that there is greater economic and life chance distance between the two. Furthermore the role and function of trade unions has weakened as union membership continues to decline thus giving employees less power in their relationship with employers (Kalleberg, 2011). For his part Bosch (2004: 630) argues that the most important factors in what he terms the 'dissolution' of the SER from the 1970s are 'high levels of unemployment together with labour market deregulation'.

There is a structural dimension to the organisation of employment which also has a bearing on our understanding of precarious employment and its relationship to the SER. A well-established literature exists on the concept of a dual or segmented labour market (Reich et al, 1973; Kalleberg and Sørensen, 1979; Bosch, 2004; Häusermann and Schwander, 2012). Reich et al (1973: 360) trace the historical roots of the dual labour market from the latter part of the nineteenth century when the process of 'the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism' began reversing the previous trend towards homogenisation of the labour force. This transition came about due to economic-political forces that wished to halt the threat of the proletarianisation of the workforce and encouraged instead the segmentation of the labour market, the defining characteristic of which was based on (in)stability (Reich et al, 1973). The main feature of labour market segmentation is the division between primary and secondary labour markets.

Primary jobs skills are often acquired on the job; wages are relatively high; and job ladders exist. Secondary jobs do not require and often discourage stable working habits; wages are low; turnover is high; and job ladders are few. Secondary jobs are mainly (though not exclusively) filled by minority workers, women, and youth.

(Reich et al, 1973: 359-360)

Of note is the disadvantaging of certain groups within the dual labour market with women, minorities and young people predominantly found within the secondary labour market (Kallebeg and Sørensen, 1979) which is also an ingrained feature of precariousness (Standing 2011). This segmentation of the labour market intensified during the last quarter of the twentieth century leading to polarised jobs, a phenomenon coined as ‘good jobs versus lousy jobs’ by Goos and Manning (2003, 2007) or ‘good jobs, bad jobs’ by Kalleberg (2011). This dualisation (or ‘polarisation’ (see Kalleberg, 2011)) in the labour market between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, is according to Häusermann and Schwander (2012: 27), a trend across all countries but its extent is contingent on political and policy choices (see also Düll, 2003; Bosch, 2004). With the onset of globalised neo-liberalism the relocation of manufacturing industries to low cost emerging economies has hollowed out a middle tier of well-paid secure jobs in Western post-industrialised countries. They have been replaced with service jobs with lower levels of pay and insecurity of employment (Kalleberg, 2009 and 2011; Häusermann and Schwander, 2012). A restructuring of work and the relationship between workers and employers is taking place (de Peuter, 2011; Standing, 2011) but there is a continuity in employer-worker relationships that are historically long-established and in that sense what is occurring is not new (Kalleberg, 2011; Quinlan, 2012; Jørgensen, 2015).

SHIFTING SANDS OF THE GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PRECARIOUS WORK

This new post-Fordist era of ‘flexible, mobile and precarious labor relations’ replaced the economic model characterised by a core feature of Fordism, stable long-term employment (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 112). At the heart of the era of neo-liberalism is capitalist re-structuring and this says de Peuter (2011: 421), requires a ‘reconfiguration of labor’. Kalleberg (2009; 2011) offers an explanation of what has occurred during the epoch of global transformation that makes the current form of precarious work different to that of pre-Fordism. The first difference is that globalisation has brought about the re-spatialisation of labour and in so doing has given capital the balance of power over labour (Kalleberg, 2009). As a result of the development and growth of information technologies, communications, improved transport, more efficient production methods, the opening up of markets, including labour, and deregulated financial systems, employers can move their business operations to locations across the world, availing of cheap labour and other competitive advantages in its quest for greater profitability.

The second point Kalleberg (2009) makes is the central position of the service sector. Traditional Fordist-style manufacturing is in decline while service sector

work is growing and 'has become increasingly central' to the precarious work of today (Kalleberg, 2009: 5). Third, Kalleberg (2009: 5) says that while layoffs were always a feature of business, in the past such layoffs reflected economic downturn and seasonal labour requirements, but '[t]he difference now is that layoffs have become a basic component of employers' restructuring strategies. They reflect a way of increasing short-term profits by reducing labor costs, even in good economic times'. In his fourth point Kalleberg (2009) refers to the lack of a counter-posing ideology in the current period of 'precarity', while in the previous period the position of Marxism provided an ideological brake on economic liberalism. Finally, as discussed in the previous section, precariousness in the past was represented in the ancillary or secondary labour market. In the current labour market Kalleberg (2009) argues that precariousness has become much more pervasive and impacts on all sections of the market thus widening the scope for precariousness.

The debate on precarious employment cannot be presented only in terms of capital and labour, however. There is also the body politic in which the state and supranational governmental organisations play a hugely significant role. As a result of expanded global governance and the broader influences of globalisation the locus of political power no longer rests solely with governments of nation-states and Held and McGrew (2007) question if political power has ever been so narrowly construed. However, states still have it within their power to make choices about policy direction (Häusermann and Schwander, 2012). The political values of national governments, including how they approach labour market policies and labour market regulation, play their part in determining policy choices including the extent of precariousness (Düll, 2003). Bowles and MacPhail (2008) state that structural changes such as government neo-liberal policies are one of the factors that contributes to precarious employment. As the majority of countries have bought into the Washington Consensus of 'economic liberalization and global market integration' (Held and McGrew, 2007: 226) it is hardly surprising that policies leading to precarious employment are gaining ground.

Policies promoting deregulated labour markets are supported by international governmental organisations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (King and Rueda, 2008) and the policy of labour flexibility has become almost an essential ingredient in the intense global competition between countries to attract foreign direct investment (Lee and Kofman, 2012; Kalleberg and Hewison, 2013). The consequence of this, Standing (2011: 31) argues, is that '[t]he pursuit of flexible labour relations has been the major direct cause of the growth of the global precariat'. Lee and Kofman (2012: 388) suggest that precarious employment has even become part of macro-economic policies pursued by the governments of some countries as 'an integral part of their development strategies'.

Given its diverse nature, completely accurate data on the prevalence of precarious work is not available (Bowles and MacPhail, 2008; McDowell et al, 2009; Broughton et al, 2010). However, there is adequate data to demonstrate the continued growth

of precarious employment in developing and industrialised countries, including the EU, over some decades (Düll, 2003; McKay et al, 2012; Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Prosser, 2015; Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016) where this growth has been so extensive in some sectors that it has become the dominant form of employment status. A further factor in the political melting pot is the well-documented influence of powerful multinational corporations on the political, economic and labour policies of individual states, an influence that ‘makes local economic landscapes more volatile and jobs more insecure than before’ (Gray, 2004: 37).

A visible trend in the labour market of OECD countries since the 1970s has been the increase in unemployment and especially long-term unemployment (Emmenegger et al, 2012a; see also Kalleberg, 2009; Eurofound, 2015). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015) expresses its concern about the persistently high levels of unemployment and under-employment worldwide resulting from the onset of the global crisis in 2008. These levels of unemployment and under-employment have not been closed since and are unlikely to be reversed in the short to medium term. Unemployment remains a challenge in the EU, particularly youth unemployment and long-term unemployment. The latter was at 50 per cent in 2014 in the EU, up by 11.5 per cent from 2008. This has had implications for increased levels of poverty and social exclusion, which were determined at 24 per cent of the EU’s population in 2013 (ILO, 2015).

This trend has been accompanied by a further and profoundly transformative change in the labour market brought about through ‘deregulation and flexibilization of employment contracts’ (Emmenegger et al, 2012a: 6) and reductions in social protection in many countries due to the implementation of ‘fiscal consolidation’ policies (ILO, 2015: 36). Prior to the crisis, for those at the lower end of the skilled labour market and for those who were seeking employment, the quality of work available appeared to be declining in any case (Gray, 2004), but the challenges for the unemployed have greatly increased since the economic recession.

As we shall see in the next chapter the unemployed and others marginal to the labour market have become subject to work-first activation policies in many countries. The intensity of these activation policies has increased markedly in recent years (Greer, 2016). This is not surprising given the fundamental changes in government policy made by the demands of economic priorities, prior to and subsequent to the crisis (Dukelow, 2015). These changes have pushed more and more workers into circumstances of economic precariousness (Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Boland and Griffin, 2015; Greer, 2016).

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF WORKERS

Kalleberg (2009) places work in second place only to kin in terms of its influence on people’s lives. He says that it is a core activity in society and ‘[i]t is central to

individual identity, links individuals to each other, and locates people within the stratification system' (Kalleberg, 2009: 1). Thus, given the centrality of work for all, and its importance for people's lives (and the knock-on effect for communities) across a range of dimensions, from financial to social and psychological, the relevance of precarious employment and its consequences are of some significance. In contrast to Kalleberg's reflection on the importance of work at the personal and social level Gray (2004: 3) makes a more pragmatic interpretation of the function of the act of contemporary work: '[l]abour is wanted by many modern companies in a form more like water, a resource to be turned on and off at will'.

This pernicious approach, supported by governments through the deregulation of labour and the restructuring of welfare, has brought about 'profound insecurity in the labour market and the weakening of welfare structures' (Hutton, 1996: 197, cited in Dean and Melrose, 1999: 241). Kalleberg (2009) claims that wider societal insecurities, inequalities and instabilities associated with the United States are contributed to by precarious employment, reflecting patterns in other late modern industrial societies. In this section I will identify the groups of workers most at risk of precarious employment and explore the extent of this phenomenon in industrialised countries. This will be followed by a review of some of the international studies on the impact of precariousness on the lives of workers who experience it.

The groups at risk and the extent of precarious work in industrialised countries

There is almost unanimous agreement in the literature on the groups that are at the centre of precarious work in western industrial societies – women, young people, immigrants and visible minorities and low-skilled workers of both sexes (Tucker, 2002; Düll, 2003; Bowles and MacPhail, 2008; Gibb, 2009; McDowell et al, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; Vosko, 2010; Standing, 2011; McKay et al, 2012; Burrows, 2013). Some authors also include older workers who, according to Bowles and MacPhail (2008), alongside younger workers, are disproportionately represented among casual workers. The net of precarious work is broadening however, as 'prime age males are increasingly becoming casual workers in some countries' (Bowles and MacPhail, 2008: 4). There is much diversity in the distribution of precarious work depending on the sector, the season, the gender and race of the worker and the country in which the work takes place (Bowles and MacPhail, 2008; Standing, 2011).

There has been an increase in precarious employment in OECD countries (Prosser, 2015) and quantifying accurate levels of precarious work is an impossible task given the lack of definitional agreement of the concept and the lack of reliable data. However, we do know that the level of precarious employment differs between countries (Broughton et al, 2010). Gibb's (2009: 20) review of a number of countries shows that around one third of the Canadian workforce is in '[p]art-time, contract, and temporary work as well as self-employment'; 31 per cent of the United States workforce is in contingent work; and, around two million UK workers fit into the precarious employment category.

The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) (2015: 6), referring to research by the British State's Office for National Statistics (2014), estimated that there are 1.4 million zero-hour contracts in the United Kingdom. They continue, '[o]ver a quarter of individuals on zero-hours contracts worked in accommodation and food services (26 per cent), another quarter in administration and support services (25 per cent), and 10 per cent in the wholesale and retail sector'. The TUC report also makes the point that a feature of the data on zero-hours contracts are the levels in the public and voluntary sectors 'with 35 per cent of education and 27 per cent of healthcare employers using these working arrangements (TUC, 2015: 6). Standing (2013) concurs with the view of an exponential increase in in this form of labour when he claims that the number of people on zero-hours contracts in the UK doubled between 2004 and 2011 and 'rose 50%' in 2012. Bowles and MacPhail (2008: 3) say that the Australian casual workforce was 'at 26.8% in 2005, an increase from 15.8% in 1984'. These are just some examples of a much broader trend, where in OECD countries the overall share of atypical employment 'has grown from an average of around 10 percent to country-specific levels of 25 to 35 percent' (Emmenegger et al, 2012b: 306).

International studies on the impact of precariousness on the lives of workers

There may be an absence of quantitative data on the extent of precarious employment but there are many qualitative studies that address the impact of precarious work on the lives of workers (for example Pocock et al, 2004; Hanniff and Lamm, 2005; Bujold and Fournier, 2008; McGann et al, 2012). The five studies reviewed below provide valuable insights into the everyday challenges faced by workers engaged in precarious employment. Crucially the studies are also of benefit to the current research in three ways. First, they will provide a roadmap for the interviews and the data collection process of my research. Second, they will facilitate my research contribution to the literature on precarious employment by helping me to discern and explore research puzzles that arise and are unanswered in these studies. Third, the content of the studies will be used to confirm the validity and reliability of the findings in my research.

The studies chosen for this review were selected by trawling through the research literature. They were nominated as being representative of precarious workers across a variety of occupational backgrounds but who were generally at the lower end of wage and occupational ladders, coinciding with the characteristics of workers of interest in my own research. The five research studies cover a period of almost a decade across three countries the general details of which are sketched out in Table 2.1 below. My brief discussion of the studies will be informed by Rodgers' (1989) understanding of precarious employment, referred to earlier in this chapter, which will provide the theoretical basis for the analysis of this study. His four dimensions of precarious employment are temporal, organisational, social and economic.

As Table 2.1 details, all of the studies show important features of precarious employment, which have a negative impact on workers in this form of work. The studies of Pocock et al (2004), Bujold and Fournier (2008) and McGann et al (2012) refer to some limited advantages of precarious work. Pocock et al (2004) find that while some participants in their study are positive about the work (students and carers with family responsibilities) others are ambivalent and the largest group in their study are negative about casual work. The availability of additional income and a good relationship with the supervisor who allocates work shifts were the two most important aspects which led to positive views of casual work (Pocock et al, 2004). Life cycle stage is also a determinant of satisfaction with this type of work. Moreover, even in cases where the workers enjoy the work they do, they still have difficulties with the nature of casual work. Bujold and Fournier (2008: 347) refer to possible benefits from precarious employment referred to by some of their interviewees; the challenges and opportunities provided by the uncertainty of this form of work. These are described 'as rich and satisfying' and allow individuals to find 'new possibilities, hidden talents, and unsuspected resources' (Bujold and Fournier, 2008: 347). However, from the generally negative accounts given by Bujold and Fournier (2008) the 'benefits' of precarious employment are far outweighed by its disadvantages. McGann et al (2012: 108) found that while some workers, mainly independent contractors, enjoyed the flexibility offered by their work circumstances this was contingent on, as one participant observed, 'permanent income coming in from somewhere else'.

Temporal dimensions

Rodgers' (1989) reference to the 'temporal' as a feature of precarious employment is common to all five of the studies under review. Pocock et al (2004) question the benefit of the notion of flexibility for workers, regarded as one of the core positive reasons for undertaking casual labour (Nienhauser, 2005). They found in their research that flexibility benefited employers more than employees and '[w]orking lives are often determined at short notice' (Pocock et al, 2004: 463). Workers were reluctant to turn down work as this could have a possible future detrimental effect through loss of shifts or working hours. In effect the workers lacked 'control both over their work and their social time' (Pocock et al, 466). McGann et al (2012) also found mixed-feelings about flexible work in their study. On the one hand there were those who saw it as an advantage, although this was conditional as we have noted above. Others, for example fruit pickers, who could not avail of sufficient work 'were now unable to get enough work to survive and many were reluctant to turn down any work that was available, even if they felt sick or injured' (McGann et al, 2012: 108). Moreover, the lack of sufficient notice of work patterns impacts negatively on social participation preventing the capacity to make commitments beyond work (McGann et al, 2012).

In a different work environment time is also a problem as Hanniff and Lamm's (2005) study of two call centres in New Zealand found. Although classified as part-time workers most of the workers were working almost as many hours as full-time

workers. Casual workers were employed to fill gaps in spite of the desire by part-timers for more hours (Hanniff and Lamm, 2005). For Bujold and Fournier (2008: 345) temporality is a factor associated with the 'weakening of the link with employment' and occupational uncertainty, where job loss, the length of contract, the number of hours worked per week and maintaining multiple jobs are all features. In Burrows' (2013) Australian research on young people there is evidence of the young people moving in and out of jobs over short-time spans ('churning' as Shildrick et al, 2012: 18, call it) with few prospects for long term, more secure work.

Pocock et al (2004: 149) also found mixed feelings about trade union membership. Some workers were fearful of joining trade unions, not wanting to be seen to rock the boat while others found them helpful. But the authors note the 'difference in workplace power' between permanent workers and casual workers and this is significant in the latter's capacity to unionise (Pocock et al, 2004: 149). In their study McGann et al (2012) are informed of the lack of control over their work that independent contractors have where they are effectively tied to an employer. The young people in Burrows' (2013) study put up with poor conditions and lack of control over their working lives because they believe that the work they are doing is just a stepping stone to something better even if this work is without holidays, sick pay or regular hours of work (Burrows, 2013).

Table 2.1 Details of research studies on precarious employment

Authors	Barbara Pocock, Rosslyn Prosser & Ken Bridge	Zeenobiyah Hannif & Felicity Lamm	Charles Bujold & Geneviève Fournier	Michael McGann, Jeremy Moss & Kevin White	Scott Burrows
Year	2004	2005	2008	2012	2013
Location	Urban & rural New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, Australia	Urban New Zealand	Urban Quebec, Canada	Rural and urban Victoria, Australia	Rural & urban Illawara region, New South Wales, Australia
Participants	55 employees who have been recently, or are currently, employed casually, Variety of occupations	56 employees, supervisors, managers & stakeholders from two call centres	124 participants not in permanent work for previous three years, variety of occupations	72 participants, range of precarious forms of employment, variety of occupations	30 young people (15-24 year olds) Varieties of employment, under-employment & unemployment
Research method	Interview	Interview and case study	Interview	Interview	interview
Advantages of precarious employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional income • Offers flexibility for some workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities provided by the uncertainty for surpassing oneself at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexibility and control over their work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in prospects of better work – precarious employment as stepping stone
Disadvantages of precarious employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on health • Flexibility does not benefit employees • Sense of being under surveillance • Bullying • Lack of respect for workers • Divides workplaces • Less training • Silences workers • Commodified labour • Lack of in-work benefits • Lack of control over work • Lack of control over social time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial insecurity • Stress on individual and family well-being • Poor social protection • Little control over work • Poor employment conditions • Lack of worker representation • Unsocial hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weakening of link with employment • Identity deficit and ill-being • Inability to identify career paths and take action • Occupational and social exclusion • Difficulties in relation to socialising areas (life goals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debilitating effects of uncertainty on workers' ability to plan lives • Coercive effects of job insecurity on workers' agency in work • Marginalising effect of insecure workers' employment status • Impact on their voice in the workplace • Impact on experience of social recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of prospects • Moving in and out of jobs • Many jobs insecure • Precarious pay • Lack of choice - had to accept precarious work

Social dimension

Crucial to the social dimension is the idea of protection both in the work place, to ensure fair treatment and outside the workplace, during periods of unemployment (Rodgers, 1989). The five research studies all show to varying levels the impact of the social on precarious workers. Pocock et al's (2004) study refers to workers susceptibility to bullying, a lack of respect shown towards them, the sense of being under surveillance, lack of training and the feeling of the need to work harder than other workers as a result of their casual status. They conclude that the workers see themselves as 'commodified labour rather than employees' without the range of benefits that accompanies this status (Pocock et al, 2004: 465). Bujold and Fournier (2008) highlight the impact of this form of work, with its intrinsic lack of protection, on their participants. The outcomes are manifest in mental ill-health and psycho-social illnesses.

The workers in Hanniff and Lamm's (2005) study had none or poor access to non-pay employment benefits such as superannuation and health benefits; the only guarantee of in-work benefits were those determined by law such as holiday pay. In one of the two call centres in Hanniff and Lamm's (2005: 341) research there were no policies on 'unacceptable working practices, such as discrimination and sexual harassment' and only cursory health and safety training. A further issue raised by the workers in the study by McGann et al (2012) was their marginalisation within the workplace, being treated with hostility by co-workers or as lesser beings by their employers. But the lack of protection goes deeper where the loss or threat of the loss of work is a significant part of the precarious experience of some workers. Burrows (2013) refers to the social dimension of precarious work when he states that often the young people lost their jobs through bullying or discrimination. The precarious workers in McGann et al's (2012) study were very conscious of how easily they could be let go from their jobs and were thus willing to take risks in their work that permanent workers would not agree to.

Economic dimension

Low, unfair and unpredictable pay is a common theme in these studies on precarious workers. Pocock et al (2004), Hanniff and Lamm (2005) and Bujold and Fournier (2008) all refer to low pay as an issue for the workers they interviewed and the consequences of trying to plan ahead in a financial environment which is erratic and unreliable. An interviewee in Bujold and Hanniff's (2008: 347) research encapsulates the worry of being in this position when he says "you're never sure if you have a sufficient income to support your wife and pay the grocery bills and rent". Hanniff and Lamm (2005) also note the inequalities in pay between workers doing the same work tasks. Because of their different employment status the precarious workers earn less. They also found that '[n]one of the employees interviewed in these two call centres could depend solely on their call centre income to maintain their wellbeing or the wellbeing of their dependants' (Hanniff and Lamm, 2005: 340). Workers who do not have the financial support of their family

have to work multiple jobs or depend on government income supports (Hanniff and Lamm, 2005: 340).

Often workers have little choice but to accept precarious work as is the case for the young people in Burrows' (2013) study – their financial circumstances drive their motivation to work even if the pay is low. Further problems arise when workers are not paid. They can find themselves in an invidious and exploitative situation when they are not paid, as this quote from a casual fruit picker in McGann et al (2012: 109) demonstrates: 'but you know, if they give you less money, sometimes you don't get paid, you go "look we need the money for, because we've got bills, we've got shopping". And if you go, you know, complaining to them, they'll sack you'. The evidence from these studies suggest Rodgers' (1989: 3) assertion that 'low income jobs may be regarded as precarious if they are associated with poverty and insecure social insertion' is apposite.

The five studies reviewed here are comprehensive in their depiction of the multifaceted nature of precarious employment. Each has its own particular emphasis but taken together they plot the many dimensions of the precarious lives of workers whose jobs are insecure and pay is low. They raise a number of puzzles and highlight gaps which shall become the focus of the analysis later in this thesis. These are as follows:

In his paper, Burrows (2013) discusses the neo-liberal processes at the heart of contemporary economy and society. These processes influence not only the nature of work but also the young people's attitude towards work, which Burrows (2013: 12) claims are 'driven by a neoliberal ideology of the labour market'. This raises an interesting research puzzle about how neo-liberalism has been internalised by these young workers. This process is not referred to in the other studies reviewed here and is underdeveloped in Burrows' analysis. This puzzle will be explored later in the thesis by addressing the intersectionality of the concepts of worker identity and neo-liberalism.

Much of the literature on precarious employment, including these studies, has a tendency to present the workers as passive actors in their own lives. In part this reflects the methodological approaches used in the studies where thematic analysis presents data which is detached from the storyteller and consequently diminishes their whole story, the story of the agentic person. I believe that by using narrative inquiry and positioning the lives of the workers in a much broader narrative context the stories of precarious working lives do not define them as passive but rather as active agents, notwithstanding the enormous and ongoing challenges they face on a daily basis.

The research studies used in this section do not interrogate the relationship between precarious employment and the social protection policies of the countries in which the workers reside. These social protection policies, where available, play a crucial, if ambiguous, role in supporting precarious workers/precarious employment. A central focus of this thesis is to explore the relationship between precarious employment and the social inclusion policies of the Irish state.

THE STORY OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND

As recently as 2012, Loftus noted that precarious employment had received very little attention in Irish policy making. However, she added, Ireland's flexible approach to employment regulation and high levels of part-time work, suggested that '[t]he scale of the problem is too big to be ignored' (Loftus, 2012: 31). This observation proved to be an accurate one and subsequently a number of developments have taken place. The academic literature on precarious employment in Ireland has increased (Murphy and Loftus, 2015; Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015; Collins and Murphy, 2016). Precariousness has also moved onto the policy agenda with the commitment by government in its Statement of Government Priorities 2014 to commission a research report on the prevalence of zero-hours contracts in Ireland (O'Sullivan et al, 2015). Trade unions such as Mandate (2015, representing retail workers at Dunnes Stores) and the Teachers Union of Ireland and the Irish Federation of University Teachers (representing academics in third level education) have also commissioned research (Clarke et al, 2015) on the working conditions of their members. Additionally, the National Youth Council of Ireland commissioned research on the government's JobBridge internship programme (Doorley, 2015; see also Indecon, 2013 for an earlier evaluation commissioned by the Department of Social Protection). The IMPACT trade union has also published a report on JobBridge (Murphy, 2015).

Any attempt to fathom the landscape of Irish employment types is fraught with difficulties (O'Sullivan et al, 2015) due to a lack of data and the official narrow definition of employment in Ireland. The Central Statistics Office describes work as either full-time employment or part-time employment with the latter divided into two categories 'part-time, not underemployed' and 'part-time, underemployed'. Part-time underemployed (based on ILO and Eurostat recommendations), is defined as an individual that is 1) 'working part-time', 2) 'willing to work additional hours' and 3) 'available to work additional hours' (CSO, 2016: n.p.). This information gives us little detail about the nature of the employment experience of either group of part-time workers (O'Connor, 2009). However, what is available paints a picture, albeit an incomplete one, of a significant number of workers who are experiencing precarious employment or are within its ambit. In the remainder of this section a range of work-related features will be discussed, delineating the influence of Ireland's variety of capitalism (Prosser, 2015; O'Riain et al, 2015), in order to build a picture of the context of employment in Ireland. It will include Ireland and the SER, atypical work, polarisation, weak institutional support for work and low paid work. First, I will begin with a review of studies on precarious employment in Ireland.

Studies on precarious employment in Ireland

In the introduction to this section I referred to the increasing literature on precarious employment in Ireland. However, while the literature is increasing there

still remains a dearth of studies that specifically address the issue of precarious employment. There are a small number of related studies which I will briefly review. Doherty's (2009: 84) paper, 'When the working day is through: the end of work as identity?' is based on research he carried out in 2003-2004 using case study data from four employment sectors in Dublin. Two of these were in the state sector (a bus company and a local authority) and two in the private sector (financial services and retail). The workers in the state sector were in jobs that reflected the SER whereas in the financial services sector one fifth of the workers had part-time contracts. Non-standard employment was most prevalent in the large retail business with approximately 20 per cent of workers in permanent employment, about 50 per cent in part-time work and the remaining 30 per cent on temporary/seasonal contracts (Doherty, 2009).

Interestingly and in contrast to the findings of other research in this area, including the international research literature referred to above, Doherty (2009: 93-94) says 'none of the part-time respondents in the retail sector professed themselves dissatisfied with their status. This type of non-standard working was convenient for them in order to fulfil domestic responsibilities or to facilitate educational pursuits'. Yet, he later acknowledges that the use of "flexible" contracts was an issue for the workers in retail and '[t]he potential costs to employees of this type of work were vividly portrayed' (Doherty, 2009: 94) suggesting that all was not well for this particular cohort of workers.

The Mandate trade union commissioned a study called *Decent Work? The impact of the recession on low paid workers*, published in 2012. This study was conducted in two parts; the first part consisted of a survey by Behaviours and Attitudes (B&A) of 500 retail workers and the second part was a report compiled by Loftus based on the data from the B&A study (Loftus, 2012). Loftus writes of the findings in the context of the economic crisis and recession which began in 2008 and claims that workers' problems have been exacerbated by the macro-economic circumstances and the government response. She says '[b]asic protections for these vulnerable workers - statutory minimum wage, JLC [Joint Labour Committees] pay agreements, the low income tax regime for low paid workers, and social protection rights and entitlements - were among the first areas to come under pressure as the recession took hold' (Loftus, 2012: 3).

A concern for Loftus is that the wholesale and retail sector is Ireland's biggest employer and her research shows that income earned by employees in the sector is inadequate to meet basic living costs and could lead to in-work poverty. Findings from this research concur with findings on precariousness from across the industrialised world: the majority of the retail workers surveyed experienced precarious employment; it is dominated by low paid female workers; two-thirds of whom are without contracts; they work predominantly part-time hours; there is huge expectation of worker flexibility; and it is accompanied by significant financial and psychological stress as hours and wages are cut (Loftus, 2012).

An online survey of 1,300 Dunnes stores workers across 103 stores in Ireland conducted by Mandate suggests that there have been improvements in the conditions of the workers in these stores as the number of workers on temporary contracts has fallen. Among the workers 97 per cent had a permanent contract and were broken down as follows: 74 per cent flexi-contract, 19 per cent full-time and 9 per cent part-time (Mandate, 2015). One of the improvements noted for those on flexible contracts was the increase in their average working week to 26 hours per week but 86 per cent of the staff are still only guaranteed a minimum of 15 hours work (Mandate, 2015). Workers in the survey indicated that fewer extra staff were taken on leading to an increase in hours available to existing workers (Mandate, 2015).

Clarke et al's (2015) study on supporting academics in higher education in Ireland was part of a wider European study. It has a much broader application than precariousness although the casualisation of the workforce emerges as a consideration. Concern about the changing structures of higher education, increased student numbers, decreased funding and increased workloads under the guise of new managerialism within the higher education sector provides the context for casualisation. Clarke et al (2015: 25) define the process of casualisation within the sector as 'the expanding utilisation by higher education institutions of precarious employment contracts (including, hourly paid, part-time, fixed-term, zero hour) and the reduction of permanent whole-time positions this includes tenured posts'. The consequences of this are divisions between permanent and non-permanent academic staff, implications for academic freedom and the quality of work undertaken (Clarke et al, 2015).

Courtois and O'Keefe's (2015) research paper on the casualisation of the Irish higher education sector is important as a welcome addition to existing primary research on precarious employment in Ireland. It also addresses a sector at the higher end of the employment market and gives support to Standing's (2011) thesis that all work is becoming precarious. Courtois and O'Keefe (2015) used email to conduct a survey of academics experiencing precarious employment, to which 227 respondents replied. The authors found that work within the higher education sector was becoming increasingly precarious and they summarise their findings as follows:

Our study documents the impact of casualisation of workers' morale and quality of life. It indicates a substantial amount of fully-qualified, experienced lecturers receive less than the minimum wage, that these are more likely to be women, and that time spent in the sector does not result in an improvement of conditions - in fact for many, conditions deteriorate over time and workers remain trapped in precarious, low-paid employment.

(Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015: 61)

Doorley's (2015) research on young workers' (18-25 year olds) experiences of JobBridge, is presented in the publication *JobBridge: Stepping stone or dead end?* The focus of the study is on this labour activation programme but brings up broader issues pertinent to the experience of precarious workers. The outcomes of

JobBridge for those young people who took part in the scheme were mixed with many variables affecting the individual experience. Doorley (2015: 79) raises issues about 'exploiting interns, being used for free labour and leading to job displacement'.

Murphy (2015) in her research for the IMPACT trade union used a multi-method approach (reviewed Irish and international literature, held focus groups and used qualitative interviews) to examine the JobBridge scheme as it applies to the education sector. Her research refers to the 'pervasiveness' of the JobBridge programme in the education sector, used in administration, for special needs assistants and other staff such as 'caretakers, maintenance and school secretaries' (Murphy, 2015: 17). The research expresses fears of job displacement and breaches of the light-touch regulations that are in place. IMPACT is not against the use of internships per se but recommends a 'reframed social protection supported national internship programme resized and refocused on a specific and narrow target group who have distinct labour market integration needs' and gives details of how this might be done (Murphy, 2015: 19).

O'Sullivan et al's (2015) *A Study on the Prevalence of Zero Hours Contracts among Irish Employers and their Impact on Employees*, commissioned by the Irish government is the first official study of its kind in Ireland on this subject. The aims of the study were to produce hard data on the phenomenon of zero-hours contracts in order to fill the information gap which existed, 'to assess the impact of zero hours contracts on employees' and to make recommendations to the Minister for Jobs and the Irish government (O'Sullivan et al, 2015: 1). The research team reviewed international literature, consulted with international experts and with a range of Irish interest groups. It found that zero-hours contracts were not in wide-spread use in Ireland but they found evidence of, 'If and When' contracts (O'Sullivan et al, 2015). The authors explain the difference between the two types of contracts

The term 'zero hours contract' means someone who is not guaranteed hours of work but who is contractually required to make themselves available for work with an employer. This is the meaning ascribed by Section 18 of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. Under the Act, someone with a zero hours contract is entitled to some compensation if they are not required by an employer in a week. An 'If and When contract' is one in which an individual does not have guaranteed hours of work and they are not contractually required to make themselves available for work with an employer. Someone with an If and When contract does not have any guaranteed income from work; they are only paid for the hours offered and worked.

(O'Sullivan et al, 2015: 2)

In the presentation of their evidence the authors report differing stances by the interest groups. Employers did not see these types of contracts as a problem but as necessary for business and desired by employees. Groups representing employees took an opposing view and regarded flexible If and When contracts as harmful to the economic and welfare needs of employees who were subject to them (O'Sullivan et al, 2015). The authors of the study recommended better regulation and

increased protection for these workers in line with international best practice (O'Sullivan et al, 2015).

The Irish media have begun in recent years to take an interest in the issue of zero-hours contracts. Bray's (2013) article in the *Irish Independent* demonstrates that zero hours contracts are the lynchpin of employment contracts for two of the multi-national fast-food chains that operate in Ireland. She writes that McDonalds 'has confirmed that over 90pc of its 4,200 non-managerial staff in Ireland are employed on zero-hours contracts and have been since 1999'. Bray (2013) says that 'Domino's Pizza also admitted to using zero-hours contracts for the "majority of the non-managerial or supervisory positions"' in Ireland. Burger King would not respond to her request for an interview but she says that in the UK the fast-food company has admitted to 'using the contracts for 20,000 of its employees' in that country (Bray, 2013). An article by O'Brien (2015) in the *Irish Times* refers to the wider issue of precarious employment. '[A]cross different sectors, evidence points to a greater emphasis on short-term or low-hours contracts, bogus self-employment and free-riding on internships' (O'Brien, 2015). He identifies seven areas which are most at risk of precarious employment: education, tech, media, health, hospitality, retail and construction. What the literature and media show is that precarious employment has become a concern in Ireland for at least part of the working population. In the next section our attention will move to the context in which this is occurring and explore the possible drivers towards precariousness within the Irish workforce.

Fraying at the edges – standard employment relationships in Ireland

In Eurofound's *5th European Working Conditions Survey* (2012) a telling point about employment relationships in Ireland and a small number of other states is highlighted. 'In four EU countries, standard employment relationships are not the norm, meaning that "only" 50%-60% of employees have indefinite contracts; these are Cyprus (52%), Greece (57%), Malta (61%) and Ireland (62%). In these countries, there is a clear correlation with a very high proportion of 'nocontract' employment arrangements' (Eurofound, 2012: 18). The average SER, indefinite contracts, within the EU27 is 80 per cent. Eurofound (2012: 16) says of indefinite contracts: 'This type of contract in principle gives workers high security in the labour market (because of its open duration), social benefits (social protection, unemployment benefits) and rights (representation rights)'. In contrast the other forms of employment contracts where one or more of these benefits are not available put the long-term security of workers at risk (Eurofound, 2012). Furthermore, in the EU27 an average of five per cent of workers have no contracts whereas in Ireland 23 per cent of workers have no contracts, nearly five times higher than the EU average (Eurofound, 2012). On the evidence of Eurofound's findings the obvious question is: what is it about Ireland and its economic and employment policies that place Ireland's policy approach on the fringes of the European norm? The answer to this question can be explored by using the framework of the theory of varieties of capitalism as the locus for analysis.

Not all scholars are convinced of the varieties of capitalism approach to analysing work and political economy. This, it is argued, is due to an absence of sophistication in the understanding and presentation of the relationship between political economy and work in the varieties of capitalism approach (O’Riain et al, 2015). This approach is seen to be limited because production is a complex system ‘in its own right’ (O’Riain et al, 2015: 6). There is no necessary linear connection between the general characteristics of a regime type as understood within varieties of capitalism and the insertion of work and production onto these ideal types. Notwithstanding its limitations, the varieties of capitalism literature provides a general framework for exploring differences in approaches to work. In the varieties of capitalism literature Ireland is ‘usually’ located in the liberal regime (Murphy and Loftus, 2016: 99; see also Lallement, 2011; Dukelow, 2015; Prosser, 2015; Murphy, 2016) within which there are also varieties of liberalism (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). In the following sub-sections features of Ireland’s approach to employment will show how closely it is aligned to the liberal regime (Prosser, 2015).

Atypical work in Ireland

Across Europe there has been ‘a significant growth in a wide-range of non-standard forms of employment relationships’ since the onset of the crisis (McKay et al, 2012: 5). However, as Broughton et al (2010) stress, the complexity of making comparisons between EU member states on atypical work is not easy, due to a lack of data and other challenges in methods of data collection, definition and interpretation. Of note in the Broughton et al (2010) study is the almost total lack of information on Ireland. In O’Sullivan et al’s (2015) study on zero-hours contracts the authors concur about similar complexities and lack of data on this form of atypical work in Ireland. Broughton et al (2010) observe that zero-hours contracts dominate in the retail and home help sectors in Ireland (although they acknowledge that the conditions for the latter should improve as a result of a Labour Court ruling in 2013). In contrast, O’Sullivan et al (2015: 10) found that zero-hours contracts ‘are not extensively used’ in Ireland but ‘there is evidence of If and When contracts which involve no guaranteed hours of work but also no contractual requirement for an individual to be available for work’.

It is often used in their defence that atypical forms of employment are a stepping stone to standard forms of employment. However, Broughton et al (2010) claim the general view in Ireland is that this is not the case. They say ‘it is difficult for individuals engaged in very atypical forms of working to make the transition to standard forms of employment’ in Ireland. This point is supported by Loftus’ (2012) study where six out of ten of the workers interviewed wanted to work more hours and this was not available to them. Over 70 per cent of those surveyed were in their posts for over five years suggesting that the workforce is not a transient one or that it necessarily provides a step to standard forms of employment (Loftus, 2012; see also Mandate, 2015). A final point from Broughton et al’s study on atypical work of relevance to Ireland is the following:

In countries where there are fewer restrictions on non-standard working, such as Ireland, employers tend to make use of flexibility so that they can react to economic and labour market changes. Therefore, employers in Ireland resist any attempts to erode this flexibility. A common practice is to have a core workforce and use a periphery of non-permanent workers to meet fluctuations in demand.

(Broughton et al, 2010)

Loftus (2012) takes up the point on flexibility too as her research demonstrates the increased levels of flexibility demanded by employers. This comes at a huge cost to the workers but there is also a cost to the state for as Loftus (2012: 31) says '[g]reater flexibility for employers increases the need for the state to supplement inadequate pay'.

Polarisation

The polarisation of the workforce is a growing feature of western economies (O'Farrell, 2013a). Kalleberg (2011) addresses this issue in the US context in his aptly named book *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*. He argues that structural changes have occurred over a number of decades in the employment system in the US, leading to the hollowing out of the middle ground of employment and resulting in the polarisation of the labour force (Kalleberg, 2011). Eurofound (2013: 2) in their European jobs monitor report *Employment Polarisation and Job Quality in the Crisis*, found that '(t)he destruction of employment across Europe during the recession led to polarisation in terms of the wage structure. A large proportion of the jobs destroyed were in mid-paid manufacturing and construction occupations'. Eurofound (2013) offers an observation that employment polarisation is possibly a long-term underlying trend.

O'Farrell (2013a) writing specifically about wage polarisation in Irish employment raises a similar question. He queries if the underlying trend of polarisation in wages was hidden by the construction boom in Ireland? Answering his own question O'Farrell (2013a) argues that there had been polarisation in evidence throughout the boom period, but this was masked by high levels of employment in construction. In a separate paper O'Farrell (2013b) addresses working hours in the polarisation debate. He demonstrates that in Ireland between 1992 and 2009 'working hours declined steadily' (O'Farrell, 2013b: 9) but then stabilised throughout the period of the recession. O'Farrell (2013b: 16) concludes '(d)eclines in working hours have occurred mostly within sectors that are labour intensive and associated with low pay' and he claims the recession was not the major cause of reduced working hours. According to O'Farrell (2013a: 20)

it is probable that there will be a continued expansion of employment for the higher paid, stagnation or declines for those in middle paid occupations, and the fate of the lower paid will depend on a trickle down from those in higher paying jobs.

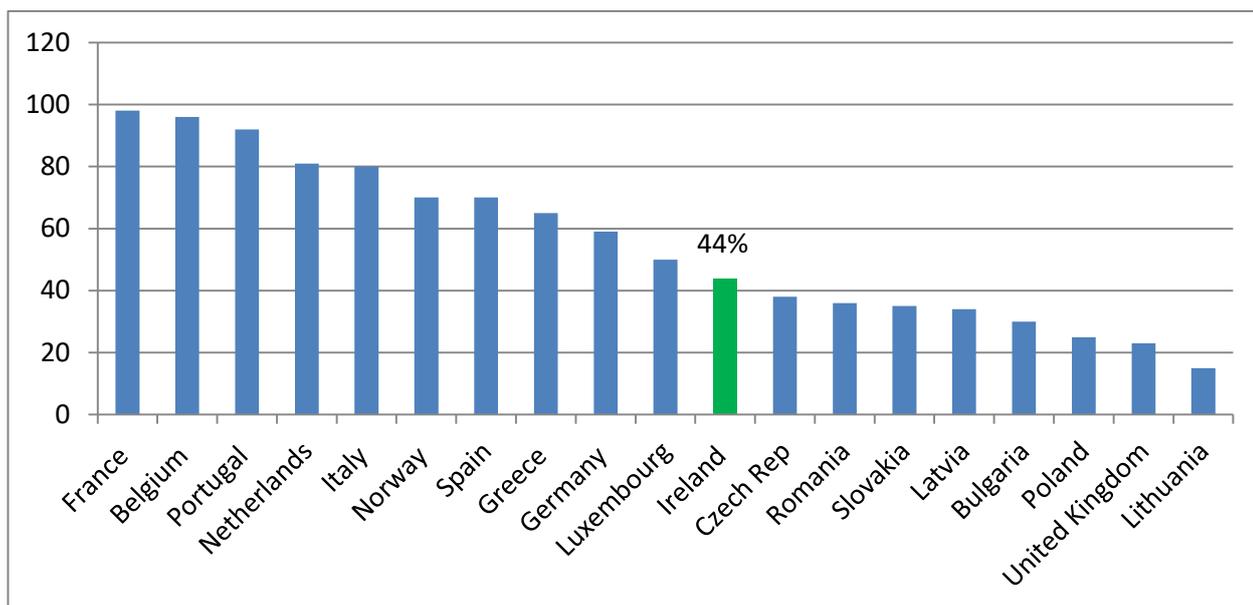
Weak institutional support for workers

According to Kalleberg (2011) a feature of precarious employment is weak institutional support for workers. Ireland has ‘a relatively low level of employment protection regulation’ (O’Connor, 2009: 104; see also Loftus 2012). In the OECD’s (2013) *Employment Outlook*, Ireland is located among the top ten countries which have the lowest protection regulation regimes in place. Ireland is in eighth place for protection of permanent workers against individual and collective dismissal; regulation on standard fixed-term contracts, seventh place; regulation on temporary contracts, eighth place and protection of permanent workers against individual dismissal, seventh place (OECD, 2013). Ireland’s position reflects its membership of the ‘common-law countries’ which ‘are typically characterised by unrestrictive regulations as regards temporary contracts and weak-to-intermediate protection against individual dismissal’ (OECD, 2013: 93). The English speaking countries which dominate the top ten places of weak employment protection regimes reflect the liberal model of welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Another element in the weakening of institutional support for lower paid workers is the striking down of Ireland’s collective bargaining agreements (Registered Employment Agreements and Joint Labour Committees) in what Hendy (2014: 1-2) refers to as ‘a trilogy of cases which have all but destroyed the Irish system of industrial relations which now needs to be rebuilt’. These are *McGowan & others v The Labour Court, Ireland & another* in 2013 and previously *Ryanair v the Labour Court* [2007] and *John Grace Fried Chicken Ltd & others v The Catering Joint Labour Committee & others* [2011]. Hendy (2014: 50) claims that collective bargaining ‘remains a common and thriving feature’ of many European states. Yet ‘(c)ollective bargaining coverage in Europe is falling under pressure from the neoliberal policies of the Troika ... especially the European Commission’ under what are termed ‘employment friendly reforms’ (Hendy, 2014: 48). Figure 2.1 demonstrates Ireland’s position at 44% of workers whose pay is determined by collective bargaining.

Trade unions have traditionally been central to the protection of workers’ rights. However, the evidence in Ireland suggests that although the number of trade union members in Ireland increased by 100,000 from the early 1990s to 2009, the density of union membership in the workforce has decreased from 49 per cent in 1994 to 34 per cent in 2009 (CSO, 2013; D’Art and Turner, 2011) and to 28 per cent in 2014 (Walsh, 2015). The

Figure 2.1 European Collective Bargaining – Selected States



Source: Hendy (2014)

extent of the decline is accentuated by a decrease of six per cent recorded in union membership in Ireland between 2013 and 2014 on top of a four per cent decline in the previous year (Eurofound, 2015). Of course these broad figures do not tell the full story; trade union membership is at its strongest in the public sector and weakest in the private sector (D’Art and Turner, 2011; Loftus, 2012; Eurofound, 2015). Trade union membership is also at its lowest among part-time workers, women, young people and immigrants (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2011), groups that are more likely to be in situations of precarious employment.

Low paid work

In its *Employment Outlook 2013* the OECD states that just over a fifth of Irish workers are in low paid jobs (OECD, 2013), approximately 382,000 workers. See Figure 2.2 for a comparison between Ireland and other countries. Collins (2015a and 2015b) in papers on the minimum wage and low pay says of the former

Of the approximate 75,000 workers on the minimum wage, most are women (65%), most are aged in their 20s and 30s and large proportions of these employees work in sectors such as accommodation and food and wholesale and retail. Relative to employees in general, minimum wage workers are more likely to be on temporary contracts, work less than 20 hours per week, work part-time and be in the private sector. Overall, those on the minimum wage represent 5.6% of all employees.

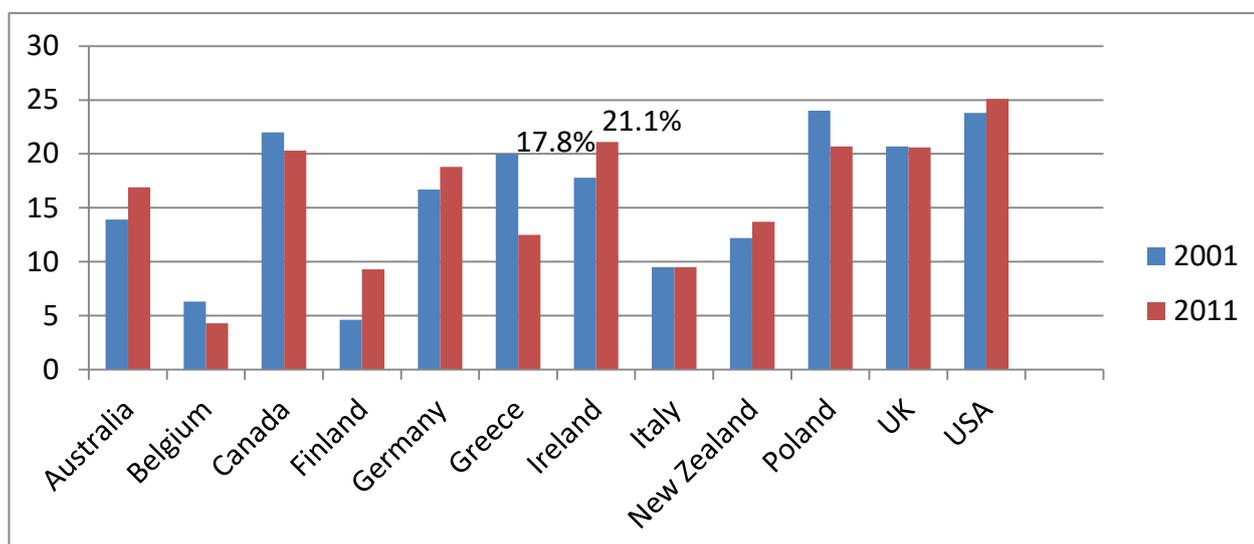
(Collins, 2015a: 18)

On low pay, Collins (2015b: 28) concludes that ‘25% of employees earn an hourly wage of less than the Living Wage threshold of €11.45 per hour (approximately

345,000 employees) while 30% of employees earn below the Eurostat low pay threshold of €12.20 per hour (approximately 400,000 employees)'. Collins (2015b) also states that the distribution of low pay is highly gendered with the same sectors of employment dominating but administration and support services can also be added. Furthermore, he notes that low pay extends across the age range, which he says shows that low pay is not only experienced by young workers starting out on their employment careers (Collins, 2015b).

There are about another 90,000 workers on low incomes (Hennigan, 2015) who are in employment activation schemes of one kind or another, such as, the Community Employment Scheme, the Rural Social Scheme, Tús (Community Work Placement Scheme), JobBridge and Gateway (internship schemes). Collins and Murphy (2015: 77) interrogate the state's support for such schemes. They describe them, along with in-work benefits, such as Family Income Supplement, as 'corporate welfare' because 'they support participation in precarious low hours employment that would otherwise be unsustainable' (Collins and Murphy, 2015: 77). They also argue that active labour market policies enhance employer productivity and profit. Moreover, citing the Indecon (2013) evaluation of JobBridge, they say this internship scheme is associated with a 29 per cent displacement of entry level jobs (Collins and Murphy, 2015).

Figure 2.2 Incidence of low pay in selected OECD countries 2001 and 2011



Source: OECD (2013)

A common feature of the complex landscape of work in Ireland is the inexorable move to uncertainty for many workers, caught in the vortex of the normalised liberal paradigm. The pincer movement of Ireland's existing 'neoliberal modernization policy' (Lallement, 2011: 636) and the impact of 'EU [policy] intrusion' as it pushes "against an open door" (Dukelow, 2015: 93) does not augur well for workers in many sectors of the Irish economy. For those workers who can least afford it Ireland's labour market policies offer little protection from the

vagaries of modern capitalism. In fact, the policies add to the severe economic challenges these workers face.

CONCLUSION

At an International Labour Conference held in June 2015, Danny McCoy, Chief Executive Officer of Ireland's largest business representative organisation, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (Ibec), gave a paper titled 'The Future of Work' in which he described the emerging workplace as being very different from the workplace we have traditionally known. This change he said was driven by competitiveness, globalisation and technology, leading to a new work relationship which is continually evolving and 'moving away from lifetime careers with collectively bargained or universal terms and conditions' (McCoy, 2015: n.p.). He championed the end of the SER and its replacement by flexible working when he said

It is clear that the tradition of a single job with a single employer has become the exceptional situation. Labour markets must reflect the future realities of work-life including, the need for flexible working, whether part-time, fixed-term or other atypical arrangements. The advantages of flexible working and part-time contracts are significant for both employers and employees.

(McCoy, 2015: n.p.)

He continued by appealing for a need to change the negative narrative on flexible work and he relied on the well-trying, if dubious, claim about how flexible work is chosen by workers to meet their needs.

It is time to reset the narrative that flexible-hours or part-time working is poorly paid, undesirable or precarious work. Many workers actively choose to work in sectors where flexible hours are available in order to achieve the work-life equilibrium they require or desire. The ability to access flexible work has created significant opportunities for many workers to take-up or retain an active working life while balancing other responsibilities or ambitions at the same time.

(McCoy, 2015)

McCoy may be correct about the changing nature of employment relationships. But his claim about workers' interests being met through flexible work practices are less convincing in the face of the evidence from international and Irish literature on precarious employment, which suggests otherwise (Pocock et al, 2004; Nienhauser, 2005; Lallement, 2011; Loftus, 2012; Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015). The narratives of the workers in this study also suggest otherwise, as we shall see later. It is of course not surprising that the head of an Irish employers' representative group would argue the case for flexible working conditions in this way (O'Sullivan et al, 2015). McCoy presents his paper in the context of a high-skills led economy and plays up the benefits of this for the entrepreneurial worker. However, in such a scenario not all jobs are or can be high-skilled, entrepreneurial, well-paid and give the individual worker control over her or his labour. Jobs in sectors where

precariousness has become a core feature of the employment relationship are less likely to offer these possibilities (Collins, 2015a and 2015b; Collins and Murphy, 2016).

It is evident from the scholarly literature that precarious employment is an ambiguous and complex concept and one with long historical roots (Quinlan, 2012; Kalleberg, 2012; Jørgensen, 2015). However, there is enough evidence to support its use as an important concept in the sociology of work. It is nigh on impossible to state the extent of precarious work in the industrialised world due to lack of agreement on conceptual and definitional understandings of the term. The availability of relevant data is also scarce and inconsistent across countries (Broughton et al, 2010; O'Sullivan et al, 2015). While it may not be possible to quantitatively determine the level of precarious employment in Ireland or across the Western industrialised world we do know that for many millions of workers this form of employment is a reality and a cause of great hardship for individual workers and their families.

In Ireland the concept of precarious employment which until recently was rarely used (O'Connor, 2009; Loftus, 2012) has entered into the public and academic consciousness. Indications that Ireland is an incubator for this form of employment include features of Irish labour law and policy such as low wage levels, the SER not being the norm, high levels of no contracts (Eurofound, 2012), the use of If and When contracts in certain sectors (O'Sullivan et al 2015), evidence of polarisation in the workforce (O'Farrell, 2013a), low levels of trade union representation (Walsh, 2015) and low levels of pay in some sectors (Collins, 2015a and 2015b; Collins and Murphy, 2015). The detail of Loftus' (2012) study on the precariousness of retail workers and the study of academic staff in higher education by Courtois and O'Keefe (2015) provide evidence of the vulnerability faced by those who make up the atypical segment of the Irish workforce. The recognition by government that a problem exists saw the establishment of the Low Pay Commission in 2015, with its brief to monitor the minimum wage and conditions of workers, including levels of precariousness (Collins, 2015b).

The establishment of the Low Pay Commission, while welcome, does not convince that precarious work will be addressed any time soon because of Ireland's enthrall with its 'neo-liberal policy paradigm' (Dukelow, 2015: 108). In the Irish economic model cost competitiveness needs labour market flexibility and deregulation, requirements which according to Eurofound (2013) aid the expansion of low paid jobs. The continuing dominance of the political and economic ideology of neo-liberalism with its emphasis on market deregulation and competition offers little solace for workers for the immediate future. It is likely that more and more workers will enter this uncertain world of precarious employment, as '[p]recarious work is the dominant feature of the social relations between employers and workers in the contemporary world' (Kalleberg, 2009: 17). While I would not fully agree with Hardt and Negri's (2004: 131, emphasis added) observation that **the** 'flexibility of the labor market means that *no* job is secure', there is certainly truth in their claim that

'the social division between the employed and the unemployed is becoming even more blurred'.

CHAPTER 3

Constructing precarious employment in Ireland through policies of social inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Kate: At the moment I work in a small family owned grocery shop. Ehm it originally started out at 20 hours a week and now it's reduced to 10.

Joe: How long have you been working there?

K: Ehm seven years now I think [J: right], headin' on eight. Ye know in the beginning it ... it suited me because the girls were younger so it was school hours I worked, ye know. So ehm but now they're older you need more money [laughs] and I'm getting less hours, you know so

J: And, and when were first workin' then, was it always 20 hours from the beginning?

K: Yeah, it was, it was part-time that was, which it, it helped me in the beginning because as a lone parent I was allowed work the 20 hours and then I discovered after a couple of years that I qualified for FIS [Family Income Supplement] as well. D'you know, so but when you lose your hours you lose FIS, so, it was like, d'you know, that's when you need it most ye know [J: ummm], so it's kind of ah rough [laughs].

This short extract from my interview with Kate is an example of the contradictions in the relationship between precarious employment and the social inclusion policies of the Irish welfare system. When Kate had 20 hours work per week in her employment she was entitled to claim FIS, which is a weekly tax-free payment for low income families with children. When she had her hours reduced to 10 per week she lost this payment and her income decreased significantly. Kate, in a much understated way, says that this is 'rough' because she needed income support more at the time of her reduced working hours but this was not available to her (Murphy and Loftus, 2015; Collins and Murphy, 2016). Later in this study the experiences of precarious workers' interactions with the welfare system will be explored in greater detail. The groundwork for that analysis will be presented in this chapter as I examine the theoretical basis and policy dimensions of social inclusion with a focus on its relationship to precarious employment.

Social inclusion and the related concept, social exclusion can be described as polysemic terms, open to a number of interpretations and meanings. Thus they pose a challenge to a common understanding of the concepts (Silver, 1994; Levitas, 2005; Daly and Silver, 2008). It can be argued that flexibility of this kind is enormously useful as it provides greater scope for theoretical nuances and policy interpretation. However, as Sen (2000: 9) observes 'the language of exclusion is so versatile and adaptable that there may be a temptation to dress up every deprivation as a case of social exclusion'.

The relationship between social inclusion and social exclusion is a complex one. Social inclusion is not the antonym of social exclusion (Silver, 1994), for it does not necessarily follow that efforts to eliminate social exclusion will automatically lead to social inclusion (Levitas, 2006). Silver (2007: 1; see also O'Reilly, 2005) points out '[i]ndividuals may be excluded in some respects while included in others'. Fraser (2010: 364) notes that social exclusion is becoming 'a keyword of our age' and yet 'the literature sheds little light on what "social exclusion" actually means'. She observes that 'there are major conceptual deficits in our understanding of an expression that is playing an increasingly important role in political life' (Fraser, 2010: 364). This is in spite of an explosion of literature on social exclusion since the mid-1970s which covers a wide range of social and economic problems (Sen, 2000). However, the lack of specificity with the concept of social exclusion can generate a fuzziness of thought and political manipulation (Levitas, 2005; Daly, 2006).

The complexity of meaning of social inclusion and social exclusion has not deterred the advancement of the notion of social inclusion as a political objective. This is particularly the case among member states of the EU where anti-poverty and social inclusion policies are most advanced. Room (1995: 5) describes the arrival at this social policy path by the EU as the 'miscomprehension' between the competing understandings of social exclusion by the liberal and corporate-conservative states. Levitas (2005: 22) summarises Room's analysis when she says that social exclusion is 'a curious amalgam of a liberal, Anglo-Saxon concern with poverty and a more conservative, continental concern with moral integration and social order'. Whatever the basis for this consensus on social exclusion by the EU member states, paid work has emerged as the central plank in its policy response to this issue. The EU's primary emphasis in its social inclusion strategy is exemplified in the claim by the European Commission (2000: 12) '[e]mployment is the best safeguard against social exclusion'. Yet, the relationship between employment and social inclusion policies has not been complementary (Copeland and Daly, 2014) and is fraught with antagonisms and contradictions at theoretical and policy levels.

It is my contention in this chapter that together, the European Employment Strategy (EES) and EU's social inclusion strategy prepare the ground for the imposition of precarious employment. I argue that this is due to the emphasis on paid work as the answer to poverty and social exclusion, without an equal emphasis on the quality of that work or its sustainability (Goetschy, 1999). In Ireland the response to recession intensified a jobs-first strategy as Irish government policy on activation for those marginal to the labour market deepened and moved towards the European norm (Boland, 2015; Collins and Murphy, 2016). The concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion and their implications for precarious employment in the EU and Ireland will be teased out in this chapter by exploring the following themes:

1. Social inclusion and social exclusion: the relationship to paid work
2. The EU and Ireland's policy-framework on social inclusion

3. Employment strategies, activation, flexibility and work quality and the implications for precarious employment
4. The construction of precarious employment through social inclusion policies?

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION: THE RELATIONSHIP TO PAID WORK

It is universally accepted that the concept of social exclusion has its origins in French politics. The term emerged as a subject of debate in France in the 1960s (Silver, 1994; Kröger, 2007). Klanfer, a French social commentator, published a book in 1965 entitled *L'Exclusion sociale: Étude de la marginalité dans les sociétés occidentales* [Social exclusion: the study of marginality in western societies]. This publication was described by Béland (2007: 126) as a 'moralistic book emphasising responsibility' in which social exclusion was attributed to the 'irresponsible behaviour' of people who could not enjoy economic success. A decade later social exclusion established its place in the lexicon of political discourse with the publication of Lenoir's (1974) *Les exclus: Un français sur dix* [The excluded: One Frenchman out of ten]. Lenoir was Secretary of State for Social Action in the Gaullist Government of Jacques Chirac and he estimated that ten per cent of the population in France was socially excluded (Silver, 1994). The excluded sections of the population were made up of the following groups:

mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits'.

(Silver, 1994: 532)

From France the social exclusion approach 'dispersed throughout Europe' (Silver and Miller, 2003: 5). This dispersion was reflected in the mid-1970s in the language of the European Economic Community (as the European Union was then known) when the Council of Ministers defined poverty as 'individuals or families whose resources are so small as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life of the Member State in which they live' (Council of Ministers 1975, cited in Atkinson et al (2005: 18). '[R]esources' are defined as 'goods, cash income plus services from public and private sources' (Council of Ministers 1975, cited in Atkinson et al, 2005: 18). Despite this effort to define poverty Levitas (2005: 2) observes that 'there is no monolithic pan-European definition of social exclusion; rather, there is a range of national discourses which use the idea of exclusion in different ways'.

Defining social exclusion/inclusion

Central to explanations of social exclusion is its relationship to poverty; social exclusion can be viewed as 'a broad term encompassing poverty' or as 'a cause or consequence of poverty' (Silver and Miller, 2003: 3). Social exclusion therefore is much more than what was understood traditionally as poverty with its emphasis on

inadequacy of income (Sen, 2000). Silver and Miller (2003: 8) suggest that '[i]n contrast to poverty, which is exclusively economic, material, or resource-based, social exclusion offers a more holistic understanding of deprivation'. Thus explanations or definitions of social exclusion suggest a number of common features which overlap quite considerably. These features include: a concept which is multi-dimensional (Levitas et al, 2007; Daly and Silver, 2008; Silver, 2010); a process of cumulative disadvantage (Gallie et al, 2003; Béland, 2007; Silver, 2010); a relational process (Silver, 1994; Silver and Miller, 2003; Silver, 2010; Sen, 2000); and a dynamic process (Room, 1999; Silver, 2007).

The multi-dimensional aspect of social exclusion has received most attention (Silver, 2010) with its elaboration, through an array of indicators and measurements, of various forms of social deprivation (Daly and Silver, 2008). An example of the breadth of its multi-dimensionality is to be found in Levitas et al's (2007) *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion* for the British Social Exclusion Task Force which defined social exclusion as:

a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

(Levitas et al, 2007: 25)

Silver (2010) poses questions about the use of the term multi-dimensionality and how it is characterised in the context of the EU. She asks which dimensions of social exclusion matter in developing appropriate indicators pointing to the lack of the development of social indicators in the EU in comparison to economic indicators (Silver, 2010). Consequently the indicators most used are those that assess economic deprivation rather than social deprivation. Additionally, she says, there is a political aspect to this, where politics 'drive the emphasis on economic dimensions, especially the concern with exclusion from employment' (Silver, 2010: 192; see also Silver and Miller, 2003).

The process of cumulative disadvantage is the second significant feature of social exclusion and is closely related to multi-dimensionality. The literature on social exclusion refers to the cumulative effect of multiple deprivation and disadvantage which leads to a downward spiral of exclusion characterised by 'labour market marginalisation, poverty and social isolation' (Gallie et al, 2003: 3; see also Paugam, 1995). Disadvantage is cumulative in that it extends over time with each setback adding to the one before resulting in the deterioration of the economic and social situations of the excluded. And in becoming progressively worse the excluded move away from what is regarded as the "mainstream" standards of society. In some explanations of social exclusion cumulative disadvantage leads to the 'rupturing' of the social bond (Silver, 2007: 1).

Silver (2010: 191, emphasis in original) says that because social exclusion is relational it is also '*relative*'. 'It is understood in relation to how people in a given context define belonging or integration. Often, those definitions are "ideological" or culturally meaningful' (Silver, 2010: 191). The relational aspect of social exclusion is deeply entangled in the connection between those who are regarded as socially excluded and the rest of society (Room, 1999; Sen, 2000). Relational issues include more difficult to define aspects such as 'inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of political power' (Room, 1999: 169). Finally, social exclusion is dynamic (Room, 1999). The term dynamic conjures up movement (Byrne, 2005; Silver, 2007) with the implication that individuals and groups can move in and out of social exclusion depending on the interactions of a host of determining factors sometimes within and at other times beyond the control of those individuals and groups to whom the concept is applied.

A fundamental question is posed by Fraser (2010: 365; see also Silver, 1994): 'But what exactly are the excluded excluded from?' Answering her own question Fraser (2010: 365) says that as she understands it, 'the norm of parity of participation applies broadly, across all major arenas of social interaction, including family and personal life, employment and markets, formal and informal politics, and voluntary associations in civil society'. It is possible to be excluded from some of these arenas and included in others, '[t]hus, social exclusion can take on a plurality of different forms, depending on which arenas are affected' (Fraser, 2010: 365; see also O'Reilly, 2005). This raises an important question '[w]ho exactly is entitled to participate on a par with whom in which social interactions?' (Fraser, 2010: 366; emphasis in original). The answer to this question is by no means straightforward, and becomes even more complex in the context of Silver's (2007: 2) claim that social exclusion 'entails an active relationship between excluders and the excluded', thus in theory broadening the nature of the dynamism of social exclusion beyond problematising the excluded individual, social group or community.

It is also appropriate to ask the question '[w]hat constitutes an inclusive society?' (Daly and Silver, 2008: 557) or even more fundamentally what is social inclusion? Social inclusion can be understood as a

process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live.

(European Commission, 2006 cited in Silver, 2010: 187)

A number of the features of the social exclusion definition offered by Levitas et al (2007) quoted above are also relevant to the explanation of social inclusion: the notion of process, the significance of participation in the key aspects of life of the society to which individuals belong, the availability of resources and the aspiration to a standard of living regarded as the norm for the prevailing society. These similarities in the definitional discourse cannot hide the difference between the concepts of inclusion and exclusion for as Daly and Silver (2008) have pointed out

the theoretical context of the concepts are very distinct. For social inclusion the concern is with ‘social integration and institutions of social membership’ while ‘social exclusion draws upon a discourse of social problems’ (Daly and Silver, 2008: 557).

Discourses of social exclusion

Much has been written about social exclusion but few have provided a theoretical context for the concept. To the fore in theorising on social exclusion are Silver (1994) and Levitas (2005). Silver’s “three paradigms” and Levitas’ “three discourses” on social exclusion, explain social exclusion by placing the concept firmly in the context of political ideology and discourse.

Silver’s (1994) social exclusion and social solidarity: three paradigms

Silver’s three paradigms are built from the French roots of social exclusion and a desire by French society to honour that country’s long-held political commitment to social solidarity. French society was influenced historically by Catholicism, socialism and in particular republicanism, with its notion of solidarity as central to the moral underpinnings and social cohesion of society. Silver’s (1994: 539) typologies, or paradigms, of exclusion distinguish ‘between different theoretical perspectives, political ideologies, and national discourses’. ‘Based on different notions of social integration’, she calls these ideal types ‘the *solidarity*, *specialization*, and *monopoly* paradigms’ (Silver, 1994: 539, emphasis in original). Each of these paradigms attributes exclusion to different causes, informed by different political philosophies – republicanism, liberalism and social democracy.

Table 3.2 Silver’s three paradigms of social exclusion and model of the new political economy

	Solidarity	Specialization	Monopoly
Model of the new political economy	Flexible production	Skills Work disincentives Networks Social capital	Labour market segmentation

Source: Silver (1994: 540)

In the solidarity paradigm exclusion occurs when the social bond between the individual and society breaks down. The “social” order which holds the fabric of society together ‘is conceived as external, moral, and normative, rather than grounded in individual, group, or class interests’ (Silver, 1994: 541). The world is configured of socially constructed dualistic categories. It is thus a priority of this paradigm to assimilate the excluded into the majority moral and cultural position. The socio-economic perspective of the solidarity paradigm is grounded in the notion of “flexible specialization”, which has drawn upon the influence of the French ‘working-class mutual aid movement and syndicalism’ (Silver, 1994: 550). Flexible

specialisation is rooted in solidarity rather than the liberal economic approach of competition within the market place.

In the specialisation paradigm social exclusion occurs as a consequence of individual difference (society is based on individual social actors), which in turn results from specialisation in the market place and in social groups. This view is premised on the belief that there are naturally occurring differences between groups and within the labour market. Silver (1994: 542) says that liberalism 'conceives of the social order, like the economy and politics, as networks of voluntary exchanges between autonomous individuals with their own interests and motivations'. The beliefs that inform this paradigm suggest that individuals can move freely across social spheres, including the labour market. Social exclusion results from individual failure rather than structural inequalities, although there is not unanimity on this within liberalism as differences arise between libertarians and social liberals.

In Silver's monopoly paradigm the social exclusion/inclusion dualism is as a result of dominant groups of insiders monopolising access to resources. The excluded are both outsiders and at the same time dominated by these powerful societal groups of insiders who use their class position and status to enforce 'social closure' and perpetuate inequalities. Labour market segmentation is a consequence of the relationship between the insiders and outsiders which leads to poverty and inequality. The only way to mitigate these inequalities is through the enhancement of participation through 'inclusive citizenship or social rights' for outsiders (Silver, 1994: 566).

Levitas' (2005) three discourses of social exclusion

In contrast to the French home of Silver's paradigms of social exclusion, Levitas' three discourses of social exclusion are very much rooted in the Anglo-Saxon liberal model of British welfare ideology (although the third of her discourses is influenced by the European Union). The problem of social exclusion is embedded in different discourses and its manifestation is dependent on the nature of the discourse. Levitas (2005: 7) names the three as a redistributionist discourse (RED), a moral underclass discourse (MUD) and a social integrationist discourse (SID).

The redistributionist discourse (RED) is part of a left-leaning or social democratic agenda concerned with poverty and by extension inequality. Its aim is a redistribution of power and wealth to combat social exclusion based on the notion of equal citizenship. Important characteristics of RED are its emphasis on poverty as a prime cause of social exclusion and the need to increase benefits to counter this; 'its potential to valorise unpaid work'. RED broadens the critique of inequality beyond that of material inequality; and it implies 'a redistribution of resources and of power' (Levitas, 2005: 14).

The political context for the MUD discourse was the emergence of the New Right in Britain in the 1980s. References to poverty became embedded in terms such as the “underclass” and a “culture of dependency” in a discourse ‘concerned with social order and moral integration’ (Levitas, 2005: 14). These terms never challenged the structural dimensions of poverty; instead these cultural accounts blamed the poor for their own poverty. The main characteristics of MUD include its focus on ‘the underclass or socially excluded as culturally distinct from the “mainstream”’. Thus it focuses on the behaviour of the poor rather than on broader structural inequalities which are ignored; it is a gendered discourse; unpaid work is denied; and there is ambiguity towards ideas of women’s dependency. Dependency on the state is regarded as a problem while dependency for a woman on a man is not (Levitas, 2005: 21).

Levitas’ third discourse, SID, is of significance in the policy response of the EU to social exclusion. Levitas demonstrates that the discourse used by the EU shows a narrow understanding of the concept of social exclusion. The use of the terms solidarity and social participation are linked to a social integrationist discourse where participation in the labour market and paid work are the preferred options for combating social exclusion. For Levitas (2005) this approach highlights the dominance of financial Europe over social Europe. The characteristics of SID are predominantly related to paid work and include the narrowing of ‘the definition of social exclusion to participation in paid work’ (Levitas, 2005: 26). Other features of the impact of this emphasis on paid work is that it does not address inequalities between paid workers, it obscures gender, it ignores class inequalities, it does not address differences between those who own property and the working population nor the question of unpaid work (Levitas, 2005: 26-27).

Social exclusion, social inclusion and paid work

The use of social inclusion and social exclusion is problematic as there is a lack of conceptual agreement and there are problems in defining and measuring these terms. It is remarkable the extent of concern expressed in the literature about the efficacy of social exclusion and social inclusion as conceptual ideas (Silver, 1994; Davies, 2005; Levitas, 2005; Daly, 2006; Béland, 2007; Daly and Silver, 2008; Fraser, 2010). Moran (2006) highlights a core problem with the concept of social exclusion; the primary measurement of social exclusion is material exclusion or poverty while the discourse on social exclusion is much broader. Silver (2010, see also Byrne, 2005) questions the lack of the development of social indicators in the EU to assess multi-dimensionality despite efforts by some of the most highly regarded academics in the field to develop such indicators (Burchardt et al, 1999; Atkinson et al, 2005; Whelan and Maître, 2005).

However, social exclusion continues to survive as an integral part of the understanding of the broader processes in our conceptualisation of poverty. This in turn appears to provide sufficient justification for the use of multi-dimensionality, which according to Daly (2006:7) has achieved the ‘status of gospel’ in the EU’s

interpretation of social exclusion. The resilience of multi-dimensionality is surprising given its inherent conceptual and normative weaknesses; it is impossible to define and even more difficult to measure. O'Reilly (2005: 81) observes that

The multidimensional approach to exclusion is naïvely heuristic and tautological in that it identifies social problems and then labels them as aspects of exclusion. It is not guided by any particular social science paradigm or theorisation of what either exclusion or inclusion is.

The theorisation of social exclusion by Silver (1994) and Levitas (2005) provides a better basis for understanding the drivers of the processes that inform the approach to social exclusion and social inclusion. Their understanding of the concept of social exclusion is firmly rooted in discourse (Levitas) and ideology (Silver), reflecting different political positions on the nature of poverty and work (paid and unpaid). As Levitas (2005) explains, all three of her discourses suggest that paid work is a major feature in social integration and all have to a greater or lesser extent a moral content. But it is how these elements are projected on to the excluded that makes the difference between the discourses. Levitas (2005: 27) summarises by referring to the excluded: '[t]o oversimplify, in RED they have no money, in SID they have no work, in MUD they have no morals'.

Silver's (1994) analysis of the new political economy presents the nature of paid work in the context of the political philosophies of republicanism, liberalism and social democracy. Paid work is central to each of these paradigms, if for different ideological reasons. Thus in any evaluation of social exclusion and inclusion there is no escaping the centrality of the material dimension of poverty which can only be met through paid work or income support provided by the state. The European Commission's (2000: 3) assertion that '[e]mployment is the best safeguard against social exclusion' acknowledges the centrality of paid work in the institutional response to poverty. In the next section we shall explore the EU's and Ireland's policy framework on social inclusion.

THE EU AND IRELAND'S POLICY-FRAMEWORK ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

According to Berghman (1995: 27) the EU has played a 'decisive' role in the 'introduction and spreading of the concept of social exclusion'. In the policy development on social inclusion and social exclusion the EU has led the way institutionally, set the agenda politically, and cajoled member states to act in response to poverty and unemployment at national level. Yet, there are continuing contradictions and deficits in the policy approach by the EU to social exclusion and social inclusion. This reflects the EU's overall relationship with social policy which has been described by Daly (2006: 5) as one of 'contestation'. This is not new as the history of the development of social policy in the EU demonstrates a contingent sphere of interest when compared to that of economic policy (Daly, 2007). This dichotomous view is reflected in the development of strategies on social inclusion and employment. In this section I will review the institutional policy framework of

the EU and Ireland on social inclusion and then in the following section I will turn to employment policies.

The EU's policy-framework on social inclusion

Social inclusion became a stated objective of the EU (Atkinson et al, 2005) from as early as 1972 when the EU made a social policy commitment to deal with the issue of poverty. The heads of states and governments established the first of what were to become three EU-wide anti-poverty programmes which continued into the early 1990s (Kröger, 2007). These programmes were to set in train a seismic shift in the conceptual thinking and discourse on poverty. The emerging concept of social exclusion replaced poverty at the centre of social policy formulation. The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 incorporated a new legal basis for the fight against social exclusion but it was the Lisbon Summit in 2000 which delivered a new direction for the achievement of social policy goals (Adshead, 2010). The Lisbon Strategy has been characterised by various commentators as a defining moment; it was a 'watershed' according to Adshead (2010: 120). Daly (2006: 7) says that Lisbon is 'different' as it 'instituted a coordinated program on social exclusion ... so that member states adopt the fight against social exclusion as the centrepiece of their social policy planning and development'. As a result following the Lisbon Summit expectations were high that poverty levels in the EU would be reduced (Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx, 2011). The EU's Lisbon Strategy set out a new strategic goal for the decade ahead 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Commission, 2000: 5.).

The EU had experimented with "soft law" during the 1990s and this was to become the standard approach for addressing social policy and employment issues, through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) (Hantrais, 2007). The OMC was based on cooperation 'in agreeing guidelines, setting common targets based on indicators and benchmarks, developing national action plans and exchanging best practice' (Hantrais, 2007: 19). Through this less formal approach to governance it was believed that co-operation between states and the fear of naming and shaming would be enough to encourage policy development (Hantrais, 2007). The OMC was used to establish common objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion which were agreed within months of the Lisbon Summit (Atkinson et al, 2005). Subsequent developments included the requirement of member states to publish National Action Plans on social inclusion at regular intervals which were to be open to peer review and evaluation as well as the development of social exclusion indicators to assist evaluation and cross-member state comparability (Daly, 2006: 7).

However, the Lisbon Strategy did not lead to the hoped for success in combating poverty. On a number of fronts the strategy failed to deliver. It failed to deliver 'more and better jobs' (European Commission, 2000: 5) with Atkinson and colleagues (2005: 21) observing that this proposition 'does not seem closer to

realisation than five years ago. ... Job creation has proved elusive'. In relation to social protection the European Commission itself acknowledged that even after the attempts of member states to improve its minimum protection schemes there were still many people neither in work nor receiving national minimum income protection (cited in Atkinson et al, 2005: 22). Other scholars such as Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx (2011: 3) had pinned their hopes as 'believers' (as they describe themselves) in the Lisbon process and were disappointed with the outcome when referring to the Social Protection Committee's (2009) claim that poverty had not decreased in the EU during the period of the Lisbon Strategy.

In 2005 the European Union attempted to revive the Lisbon strategy by introducing Lisbon II, a 'major "relaunch"' (Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007: 480) that included a social agenda for the remainder of the decade with the aim of strengthening 'further the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy' (Hantrais, 2007: 20). Daly (2007: 5) tells us '[t]he impulse for reform was dissatisfaction with the performance of the Lisbon Strategy, especially in terms of whether it was (capable of) fulfilling its objectives on growth and jobs (had it been oversold?)'. The Lisbon Strategy was to cement a better position for social policy in relation to economic policy but this did not occur and its position deteriorated even further with Lisbon II. Groups outside of the labour market receive less attention in Lisbon II, due to an ideological shift in both the Commission and in member states (Kröger, 2007). There is a profound ambiguity in the Lisbon Strategy according to Cantillon (2010: 24) as 'growth, job creation and social cohesion were assumed to be complementary goals and not in conflict with one another ... however this has not been the case'. Poverty at best either stabilised or increased in member states during the period of the Lisbon Strategy and the focus on employment led to lower incomes for those outside of the labour market (Cantillon, 2010). Copeland and Daly (2014: 358) argue that something quite fundamental occurred with the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy; the 'historical and structural separation between social policy on the one hand and economic, monetary and employment policy on the other' had been institutionalised.

In 2010 the Lisbon Strategy was replaced by Europe 2020, another decade-long policy commitment to economic development and social improvement for the people of Europe. The EU Commission (European Commission, 2010: 10) summarise the three 'mutually reinforcing' priorities of the new strategy:

- 'smart growth' based on a knowledge economy;
- 'sustainable growth' promoting a more competitive economy and resource efficiency;
- 'inclusive growth' focusing on high levels of employment and economic and social cohesion.

For the first time poverty reduction targets are specified in Europe 2020, with a target to reduce by 20 million the number of people at risk of poverty and social

exclusion (Copeland and Daly, 2014). Despite this commitment Copeland and Daly (2014: 358) suggest that the poverty and social exclusion target set in Europe 2020 'remains a third-order priority within the new governance architecture'. Barbier (2012: 378) refers to social policy in the new strategy as 'radically marginalized compared with the master discourse of macroeconomic and financial governance'. He concludes that the target of poverty reduction is 'insufficient and its achievement is uncertain' (Barbier, 2012: 392). The respective analyses of these authors as well as those of other scholars (Béland, 2007; Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007; Hantrais, 2007; O'Brien and Penna, 2008; Cantillon, 2010; Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx, 2011) raise a number of questions about the nature of the EU's commitment to eradicating poverty and social exclusion which rests within a complex matrix of process and politics. The shared understanding of poverty and social exclusion as a multi-dimensional, relational and participatory concept may continue in theory but has in fact largely been reconstructed into a one-dimensional relationship where the only participation that really counts is economic inclusion in the form of access to the labour market (Levitas, 2005; O'Brien and Penna, 2008). We shall return to employment but before that I will contextualise Ireland's policy-framework on social inclusion.

Ireland's policy-framework on social inclusion

Ireland has had a significant influence on the development of policies to address poverty in the EU (Ó'Cinnéide, 2010; Murphy, 2014) and is described as an 'innovator' in its approach to combating poverty with the publication in 1997 of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) entitled *Sharing in Progress: National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (Cousins, 2007: 1). Ireland bought into the new understanding of poverty within the EU which began to emerge from the mid-1970s. Nomenclature such as multidimensionality, participation, partnership and the use of the term social exclusion came to dominate the new understanding of poverty in Ireland as a result of the EU Anti-Poverty Programmes (Langford, 1999).

Ireland's first NAPS, launched in 1997, defined poverty and social exclusion, set out strategic aims and identified a target for poverty reduction (Government of Ireland, 1997), all of which remain central to Ireland's policy approach to poverty and social exclusion. The definition of poverty used in the NAPS reflects the multidimensional, relational and participatory understanding of poverty which had entered into the mainstream of EU and Irish policy.

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people.

(Government of Ireland, 1997:3)

In Partnership 2000 (one of a series of corporate partnership agreements between the Irish government, key economic partners and the community and voluntary

sectors) a definition of social exclusion was agreed and incorporated into the NAPS. In this definition social exclusion is primarily relational, referring to 'inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power' (Government of Ireland, 1997: 3) and is defined as follows

Cumulative marginalisation: from production (unemployment), from consumption (income poverty), from social networks (community, family and neighbours), from decision making and from an adequate quality of life.

(Government of Ireland 1997: 3)

In the NAPS, targets for reduction in consistent poverty were set out. At the time consistent poverty entailed a combination of inadequate income (less than 60 per cent of the median) and deprivation (being denied one or more basic lifestyle items – in 2007 this was changed to two or more items in an expanded deprivation list, from eight to 11 items (Whelan, 2007)). As a result of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 all EU member states were required to publish biennial plans outlining their approach to combating poverty and social exclusion through national plans on social inclusion (Mangan, 2010). Ireland's first plan under the social OMC was published in 2001 entitled *National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPincl) 2001-2003*, which was little more than a re-statement of the existing anti-poverty strategy. The first NAPS was followed by another ten year strategy, the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* (NAPinclusion), which continued the same broad-based strategy. In 2012 the Irish government reviewed the poverty targets of the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. It also established new targets 'to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 (interim target) and to 2 per cent or less by 2020' (Department of Social Protection, 2012a: 3).

The Irish policy-framework on poverty and social inclusion is broadly-based, in common with the policy template of the EU and largely reflects its limitations and achievements (Moran, 2006). The Irish discourse on social inclusion is that used by the EU which reflects a vision of a 'radical potential' while at the same time it is replete with contradiction and lacks consistency (Daly, 2006: 8). In Ireland and in other EU member states 15 to 20 years of these models of anti-poverty/social inclusion policies have not worked as poverty remains an intractable problem (Cantillon, 2010) although Ireland and Poland did see progress in reducing poverty between 2004 and 2008 (Cantillon, 2011). The policy approach of the EU and Ireland to poverty and social exclusion is now framed in the notion of the social investment state (Giddens, 1998). Its emphasis on replacing the traditional welfare approach with new social investment strategies gives paid work a central role; the effectiveness of this is questionable. Cantillon's (2011: 440) observation sums up the limitations of the new welfare approach 'the hypothesis of a shift from passive social protection to activation and investment has been even more problematic than anticipated and is arguably partially responsible for disappointing poverty trends' (see also Collins and Murphy, 2016).

EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES, FLEXICURITY, ACTIVATION AND QUALITY OF WORK AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Goetschy (1999) traces the genesis of the EU's interest in employment policy from the 1970s through to the emergence of the European Employment Strategy (EES) in the 1990s. In her account Goetschy (1999: 117) shows that the development of the EES came about through a number of steps over a long period to reach the policy implementation phase. She says this occurred 'as a result of a complex mixture of intergovernmentalist and supranational forces as well as spillover effects' (Goetschy, 1999: 117). In this section I will give the background to the EES followed by an assessment of it. I will then consider three significant elements of the employment strategy: activation, flexicurity and quality of work. Lastly I will provide an analysis of Ireland's relationship with the EES.

Background to the EES

For four decades after the founding of the EEC in 1957 the European institutions showed a modest commitment to employment policy (van Rie and Marx, 2012) because such matters were regarded to be beyond the competence of the EU and were strictly of national concern. In the 1980s Commission President Jacques Delors facilitated greater cooperation between the social partners with some modest returns for employment policy. This in turn paved the way (Goetschy, 1999) for the 1993 White Paper on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* which 'gave birth to the very idea of a European employment strategy by making explicit reference to ensuring that jobs and other social objectives were not ignored' (Devetzi, 2007: 32). The context for this White Paper was Europe's high levels of unemployment in the early 1990s brought about by recession and compounded by 'structural rigidities' in its labour market (van Rie and Marx, 2012: 337). Unemployment was not the only reason for the impetus towards an employment strategy. The further integration of EU economies through a common currency, the European and Monetary Union (EMU), was also emerging and it would have implications for employment policy (van Rie and Marx, 2012). van Rie and Marx (2012) argue these factors incentivised political leaders in member states to accept an employment strategy after decades of resistance.

The precursor to the EES came from the Delors' White Paper when a multilateral agreement on an employment monitoring procedure was unveiled at the Essen European Council Summit in December 1994 (Goetschy, 1999). This agreement had five objectives:

- a) to invest in vocational training;
- b) to increase the intensity of employment growth, particularly through a more flexible organisation of work and working time and wage restraint;

- c) to reduce non-wage labour costs;
- d) to develop active labour market policies through the reform of employment services, encouraging labour mobility and developing incentives for the unemployed to return to work;
- e) to fight youth and long-term unemployment.

(Devetzi, 2007: 32)

The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) provided the process with a legal basis under the 'Employment Title'. The Treaty set out an institutional process to support the EES through the OMC which includes a role for the Commission and the Council in devising and agreeing Employment Guidelines and assessing the outputs of member states (Devetzi, 2007). Later in 1997 the EES was launched in Luxembourg. The EES had four main objectives: improving employability, developing entrepreneurship, encouraging adaptability both for employees and businesses and strengthening equal opportunity policies (Goetschy, 1999; Devetzi, 2007). Across these four objectives multiple guidelines and indicators were devised and introduced. Devetzi (2007: 35) says the development of the EES reached its 'climax' in 2000 when the new Lisbon Strategy was launched. The EES had a new impetus in the context of the declared strategic aim of the Lisbon strategy for the EU 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Commission, 2000: 5). This was accompanied by specific employment targets for the EU as a whole (70 per cent) while women and older workers were given their own targets – 60 per cent and 50 per cent respectively – to be reached by 2010. The Lisbon Strategy was replaced in 2010 by Europe 2020 which was committed to 'inclusive growth' focusing on high levels of employment and economic and social cohesion (European Commission, 2010). This included raising the level of employment across the EU to 75 per cent by 2020.

The effectiveness of the EES

The EES is described by Copeland and tel Haar (2013: 21) as the 'cornerstone of the EU's employment policy' but for others the EES has even greater importance and is regarded as an integral part of the European Social Model (Goetschy, 1999; Casey, 2004; Annesley, 2007). But a further perspective sees its position as more complex, with the employment strategy 'subordinated' to the broader economic objectives of the EU (de la Porte and Pochet, 2004: 75) or alternatively as distinct from the more general fiscal and macro-economic policies pursued by the EU (Watt, 2004). Under the Lisbon Strategy the link between employment and social policy was to become closer (Annesley, 2007) as high levels of employment were believed to determine improvements in a range of socio-economic indicators (de Beer, 2007). But this relationship was never advanced in an integrated and cohesive way and by the time the Lisbon Strategy was replaced by Europe 2020 the differences in the two policy paths were institutionalised (Copeland and Daly, 2014).

The most important assessment of the effectiveness of the EU's employment strategy is its success in meeting its targets for employment growth and reducing unemployment. The outcomes for both of these indicators is somewhat mixed (Eurostat, 2015a and 2015b). From the early 2000s there was growth in employment and a reduction in unemployment within the EU but this trend was reversed with the economic crash and subsequent recession from 2008 (Eurostat, 2015a and 2015b). Furthermore, Eurostat (2015a) does not expect the achievement of the Europe 2020 target of 75 per cent of the working age population in employment, although two countries have already reached the target and others are close to it.

It remains unclear to what extent, if at all, the EES has contributed to lower unemployment and increased employment (de la Porte and Pochet, 2004). Watt (2004: 121, emphasis in original) states that '[a]t the *substantive level*, the EES is quite clearly not an encompassing strategy to achieve full employment, which would have required an explicit commitment, in particular, by macro-economic policy-makers (the European Central Bank and national fiscal authorities) to work towards that aim'. He continues by saying that the EES should be called the 'European strategy for the coordination of national labour market policies' (Watt, 2004: 121). Other commentators make analogous observations about the limitations of the EES (Goetschy, 1999; Devetzi, 2007; Mailand, 2008; van Rie and Marx, 2012; Copeland and ter Haar, 2013). Goetschy's (1999) early assessment of the EES refers to the EU's own analysis of the first two National Action Plans which showed up a number of shortcomings that demonstrated limited commitment by the member states to this new strategy. Adherence to the guidelines established as part of the EES was patchy and the National Action Plans lacked direction and coherence as governments appeared to selectively apply the new strategy to suit their own national employment and political priorities (Goetschy, 1999). de la Porte and Pochet (2004: 74) observe that 'the national action plans are characterised as governmental'.

The evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005 led to 'a complete revision of the EES' and brought the employment strategy into a closer alignment with macro and micro-economic guidelines (Devetzi, 2007: 38; see also Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007). This led to new reporting procedures called the National Reform Programme. Mailand (2008: 363) studied the impact of the EES on member state employment policies and claims that the EES, even with its revisions in 2003 and 2005 did not increase its level of impact. He suggests that if anything the impact has lessened in the intervening years due to a lack of sustained attention. In their paper on the EES as a governance tool, Copeland and ter Haar (2013) point to continuing problems with the strategy even after these adjustments and the introduction of Europe 2020. They suggest that the EES fails because of the difficulty in influencing member states away from policy measures which reflect their own priorities as seen also in the country-specific recommendations in the reporting procedures under the National Reform Programme (Copeland and ter Haar, 2013). Attempts at aligning national employment strategies with EU aims may have been less than successful but certain ideas which emerged from the inter-governmental process such as

“flexicurity” and “activation” gained in popularity over time, while the idea of “quality” in employment has regressed (Armingeon, 2007; Murphy, 2016).

The EES, flexicurity, activation and quality of work

The general shift of political power in the EU under the Barroso Commission presidency from 2004 was increasingly influenced by neo-liberal economics (Barbier, 2012). Consequently social protection policies were to be re-imagined and reformed (Silver, 2010) with the introduction of new concepts such as “flexicurity” and “activation” based on the ideas of the social investment state (Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx, 2011; see also Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007; Barbier, 2012). These important ideas of flexicurity and activation will be reviewed as they are of some significance to the theme of this study. A third idea, the quality of work, will also be reviewed. This idea has waned in institutional discourse over the past decade but was a crucial element of the employment aspect of the Lisbon Strategy. It also emerges as a theme in the narratives of the participants in this research.

Flexicurity

The conceptual notion of flexibility has a well-established history within the EU and was included as the third objective of the 1997 EES, ‘to promote and encourage the adaptability of firms and their workers’ and in so doing ‘to ensure a better balance between flexibility and security for workers’ (Goetschy, 1999: 127). This was not the first reference to flexibility as the term was used in the Delors’ White Paper in 1993 and the Essen summit in 1994. The move towards the notion of flexicurity by the EU was part of its response to the stasis of the European economy in the 1990s, stuck as it was in a Fordist model in which the business of enterprise was regarded as being overly regulated. Flexibility in the workplace was believed to be part of the answer to the ailing bloc’s economic future (Burrioni and Kuene, 2011: 76).

However, because of its stated commitment to social solidarity as outlined clearly in the Delors’ White Paper (European Commission, 1993) a novel approach to flexibility with social solidarity was devised in the term “flexicurity”. The security dimension of social solidarity was also to change, as the Delors’ White Paper stated that ‘[t]he new model of European society calls for less passive and more active solidarity’ (European Commission, 1993: 15). The social security system was to become an active agent in the flexibility-security relationship as it was becoming increasingly accepted that successful market competition could not rely only on cost reduction; protection and security were also needed for individuals (Burrioni and Kuene, 2011). Solidaristic notions of welfare were in decline so that, according to Hansen and Triantafillou (2011: 202), from around 2000, social concerns were no longer about the right to economic compensation, ‘but about being the target of investments seeking to develop the human potential of each and every person’.

The concept of flexicurity received institutional recognition and approval when it was incorporated into the Lisbon Strategy to aid the reform of the social model. In 2007 the European Commission published its own principles on flexicurity in which it defined flexicurity as an ‘integrated strategy to enhance, at the same time, flexibility and security in the labour market’ (European Commission, 2007: 10). There are four components to flexicurity outlined in the Commission’s (2007) document: first, flexible and reliable contractual agreements for both employer and employee; second, lifelong learning strategies to ensure skill and knowledge adaptability for employees to ensure employability; third, effective active labour market policies; and fourth, modern social security systems to provide adequate income support.

Burroni and Keune (2011: 86) in their analysis of flexicurity argue that there are serious shortcomings with the concept and they focus their attention on four problems associated with it: ‘the ambiguity of the concept; the uncertainties of institutional complementarities; the difficulty of achieving win-win situations; and a reductionist view of the sources of flexibility and security’. Mailand (2010: 254) also highlights the problem of ambiguity when he says ‘there are several pathways towards flexicurity’ which allows for different understandings of the concept and may lead to a “pick and mix” approach by member states. More ominously Heyes (2011: 653) concludes that as a result of EU member states weakening labour market protections, reducing welfare entitlements, linking payments to active labour market policies or forcing unemployed people to accept work whatever its quality, ‘[t]here is evidence of convergence in respect of labour market and social protection policies but the dominant tendency is towards “less security” rather than toward “flexicurity”’.

Activation

The Delors White Paper, *Growth, competitiveness, employment* raised the issue of active labour market policies (ALMPs) (European Commission, 1993) but it was not until the Essen European Council Summit in 1994 that activation became an established part of the EU policy agenda. At that Summit the Council made the following commitment: ‘to develop active labour market policies through the reform of employment services ... and developing incentives for the unemployed to return to work’ (cited in Devetzi, 2007: 32). Activation was to become a ‘fundamental feature’ of the EES when it was launched in 1997 (Triantafillou, 2008: 689). The OECD has also been a strong advocate of ALMPs from around the mid-1990s and it has had much influence in promoting this policy path (Armingeon, 2007). The historical origins of ALMPs go back to early 1950s Sweden (Bonoli, 2010). In Sweden it played ‘a crucial part of the social democratic strategy, which aimed to merge the competitiveness of an open economy with the security of full employment and social justice’ (Armingeon, 2007: 906) and has subsequently continued as a ‘core part of the “social model”’ of that country (Clasen et al, 2016; 22). More recently ALMPs have been adopted by liberal politicians and economists who look favourably on its key assumptions:

It is market enabling, and for this reason it fits into a liberal ideology. As it aims at bringing about social security without necessarily resorting to redistributive measures, and without changing established social hierarchies, it is on the whole palatable to conservative politicians.

Armingeon (2007: 906)

Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer (2004: 425-426) describe activation as 'the introduction of an increased and explicit linkage between on the one hand, social protection, and on the other hand, labour market participation and labour market programmes'. The interpretation of activation is not agreed upon. According to some scholars it reflects national political priorities thus leading to diversity of approach to ALMPs across EU member states (Clasen and Clegg, 2003; Wright et al, 2004; Bonoli, 2010; van Fliet and Koster, 2011) while to others there are consistencies and elements of convergence across European countries (Brodkin and Marston, 2013).

Regime types do make a difference to state expenditure on activation programmes; the Nordic countries outspend other EU member states by a considerable margin (Bonoli, 2010; see also Berry, 2014). van Fliet and Koster's (2011: 232) analysis of the impact of 'Europeanisation' on ALMPs suggests that 'the EES has contributed to relative shifts from passive to active labour market policies across the member states', even if they do it "their way", according each state's own historical and institutional approaches to employment policy (Triantafillou, 2008: 707). The use of ALMPs, whatever the source of their origins, reflects a neo-liberal policy path which has negative implications for the social citizenship rights of groups that are marginal to the labour market (van Oorschot, 2002). Barbier (2012: 387) argues that "activation policies", are 'more often than not a euphemism for promoting stricter eligibility criteria for benefit recipients'. The recent economic crisis fuelled the restructuring of social protection under the guise of austerity and provided added cover for a policy path of greater conditionality in benefits that was well underway prior to 2008 (Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007).

Quality of work

While flexicurity and activation have retained and grown their appeal in the European employment debate the same cannot be said for the idea of quality of work. 'Quality of work represents a core element of the European social model, but the protection and promotion of quality of work does not figure high on the EU's employment policy agenda' (Bothfeld and Leschke, 2012: 338). The idea of quality of work gained recognition in the EU in 1992 (Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007) and was included in EU documentation and guidelines leading up to its most significant policy appearance, in the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, before it was marginalised again. In fact the notion of quality was extensively used in the Lisbon Strategy with sections on 'Full Employment and Quality of Work', 'Quality of Social Policy' and 'Promoting Quality in Industrial Relations' (European Commission, 2000). The commitment to 'more and better jobs' (European Commission, 2000: 5) provided

the backdrop for the reference to quality of work in the Lisbon Strategy where the aim was not only to increase the number of jobs but to ensure that quality jobs were developed, particularly those linked to the knowledge based economy. The Commission had the following to say about quality of work.

Quality of work includes better jobs and more balanced ways of combining working life with personal life. This is to the advantage of the individual, the economy and the society. It implies better employment policies, fair remuneration, an organisation of work adapted to the needs of both companies and individuals. It is based on high skills, fair labour standards and decent levels of occupational health and safety and includes facilitating occupational and geographical mobility.

(European Commission, 2000: 13, emphasis in original)

Dieckhoff and Gallie (2007: 485) summarise the ten main 'dimensions of quality of work that should be the objective of policy initiatives' as laid out in the EU's Employment Guidelines some months before the launch of the Lisbon Strategy. They are

intrinsic job quality; skills, lifelong learning and career development; gender equality; health and safety at work; flexibility and security; inclusion and access to the labour market; work organisation and work-life balance; social dialogue and worker involvement; diversity and non-discrimination; and overall work performance.

(Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007: 485)

These dimensions are broader than those quoted in the Lisbon Strategy document. Of note is the inclusion of flexibility and security as dimensions of quality work. Indicators were introduced against which the achievement of these objectives could be assessed. However, although Dieckhoff and Gallie (2007) welcomed the decision to try and measure progress in the quality of work their analysis demonstrates significant shortcomings as the indicators were poorly thought out and were missing completely for some of the objectives.

By the time of the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005 the quality work agenda had almost completely slipped off the radar. In my search of the new Lisbon Strategy I found only one reference to quality of work, as employment policy had shifted to a more supply-side approach. Davoine et al (2008: 165) observe that '[t]he objective [quality] is still present in the EES, but its substance has changed: quality is increasingly interpreted in terms of job productivity and the financial benefits of job creation'. National Reform Plans reflect the new status of quality work. References to quality in these plans are noticeable by their absence as the focus has turned to increasing the number of people in employment (see Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007). The demotion of quality work was again conspicuous in Europe 2020 where in a search for the term I found only one reference to it in the document, a far cry from its starring role in the original Lisbon Strategy only ten years before (see also Bothfeld and Leschke, 2012).

Ireland's employment policies, flexicurity, activation and the quality of work

As a member state of the EU Ireland took part in the development and implementation of the EES under the rules of subsidiarity and the OMC and reported its progress accordingly. In response to the economic crisis the EU introduced stricter rules on member states' fiscal and economic management through the Stability and Growth Pact. The increasing surveillance by the EU of national budgetary strategies necessitated improved and more coordinated reporting systems. The *National Reform Programmes* (originally called the *National Employment Action Plans*) and Europe 2020 were subsumed into the new reporting systems, called the European Semester, 'an annual cycle of economic and budgetary policy guidance which culminates in the adoption of Country Specific Recommendations' (Department of Finance, n.d.).

A review of a number of official Irish government submissions and policy documents prior and subsequent to the introduction of the European Semester shows a trend of an ongoing supply-side effort to increase employment. Ireland had been referred to as an 'outlier' (because of its lack of compliance) on activation policies in the EU and in relation to other liberal states (Grubb et al, 2009; National Economic & Social Council, 2011; Murphy, 2016) but there has been an obvious shift towards the implementation of ALMPs and greater conditionality as a response to unemployment since the period of economic crisis began (Boland, 2015; Murphy, 2016). Core policy documents, such as, the *National Employment Action Plan* (2001 and 2003-2005) and its successor the *National Reform Programme* (2005, 2011 and 2015), *Action Plan for Jobs* (2011 to 2016), *Towards 2016* and *Pathways to Work* (2012, 2015 and 2016), all show that the priority for the various governments in office from 1997 to today has been about addressing the supply-side of employment generation.

Only the *National Workplace Strategy* (2005) and the *Second Report of the High Level Implementation Group* (2007) from the relatively short-lived National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) and the High Level Implementation Group showed any attempt to address employment related-issues beyond increasing job numbers. In the 2005 *National Workplace Strategy* there was a section on how 'the workplace of the future must be responsive to employees' needs' (NCP, 2005: 32). It refers to health and well-being in the workplace, opportunities to develop skills, career opportunities, security of employment, possibility of achieving a work/life balance, appropriate reward systems and some autonomy and control over work (NCP, 2005: 32). However, even in this strategy the prevailing view of the purpose of the workplace supported the needs of employers over those of employees.

The discourse in the various documents is couched in a work-first model (Collins and Murphy, 2016) using supply-side language of employment with emphasis on employability, adaptability/flexibility, active labour market programmes, gender equality and life-long learning. Irish activation policies have been in place since the late 1990s but the implementation of work-oriented conditionality was effectively

non-existent (Grubb et al, 2009; Martin, 2014). However, Ireland's activation policies changed profoundly as a result of the economic crisis. Ireland's commitment to structural reforms were part of its agreement with the Troika in 2010 (Dukelow, 2015), including a commitment to more intensive job activation policies (Boland and Griffin, 2016; Collins and Murphy, 2016; Murphy, 2016).

The trend towards work-oriented conditionality has not led to a similar emphasis on the quality of the work unemployed people are expected to engage in on activation programmes (Boland and Griffin, 2016). Quality of work has little salience in the Irish policy literature. It is referred to in the Irish 2003-2005 *National Economic Action Plan* which quotes the ten dimensions of the quality of work presented by the EU Commission (2000) but without stating how this might apply to Irish employment policy. In the first *National Reform Programme* under the Europe 2020 process in 2011 the only mention of quality and work was in relation to the then proposed new Tús activation programme (subsequently introduced by the Irish government). About this the document says the initiative 'will provide short-term quality and suitable working opportunities for people who are unemployed while at the same time carrying out beneficial work within communities' (Government of Ireland, 2011: 11). There is a one sentence reference to quality of work in the final pages of the 2015 *National Reform Programme* where it also connects employment with an exit from poverty: 'The quality of employment and supports provided to facilitate the movement of people into employment are crucial in providing a route out of poverty' (Government of Ireland, 2015: 74-75). What is meant by the quality of employment is not explained nor is there any indication of what measures should be undertaken to achieve this quality in employment. The employment focus of the 2015 *National Reform Programme* is to increase work participation for those who are outside of the labour market with special emphasis on targeting work activation for young people and lone parents as well as welfare reform of the One Parent Family allowance (Government of Ireland, 2015).

In the inaugural document of *Action Plan for Jobs* in 2012 (a new report has been published annually since 2012 with quarterly updates on progress) there was only one reference to quality of work. This was in the context of focusing on the impact of investment in research 'to deliver high quality and well paid employment' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2012: 20). In the 2015 *Action Plan for Jobs* there is also only one reference to quality of work. This comes in the section on retail where, under Action 335, the following is written: 'Through the Retail Consultation Forum, continue to identify and address issues which can help support quality employment in the retail sector' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015b: 123). However, what exactly this refers to is not clear as there was no discussion about this issue prior to its listing as an action. In the 2016 *Action Plan for Jobs* there is a reference to the creation of quality jobs in a chapter headed 'Disruptive Reforms' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2016: 19). Five of these reforms are set out but none of these address the intrinsic nature of paid work and instead refer to broader initiatives such as 'a step-up in enterprise skills supply' and stimulating regional growth (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2016: 19).

The Irish government's flagship activation policy, *Pathways to Work (PtW)*, was published annually from 2012, with the exception of 2014. In the original document in 2012 the term quality was used only once and this was in reference to participants on Community Employment schemes receiving a 'quality experience' (Department of Social Protection, 2012b: 17). In PtW 2013 there were two references to 'good-quality offer of employment' for young people under the Youth Guarantee (Department of Social Protection, 2013: 6 & 19). In the 2015 edition there were three references to quality. One repeated the 'good quality-offer of employment' under the Youth Guarantee and the other two refer to the quality of engagement between the employment services and the unemployed job seekers (Department of Social Protection, 2015).

In the most recent *PtW 2016-2020* published in early 2016 the authors state that there is 'a shift of focus from "activation in a time of recession" to "activation in a time of recovery and growth"' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 4). The objectives of the new focus are:

1. First, to continue and consolidate the progress made to date with an initial focus on working with unemployed jobseekers, in particular people who are long-term unemployed.
2. Second, to extend the approach of activation to other people who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force.

(Department of Social Protection, 2016: 4)

The second objective sees a new development in the government's ALMPs' landscape as it extends the activation net beyond those who are unemployed to 'other "non-active" cohorts to participate in the labour market' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 14). These additional target groups consist of qualified adult dependents, part-time workers, people who are unemployed but not in receipt of a welfare payment, people with a disability, homemakers, students and carers whose caring roles are complete (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 17). As Boland and Griffin (2016) observe the new targets for activation include everyone except children and pensioners.

Although there is a reference to good quality jobs in *PtW 2016-2020*, it suffers from the same failings as previous government statements on this aspect of employment policy. The title of Strand 4 of priority actions of *Pathways to Work* is: 'Incentivising employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people' where the ambition is '[t]o assist employers in recruiting unemployed working age clients of DSP and to incentivise employers to offer good quality and sustainable opportunities to unemployed people' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 30). The rationale for Strand 4 is clearly set out: 'The ultimate objective of all of the actions in this programme is to get people into work' (Department of Social

Protection, 2016: 30). The actions required under this strand are about facilitating employers (or as the strategy states it must be ‘employer-centric’) to take on unemployed workers rather than prioritising the quality of the work experience. Thus Public Employment Services must ‘provide a comprehensive range of recruitment services and supports to employers so that they in turn can provide good quality work opportunities’ (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 30). *PtW 2016-2020* does not explain what is meant by ‘good quality work opportunities’ nor how this will be achieved in the workplace.

In his review of four countries’ employment regimes and flexicurity during the crisis Heyes (2013: 75) characterises Ireland as a “market regime” with its relatively weak employment protection and liberal welfare state. He says that two decades of social partnership agreements have helped shape Ireland’s employment regime and its response to the EU’s social policy programme including supply-side policies which contribute to the flexicurity agenda. Roche and Teague (2012: 6) concur with the ideological positioning of Ireland in relation to employment saying that ‘the State has adopted a laissez-faire posture towards the labour market’. For these authors the 2008 economic crisis has not changed employment practices in Ireland (Roche and Teague, 2012). Heyes (2013) sees this somewhat differently when he says that the response to the crisis initially was in keeping with the employment regime already in place but that subsequent reductions in social protection would reduce security for workers and that employment regimes are at least in part being restructured. He also acknowledges that this restructuring is not new and has been in train for decades with the move towards liberalisation in the EU. An important element of the move towards liberalisation is in relation to employment and includes the weakening of labour regulation, declining trade unions and increased supply side policies (Heyes, 2013). In effect ‘[m]any of these tendencies, already well established prior to the crisis, are being reinforced’ (Heyes, 2013: 82; see also Collins and Murphy, 2016). The short-lived nod to quality of work in the noughties is a reflection of the low priority of non-quantitative dimensions of work in this policy path irrespective of the consequences for workers.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PRECARIOUSNESS THROUGH SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICIES?

There is a direct relationship between the EU and Irish government social inclusion and employment strategies, where social inclusion is equated with paid work. The theoretical explanations of social exclusion and poverty are defined much more broadly than the lack of paid work (Silver, 1993; Levitas, 2005). Likewise, the policy prescriptions that emerged in the EU from the 1970s go beyond this narrow focus. However, equating social inclusion and paid work has come to dominate the policy of social inclusion in EU member states such as Ireland. Over this same period, as detailed in Chapter 2, the nature of work has changed with the emergence of increased precariousness in the labour market. In this section the relationship between the emphasis on paid work as the answer to social inclusion and its association with precarious work will be explored.

Both Goetschy (1999) and Heyes and Lewis (2014) raise important questions about the impact of the employment policy on the quality of work and its implications for precarious employment. In her consideration of the EES Goetschy (1999: 135) says that a 'fundamental criticism' of the content of the strategy is about the quality of jobs created by it. The urgency of generating jobs for the unemployed 'does not justify overlooking the nature of the jobs to be created'. Goetschy (1999: 135) argues that giving priority to increasing the numbers at work 'may accelerate the development of forms of employment (involuntary part-time work, badly paid and insecure jobs, workfare schemes) which lack adequate social protection and recognition'. She says that this kind of work does not assist social integration and also exacerbates inequality between men and women. Goetschy (1999: 135) continues: '[t]he implication of such a dynamic within the EES is that precarious employment tends to become "banalized", normalized, officially recognized'. In a hard hitting rebuke of the ideological content of the EES she concludes

The development of precarious forms of employment, a more fragmented (because more "flexible") workforce, the growth of private services and SMEs (where employment protections are normally inferior to those in the rest of the economy) is integral to the EU strategy of job creation. These dimensions are no longer questioned in EU employment policy or in the guidelines. The demand for a disposable workforce and flexible labour markets is taken for granted; its ideological content is no longer perceived.

(Goetschy, 1999: 135-136)

Heyes and Lewis (2014), like Goetschy, question the quantitative approach to job creation and claim that in their efforts to combat unemployment and stimulate economic growth EU governments have side-lined job quality and inequality. Their paper provides an analysis of labour market deregulation in the EU since the beginning of the crisis. They say that labour market deregulation is being targeted as a means to improve employment and economic growth. However, their evidence suggests that this course of action does not achieve the stated aims and in fact has other consequences. They contend that for over two decades European governments have weakened standard employment contracts and have promoted non-standard forms of work with weaker employment and social protections (Heyes and Lewis, 2014).

Moran (2006) makes a number of observations on the conceptualisation of social inclusion through paid employment in her paper on Irish social inclusion policy. She questions this conceptualisation on the grounds of social justice, claiming that 'it does not recognise that the labour markets themselves are deeply implicated in the process of "exclusion" through the generation and reproduction of material, social and political inequalities' (Moran, 2006: 184; see also Murphy, 2007; O'Brien and Penna, 2008). Moran (2006: 184) describes the limits of the 'inclusion-through-employment rationale' as not taking into account 'low pay, insecurity, gender and racial stratification, exploitation and income poverty' all of which can co-exist with being in employment. A further contention of Moran and one which Levitas (2005) also highlights is that social inclusion through paid employment does not provide for those in 'non-commodifiable types of labour, such as certain types of care,

community and volunteer work' (Moran, 2006: 185). She also questions the implication that inclusion-through-employment can 'bring about full employment through education and training', a form of human capital that supposedly leads to social inclusion and better quality jobs (Moran, 2006: 185). She says that this focus on education for life cannot deliver on the promise of employment for all, denying as it does the inherent nature of capitalism and its requirement for a pool of low paid and unemployed workers, whatever their skill and knowledge levels (Moran, 2006; see also Byrne, 2005; Davies, 2005; Shildrick et al, 2012).

Moran (2006) characterises the Irish approach in terms of Levitas' (2005) SID, claiming that it conforms to the EU's model of inclusion through employment. Similarly, Murphy (2007: 101) observes that '[t]he maxim "a job is the best route out of poverty" and the language of "working-aged" are now firmly rooted in antipoverty and social inclusion discourse'. In the period of recession that followed the financial crash in 2008 this discourse has not altered. In fact, the Irish policy approach has become more avowedly interventionist and integrationist and arguably more moralistic (in the Levitas sense) as employment "activation" has come centre stage (Boland, 2015).

The strategic approach of the Irish government through its employment policies and in particular its *PtW* strategy clearly demonstrates this new turn in activation policy. According to Collins and Murphy (2016: 69) '[t]he PTW labour market activation strategy signalled a widespread institutional and policy change that taken together hastens Ireland's convergence towards international norms in activation policy'. These authors fear that this 'work-first' development in Irish activation policies with its emphasis on employability and job-readiness is punitive and prepares the 'flexible employee for precarious jobs which are made sustainable through employment subsidies' (Collins and Murphy, 2016: 85).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I sought to piece together the complex story of a number of inter-related aspects of social and employment policies that appear to lead towards the construction of precariousness for those marginal to the Irish labour market. The context for these developments is situated in European social inclusion/anti-poverty policies and employment strategies both of which are dominated by market exigencies. Although the EU has spent time and resources since the 1970s developing a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty through the concept of social exclusion, the policy response is very clearly one-dimensional: social inclusion is achieved through paid work. As a member state of the EU Ireland has been committed to this aim but was previously lax in fulfilling its obligations to enforcing this integrationist model (Grubb et al, 2009). Its *laissez-faire* approach to labour market intervention for the unemployed and others marginal to the labour market was to change as a consequence of the Irish financial and economic crisis and subsequent recession (Boland and Griffin, 2016; Collins and Murphy, 2016). The commitment to the Troika on restructuring the labour market was to be a

crucial step in Ireland's economic reformation. Included in this restructuring was the development and implementation of a work activation model to bring Ireland closer to the norm of international ALMPs (Collins and Murphy, 2016).

This shift in policy approach towards greater activation of those marginal to the labour market brings with it increased surveillance of the (passive) unemployed who have been recalibrated as (active) job seekers (Boland, 2015). There is a question however, about the outcome of an activation policy in a liberal state like Ireland where the levels of labour flexibility are high, the security dimensions are low and job quality is not a priority (Heyes, 2013). The emphasis is on the supply-side of employment and in an 'employer-centric' environment the economic and social benefits to the marginal worker of such arrangements are at best questionable. In this context social inclusion becomes a peripheral concept.

In the Irish government's most recent *PtW 2016-2020* the concept of social inclusion has become more closely aligned with activation. *PtW* states that the 'services and supports provided as part of a "labour market activation regime" are also an important enabler of social/active inclusion' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 14, double emphasis in original). In this declaration we are closer to what many scholars and analysts have signposted for a long time - that politically, social inclusion means paid work (Levitas, 2005; Moran, 2006; Murphy, 2007). The Irish state intends extending this activation model to others who 'although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 4). This social/active inclusion approach will inevitably impact on precarious workers but, as we shall, the integrationist notion of paid work may not lead to the positive outcomes for marginal workers implied in government policy on labour activation. Instead it may lead to a new or continued experience of what I am calling embedded precarious employment.

CHAPTER 4

A methodology of engagement – using narrative inquiry

INTRODUCTION

In chapters two and three I have discussed the theoretical and policy underpinnings of precarious employment and social inclusion/exclusion. In this chapter I will commence the applied research process by outlining my research design in preparation for the fusing of the theoretical and research literature with the findings of my study in later chapters. To achieve this outcome I have chosen narrative inquiry as my methodological approach. Narrative inquiry is a case-centred approach (Harling Stalker, 2006; Riessman, 2011) which suits the small scale-nature of this study, thirteen research participants in one region of Ireland. The use of narrative in this case study will allow me to explore and interpret the impact of precarious employment and its intersection with the social inclusion policies of the state on a bigger scale (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Luker, 2008). The first section of this chapter will set out the socio-economic context of the study before moving on to address the important matter of research design.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF THE SOUTH-EAST OF IRELAND

In this section I will briefly outline the socio-economic conditions in the South-East of Ireland to provide a contextual backdrop for my case study. The 13 participants in this study live and work in Counties Waterford and Wexford. The *Regional Labour Markets Bulletin 2014* from the Skills and Labour Research Market Unit at Solas, the Irish state's training and education agency (Milićević, 2014), is a key source of socio-economic information about the area. Other sources include three action plans on jobs for the South-East: Forfás' (2011) *South East Region Employment Action Plan: Spotlight on the South East*, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation's (2013) *South East Economic Development Strategy (SEEDS)* and the Irish Government's *Action Plan for Jobs South East* (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015a). I have also consulted Waterford City and Council's (2015) *Waterford Baseline 2015*, All-Island Research Observatory's (AIRO) (2015) *Wexford Socio-Economic Baseline Report: Local Economic and Community Plan* for Wexford County Council, the OECD's (2014) *Employment and Skills Strategies in Ireland*, which uses the South-East region as one of its two case studies (the Dublin region is the other), Pobal Haase-Pratschke (HP) Deprivation Index (2013), the Central Statistics Office's (CSO) *Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 4 2012* (2013) and *Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 4 2015* (2016) and the Southern Regional Assembly website.

The South-East of Ireland is one of eight geographical areas which divide the state into distinct regions. The other seven regions are Border, Dublin, Mid-East, Midland,

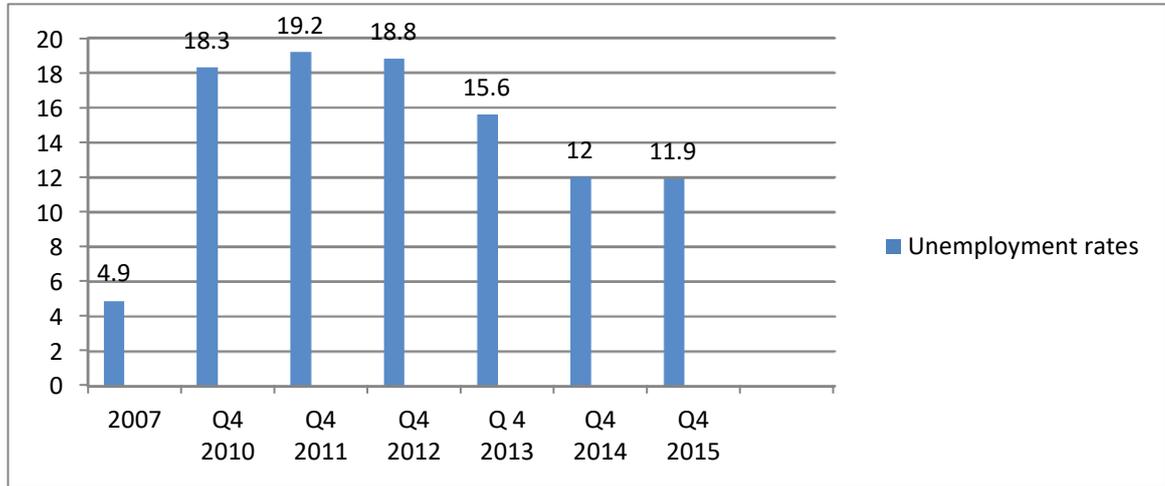
Mid-West, South-West and West. These regions do not have any political or administrative functions but are based on NUTS 3 regional classification and used for economic data-reporting purposes by the CSO and Eurostat. The eight regions are constituent members of three larger regional assemblies since January 2015, Eastern and Midland, Northern and Western and Southern (before that there were two regional assemblies the Border, Midlands and West and the Southern & Eastern). The South-East is located in the Southern regional assembly area and the headquarters for the assembly is located in Waterford, the largest urban area in the South-East. The primary role of these assemblies is to manage European Regional Development Funds. The South-East region consists of the local authority areas of Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford City and County and Wexford (Southern Regional Assembly, n.d.).

At 9,400 km² or 14 per cent of the land mass of the state, the South-East region is the fourth largest geographical area and fifth in population size with 505,900 people resident there in 2013 (Milićević, 2014). The region's biggest city is Waterford, Ireland's fifth city, with a population of 46,732 people in 2011 (Waterford City and County Council, 2015). The economy of the region is mixed and includes agriculture, industry and services (including retail and tourism) all contributing to the regional and national economies, with agriculture providing the highest level of gross value added to the region (Waterford City and County Council, 2015). In quarter four 2015 the South-East had a labour market participation rate of 58.6 per cent, below the national average of 60 per cent (CSO, 2016). The South-East had the highest rate of recorded unemployment amongst the eight regions at the end of the same quarter at 11.9 per cent (CSO, 2016). The level of unemployment has decreased since 2011 when it was at 19.2 per cent in the region (CSO, 2013) but it remains a long way off the South-East region's unemployment level of 4.9 per cent in 2007 (Forfás, 2011: 15).

As the economic crisis got under way in 2008, the rate of unemployment in the South-East began to diverge from the national rate and has continued at a higher level since then (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015a). The decrease in the overall unemployment rate at the end of 2015 cannot hide a number of underlying socio-economic weaknesses in the region, which include poorer levels of education. This is acknowledged in the *Action Plan for Jobs South East 2015*: '[a]cross all levels of education, the South East region lags behind the national average with 23 per cent having a third level qualification (state 29 per cent)' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015a: 11; see also Oireachtas Joint Committee, 2013; OECD, 2014). The type of jobs available, 'a concentration of low skilled jobs' (OECD: 2014: 41), adds to the economic difficulties encountered in the region where '[h]igh value added knowledge intensive services accounted for 10 per cent of the region's employment' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015: 15), which is low in comparison to the most successful regions in the state. The OECD (2014: 34) reports that in the South-East 'skilled trade jobs account for the highest share of employment at 18%', followed by professionals and elementary occupations. This

compares to the Dublin region where almost 40 per cent of jobs are either at professional or associate professional level.

Figure 4.1 Unemployment rates in the South-East 2007 and 4th Quarters 2010-2015



Source: Forfás, 2011; CSO, 2013 & 2016

The sector with the highest number of employees in the South-East is wholesale and retail (29,000 people employed), followed by industry, health and social work and agriculture. Twelve per cent of employees in the state’s manufacturing sector are in the South-East region, in joint fourth place with the Mid-West. Of interest is the composition of manufacturing in the regions, with Dublin having the ‘highest share of high tech manufacturing, at 41%, followed by the South-West, at 36%’ (Milićević, 2014: 12). The South-East has 20 per cent of high tech manufacturing jobs, which puts it in fifth place. These jobs are the better paid jobs in this sector but there are three further divisions below the high tech jobs, these are medium-high, medium-low and low tech. The South-East region has 13 per cent of jobs in each of two intermediate categories, but a high of 53 per cent of low tech jobs, on par with the Border region (Milićević, 2014: 12).

This regional analysis of the South-East labour market is only part of the story; national labour market trends within the macro-economic context are also relevant. The research for this study took place during Ireland's worst recession which began in 2008. The impact of the ‘Great Recession’ was severe for certain groups within the labour market (Kelly et al 2013). Research on transitions into employment and unemployment has shown increased unemployment but with evidence of a differential impact across age groups with young people most affected (Bergin et al, 2015; see also Kelly et al, 2013; McCoy et al, 2014). Dobbins (2013: 5) writing of the employment circumstances of young people says ‘[t]he growth of temporary employment and part-time work, in particular since the global economic crisis, suggests that this work is increasingly taken up by young people because it is the

only option available in a precarious labour market context'. The outcomes for young workers engaged in this form of employment activity mean less employment protection and fewer entitlements to social security benefits than permanent employees (Dobbins, 2013). Dobbins (2013: 6) also notes that 'given the severity of the crisis in Ireland and the ongoing repercussions there seems little likelihood, as things stand, that temporary contracts are serving as a 'stepping stone' to 'permanent' jobs for young people'.

Overall the transition rate into employment by the unemployed fell during the period of the recession. As well as the negative impact of the recession on young people's employment prospects immigrants also suffered job losses disproportionately, most noticeably males from Eastern Europe accession states (Bergin et al, 2015: 2; see also Kelly et al, 2013). The impact on employment was worst for those with lower levels of education as higher educated graduates are less likely to lose their jobs (Kelly et al, 2013). Furthermore, there is a geographic dimension to the macro-economic situation. Because of a greater opportunity for economic activity in the Dublin region workers in this region have a better chance of employment (Bergin et al, 2015) which has consequences for wealth generation and social well-being. For regions such as the South-East, a lack of economic activity, resulting in poorer employment opportunities, leads in the opposite direction, towards greater disadvantage and increased risk of poverty.

Poverty levels and disadvantage are higher in the South-East than is the norm across the state. Levels of disadvantage are particularly high in the South-East, the second most disadvantaged region in the state, according to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index 2011; but disadvantage is not evenly distributed. Wexford and Waterford City are the first and second most disadvantaged local authority areas in the region (Engling and Haase, 2013a and 2013b; see also O'Donoghue and Meredith, 2014). At national level Wexford is the third most disadvantaged county in the country moving from ninth place prior to the onset of the recession in 2008 (Engling and Haase, 2013b). Waterford City remains among the most disadvantaged local authority areas, although it has moved from third to sixth place in the same period (Engling and Haase, 2013a).

A combination of macro-economic challenges and the particular social and economic circumstances of the South-East, such as the preponderance of low paying jobs due to the structure of employment opportunities in the region, higher than average national levels of early school leavers, lower participation in third level education, unemployment at higher levels than the national average and high levels of dependency on social welfare transfers to support household income (Milićević, 2014, AIRO, 2015; Waterford City and County Council, 2015) all point to a region which is not reaching its potential despite its 'many strengths' (Oireachtas Joint Committee, 2013: 9). This is the challenging context in which the 13 participants in this study live and work.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research accommodates and facilitates a flexible structure in research design (Cresswell, 1998; Sarantakos, 2005) but within certain well-defined parameters. According to Sarantakos (2005) structure includes: selection of research topic and methodology; framing of research question; sampling procedures; data collection; data analysis and interpretation; and, reporting. The selection of the research topic has already been referred to in the introductory chapter as was the rationale for making this choice. In the introduction to this chapter I have stated that narrative inquiry was my methodological approach within a complementary case study design (Stake, 2000). Stake (2000: 436) proposes three possible options for the case study: the intrinsic, the instrumental and the collective (Stake, 2000). The current study can be characterised as a collective case study which Stake (2000: 437) portrays as an 'instrumental study extended to several cases'. He continues '[t]hey are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing about a still larger collection of cases' (Stake, 2000: 437). This is at the core of my study; the belief that the story of the collective case of 13 individual precarious workers can give us insights into the nexus of the broader question of precarious employment in a region and the role of the state's social protection policies. Using the flexible structure of qualitative research design outlined by Sarantakos (2005) I will address the following in the remainder of this chapter:

- research question and key debates
- narrative inquiry
- recruiting and engaging with participants
- data collection and analysis
- ethics
- questions of credibility

RESEARCH QUESTION AND KEY DEBATES

The research topic, which begins its journey as an idea, is formulated into a 'workable research question' as part of the research design (Silverman, 2005: 90). The following research question is to be answered in this thesis:

What role does the Irish state play in facilitating and sustaining precarious employment in Ireland?

This question is a very important one because on the one hand as I have argued in Chapter 2 precarious employment is an important feature of the labour market in Ireland (O'Connor, 2009; Loftus, 2012; Collins and Murphy, 2016) with profound implications for security of paid work and security of income for those in such employment. On the other hand, as was discussed in Chapter 3, the state and non-

state actors have engaged in extensive policy debate and programme implementation to address social exclusion since the early 1990s. The empirical focus of this study is to explore how workers in situations of precarious employment in one Irish region interpret their experiences of their paid employment and the Irish state's social inclusion policies, underpinned as they are by an emphasis on paid work. The research question raises a number of key debates which are reflected upon in my thesis. These debates emerged from my analysis of the data produced by the interviewees and reflect the nature of narrative inquiry which allows for a process of simultaneous data production and analysis (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The debates, which are as follows: identity and the precarious worker, the master narrative of work and the state's construction of precarious employment through the social protection system, are briefly summarised below.

Identity and the precarious worker

The literature on precarious employment argues that this form of work negatively impacts on the precarious workers' occupational identity (Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Standing, 2011). It is claimed that the short-term horizon of contemporary employment arrangements influences the commitment of the employer to the employee and the employee's commitment to their place of work (Pocock et al, 2004). As a result, it is suggested that the worker's relationship to their work is a form of alienation and prevents the establishment of an occupational identity (Standing, 2011). The evidence from my study contests this argument about occupational identity. To aid me with my analysis I use Bauman's (2005: 5) notion of 'work ethic' based on the premise 'to work is good, not to work is evil' as an analytical tool. There is a strong relationship between this central debate and that of a master narrative of work.

Master narrative of work

Hammack (2011: 313) describes the master narrative as 'a collective storyline which group members perceive as compulsory — a story which is so central to the group's existence and "essence" that it commands identification and integration into the personal narrative'. Bauman's (2005: 5) moral principle 'to work is good, not to work is evil' is at the centre of the master narrative of work. Bauman's moral principle coupled with Streeck's (2009) account of the recent historical change in the organisation of work, practically and philosophically as it shifted from the Fordist period to the present preoccupation with flexibility, demonstrates for Streeck (2009: 27) that 'people ... were broadly embracing capitalism as a way of life, and markets as sites of opportunity rather than uncertainty'. In other words the narrative of individualism at the heart of neo-liberalism has been embraced by the people including workers. In this study I will explore how the workers relate to this master narrative of neo-liberal individualism.

The Irish state's construction of precarious employment through the social protection system

I have referred above to how morality is implicated within the narrative of paid work and it is also an intrinsic element of the discourse on social inclusion. Levitas (2005: 186) says of her three discourses on social exclusion – moral underclass (MUD), social integration (SID) and redistributionist (RED) – ‘they all appeal to moral precepts’. The SID discourse is favoured by EU policymakers, informing as it does social inclusion policies with ‘integration through work and moral integration’ (Levitas, 2005: 179). Goetschy (1999), in her critique of the European Employment Strategy, predicted an increase in precarious employment as a result of the Strategy’s emphasis on creating jobs irrespective of their quality. In this work-first approach to addressing poverty and social exclusion those who are outside of the labour market are obliged to engage with employment activation services (Murphy, 2016). In the latest iteration of the Irish policy context this engagement no longer refers only to those who are unemployed but also to those in circumstances of precarious work, among others (Department of Social Protection, 2016). The question arises about the benefit of such engagement when improved work opportunities and outcomes are far from guaranteed from these interventions (Collins and Murphy, 2016). I engage in a discussion about social inclusion informed by the idea of ‘integration through work and moral integration’ (Levitas, 2005: 179) and what I describe as embedded precariousness in the Irish policy context.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The telling aspect of narrative is as Riessman (2008: 3) highlights, synonymous with the “story”. In this age of information technology the telling of one’s personal story has become ubiquitous and a central tenet of western popular culture. Everyone seemingly has a story and is happy to tell it, through the medium of reality TV or talk jocks on radio or by using various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs or other outlets that offer easy access to telling one’s story.

Described as the ‘interview society’ by Atkinson and Silverman (1997 cited in Mishler, 1999; see also Gubrium and Holstein, 2012) the narrative turn in this context ignores society’s structural issues by giving prominence to the personal and confessional (Mishler, 1999). This dominance of the story in popular culture as well as its expanded use within the professions and the academy poses challenges to narrative as an academic enterprise, ‘the tyranny of narrative’ as Riessman (2008: 5) calls it. She is not alone in her fear for the soul of narrative as Atkinson and Delamont (2006: 164) believe ‘that the analysis of narratives needs to be “rescued” from many applications in contemporary social research’. For these authors biography has become celebrated rather than critically analysed, a fundamental requirement of social research. But just because someone tells a story does not

necessarily make it a narrative for '[a]ll talk and text is not narrative' according to Riessman (2008: 5). In other words there is more to narrative than the mere act of storytelling. In this section I will address four key points about narrative and its use in this study: definition, approaches to narrative, narrative and social change and narrative and the interview.

Definition of narrative

As a qualitative research methodology narrative inquiry has become popular in the social sciences in the past thirty years (Elliott, 2005; Squire et al, 2013). Yet, despite this surge of interest in recent decades and an even more protracted historical existence through its relationship with anthropology and ethnography narrative is still regarded as a 'field in the making' (Chase, 2011). There is no agreement on its definition and there are serious challenges in even finding a precise framework for its operation 'because narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points' and it lacks 'overall rules' (Squire et al, 2013: 1).

An absence of specificity is disturbing for some but not for all. Mishler (1999: 17) extols the lack of boundaries within narrative saying that he is 'opposed to any effort to police the boundaries of this area of work. ... The excitement of doing narrative research is owing to, in some degree, the multiplicity of approaches and the clash of different perspectives'. Even if there is not a 'canonical' definition of narrative inquiry as Mishler (1999: 17) argues, this storied form possesses key features which give it a character that is recognisably "narrative". Chase (2011: 421) for instance says that '[n]arrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them'. Elliott suggests that there is more to narrative when she quotes what she calls 'a useful definition of narrative' by Hinchman and Hinchman.

Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it.

(Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997:xvi, cited in Elliott, 2005: 3)

Based on this definition of narrative there are three core elements to this storied form: there is a time or *chronological* dimension, it must be *meaningful* and it must be *social* as it is produced for an audience (Elliott, 2005: 4; emphasis in original). Furthermore, this form is structured in such a way as to contain the content of the story in a coherent whole, (Bamberg, 2012) although not all narrative scholars agree with this supposition (Porter Abbott, 2008).

Approaches to narrative

In carrying out narrative research a range of different methods and strategies may be used. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 5) provide a general overview of these

approaches including the use of metaphor from which a range of options are available to the researcher such as 'metanarrative, historiography, and critical analysis'. The various approaches offer a choice of analytical tools including sociolinguistics, literary analysis and survey or measurement strategies through the coding of narratives (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). In their much quoted work Lieblich et al (1998: 3-7) divide the approaches to narrative into three main domains:

- Studies in which the narrative is used for the investigation of any research question – the most common approach in narrative where a particular research problem is investigated through the use of narrative.
- Studies that investigate the narrative as their research object – this domain refers to work about narrative itself and has as its reference point the form rather than the content of the story.
- Studies on the philosophy and methodology of qualitative approaches to research and, among them, narrative research – this domain is concerned primarily with the philosophical and methodological perspectives of narrative research.

These three domains with their referents of content, form and philosophy are not necessarily mutually exclusive as narrative research can contain any combination of the three. The focus of the narrative approach also remains the same because narrative research 'refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials' (Lieblich et al, 1998: 2). Yet this understanding does not necessarily aid the narrative researcher (and certainly not the novice to this field of inquiry) because 'narrative research offers no overall rules about suitable materials or modes of investigation, or the best level at which to study stories' (Squire et al, 2013: 1). Without a solid template and rules for carrying out narrative inquiry the researcher must seek out other clues to facilitate their understanding of the practical steps to assist them with their research.

Elliott (2005: 6) lists some of the common themes that run through research that uses narrative. The themes include '[a]n interest in people's lived experiences and an appreciation of the temporal nature of that experience'; '[a] desire to empower research participants and allow them to contribute to determining what are the most salient themes in an area of research'; 'an interest in the process and change over time'; and '[a]n awareness that the researcher him- or herself is also a narrator' (Elliott, 2005: 6). Horsdal (2012: 75) makes the point that the researcher should not see the research participant as objects of information to assist with the accomplishment of the research task 'but as human beings whose voices we are grateful to hear, and whose experiences we are grateful to share'. Narrative inquiry thus has the potential to place the research task firmly in the arena of social justice.

Narrative and social change

Some narrative scholars have developed a critically informed narrative inquiry approach (see for example, Mishler, 1986) while others see some benefits in the critical approach but are more cautious in their assessment of it (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Riessman, 2008). As is the case with the broader qualitative research paradigm, narrative inquiry is neither inherently conservative nor inherently critical but as a methodological tool it can be used to support a critical approach (Ewick and Silbey, 1995). At the very core of narrative inquiry is the individual, the narrator of stories, and this methodological approach has the potential to give voice to the individual narrator especially those who are marginalised in society (Elliott, 2005). There are two dimensions to this notion of giving voice, one is within the interview process itself and the second is the power of the personal story. Riessman (2008: 8) acknowledges the power of the personal story when she says that '[n]arratives do political work. The social role of stories – how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world – is an important facet of narrative theory'. She goes on to say that stories can lead to progressive social change through their ability to mobilise others to action. And as a result of the stories of discrimination shared by small groups the major resistance movements of the twentieth century were born (Riessman, 2008: 9).

The use of stories does not of course always lead to grand social change. In critically-influenced analysis of narrative a fissure exists between the macro-structural view in which personal stories are regarded as just that, personal apolitical stories where individuals are purported to perpetuate their own oppression versus the notion of the politically motivated voice which leads to structural social change (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007: 64). This presents a dichotomous understanding of the power/lack of power of narrative which is not warranted. Challenges and changes to the politico-socio-economic systems do not always have to be on a grand scale as Ewick and Silbey (1995; 2003) argue. '[N]arrative scholarship is overtly political' and '[s]ome scholars contend that narratives have significant subversive or transformative potential' (Ewick and Silbey, 1995: 199). In their seminal papers on hegemonic power and the role of narrative in acts of individual resistance Ewick and Silbey (1995: 222) argue that

Narratives are likely to bear the marks of existing social inequalities, disparities of power, and ideological effects. However, at the same time that particular and personal narratives partake of and reproduce collective narratives, they also provide openings for creativity and invention in shaping the social world.

So while individual narratives may not always result in a collective force and be drivers for change at a macro-level, personal narratives can deliver victories for the individual and help shape the social world around them. These subjective and particularist events are of sociological importance for the interpretation of personal stories. Hammack (2011) argues that, through the use of narrative, meaning is not only of psychological benefit to the individual but the personal narrative is also political as it has broader implications for society. These stories inter-linked by an

epistemologically-based understanding of their own individual circumstances, in which marginal individuals face more powerful social actors, generate a potentially transformative reality (Ewick and Silbey, 1995; 2003).

Allowing people to 'speak out', giving them voice, the very essence of narrative, can help people 'to theorise themselves as political and moral subjects' (Squire, 2012: 54; see also Hammack, 2011). The ability to use one's own voice and reflect on one's own life and experience – the opposite to silence, that which maintains subjugation – has long been recognised by Freire (1970) as a transformative vehicle. The narrative researcher plays a key role in presenting "voice". As Elliott (2005: 148) explains it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide the analysis for the subjective views of the individual and their relationship to the underlying social conditions (including the hegemonic) recounted in their stories. My analysis will be informed by the views of the workers gained through the medium of the interview.

Narrative and the interview

Interviews are the most used method for the collection of empirical information in qualitative research (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). While forms of the interview have a very long history, noted as far back as ancient Egypt (Fontana and Frey, 2008), 'the interview, as a procedure for securing knowledge, is relatively new historically' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2001: 4). As might be expected the interview has changed over time with the development of social research, and these changes occurred 'both as a practice and as a methodological term' (Platt, 2001: 33). There is in effect, a 'canonical' approach (to borrow Luker's (2008) term) to the understanding of interviewing, where it is a tool for data collection (Denscombe, 2010) and an alternative perspective of the interview as an active relationship and mechanism for empowerment (Mishler, 1986).

Neuman (2011: 449) points out the interview 'is a joint production of the researcher and one or more members [participants]'. He continues '[m]embers are active participants whose insights, feelings, and cooperation are essential parts of a discussion process that reveals subjective meanings' (Neuman, 2011: 449). Similarly, Chase (2011: 422) says of narrative that it is social action in itself, where 'narration is the practice of constructing meaningful selves, identities and realities'. In the narrative interview this is not achieved by the interviewee as an autonomous source of action, because all participants in the interview 'are implicated in the construction of narrative reality' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011: 163; see also Mishler, 1986; Elliott, 2005). The interviewer thus plays an essential role in the process of producing action and knowledge. Those who are often the subject of the interview are not always acknowledged in the production of knowledge about their own lives. The stereotypical view of those who are marginalised in society is that they have little to contribute to the resolution of their own individual problems or the problems of the communities to which they belong. Gómez et al (2011: 237, emphasis in original) question this point of view by using what they call the

principle of '*cultural intelligence*', which states that 'every individual has communicative, practical, and academic abilities'. The narrative interview, with its focus on depth and detail, provides a vehicle for the interviewee to make sense of and give meaning to their lives (Chase, 2011).

RECRUITING AND ENGAGING WITH PARTICIPANTS

There are two aspects to the recruitment of and engagement with participants; one is to find relevant people willing to take part in the research (a sample). The second aspect, once they agree to participate, is to ensure the participating individuals are comfortable in sharing details of their life story in a manner which is more than confessional or a chronicle; they must also be encouraged to be reflexive. I will address these matters in this section by outlining my approach to sampling, by giving some background details on the participants, by explaining my recruitment approach and by presenting information on my interviews with the participants.

Sampling

In research textbooks the standard structure on the presentation of the discussion on sampling, is to divide it into two sections, one on probability sampling (quantitative) and the second on non-probability sampling (qualitative) (see for example, Sarantakos, 2005; Denscombe, 2010; Neuman, 2011; Bryman, 2012). Luker (2008: 3) sets out a challenging proposition for what she calls a '*salsa-dancing social science*', which she describes as 'holistic and attentive to context, conceptually innovative, methodologically agnostic research that sees itself as socially embedded, is strongly committed to building theory in a cumulative way, and is deeply attentive to questions of power'. She questions what she calls the canonical view on sampling and says that salsa-dancing social science researchers are not interested in the canonicals' goal to know 'the *distribution of population* among *known categories*, as estimated from a properly drawn sample with a known error factor' (Luker, 2008: 102, emphasis in the original). Luker (2008: 102, emphasis in original) continues '[w]e salsa-dancing researchers ... want to discover the *relevant categories at work*, not the distribution of some larger population across categories that we have a priori chosen'. She stresses the point that 'our task is to find a case or set of cases that is ... reasonably representative of the larger *phenomenon* that we are investigating. Listen carefully: not representative of the larger *population*, but of the larger *phenomenon*' (Luker, 2008: 103, emphasis in original).

There is however, the task for researchers to find people who are willing to share their experiences/insights/understandings of the larger phenomenon being investigated. To achieve that goal in this thesis purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling (also known as judgement or criterion sampling) is a non-probability sampling approach. Ritchie et al (2003: 78) make the point that instead of looking for representativeness 'the characteristics of the population are used as the basis of selection' in non-probability sampling. This is particularly the case for

purposive sampling where according to Sarantakos (2005: 164, emphasis in original) 'the researchers purposely choose subjects *who, in their opinion, are relevant to the project*'. The sample selection is thus based on the criteria of 'the knowledge and expertise' of the research participants (Sarantakos, 2005: 164).

Luker (2008: 108, emphasis in original) supports the idea of variety in the setting, 'where the variable that you are trying to explain *varies*'. Secondly, she also says that while it is not possible to statistically prove that the experiences of the participants in a study represent many more people than themselves, we can '*logically show the ways in which they do (or do not) resemble people elsewhere*' (Luker, 2008: 109, emphasis in original). The practical implications of the discussion on sampling indicate that those chosen to participate in this study should be representative of a number of different experiences of precarious employment. There should also be variety based on gender, age, class and ethnicity, to ensure that a range of work experience is represented in the sample. Using Luker's (2008) advice on taking guidance from theory about who should be chosen as research participants I reviewed the research available on precarious employment. There is a very obvious trend in the literature on precarious employment. The groups of workers who are most likely to experience this form of employment are women, young people, immigrants and visible minorities, and low-skilled workers of both sexes (Vosko, 2010; Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011; Collins, 2015b). Workers in certain categories of employment are more likely to be vulnerable to precarious employment than others and these include the food industry, cleaning industry, care sector, health and social work, seasonal work in agriculture and tourism industries, services sector, public sector, and retail (Broughton et al, 2010; Collins, 2015b).

It was never my intention to include all categories of employment or all groups of workers in my research. What I sought to do was to hear personal stories from a number of people who were typical of those experiencing precarious employment. From my reading of studies on precarious employment in Ireland (Loftus, 2012; Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015), Canada (Bujold and Fournier, 2008), New Zealand (Lamm and Hanniff, 2005) and Australia (Pocock et al, 2004; McGann et al, 2012; Burrows, 2013) there were few differences in the experiences of workers from the different sectors. The fundamental features of precarious employment are universal across these studies - uncertain working lives and uncertain income.

Participants in my study

In an ad hoc manner (Mishler, 1999) I used purposive sampling with an element of snowballing (Sarantakos, 2005). I was able to interview thirteen people in my study, within the confines of the time available to me. Eight of the participants I approached directly and the remaining five were as a result of snowballing. In Table 4.1 below I give some general details of the thirteen interviewees. Following Table 4.1 I provide a summary of the personal details of each participant.

I carried out eleven individual interviews with eight women and three men and one interview with a male and female couple. At the time I interviewed the participants (between June 2013 and September 2014) their ages ranged from 18 years to 48 years. All but two of the interviewees had children, the two youngest (an 18 year old male and 25 year old female) did not. These two participants were single (although in relationships), four were lone parents, and the remainder were married or in cohabiting relationships. Six of the participants worked in retail, three in care work, one in construction, one in education, one in light engineering and one in community work. All but one were white Irish; the non-Irish national was male and from Eastern Europe. All had completed a Leaving Certificate or equivalent, two had FETAC qualifications, one had two modules to complete in her honours degree, two more held honours degrees and two had M.A. degrees (one of whom was studying for a doctorate).

As can be observed in the previous paragraph the backgrounds and experiences of the workers are diverse. Yet, in this thesis I present the stories of the precarious workers in an undifferentiated way, treating all workers as if their experiences were the same. Only occasionally have I acknowledged the stratification that exists within the world of employment where certain categories of workers, such as women, immigrants and young workers are more likely to be found within the ranks of precarious workers. There is a wide-ranging literature dedicated to precarious employment and each of these categories of workers: gender (Fudge and Owens, 2006; Vosko et al, 2009; Good Gringrich, 2010; Vosko, 2010; Worth, 2015), migrant workers (McDowell et al, 2009; Anderson, 2010; Lewis et al, 2015; Migrants Rights Centre Ireland, 2015; Schierup et al, 2015) and young workers (MacDonald, 2009; Burrows, 2013; Hardgrove et al, 2015).

Within the group of 13 precarious workers I interviewed, nine were women and four were men, one was a male immigrant (Lukas) and two were young workers (Larry, 18 years and Sophie, 25 years). I did not set out to explore precarious employment on the basis of participants' status as women, migrant and young people, but sought to explore more generally the experiences of precarious workers and the intersection of those experiences with policies of social inclusion. However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of these stratifications as they play an important role in labour market dualisms (Murphy, forthcoming).

In this study the differences between the women and men in their experiences of precarious employment reflected the wider gendered features of employment relations in Ireland, including their unpaid caring role and the lack of adequate childcare provision (Murphy and Loftus, 2015). All of the women with younger children (Valerie, Ruth, Rita and Grace) spoke of arranging their working hours to fulfil both their caring roles and their paid employment. Even mothers with children in secondary school (Marian, Kate and Amy) raised the issue of organising work hours around school hours or making alternative care arrangements on an ad hoc basis. Marian, Kate and Amy referred to changes in reduced payments and activation policy for lone parents and of these three, Marian was most concerned

about reductions in payments to women with younger children. All of the women in the study worked in retail, education or care work reflecting employment segregation along gender lines (Collins, 2015a), while one of the men worked in construction, one worked in retail and one in care work. The fourth, Lukas, was unemployed at the time of the interview but had been working in light engineering.

Collins (2015a) shows that women in the labour force in Ireland were most likely to be on the minimum wage, the majority of whom are in their 20s and 30s. In this study there was no significant difference in the highest levels of income available to women and men although there was a greater dispersion of wages among the nine women going from the minimum wage to €15 per hour, with four women earning above €12 an hour. Two of the men also earned €12 per hour and Larry earned the minimum wage. In relation to primary/secondary earning capacity of the workers four of the female workers were lone parents, one was single and four of the women were in marital or cohabitation relationships. In three of these four relationships the women were secondary income earners while one of the three men (Lukas, who was unemployed) in married or cohabiting relationships was a secondary income earner.

There was no discernible difference in treatment by employers of the workers on grounds of gender or immigrant status as the narratives of all of the workers were consistently similar in how they reported their working lives. Lukas never raised his status as an immigrant as a particular barrier in his working life in his interview. Larry felt aggrieved and discriminated against as a young worker, for both his wage from work and his welfare payment from the DSP were below the norm for adult workers and adult claimants. Although Larry was legally an adult as he was 18 years old when interviewed, the rate of job seekers allowance is lower for young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years. The legal minimum wage rate also allows for sub-minimum rate payments to young workers for the first two years after they turn 18 years. Sophie, the second young person in the study, had reached 25 years of age so she was entitled to full minimum wage and full welfare payment (but means-tested). Their circumstances were different, but both Sophie and Larry were faced with challenges which the other workers did not encounter because of the structures of employment regulation and welfare provision that are specifically aimed at young people with the consequence of hampering their transition into adulthood (Hardgrove et al, 2015).

Table 4.1 Research participants (presented in order of my interviews with them)

Name	Gender	Age	Work	Civil status	Children
Michael	M	47	construction	married	three adult children
Marian	F	36	retail	lone parent	one teenager
Larry	M	18	retail	single	none
Sophie	F	25	retail	single	none
Ruth	F	34	community work	lone parent	three children, one teen and two younger
Kate	F	48	retail	lone parent	two teenagers
Lukas	M	37	light engineering	married	three younger children
Shelley	F	37	social care	cohabiting	four children, teens and younger
Amy	F	32	retail	lone parent	one teenager
Rita	F	47	social care	married	three children, adult, teen and younger
Neil*	M	42	social care	cohabiting	one young child
Grace*	F	36	education	cohabiting	one young child
Valerie	F	31	retail	married	one young child

*Interviewed together

Michael

Michael was a weekly indoor football acquaintance of mine for many years. I became interested in his story of work because he would often share with his fellow “footballers” his views on work and related matters, such as FÁS training programmes, in the dressing room before and after games. His stories were often funny and very insightful. Michael (47 years old) is married with three grown up children, a daughter (who has an MA) and two sons (at third level college). He possesses a certificate in mechanical engineering. He has worked since he left school and has a range of work experiences including in mechanical engineering for almost 15 years and in building supplies for 12 years. In the two years leading up to our interview he worked as a labourer through a construction employment agency, although his work is intermittent based as he awaits a call from the agency on a day-to-day basis. His income derives from a combination of his paid employment and welfare payments. Michael is a member of a trade union although he is not convinced of the benefits of this membership. Michael lives in a private house in a rural area.

Marian

Marian is a distant relative of mine who I had met very occasionally prior to the interview. It was through other family members I learned of her work circumstances. Marian was very honest and to the point about her views on her working life. When I interviewed Marian she was a 36 year old lone parent with a 13 year old son. She completed her Leaving Certificate and subsequently took a

number of courses including one as an auxiliary nurse in the UK. She worked in care work for four years, then as a hospital housekeeper and in catering for five years. She has worked for the last six years as a sales assistant in retail, at a service station. Marian's income comes from a combination of her paid part-time employment and the state's Family Income Supplement (FIS) and One-Parent Family Payment (OFP). She is not a member of a trade union. Marian and her son live in local authority accommodation in a medium-sized urban area.

Larry

Larry was an 18-year old single man who exuded great self-belief and had plans for the future. He radiated energy and hope; he was comfortable with himself and those around him. In many ways he was a role model; he was a member of the local GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) club, volunteered at a community project and was a member of a snooker club. Larry successfully completed his Applied Leaving Certificate and then went on to complete a FETAC Level 5 course in Health and Social Care. His aim is to go to college and eventually to work with young people. Larry is unusual in that soon after he turned 18 years he moved out of the local authority home where he had lived with his mother. At the time of interview he lived in a private rented house in a medium-sized urban area, with subsidised rent due to his low income. This was Larry's first experience of paid employment, even though as we shall learn in a later chapter this work was irregular and not what Larry expected. His wages are supplemented by jobs seekers allowance. Larry was not sure if he was a member of a trade union.

Sophie

Sophie (25 years old) was a volunteer at the community project where I too volunteered. She always appeared comfortable and relaxed at the project. She was single and lived with her parents on a local authority housing estate in a medium-sized urban area. She completed her Leaving Certificate and has an honours degree in legal studies. Sophie began summer work while at school and when she finished school she got a job in a local shop where she worked for a year before taking up work in her current place of employment, a grocery outlet which is part of an international franchise chain. She has been an assistant in this store for seven years working in both a full and part-time capacity. Sophie had a plan and was very determined to achieve her employment ambition to become a legal secretary, even if that meant emigrating. Sophie's income consists of her wages from her part-time job and welfare. She is not a member of a trade union.

Ruth

Ruth was a 34 year old mother of three children, two boys and a girl, all of whom were at school. During the interview I learned her relationship with her partner had

recently ended and she was now a lone parent. She had completed her Junior Certificate. Ruth had begun a certificate course in youth work but did not complete it because of her caring responsibilities for her children. I knew Ruth through the community project I volunteered in; she was a member of staff at the project, a friendly presence who got on well with everyone. Ruth's work experience has been mostly part-time and she has worked as a waitress, in kitchens, in a factory work and in a supermarket. Throughout the time I volunteered at the project the work situations of the staff and even the project itself was precarious. As a result of the uncertainty she worked two jobs for a period of time, the second in a kitchen preparing food. Ruth's income derived from her paid work at the project and OFP. Ruth was not a member of a trade union. She lived in a local authority house with her children in a medium-sized urban area.

Kate

Kate was a soft-spoken and warm 48 year old mother of two teenage girls who were at school. She was a lone parent, separated for some years from her husband. She had completed her Leaving Certificate and before she got married worked in a number of different jobs until her children were born. Kate has been working in a family run, small grocery store (corner shop) for almost eight years. In the past she has lived and worked in Dublin as well as abroad for nearly 20 years. Her work experiences included jobs in a coffee shop, in shipping, as an au pair, and in media services work. At the time of the interview Kate was on a back to education course which she seemed to greatly enjoy. She lived in a local authority house with her two daughters in a medium-sized urban area. Her income came from a combination of paid employment and OFP. She was not a member of a trade union.

Lukas

Lukas (37) from Eastern Europe was married to a woman also from Eastern Europe and they had three young children, two boys and a girl. When Lukas first came to Ireland he worked in a couple of different places on jobs which were short term before getting work which lasted six and a half years. During this period Lukas had full-time secure employment as a welder in the South East but the onset of the recession changed that and when he lost this job his work life became precarious with extended periods of unemployment. When he agreed to do the interview Lukas had been offered some work in fixing agricultural machinery which was very uncertain so that by the time we actually met he no longer had that job and was unemployed again. Lukas was a determined man who demanded high standards of himself at work. Lukas has achieved the equivalent of the Leaving Certificate in his own country and since becoming unemployed has undertaken a number of short FÁS courses in welding, safe pass and thermal insulation. When I interviewed him Lukas was receiving jobs seekers allowance. He was not a member of a trade union. He lived in private rented accommodation with his wife and children in a medium-sized urban area.

Shelley

Shelley had three jobs; she worked as a care assistant, in a pub and she cleaned a house once a fortnight. Her cleaning and pub jobs were only referred to in passing as Shelley saw herself primarily as a care assistant. In the past Shelley had a number of clients whose houses she cleaned before the recession struck. She had worked as care assistant in a nursing home for some years before the nursing home closed. Her care assistant work was with a multinational franchise chain and she had no contract hours with this agency. Shelley was eloquent, insightful and clear in the presentation of her views. When I interviewed her Shelley was aged 37 years, she had four children between the ages of 10 and 17 years who lived with her and her partner. She had been a lone parent in the past. She lived in a rural area in the South-East of Ireland and her paid work was located within that same rural area, which required her to own a car and to travel. She completed her Leaving Certificate and a FETAC Level 5 programme in Health Care Support, the qualification needed to work as a care assistant. She said she would love to return to college and complete a degree in social care but could not due to the dual problems of a lack of money and time. Shelley's income came from her paid employment and FIS. She was not a member of a trade union.

Amy

Amy lives and works in a large urban area in the South-East of Ireland. I had known Amy, a former student of mine, for some years before I interviewed her for this study. It was during her time as a postgraduate student that I became familiar with snippets of Amy's story as she occasionally shared some of her experiences in break-time conversation. Amy is a bright, hardworking woman with a masters degree. When I interviewed her she was a 32 year-old lone parent with a 15 year old son at school. Amy has worked since she was 16 years of age (coincidentally she began her working career at 16 with her current employer stacking shelves on weekends leading up to Christmas); even when she had her son and attended college she continued working through it all. She is working for her current employer for six years. Before taking up this employment she worked with a multinational corporation at weekends and in an architect's office during the week. After her Leaving Certificate she did construction studies. Amy wishes to work in social care but is finding it very difficult to break into that field of work. She is not a member of a trade union. Amy's income comes from her paid employment and her OFP. Amy lives with her son in local authority housing.

Rita

Rita was a most welcoming, open and engaging interviewee. Rita was 47 years old and married with three children when I met her. She had a daughter in college and two boys who were at school. Rita has her Leaving Certificate and a Level 5 FETAC qualification in Health Care Support. For much of her adult life Rita did not engage

in paid work outside of the home but latterly has worked caring for children and she worked in a nursing home until six months before I interviewed her when the nursing home closed down. She had two jobs working as a carer in the community for two different agencies, one a locally based not-for-profit organisation and the other a multi-national franchise chain, but she had no-contract hours with the agencies. Rita's income came from her two jobs and also claims jobseekers benefit for the hours she is not in paid work. She is not a member of a trade union. Rita lived with her family in a detached house in a rural area and her work, which was in the same geographical area required her to own a car.

Grace

Grace works in the same urban area in which she lives as a part-time child care worker in a community (not-for-profit) pre-school. She worked in this job since she completed a relevant degree in 2010, four years prior to my interview with her and her partner. Grace is a former mature student of mine. I taught Grace for a short time in her final year of her degree and she was an able student. Grace was open and honest in the information she shared with me about her life and her live with Neil (see next participant). Grace and Neil had a little boy who was 18 months at the time of our interview. Grace, who was 36 years old, had trained and worked as a massage, reflexology and beauty therapist. Grace was not a member of a trade union. Grace's income derived from her paid employment and a disability benefit. The couple lived with their son in a local authority house in a medium-sized urban centre.

Neil

Neil had worked for three and a half years in a not-for-profit social care organisation in the region. At the time of our interview he was working at weekends. Neil has undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and at the time of the interview he was also studying for a further postgraduate degree. In similar circumstances to Amy, Neil was a former student of mine and I got to hear of his precarious work through informal conversation with him. I found Neil a keen and able student when in college. Neil who was 42 years old had previously worked as a welder and fabricator. Neil's income came from his paid employment and an educational scholarship. He was not a member of a trade union.

Valerie

Valerie was a 31 year old retail assistant for a large multinational supermarket chain. I knew Valerie as a former student but did not realise that I had taught her until I met her for interview. She was introduced to the study by Amy. She lived with her partner and three year old daughter in a rural part of the South-East but worked in an urban centre. The birth of Valerie's child came at the end of her final year in

college and she did not finish her degree; she had two modules outstanding. My memory of Valerie as a student was someone who was quiet in class, but in my interview with her she showed a very different side to her personality, confident and knowledgeable. Valerie and her partner were home owners with a mortgage. Her income came from her work with the retail organisation for which she worked. Valerie was a member of a trade union.

Recruiting the participants

In different contexts I had spent some time over a number of years with ten of the interviewees in advance of asking them to take part in the study. It was through these contacts that I had some advance knowledge of the employment circumstances of eight of the eventual participants, enough to know that their working lives were precarious. Three of the interviewees I got to know over a period of two years as a volunteer in a local community project. The interviewee Ruth worked for the project and Larry and Sophie were volunteers and were often present at the times I volunteered there. I directly approached each of them at the project to ask them to participate in my study.

I had become aware that Neil, a former student of mine, worked in an insecure job and in a chance meeting I asked him to participate in my research. Likewise, I asked Amy, another former student whose work story I had some knowledge of, to take part in my study. She had completed her postgraduate degree when she met with me to discuss career options and at that meeting I asked her to participate in my research. In total I interviewed four former students; the third, Grace, was Neil's partner and she was asked by Neil to take part in the study. I did not know that Neil was in a relationship with Grace when I met them for the interview; I was thrown momentarily when I realised this as I had not spoken to Grace prior to the meeting. The fourth was Valerie, a friend of Amy's. Amy approached her about participating in my research but I was not aware until I met Valerie that she too was a former student of mine. Amy asked Valerie to take part in the study and she agreed and gave Amy her phone details to pass on to me. I spoke to Valerie by phone about the research and organised a meeting but she did not raise the fact at that point that I had taught her.

Marian I knew as a distant relative who I had occasionally met over the years in the home of another relative and was thus vaguely aware of her work circumstances. I asked this relative to approach Marian to ask her if she would be willing to take part in the study. Marian agreed and permitted my relative to pass on her phone number to me. I then spoke to Marian about the research and she agreed to be interviewed by me. Michael I had known socially for some years, as we met once a week with a group of other older men to play indoor football. It was through conversations with him in the dressing room I began to realise that he had a precarious working life. I asked Michael if he would be willing to take part in my study and he agreed. Lukas I have known for a number of years through my wife's friendship with his wife and I asked him on an occasion when I met him and he agreed. The final three

participants (Kate, Shelley and Rita) I did not know personally in advance of meeting them. Marian introduced me to Kate and another relative of mine with whom I had discussed my PhD study introduced me to Shelley who in turn gave me Rita's name. In each of these cases the same procedure was followed. The three participants were asked through my contacts if they would be willing to take part in my research and on agreeing they gave permission to the contacts to pass on their phone details. I then spoke to each about my project and they in turn agreed to being interviewed by me.

I'm sure that for some the manner in which I selected my 'sample' was unorthodox, unscientific and thus questionable (Mishler, 1999). I would disagree with that assessment but I will address these issues in the section on 'questions of credibility' later in the chapter. Rather than an objective view I took a relational view of my association with the participants in the study which as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 11) argue 'involves a reconceptualization of the status of the researched in the relationship. Researchers acknowledge that their subjects are not bound, static, atemporal, and decontextualized'. Meaningful engagement with participants is crucial to the research task but there are two aspects to this that need some attention – the issue of power within the research relationship and the reflexivity of participants. Ten of the thirteen participants knew me to some extent in advance of my interviews with them. I have already outlined my contacts with them and some were better known to me than others, having spent lesser or greater periods of time in their company and in a number of different contexts. These connections and familiarity with me through relationships already established contributed to an ease in the research relationship which I believe facilitated a more equal relationship. For the three women I did not know in advance there were connections already established through others who could vouch for me. With these women I also took time when meeting them to try and make connections, through family links, geography and work. This attempt at openness on my part accords with Oakley's (1981) demand for personal investment in the interview. I believe that the level of personal comfort reached between the research participants and me led to more complete personal narratives.

The second aspect to facilitate achieving meaningful engagement with participants is related to my (the researcher's) capacity to encourage participant reflexivity. If the researcher truly believes in Freire's (1970) contention about everyone's capacity to reflect on their circumstances then there must be a practical commitment to this. To facilitate participant reflexivity I shared what I thought was important by acknowledging the precarious nature of their employment and the limited response of the state's welfare system to their predicament. Both of these interventions appeared to allow the participants to openly give their views on these different key issues. I believe it gave them comfort that I was on their side, freely acknowledging their position within the employment/welfare nexus, without judging them. The outcome, as will become evident later in the thesis shows the participants to be very insightful on the practical and theoretical dimensions of their own and others' employment and welfare circumstances. I believe that even within the limits of my

one-off interviews Riessman's (2008) observation applies in part, due to my earlier relationship with the majority of the participants. She says

Narrative interviewing is not a set of "techniques" nor is it necessarily "natural". If sensitively practiced, it can offer a way, in many research situations, for investigators to forge dialogic relationships and greater communicative equality. Towards these ends, it is preferable to have repeated conversations rather than the typical one-shot interview, especially when studying biographical experience. Working ethnographically with participants in their settings over time offers the best conditions for storytelling.

(Riessman, 2008: 26)

My interviews with the participants

There was a similar pattern to how I conducted all of the interviews – greeting, preliminary information about the research and how the interview would proceed; the information sheet and consent form (see appendix); the interview; and, the departure. In the first part of the greeting phase I always thanked the interviewee for agreeing to take part in my study. This phase was accompanied by a level of informal conversation to help the interviewee to relax. For example, I began conversations about how it was the first time I had been in the area in which the interviewee lived, or in the case of former students I would comment on how quickly time had passed since they finished their programmes, or in the case of the workers from the community project I'd comment on how busy or quiet it was on that particular day. There was always an effort on my part to try and make a connection with the interviewees and that invariably depended on the particular circumstances of the individuals I interviewed and how well I knew them.

In the second phase I provided the interviewee preliminary information about the research project and how the interview would proceed. This included acknowledging their circumstances of precarious employment, asking for permission to record and setting up the recorder. The third phase was to give the interviewee the information sheet and consent form and to go through these papers with them before asking the interviewee to sign the form, which I also signed. I gave each interviewee a copy of the signed form and a copy of the information sheet. Then there was the interview which I shall address in the next paragraph. Finally, there was the departure, which often took some time as the interviewees often chatted for quite a period after the formal interview had ended. At this stage I always moved onto more informal issues to chat about as part of the ending of the contact, such as the weather or by asking about their children when appropriate or some other matter of interest to the interviewee. This conversation depended on the context of the interview and the individual I was chatting to. I always asked the interviewee if I could contact them again if I needed to talk to them further and all agreed that I could do so. I then thanked them for their time and for sharing both their knowledge and stories about their lives. By way of a thank you I gave each participant €20, although one individual absolutely refused to accept. I thought this gesture was appropriate in recognition of the time the participants gave to me.

My interviews with the workers who participated in my research were unstructured. I began each interview with the same question (Bishop, 2012): Could you please tell me about your job? Some participants ran with this prompt very easily and gave a lot of information in the first couple of minutes of the interview which gave me

scope to ask for clarifications and more details and the stories were developed from there. Some interviewees were more hesitant in their replies and asked if what they were saying was okay and I had to draw them out a bit more with prompts to expand on what they had told me and this led to the expansion of their stories. From the knowledge I had gained in reviewing the literature on precarious employment and guided by Rodgers' (1989) framework there were certain topics that I was particularly interested in from the stories about their jobs. These topics were: control within the work environment; training; what should government do to improve the lives of precarious workers; how they manage their finances; what happened when they had a problem in the workplace, including membership of a trade union; a question on the possibility of stress on their family life and relationships as a result of precarious employment. I did not seek this information in any particular order; I allowed it to emerge from the stories I was being told. The story of each participant had its own unique emphasis and I allowed these particular stories to develop which provided the raw material for a greater depth of analysis in my study.

The interviews were relatively short and focused on the current employment experiences of the workers. Michael's interview was the longest at 76 minutes and Sophie's was shortest at 23 minutes with the overall average at 42 minutes for the 12 interviews (Grace and Neil were interviewed together). I met the interviewees in a range of locations, all of their choosing: five interviews took place in the participants' own homes; I conducted three interviews at the community project building; two interviews were held in my place of work, one was at the interviewee's place of work; and, one interviewee came to my home to be interviewed.

DATA PRODUCTION AND ANALYSIS

May's (2001: 28) claim that '[d]ata are not collected, but produced' brings us to the centre of the debate on the nature of data used in social research. It is common in textbooks on social research to refer to 'data collection' as if it were hanging there waiting to be plucked like fruit from a tree (see for example Denscombe, 2010). Lurking behind May's claim is the question of "objectivity". Facts do not speak for themselves and '[i]f we assume that we can neutrally observe the social world we shall simply reproduce the assumptions and stereotypes of everyday actions and conventions' (May, 2001: 31). Qualitative research is interested in subjective meaning, the way in which people make sense of their world and assign meaning to it (Sarantakos, 2005). This can only be achieved through interpretation. In the case of narrative inquiry this occurs in the first instance through those who narrate their stories. The researcher then adds another layer of interpretation to these individual stories as they (the researcher) try to make sense of the stories of interviewees in a broader social context (Striano, 2012). Notions of objectivity are thus redundant. On objectivity and narrative Hammack (2011: 313) states the following:

Narrativists also reject the twentieth-century concept of "objectivity" in method in favor of an epistemological standpoint that views all knowledge as positioned. In the narrative approach, the investigator does not assume a mechanistic role in the collection and analysis of data but rather an active, critical role that embraces the complexity of the social and psychological and does not seek to reduce them into isolated components.

What of data analysis? In the earlier section, on approaches to narrative inquiry, reference was made to Lieblich et al (1998) and their three domains of narrative studies. The domain that I chose was to investigate my research question using narrative content as I decided from early on that it was the content of the interviews that I was most interested in. This would allow me to present the stories of the participants through an analysis of the content of their narratives in the socio-political contexts of precarious employment and the policy of social inclusion.

All of my interviews were recorded as audio files and then I transcribed them because like Bishop (2012) I thought it important for me to do this in order to allow me to spend time listening carefully to the stories and to hear them for a second time. I sought to follow Riessman's (2008: 53) 'thematic analysis' and 'thematic narrative' by trying to understand the intact stories of the interviewees both as whole narratives, cases in themselves, but also as important contributors to a collective storyline which I would narrate (Elliott, 2005). This work took a long-time to complete as time and again I read through and parsed the narratives, took copious notes and highlighted through colour-coding emerging themes and ideas within and across the transcripts. This I did in an attempt to ensure coherent and substantial storylines to do justice to the workers' stories of precarious employment and at the same time allow for the development of theory from this collective case.

The traditional analytical approach in qualitative research has been to codify segments from interviews, either manually or by using software and then reconstruct them into themes. These themes are then presented in a pre-determined framework (McCormack, 2004). Many narrative scholars reject this approach and seek an alternative which eschews the "scientific" approach that replicates quantitative methodology in narrative research (Mishler, 1986, 1999; Freeman, 2004; McCormack, 2004; Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008 and 2011; Pederson, 2013). Instead of using a reductionist approach to the narratives of research participants these authors desire to present narrators' stories as completely intact as possible. According to Pederson (2013: 308) '[t]he main purpose of narrative thematic analysis is to explore how the narrative hangs together as a whole, while recognizing how the narrative is situated within a specific context, time, setting, and for a particular audience'. This contrasts to the traditional analytical approach of the research interview, dismembered into coded segments and in the process denying its relationship to time, context and audience (McCormack, 2004) and even fracturing it to such an extent that the presented material may be left devoid of its original meaning (Freeman, 2004).

Riessman (2008: 53) refers to 'thematic analysis' and 'thematic narrative' in her account of narrative method. She says that 'narrative scholars keep a story "intact" by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases' (Riessman, 2008: 53). She also makes the point that all narrative inquiry is guided by prior theory while at the same time researchers seek new theoretical insights from the data. Most importantly for Riessman (2008) researchers present story sequences rather than thematic coded segments. A further feature of narrative

analysis is the recognition that narratives are co-produced with both narrator and investigator party to the outcome of the joint production of a story; the reader then co-participates with the production to present another layer of interpretation (Gunn, 2008). Thematic segmentation of the narrative denies the existence of these intersubjective relationships in the text, by usually excluding the in-text voice of the researcher as a co-creator of the narrative. The researcher's role is then diminished and the narrative is at a loss as a result. The reader is also short-changed in such a transaction as they cannot determine the depth of the narrator's story or the extent of the involvement of the researcher. In my efforts to adhere to the principles of narrative as outlined by Gunn (2008), Riessman (2008) and Pederson (2013), I have presented the stories of the workers in this study as intact as possible by using large tracts from interviews with the participants, tracts which also include my contributions to the narrative text.

'We need to realise that within all research there are *two* narratives that contribute to the telling of a sociological story — the ontological and the epistemological', (Harling Stalker, 2009: 222, emphasis in original). In my approach to data analysis I hope to avoid the problems outlined in the previous paragraph by using dual narratives as suggested by Harling Stalker. Elliott (2005) presents this binary approach by referring to Carr's (1997 cited in Elliott, 2005: 12) 'first-order narratives' and 'second-order narratives'. These are classified by Somers and Gibson (1994, cited in Elliott, 2005: 12) as 'ontological narratives' and 'representational narratives'. I used the terms first-order narratives and second-order narratives in my research to denote the distinctions which are at the heart of the dualism. The first-order narratives are ontological narratives and refer to the real-life stories as told by the narrators. The second-order narratives are epistemological or representational narratives. In other words they reflect the researcher's interpretation and construction of stories to assist in the sense-making of the social world of the first-order narrators (Elliott, 2005; Harling Stalker, 2009). It is through these second-order or epistemological narratives that 'we as researchers can start to articulate the temporal, spatial, social, cultural, political and economic connections between individuals' telling of their experiences and the various social structures that are incorporated into everyday life' (Harling Stalker, 2009: 224).

I used Rodgers' (1989) theoretical framework on precarious employment as the basis for the analysis of my data through first and second order narratives (Elliott, 2005). My approach to first-order narratives was to use the stories from four interviews as ontological exemplars, outlined in the next chapter, based on Rodgers' (1989) key themes from his framework – the temporal, the organisational, the social and the financial dimensions of precarious employment. I did not plan in advance whose stories would be used for these exemplars. This became apparent after the stories of all the interviewees were told. Each of these four stories developed its own focus and emphasis which coincided to a large extent with the individual themes of Rodgers' (1989) work. As shall be recounted in some detail in the next chapter Shelley's story had at its core the idea of time; Amy's focused on organisation; Larry's story recounted the financial implications of precarious

employment; and, Neil and Grace informed us of the social dimensions of this form of work. With this approach I was able to keep the narrative storylines of these cases very much intact as Riessmann (2008) suggests. This approach allowed me to avoid the segmentation of their stories into thematic events and contained my contribution to the co-construction of the stories by including my interactions with the interviewees. By using second-order narratives my epistemological contribution can be seen as it enabled me to theorise from the stories of the collective case – I have already referred to identity and precarious work and the master narrative of work – which were informed by the collective storyline. This methodological approach underlines the co-production of knowledge and allows for transparency in the presentation of the narrative which is essential for ethics and questions of credibility.

ETHICS

Ethics are the soul of research and transcend all of its dimensions, applied and theoretical, methodology and epistemology (Ryen, 2011). For some researchers ethics are treated as a one-off, a barrier to be overcome before one engages in research. From this perspective ethics are about getting through the ethics committee of one's institution. I successfully went through that process by getting the relevant ethical clearance from Maynooth University. All of the formalities are met by completing the ethics process: completed application form, draft questionnaires or interview topic guidelines, draft consent forms, draft information leaflets, followed by getting the all-important letter of approval. In this approach there are a number of standard text-book requirements and commitments to be observed and included in the ethics application. For instance, Sarantakos (2005) highlights privacy, free and informed consent along with other matters in the researcher-participant relationship. These include not giving false impressions to the participants; being clear from the outset about the research and possible consequences for the participants; being concerned for the welfare of the participants and doing them no harm; facilitating the participants' right to anonymity and confidentiality (Sarantakos, 2005). Ethics is all of this but it is also much more (Smythe and Murray, 2000; Josselson, 2007).

An ethical commitment in a research project using narrative goes beyond the procedural and demands an ongoing reflexive engagement with the core features of ethics. Authors such as Smythe and Murray (2000), Elliott (2005), Josselson (2007) and Ryen (2011) delve into what Ryen (2011: 420) calls 'our moral responsibility in complex realities'. Issues such as the impact of the interview itself, consent, confidentiality, deception, the no harm principle and anonymity are complex matters which require ongoing negotiation and reflection to ensure a meaningful commitment to the best interests of the research participant. In this study the procedural aspect of ethical approval was obtained without difficulty but there were many moments of uncertainty as I journeyed through the interviews. Examples of uncertainty arose through the process of engaging with the participants, such as my connections to former students, acquaintances, a distant relative, someone who

works for a relative and people that I got to know through the community project. The ethical uncertainty arises specifically in relation to consent to participate in the research for people that I know. I had to be convinced that the participants were giving their consent freely given the proximity of my relationships to many of them. In the case of former students I had no obvious power to wield over them as my role as faculty had ended once they completed their degrees. The fact that two former students of mine asked two other former students to take part in my study suggests that they were favourably disposed towards participating. With regard to my distant relative, I knew enough about her to know that she would have said no if she did not want to take part. She also recommended a friend of hers to take part, a sign to me that she was happy to be involved. The three participants from the community project got to know me over a number of years and I was only a volunteer and not in any position of authority in my relationship with them. Michael and Lukas were acquaintances of mine who knew and trusted me well enough to agree to be interviewed for the project. The woman who worked for my relative, it could be argued might have felt obliged to meet me because she needed her one day's work a fortnight, but she was happy to recommend me to a friend of hers who also participated in the study. This is hardly the behaviour of people who did not want to give consent.

I explained the nature of consent to all participants and informed them that they could withdraw at any time and decline to answer any questions they did not wish to answer. Not one of the interviewees took up either of these options. Informed consent is very important and as a researcher I must make every effort to ensure that research participants are aware of this aspect of the research process and that they have rights in this regard. Furthermore, a feature of this study was the individual agency shown by this group of people. Therefore, I do not believe that if any of the participants did not wish to take part in my study they would have gone ahead. And I am even more certain that having been interviewed, they would not have recommended participation by their friends if they thought I could not be trusted.

I was aware that some participants who were former students could possibly be identified through their connection to me. One of the ways I tried to address these issues was to make available to two of the participants the transcripts of their stories. Secondly I gave them a copy of the first draft of my completed thesis to get their views on what I had written about their stories and also to allow them to make comment on issues of privacy and confidentiality. Time did not allow me to go through this process with all 13 of the workers but the feedback received from the two participants was used as a template to improve issues of privacy and confidentiality for all. Neither of the two participants reported any problems with the interpretation of their stories and stated that they could personally identify with the narrative of my thesis. There was also a risk to the three people from the community project of being identified, but that project closed not long after I interviewed them. The time lapse since those interviews took place and the closing of the project has made it very unlikely that the participants would be recognised in these pages.

A major concern for narrative research is the issue of ownership of the story given to the researcher (Josselson, 2007; Gready, 2013). McCormack (2004: 234) states that this is an ethical struggle and she asks '[w]hose story do we construct?' This is where issues of deception, trust and honesty come into play. It requires of me to be upfront about the fact that although I present the stories of the research participants, it is my interpretation of their stories that becomes the final story ("my narrative" – see Josselson, 2007; Chase, 2011). My interpretation of these stories must be carried out sensitively as there is a moral issue at stake in how I portray the participants in my research (Smythe and Murray, 2000; McCormack, 2004) and this is not an uncomplicated task (Josselson, 2007).

QUESTIONS OF CREDIBILITY

The standard textbook positions on the main elements of credibility – reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability – are unanimous in their presentation of quantitative research methodology as superior to qualitative methodology, although not without some reservations (Sarantakos, 2005; Denscombe, 2010). Of course qualitative methodology and by extension narrative inquiry should be open to exacting scrutiny and narratives should not be uncritically celebrated as self-evident (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006). But qualitative methodology and within that paradigm, narrative inquiry, make different claims for achieving their research outcomes. On reliability and validity Elliott (2005) questions the appropriateness of these criteria and in particular the concept of "measuring" for evaluating narrative research. However, Elliott (2005: 22) says that 'even if the focus is shifted from measurement to description, the researcher must still confront the question of whether the accounts produced in a qualitative interview study are "accurate" or "valid" representations of reality'. She also says that qualitative researchers must address the issues of 'stability, trustworthiness, and scope of their findings' arising from their research, which tends to be 'a small, relatively homogenous sample of individuals living in a specific geographic area' (Elliott, 2005: 22). Mishler (1986: 109) contributes to this debate by querying (and then thoroughly dissecting) the assumption that 'issues of reliability, validity and replicability have been effectively resolved' in quantitative research. He also questions the reverse assumption implied by the positivists that those engaged in other forms of research are 'too easily satisfied with imprecise methods, unrepeatably analyses, and vague and ungrounded inferences' (Mishler, 1986: 109-110). At the centre of these assumptions is the belief that there is 'one "true" interpretation of an array of data and that this interpretation may be determined by standard, universally applicable technical procedures' (Mishler, 1986: 110).

The concept of "truth" cuts to the core of this debate. Scholars who work with personal narratives reject the idea of objectivity (as referred to earlier). In similar vein they do not see these narratives representing some universal "truth" but rather as articulating "truths" (Mishler, 1986; Josselson, 2007; Gready, 2013;). Sandelowski (1991: 165, emphasis in original) observes that the preoccupations of the storyteller and the researcher in narrative are 'not how to know truth, but rather

how experience is endowed with *meaning*'. As our identities develop, shift and change over time the meaning we give to particular events in our lives also change, so our "truth" is thus malleable and subject to the vicissitudes brought about over time, shifting memory and changed circumstances (Andrews et al, 2004).

Furthermore, the narrative is a socially situated inter-active performance produced for a specific audience at a given time and in its telling is a joint production of the storyteller and researcher (Chase, 2011). The acknowledgement of these complicating factors in the production of narratives challenges the traditional approach to addressing issues of research credibility. Narrative stories are interpretations and re-interpretations of our lives and 'can be reasonably expected to change from telling to telling, making the idea of empirically validating them for consistency or stability completely alien to the concept of narrative truth' (Sandelowski, 1991: 165).

Narrative truth is different because the interview model, based as it is on inter-active performance, produces knowledge through reflexivity (Elliott, 2005). It is this capacity to give meaning to personal circumstances through reflexivity that provides one facet of credibility to the personal story in narrative research. The use of substantial excerpts of interviews to demonstrate the capacity of the research participant for reflection provides the tool for credibility within each interview. This approach allows for the audience beyond the narrator and researcher to make an assessment of the interpretations of the personal stories. As Mishler (1986: 112) puts it: '[i]t has become clear that the critical issue is not the determination of one singular and absolute "truth" but the assessment of the relative plausibility of an interpretation when compared with other specific and potentially plausible alternative interpretations'.

Beyond the single interview credibility is enhanced through coherence between the stories of different research participants. This consistency of the "collective" voice of the research participants demonstrates the broader social, political and economic dimensions of their narratives which go beyond personal concerns (Ewick and Silbey, 1995). This coherence and interaction between the narratives counters Atkinson's (1997) claim that much of narrative analysis fails to move beyond the unattached personal story. He says that 'narratives seem to float in a social vacuum. The voices echo in an otherwise empty world. There is an extraordinary absence of social context, social action and social interaction' (Atkinson, 1997: 339).

The third way in which I provide credibility for my research is through locating the narratives of the research participants in the international scientific literature on precarious employment. It will be shown in later chapters that the personal stories of the research participants not only concur with the general thrust of the international research on precarious employment, they also add to it. This is of significance as this factor helps to make wider connections between the particularity of the personal stories of individuals within a broader frame (Chase, 2011). Elliott (2005: 28) makes the important point that even from a small number

of cases the cultural framework within which individuals give meaning to their lives 'may produce evidence that is considered to provide an understanding of the intersubjective meanings shared by the whole of a community'.

CONCLUSION

The puzzle of this thesis is to determine if the Irish state through its employment and social inclusion policies contributes to the precariousness of workers. The case-study approach which I have chosen using narrative inquiry as my methodology puts the stories of the participants centre stage. In the following four chapters I will weave together empirical evidence and epistemological understanding to present a narrative of precarious employment of 13 workers in the South-East of Ireland.

CHAPTER 5

Contextualising precarious employment through first order narratives

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I begin the task of presenting the stories of the thirteen women and men who took part in this research project. Through this chapter and in the next I will present a picture of a diverse group of women and men who have a desire to enjoy rewarding working lives to support them and their families. Using the concept of 'first order' narratives (Elliott, 2005) described earlier in the methodology chapter I will outline details of the expectations, fears, insights and resilience of the people interviewed. In this chapter of first order narratives I will introduce the reader to Shelley, Amy, Larry and the couple Neil and Grace. I will use their stories to present cohesive storylines of particular aspects of precarious employment as described by Rodgers (1989, see Chapter 2). These four dimensions include the *temporal* dimension of precarious work through Shelley's story, the *organisational* dimension through Amy's story, the *social* dimension through the joint story of Neil and Grace and the *economic* dimension through Larry's story. Examples of these four dimensions can be found in the stories of all 13 participants in the study. The experiences of the exemplars shared here traverse the full range of Rodgers' dimensions of precarious employment. First order narratives will be used to give cohesion to the story of precariousness with the intention of placing the experiences of employment in the mainstream of the precarious literature (Harling Stalker, 2006). In Chapter 6 I will use second-order narratives to extend our knowledge and understanding of the lives of these women and men (as well as the other participants) as we explore their experience of the relationship between precarious employment and social inclusion.

The five participants in this chapter used their interview to focus on the aspects of their experience of work which were of most concern to them. In the remainder of the chapter Shelley, Amy, Larry and Neil and Grace jointly, narrate their concerns discussing four features of precarious employment: the temporal, organisation, economic and social dimensions.

SHELLEY'S STORY - TEMPORALITY

Introduction

The issue of time is the focus of the narrative in my interview with Shelley. A number of relevant themes arise in her story such as irregular working hours and the uncertainty about the 'continuing availability' (Rodgers, 1989: 3) of her work. Other related themes also arise in Shelley's account which are not referred to in Rodgers' explanation of precarious employment but which are consequences of this

employment relationship (Pocock et al, 2004). These themes include managing time (Glucksmann, 2005) and insecurity of income (Loftus, 2012; McGann et al, 2012) due to the uncertainty of available working hours for Shelley.

Irregular working hours

Rodgers (1989) refers to temporality as the first of his four features of precarious employment. The temporal element of precarious employment according to Rodgers denotes paid work with a short time horizon and a high risk of job loss. This feature of precarious employment applies to irregular work, the type of work Shelley is engaged in, where 'there is uncertainty as to its continuing availability' (Rodgers, 1989: 3). There is no doubt but that Shelley's work is irregular as the following excerpt from my interview with her demonstrates. It was very early in the interview and Shelley had just given me a general outline of what her work entailed. This was then followed by my triple question and her reply.

J: And how often do you get this work, what kind of shifts do you work or how regular are they?

S: Eh, ahm, hard to know really. At the moment I have two regular clients, one is a, would be a woman who has spinal injuries so she is long-term care and she is a young woman so I would view her as long term. But a lot of the clients I would get would be elderly clients or palliative care, so you never know from week to week what's going to happen. I could be expected to go to a client tomorrow and I could get a phone call in the morning to say that client is in hospital. So therefore I don't have to go, therefore I don't get paid and I don't know when that person is coming back, if that person is comin' back. So it's hard to, to judge it especially with the elderly or with palliative care. You could work for one week, you could be workin' for three months, you just don't know really.

J: And when you say you could be working for a week or for three months how many hours a week would you get in that week, or, or is there a typical number of hours?

S: Ehm generally no, there's not a typical, everyone varies from person to person depending on again as to what they need.

The uncertainty permeates throughout Shelley's work as her hours can change at any time. Given the circumstances of the people she cares for this is a constant feature of her work. Even where a client may be quite able and their health condition is relatively stable that person may decide to take a break away from their home and this has implications for Shelley's hours. Referring to one of her clients Shelley said

She's quite, apart from being in a wheelchair, she is quite able. She has gone off on holidays and things like that so that, you know, obviously then if she's away there's no work or whatever. She's not a case that would go into hospital regularly or anything you know. For the majority of the time she is there but if she decides she wants, if she wanted to go to Spain for a month or go to Cavan for a month she can do it and that would be no work.

(Shelley)

Shelley works for a home care agency franchise of a multi-national corporation; she had been with this company six months when I interviewed her. She told me that she likes the work and her employers are supportive if there are difficulties with clients. But she does not like the uncertainty of the work, a recurring theme in her interview.

S: I like the work. I just don't like the uncertainty but I would rather know how much work I have and how much money I have every week, every month or whatever, but you can only give a rough guess that's providin' everything stays as it is and everything stays right, ye know. God forbid anything could happen tomorrow and my work could be halved.

J: And that, and that just literally changes over night?

S: Literally could change overnight and there's no guarantee that I could get a new client. I could be waitin' two three months, God knows how long I could be waiting before I would get a new client. There's not a, I wouldn't be fitted in somewhere else. I'd have to wait for a new client to come in.

Later in the interview Shelley gave an example of a friend of hers where this situation arose and she found herself without work for a number of months.

Like I know one friend of mine, she started workin' before me and she was workin' for maybe six months or whatever and then the client died and she didn't work a day for three months [J: right] you know, that [J: yeah] can happen.

(Shelley)

The nature of Shelley's work leads to short-time horizons, accompanied by constant uncertainty.

One of them I've been workin' for six months as I said I count her as being long term. The other man is recent actually. I've only been workin' with him two weeks, ahm. It is viewed as in, as long-term from my employer's point of view, but how long-term can you be when you're in, when you're in your mid-eighties, you know? Anything can happen. Generally these people have a list of medical conditions the length of your arm, and you know it's quite easy for them to end up in hospital or for things to go downhill rapidly.

(Shelley)

Her experience of irregular hours is not only related to the possibility of hours suddenly disappearing in this way. The structure of Shelley's working time is another element of her irregular working hours. In the following exchange Shelley explains how her working week and her working day is structured

J: So you could do an hour for one person in the morning first thing and then you have to travel to someone else and spend another hour with them and then finish for the, for the day or for the evening time and then you [S speaks over]

S: And then go back and do the same again [J: right]. Yeah. Yeah. Yes that'd be fairly typical.

J: Right, and at the moment, say for example, the last week how, how, what, how many jobs or how many people?

- S: I have, I have two clients at the moment. One of them is getting up in the morning putting them back to bed at night and the other is ahm is in the afternoons cookin' for a client, bringing that client shoppin' to make sure that he has adequate food in the house and to just make sure that he eats it. And that's all, he's able to take care of himself otherwise but he's just not able to cook for himself so.
- J: And with the two clients how many hours a week are you, or how many hours per day, per week have you got with, with each of those?
- S: With one client I'd have approximately nine hours a week and possibly more if I worked the weekend. And then the other client is six hours a week but again it could change at the drop of a hat.
- J: And just to be clear the nine hours are divided over how many days?
- S: The nine hours would be divided over four days.
- J: Right okay. So two to three hours?
- S: It's, it's, it's slightly confusing case that one is because it would be two and half hours today and two hours tomorrow [J: Ah right]. Every second day is two hours, every second day is two and a half.
- J: And the other person then is six hours, an hour in the morning an hour in the evening over three days. Is that it?
- S: No it's one and a half hours four days a week.
- J: Right okay thanks. So that, that changes though. It sounds if from what you say that it can [S speaks over].
- S: It can change at the drop of a hat yet, yeah, yeah.

In the interview Shelley said that she works nine hours and six hours respectively with two clients over four days, a total of 15 hours per week. These hours are spread across the morning and evening with one client, a split shift, two visits of one hour each visit for two days and two visits of one hour and one and half hour visits for two days. She then works for her second client in the afternoons, one and a half hours four days a week. But Shelley states on two occasions in the extract that this 'can change at the drop of a hat'.

Managing time

Time management becomes hugely important when one is as busy as Shelley, with three jobs on the go and a family to tend to. These commitments dictate a very well-planned life and require lots of energy and an inner strength to shoulder the time demands of a precarious working life. Time is therefore precious and managing it well is essential. Shelley did not refer to the disadvantage for her of working 15 hours over four days as described above. This is not the best use of Shelley's time as it reduces her availability for other potential work opportunities. However, her commitment to her clients appears to outweigh consideration of her own circumstances. Shelley dislikes not knowing what is going on in the lives of her clients and this can only be achieved through contact with the client, which means regular and frequent time spent with them. She explained:

I don't like to do one day on, one day off because you get out of the loop as to what's happening because generally with these people things can change fairly quickly and if you're not there regularly you can miss out on things that have

happened and you don't know what has changed and things.

(Shelley)

There is a communications system in place to bring staff up to speed on what has happened when they have not been with a person for a time. The communication is through a record book which has to be completed by the various workers who see the client. However, according to Shelley this system is not adequate as there is a lack of time built into her contact with the client to allow for reading this information. She also does not like having to read a document on arrival at the client's home before she can commence her work.

Well, it's just like you know there can be doctor visits or whatever, tablets have changed, things like that can happen. Now we have a book but again you're on limited time so you don't always have the time to go readin' in the book and see what people have written for the last, if you weren't there for four days you don't necessarily have the time to go back readin' four days' worth of notes to find out exactly what's happened. Sometimes you would or if you're only missin' for a day you would have time to but if you're on holidays or if you're sick or if anything like that happened it's hard to find the time before you go in, before you start workin' with the client to just go 'okay I have to read this first'. And go and do that ye know it can be difficult too.

(Shelley)

Shelley reported that the time given to Health Service Executive (HSE) referred clients is qualitatively different from the time given to privately referred clients. The agency Shelley works for provides services to both the HSE and private clients. She finds the time available to get the work done for the HSE clients is much tighter and there is little or no time for her to sit and chat.

If it's HSE required usually it's just basic get the person up, get them dressed, get them washed, cook for them. That's usually it for HSE patients. But you can have private patients they might want somebody just to sit there, just somebody to be there so that could be a longer time whereas I said if it's HSE mainly then it's just the bare basics, there's no extras, there's no sittin' around talkin' to the person or whatever, get in get it done, get out. Or you might have an hour to get somebody up, dressed and washed in the mornin' and then you might have an hour to get them back to bed at night and make sure that they take their medication an, ye know. You could have personal things to do with them at night as well. And usually when you have an hour, it takes you that hour. You're pushin' it to get it done in that hour.

(Shelley)

In our discussion on the different jobs that Shelley works I make a comment about how busy she is and she acknowledged my comment with a 'yes' but also laughed. She is much understated about her ability to manage her daily life and she did not make any fuss about her capacity to manage her time as well as she does.

J: So you spend a lot of time then sounds to me like, kind of juggling work and time and hours.

S: Yes [J: yeah] yeah it is a bit of a balancing act to try and go from one to the other and to have the time and to be able to fit everything all in.

Insecurity of income

Managing time and uncertainty is closely related to another theme referred to by Shelley, the relationship between time worked and the insecurity of her income. Without the hours there is no income. As already referred to in earlier quotes from Shelley if one of her clients goes into hospital, goes on holiday or dies she cannot work and receives no income from her employer. Nor does she receive sick pay. In one quote Shelley confirmed 'I only get paid for the hours that we're actually there, yes'. There is an onus on her to stay at work and to work as often as possible. She takes on extra hours when available to her, such as when another worker is out sick or on holidays. She is not paid for her time travelling between clients' homes.

If you have another client and you can be travellin' which you're not getting paid for. So you might be gone from home for six hours but only workin' for 4 or four and a half and you're only getting paid for that four or four and a half. You're not gettin' paid for all your travel time in between.

(Shelley)

The uncertainty in hours and the consequent impact on her income has its implications for Shelley and her family. When I asked her about the impact of this uncertainty on her and her family, time rears its head again. Everything has to be planned but planning is not easy when there is uncertainty about her hours and her income.

Well I can't say I'm definitely goin' on holidays ye know, in six months' time or whatever because ye know you don't know if I still have that work in six months' time. It's a case of I have four children, so it's a case of I'll never say to them oh we'll, we'll go on holidays now in July or whatever. I just put by, put by whatever and then if it's there in July then I say or whatever. You can't really plan anything major, anything that costs a lot. You can't plan too far down the line because you know you mightn't have the same money next week [laughs].

(Shelley)

The low number of hours in Shelley's care assistant work does not suit her. She needs more hours but they are not available. Shelley referred to this problem three times during our interview. I asked her if she would like more hours and this was her response.

Yes, yes, that's why I could, I was until this second client came along there a few weeks ago I was actually looking through the papers and looking on websites and considering going for a proper job as in where I'd be guaranteed more hours. But ideally I prefer this work and that's why I was trying to stick at it, but I have a daughter wantin' to go to college in September, so I was thinkin' if somethin' more doesn't happen quickly I'm goin' to have to go lookin' for the proper job again where I'm guaranteed 30 hours a week or 40 hours a week or whatever.

(Shelley)

Shelley does not regard her care work with irregular hours as a proper job. She made this point twice. For her a proper job is one in which she is guaranteed paid

work of 30 or 40 hours per week. This is a dilemma for Shelley. She enjoys care work but there is little opportunity for her to earn a living wage from that work. She confirmed that there are very few jobs in this area of work that are not part-time. I brought her back to this issue again a little further into the interview when I asked her if she knew of anyone working in the agency who worked close to full-time hours.

S: There's nobody on full-time hours no. The only people I know of in my line of work are people getting' full-time hours are people who work with the HSE, who have been with them before the embargo was, was placed. But the agencies, I know people who are working for different agencies and no one, no one is able to. They just keep advertising for more staff, and more staff and more staff and they have so many people on their books that. I think as well that if they get you in with one or two clients they don't really look for a-anymore for you, I think. Ahm.

J: So they just get a lot of people into do [unclear]

S: They just yes, yeah.

J: Why, why do you think they keep the hours so low?

S: They like havin' that, they like havin' it that, that they got a lot of you know, available carers. You know they have an awful lot of people on their books but what percentage of them are workin' at any one time I don't know.

She raises two important points in her reply to that question, the first is that no-one she knows working for agencies gets full-time work. The second is that the agency continues to recruit staff even though she thinks that many of those already on the agency's books are not working. It appears from Shelley's observations that this agency and others like it intentionally want to maintain the highest degree of flexibility possible within its workforce whatever the implications of this policy for its workers (Lambert and Henley, 2013). As we came to the end of the interview I asked Shelley what her future work prospects are. She indicated uncertainty and again referred to the possibility of seeking full-time work even if it is in a different field in order to enjoy more financial certainty. It is clear that she does not want to move away from care work as she likes it but she suggested there may be no option but to change.

I'd like to keep doing this but I don't know if I will. If one of those 39 hour a week jobs came along, I don't, I don't think I'd be able to say no to it, just to be more financially stable, even though I'd like to say no to it because I like this kind of work that I'm doin'. The one to one work in people's homes, I'd prefer that to workin' in a shop or you know even workin' in a nursin' home where they've got 10 people and you can only deal with two at a time or whatever you know, you're not under the same kind of pressure but, it's hard to know where I'll end up. I'd like to keep doing this kind of work but whether it'll be possible or not, I don't know.

(Shelley)

The relevance of Rodgers' (1989) view on the temporal aspect of precarious work with its short time horizon and a high risk of job loss is apparent from Shelley's story. However, Rodgers does not refer to the centrality of time in its totality in the lives of people who are in precarious work. As we can observe from Shelley's narrative time dominates all aspects of her life. There are gradations of the control

time exacts in the lives of the interviewees who participated in this study. Shelley is on If and When contracts (O'Sullivan et al, 2015) and some other participants in this study are in the same employment arrangements. These include Michael who works for an agency in the building trade, Larry who works in a large retail store chain and Rita who also works for care agencies (two in her case). Their lives, working and non-working are dictated to by the uncertainty of their working time. Marian, Amy and Valerie know they will have a fixed number of hours to work every week for the most part. However they can be called upon to work more hours to cover for sickness and holidays. Moreover, the notification of their work rosters is provided, at best, a week prior to the commencement of their weekly work rota. Thus the organisation of family and social time is negatively impacted on. For all of the other participants, time is also a concern, mainly around the lack of hours or having to work unsociable hours. Another element of the problem with time for the majority of the participants is having little or no say in when time-off can be taken. This issue will be taken up as part of Amy's story to which we turn next.

AMY'S STORY – THE ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION

Introduction

Throughout her five years in college Amy worked for the chain store which is at the centre of her story. Amy has worked for her employer for six years, for a time as a retail assistant and then more recently as a supervisor. In Amy's narrative there is a strong under-current of 'I'm lucky to have a job'. The fact that she can be easily replaced informs this view. Yet, she, like the other interviewees shows enormous resilience and at times resistance in her daily working life as she makes every effort to improve her own and her son's life. However, the limited options available to her and the organisational structure of the working environment in which she finds herself plays a central part in determining her chances of moving on. Rodgers (1989: 3) explains the organisational dimension of precarious employment as follows. 'There is an aspect of control over work — work is more insecure the less the worker (individually or collectively) controls working conditions, wages, or the pace of work' (Rodgers, 1989: 3). Amy's case in particular exemplifies the organisational dimension of precarious employment and this will be explored under Rodgers' three sub-themes, control of working conditions, control of wages and pace of work.

Control of working conditions

In Amy's story a number of elements of the lack of control emerge: such as the lack of control over her day-to-day work; the responsibility she must take on which is disproportionate to the remuneration she receives; the sense of unfairness in the way she and other staff are treated; the lack of support and training provided and the lack of say in when she can take her holidays and other periods of leave.

Amy is a supervisor in the store where she works and given that level of seniority (there are only two other staff members more senior than her – the manager and assistant manager) I assumed that she would have a commensurate role in making day-to-day decisions about how the shop was organised and run. However, I was wrong in this assumption; her role is more ambiguous, as the first extract from my interview with Amy demonstrates.

J: In terms of havin' control over the work itself, do you have any say, or do you have any, you're a supervisor so I presume you a certain amount of say in it [A: yeah] but generally, you know are, are you listened to when you come up with ideas, or you want to try and improve things or, or, or, or just generally how you manage your work and that?

A: Ehm well this like, if I, if new stock came in an' it was a day a manager wasn't there like it's up to me to merchandise it. But he could come in the next day and say he don't like it and rip it all off the shelves and make me change it all around again. If, if it's not up to his standard or he just don't like the look of it or whatever it is. Ehm I have actually been given out to, I was actually told once before that if I move somethin' around that I'd lose me job, because I re-merchandise a few refill pads and I was told that if I re-merchandised anythin' again without the permission of the manager that ehm that I'd be shown the door [J: oh right, okay]. So it just depends.

J: Yeah, yeah. So does that encourage you to do any of that [A interrupts]

A: [Laughs] No there's no, there's no incentive at all to do, to even try, en, en, make the place presentable or whatever because even if you did do it you'd never get the credit for it. It's always, if the sales are well in a shop it's down to the manager even if the manager was up the stairs on the internet all day. It's the manager who is runnin' the shop gets the credit for whatever it's goin' on. It's never the staff.

J: Right, right. That must be frustrating.

A: Yeah, because like you go on, you're on the floor, you could be helpin' someone and you could say would you not like to get something else. You could help in-, increase the sales ehm but you're never, there's no bonuses or there's no, there's no- nothing for doin' that.

J: Right, okay, so you're just, you're just there to do what you're told [A interrupts]

A: Yeah, basically, yeah.

Amy's comments reveal a not-to-be-bridged relationship of distance between her and the management of the business she works for but she is not alone in experiencing this gap. All of the interviewees relate similar experiences of remoteness between them and the managers/owners of their places of work. Not all act as Amy's manager does in this instance but there is a distinct position held by employers/managers which is sometimes verbally expressed but at other times subtly implied in their relationships with their staff making it very clear who is in charge. Sometimes this can be ameliorated by the kindness of certain managers or where the worker has built up a good working relationship with her or his boss. Amy has had experiences of the upside and downside of such a relationship as well. In response to my question about getting time off, Amy said

A: Ehm my experience is at the, the like manager, the first manager I had was fairly okay. Ye go in and you'd talk to her and she'd be fairly okay and she'd change things around. The next manager that came in I was ok personally because I

knew her I went to school with her. She had no problem if I needed a day or two to be changed to do it. But I do remember ah we had a fallin' out and eh she stuck me with all the bad shifts. No one, I couldn't say anythin' because it would look like I was intimidatin' her in the workforce because I was after havin' an argument that was after happenin' in work [J: mmm]. So I just had to do the hours then I was given. Ehm but that after that it sorted, we were back talkin' again because I had to, because I'm workin' with her and she's after goin' easier with me, even givin' me a Saturday off. I never got a Saturday day off when I was workin' there [J: right, okay] even though I didn't ask for it.

J: Yeah, okay. So, so you have, so you're really much dependent on the relationship

A: The relationship you have with your manager, yeah.

If Amy wants to challenge the manager and the way she is treated there are no obvious channels to do this. In this workforce trade union membership is not a realistic option, and if this path was taken it would be an arduous one. Making a complaint up the line to more senior management is full of risk too with a possible outcome of retaliation and vindictiveness as Amy explains in the following piece which begins with Amy's response to my question about trade union representation.

A: We don't'. Ehm there was issues before, there was one member of staff that joined the union and ehm the area manager said you can join, go ahead and join whatever union that you want but we don't recognise them. That's what we were told.

J: So there's no union. [A: No] And is there any, any, any ehm, workers kind of committees or anything like that?

A: No [J: nothing at all] Nothin' at all.

J: Eh if you've got a problem then what do you have to do?

A: If we have a problem eh, with our manager, just say or with another member of staff, the manager deals with it. If you have an issue with a manager it's meant to be dealt with by the area manager, but our area manager happened to be our manager before she like, that's the job she got promoted to. So she is friends with our manager [J: right]. So even if they done something wrong there's never any sort of punishment or nothing. Mean we had a manager swear at us on the floor, like cursed at us. There's never anythin' get said for it because she, she's a good manager.

J: Right, right and from what you said earlier if you actually say something to the area manager about the manager your shifts [A: yeah] are goin' to

A: Yeah, cos she goes back and says it anyway. Obviously if you have a problem and the way she deals with it is, sh-, sh-, she'll give you the crap shift, the Friday night shift like, it's three hours or whatever. Or if she knew you had a child at school she could put you down for half eight in the morning [J: right] which they like they had me down workin' some days at eight o'clock, even though my son is in school for 9. [J: yeah] Like they don't care like if he don't get up out of the bed or if he don't go. If I don't go in that day like, I'm the one openin' up the shop.

J: Right, okay so, so there's no real incentive to say anything about anything

A: No

But a lot is expected of Amy and other workers in her situation. She carries quite a responsibility in her work as a supervisor, apart from the general work of a retail assistant.

It's, eh, like eh of a general day you get a delivery in the mornin', ye, ye offload the stock, you pack whatever stock you need. The rest you sort of put back up into the stockroom and then eh you're pricin' stuff ehm customers you're dealing with whatever, queries if they're comin' in durin' the day and then you're on the cash registers, servin' customers as well.

(Amy)

As a result of her supervisory role her responsibilities have increased and include the following

That's the kind of work but since I got the promotion, it also, it also involves ehm openin' up in the morning, eh dealin' with the money, the safes, ehm if there is any calls from head office. Just say it's a day one of the managers was off, I'd have to deal with that and if they were on holidays, if they had, if stock had to be ordered, ehm I'd have to do that as well, if there was no one else there, in management.

(Amy)

Amy gives a sense of how she perceives the unfairness in the way she and other staff are treated by management. This has become more apparent to her since she took up the position of supervisor.

Eh, at the start, it was just, a, a job but I think ehm since, when you get into the sort of the management side of it an ye, ye see it from that side of it, ehm you can see like the unfairness when it comes to say, eh, the hours and the, the politics behind the job, like, what way they give out the hours and ehm. Then even the levels of work, when you, when you hear about what they're doin' like say in the head office, they're sittin' around and they're on Facebook and you're, and you're sluggin' your guts out and they, they could be ringin' you up about like pricin' stuff or if a customer complains, en, d'you know things, things like that like.

(Amy)

This sense of grievance can be exacerbated by a change of manager and this can impact negatively on the work environment. A previous manager of the store was promoted some years back and her replacement was perceived as being less fair than their predecessor and Amy said that things seemed to 'fall apart' since then.

She [the previous manager] was more fair with hours if you were stuck, if you needed a shift change or whatever she had, she wasn't, she had no problem doin' it but the manager [current manager] said no, I'm the manager and you if you don't do what I say, ehm there's the door basically.

(Amy)

As a result of the change in atmosphere Amy says that there is a lack of camaraderie among the staff and '[i]t's [the job] only a means to an end for, for most people that are there'. There is a lack of support for and little investment in staff through the provision of training.

J: Do you do any, have they trained you in anything or offered you any kind of training?

A: No, we haven't, the only trainin' we got even if you could call it trainin' is how to use the fire extinguisher. Like, like my manual handlin, even though I'm liftin' boxes every day, I've done manual handlin' in [names a MNC] I was workin' there a few years ago. But other than like there's, there's members of staff never shown how to pick up a bok-, box properly. And they're just goin' in to, to work down there [J: right]. You're basically shown the shop and shown like that they tell you how to like merchandise stuff but there's no real trainin'.

J: Right, right. So they've never invested in any training at all?

A: No

When asked about how she got time to complete her academic studies, Amy said that it suited the store manager to give her the time off. Amy attended college on quiet days in the store.

A: But if that had been a Friday [J: yeah] she would have said to me that it you want to go to college there's the door [J: right]. We need you on Friday, that's the choice I would have had to make [J: right].

J: Okay, so it was just fortunate that [A: interrupts]

A: It was just fortunate that it was quiet days that I was in college.

In theory Amy knows the hours she has to work but in practice she has little say in the number of hours she works or when she can take her holidays and other periods of leave. In Shelley's story above I presented her concern with hours as dominating her working and family life. For Amy I present work-time as part of a bigger picture, the organisation of work. In reality both of these themes are deeply inter-connected. However, because of Amy's greater proximity to the centre of her working environment, where Shelley's is more peripheral, Amy's story better draws out the relationship between temporality and the organisation of work (Glucksmann, 2005)

Amy says she works 'about 20 hours' a week; as a supervisor she could have more hours if she wished. However, committing to work additional hours does not suit her as she wants time to spend with her teenage son. Yet, further exploration of Amy's working time arrangements appears to show that she has little control over her hours. She often works more hours than she is contracted for but the hours can also decrease. In this particular business even the store manager has little say in the availability of the overall number of hours because these are determined by management at head office based on their view of the staffing needs of the store from week-to-week.

A: They [store manager] don't know from one end of the week what way their hours are goin', cos they only find out maybe the Friday or ehm how many hours. They, they put in a time-sheet at say they, it's a 180 hours and she could get a phone call at 4 o'clock in the day sayin' take 10 hours off that timesheet.

J: Okay, just to explain that then. So every week the manager has to put in the request for hours for the following week?

A: Yeah, ye put in your rota [J: yeah] with all the days, with whatever breaks people have to take have to go in on the timesheet and that gets sent off on a

Wednesday and if you don't hear anythin' back by Friday you take it that the timesheet is okay. Ehm but sometimes they could ring you to say on Friday cut 10 hours off the timesheet or you're goin' to be busy I'll give you an extra five hours.

J: Right and you then as a staff member don't know [A interrupts: we don't know, no] what hours you're going to have?

A: Our time sheet normally goes up ehm five or six o'clock on a Friday evening.

There is the expectation that Amy and colleagues increase their working hours to cover holidays and periods of sickness of other staff members. Amy is expected to do the same when a manager takes leave. The configuration of the allocation of hours is further complicated when unexpected events occur such as when a staff member is absent from work for a lengthy period of time as was the case when I interviewed Amy. The staff have no choice but to cover the hours of their absent colleague between them for, as Amy explained, non-cooperation is deemed an 'unauthorised absence' and recorded as such.

J: Yeah and ehm, d-d, do you have any choice about that?

A: Ehm no. Not really. They just tell you the hours are there and if you don't do them it's down as an unauthorised absence and it'll go on your record.

J: Oh right, okay. So if you don't do extra hours when they ask you to do it [A: yeah] that's what happens [A: yeah]. Right. Okay so you don't have any say [A: no] right.

Hours can drop at quiet times such as in the post-Christmas period when Amy's hours dropped to eight per week for the month of January in the year I interviewed her. Amy has little control over the hours she works and she also has limited control over the time she takes off for holiday periods.

A: And then they put pressure on us and then there is times in the year ye get slumps like, January is always very quiet but ehm and so if you go down in those months, they'll sort of, ye have try and recover say the other months as well.

J: Okay and if, when you go down on those months are staff reduced?

A: Staff is reduced as well but normally the way they do it is ehm the way we do it if we had holidays we take our holidays [J: right] in that month, so then at least other people would still have their hours. They wouldn't be getting' their hours cut.

J: Okay, okay and do you get paid for holidays?

A: Yeah, ye, ye get so many hours, ehm for however many days you work, it is whatever the legal sort of

J: Pro rata [A: yeah] okay, okay, so you do get, you do get holiday pay?

A: You do get holiday pay.

J: And, and paid for all of that. And do you have choice about when take your holidays?

A: Ehm well they, they say, you can't, you can't have two members of staff goin' the same week because the hours are cut. Ehm you can't ehm take it durin' busy times so you couldn't plan a holiday for Christmas because you wouldn't get the time off and then the, because the managers, like, we couldn't all take the same week off neither [J: right]. So they generally as a rule they, they leave you take a week in spring, two weeks in summer and a week in autumn [J: okay] but it goes then on the hours like. Normally before ehm you could take your holidays in

the, in the summer whatever and you could have like 40 hours worked up but now because your hours are cut ye might only have 25 hours worked up.

Occasional days off have to be negotiated in advance and there is little room for last minute requests for a day off.

J: So, so it sounds to me then that if you want do something different or to plan something you, you [A speaks over]

A: You, you can't [J: Okay] unless you went in, unless you knew in advance you had something comin' up you could go in and ask not to leave me works say of a Friday cos I have say a christenin' or confirmation. And then they'd know not to put you down on the timesheet, but I mean if it was a last minute thing like what I had, my friend had ehm a christenin' last Saturday and because I was after getting the Saturday previous off I couldn't off that Saturday off so I had to miss out an I just I didn't go.

The fluctuation of hours, apart from its inherent difficulty in planning her life, negatively impacts on Amy's income and the pace of work.

Control of wages

Just as Amy lacks control over her working conditions she has no say in the hourly rate of her income. This is something which is fixed and there appears to be little prospect of this changing.

J: When you were promoted to supervisor was there an increase in pay?

A: An extra 50 cent an hour [J: right], that's what I got. They don't do yearly percentage pay rises. Ye just, that's what I was getting, the basic and now I'm on 9.35.

J: 9.35? [A: Yeah] and you were on, what's that 8.75 [A: yea] or [unclear] that. And how long were you on that?

A: Ehm, when I started.

J: You started on 8.75 [A: yes] and it has never changed [A: no]. Gosh!

A: There's people down there 10 years and they're still, still on the same money.

The lack of control over the organisation of her work and in particular over her hours has implications for Amy's overall income and subsidiary benefits such as her differential rent and her entitlement to a medical card. Her hourly rate of pay may be marginally above the minimum wage but because of her fluctuating and erratic hours her overall income is adversely affected. On 20 hours per week, which is what she agreed to work, Amy would be entitled to claim FIS but because of the ebb and flow of her weekly hours she cannot claim FIS as she explained.

J: How ehm, so if you're on 20 hours do you get FIS then?

A: Ehm, I don't now. I did get it before but because one week, if I had 16 hours, ehm and then the next week I could have 20 hours, ehm at the time when FIS was up for renewal I didn't have the four weeks paid that they, what was the 20 somethin' hours so I didn't qualify, so I couldn't apply for it.

J: Right, so the hours were just too irregular?

A: Yeah they're too erratic so I can re-apply for it now, it's just a matter of goin' in with, with the payslips but at the moment for the summer the hours are extra, I could be getting' 26 hours, so I probably have to wait again 'til it dies down maybe in September before I could apply for it again.

The variation in hours also has consequences for Amy's lone parent benefit. Her benefit is assessed at a certain point of the year. If she happens to have had higher levels of work-related income as a result of working extra hours, even though they are only temporary, her annualised lone parent payment is set at a rate that may not reflect her real earned income for the year. And as Amy said 'but then if it drops they don't reimburse me for the weeks that, m-maybe the hours are go-, are gone down because they just don't have the time to be just choppin' and changin' it. It's a set rate'. The differential rent for Amy's local authority accommodation, also means tested, is similarly affected. It is likewise with her medical card. A claim for this was under review at the time we met, but she says that she is at least entitled to a GP only card. Amy's wages are low and in normal circumstances her income would be enhanced through state welfare supports but because of her lack of control of the organisation of her working life she does not benefit as she should and her level of disposable income and entitlement to other supports are under strain as a consequence.

Pace of work

Early in the interview I asked Amy what had changed over the six years she has worked with the store. Having first referred to her own changed role as a supervisor she spoke about the increased work pressure on the staff particularly since another similar store opened up close by.

A: An the, the levels of work have been like, they have the girls like and we're all liftin' boxes and we're runnin' round all over the place. It's just there's a lot of pressure to it as well [J: right] to get things done. Now and then cost cuttin', it's all about claimin' back money that they lost out on, cos there's another discount retailer got in next to us so you be put in all the work for, for like, there's no gains from us for it.

J: And how, when did, so, so you, so you're sayin' there is more pressure on you now than there [A: Yeah] used to be? Yeah

A: Yeah definitely.

J: Yeah, can you tell us a bit more about that?

A: Well, like because we're gone down now, there's another [identifying information not included] we would have been at a loss. Ehm like on the figures, sales figures, ehm because like customers would have gone in there, you know cos it was a new shop to see what they had and our sales figures went down. Ehm so they calculate the amount of hours that go to each shop on the turnover, ehm, so, ehm, our hours even though now we're startin' to make back the money we're still getting less hours to make up for the money they lost out on from last year. So like say this day last year we could've had five people on in the shop and now there's only three of us. ... So ehm, yeah you could have three tills goin and you could have the whole three members of staff in servin'

customers and you could have two pallets left on the floor and you still have to get that work done [J: right] before you can leave.

Amy says that there is also pressure on them to make up for the quiet months of the year, such as in January when there is a slump in business. Amy accepts that the company she works for is 'trying to run a business. But there is fairer ways to run a business'. She questions the unfairness of the staff's predicament when hours are cut to make good losses from competition and she contrasts this with the way the managers are treated and the wealth the business is generating for the owner of the company. She does not believe the state will step in to change this form of work organisation. Amy says that this business produces jobs, whatever about their quality, and that, for her, is the bottom line.

A: Like there's no fairness in what's goin' on really from what I can see anyway.

J: Ehm, what do you think government should do about that?

A: Being honest I don't think there is anything they can they do is because the way they see it is you can count yourself lucky to have a job. There's people out there with nothing an ehm, an we've been told that we had 20 CVs in the, in the press. You walk out the door you're goin' to be replaced you're, you're no loss to us. They'd be someone more willin' to take your job. So it's like put up or shut up, that's the way it is an I genuinely can't see the government intervenin' in, in that sort of work. Because he is creatin' jobs, he is openin' shops all over the country and he's creatin' employment. So I couldn't see them interferin' with people that are makin' jobs.

Amy wishes to move on to do something else, preferably to get a job in social care but she says that the prospects of getting work in her preferred area are very limited and large numbers apply for any available jobs. She says that her biggest problem is a lack of experience. She has tried to increase her experience by taking on voluntary work but the organisation of her working life and the lack of control she has over it makes it difficult to do voluntary work and she thus finds herself stuck with very limited options as she explained.

A: From the feedback I'm getting', because I did go for feedback for a few interviews it's the work experience where I'm getting caught. Ehm so like I was, I'm tryin' to go out and do some voluntary, cos I volunteer in ehm in a, in the youth service. But it's the same with them I can only text them on a Friday evenin' say if I, if I'm free of whatever day I can come up and help you out. An when I'm not I can't do anything else about it.

J: Right, so, so the way the hours work for you in your job you need the job [A: yeah] but you cannot plan to try and move on from that [A: no] or do anything else because of the restrictions [A: yeah] the uncertainty of the hours [A: Yeah] you work.

A: I'm, I'm at the moment I'm stuck [laughs] [J unclear]. I'll, I'll, like I don't see it getting any better unless I decided to move into another job and the only job I'd probably more than likely get is another job in retail so [J: right], it would be the same thing it's just a different company.

NEIL AND GRACE'S STORY - PROTECTION

Introduction

The joint story of Neil and Grace will inform the reader of the importance of the protection dimension of precarious employment of which Rodgers' says

[P]rotection is of crucial importance: that is, to what extent are workers protected, either by law, or through collective organisation, or through customary practice — protected against, say, discrimination, unfair dismissal or unacceptable working practices, but also in the sense of social protection, notably access to social security benefits (covering health, accidents, pensions, unemployment insurance and the like).

(Rodgers, 1989: 3)

Rodgers' (1989: 3) divides protection into the two forms: in-work protection (protection 'either by law, or through collective organisation, or through customary practice') and state social protection, access to various elements of social security benefits and other associated benefits provided by the state and its agencies, such as health and housing. In this narrative I will address the first of these two forms of protection, in-work protection. The second form of protection, state social protection will be considered in Chapter 7 as part of the second-order narrative where the primary focus is on how social inclusion policies interact with precarious employment.

In-work protection

We have already noted in the stories of Shelley and Amy that there is limited if any protection for precarious workers in their workplace. The stories of all of the participants in my research demonstrate the vulnerability of these workers. They not only lack say over their hours or the organisation of their work, there is also a failure within the working environment to protect workers from exploitation, bullying, incompetent management, nepotism, basic health and safety issues and to provide any meaningful training. All of the workers I interviewed related stories about their working lives featuring one or more of these themes. Neil and Grace's story epitomises the consequences of the lack of in-work protection where it generates stress and worry. How the lack of in-work protection manifests itself depends on the nature and structure of the employing organisation. The story of Neil and Grace throw up some common themes such as the expectation that workers are always flexible and available to meet the needs of their employer, the lack of transparency in how decisions are made about matters that affect the working (and family) lives of employees and the lack of representation and systems of redress for employees.

Always available

A feature of the lives of the precarious workers I interviewed is that they are always available to their employers. The workers on If and When contracts are most vulnerable to this notion of availability but even the workers who have specified hours regularly find themselves having to work extra hours at short notice. Saying no to such demands is rarely an option for, as we saw in Amy's workplace, refusal is regarded as an unauthorised absence. For others, refusing work, as Shelley informs us, could mean that the worker falls down the pecking order when it comes to allocation of hours with consequent implications for income generation. Neil's case is an example of required flexibility although its form has changed over time.

Ehm my hours kinda of 24 hours a week I work now at the minute. It's fairly set in stone at the minute but ah up till maybe 2 months ago I was workin' kind of I was on call really, you know. I was definitely getting 12 hours a week which we do 12 hour shifts. So one day is 12 hours so I was getting 12 hours at the very least but then some weeks I was covering holidays and you get three, three 12 hour shifts, but nothing was written down. There was no contract or anything.

(Neil)

Now Neil works a 24 hour shift over the weekend which he has agreed to do with his employer but it is the extra demands on his time he has problems with. The organisation he works for has a number of facilities in different locations and there has been a recent drive to bring greater unity within the organisation. The consequence of this for Neil is that it requires him to attend meetings outside of his normal working hours for which he does not get paid.

We are expected now to, to attend formal gath, formal gatherings and mingle with other employees from other centres all under the one heading you know. That in itself is extra work you know, it's a day away from home. It's not paid, you know, so that is just one example off the top of my head.

(Neil)

It is not just the meetings it is also the emails and the phone calls outside of work time.

N: Also, I just also yeah there's more kind of before this change you go in and do a day's work and you come home and you could forget about the place till the next time you're in there while now you can get an email at any time work related. You can get a phone call at any time work related and there's more kind of meetings, there's more staff meetings, there's more supervision, ehm and it's all your own time like, do you know, I have to travel, travel half an hour to get there and half an hour back. So in that sense there is, even that alone you know there is more work, ehm.

J: And there is an expectation that you will do all of this, is there?

N: Oh yeah, it's just it's assumed like you know, it's, it's the new drive, it's the new energetic (laughs) organisation.

Neil has also been asked to do extra work beyond that expected of the job he is paid for. Because of his academic qualifications he has been asked to develop educational resources for the professional staff in the organisation. He said

Again that's kind of almost expected, do you know, I mean I could have said no but I felt obliged to say yes. But anyway it's an interesting thing at the same time there's no question or mention of extra income or extra wages. It is all in a day's work, ehm.

(Neil)

Neil describes his work as draining and mentally demanding and he feels his pay does not adequately reflect the work he has to do.

Ehm [coughs] it's fairly demanding work, kinda draining, mentally draining you know and the wages are, the first two years I was on just above minimum wage and then [coughs] I had to fight for a pay rise. I really fight hard now ehm, so ehm I'm on €12 an hour there now, which is still not great for the, for the kind of work that it is you know. Ehm but ah there's been a big change recently as well, organisational structure, ... shaken up the place and I suppose like many other places ... trying to squeeze us harder (laughs) like a cloth, ... trying to get more out of us for the same money ... (laughs). [Removed identifying information, replaced with ...]

(Neil)

Lack of transparency in decision-making

The reasons for decisions taken by employers appear to lack transparency. Grace gave an example of how a new development to provide extra sessions in her workplace required someone to do more hours. A decision on this was taken without her knowledge and thus denied her the opportunity to apply for the extra hours when she was on maternity leave.

Then last year then we decided to do [extra] session[s] but at the time then I was on maternity leave so they got another girl in to do the [extra] sessions. So when I come back then I did not really have much of a choice, this other girl was there to do it. [J: right] So that's why I'm doin the the 15 hours yeah. [Changed details to protect Grace's identity]

(Grace)

Grace said she probably would not have taken on the extra hours because she wanted to spend time with her young son but she was not given any choice in the decision. There is a lack of a transparent management system in place in Grace's work organisation. She explained in response to my question about who runs the organisation.

J: And who runs the organisation then?

G: It's meant to be run by a committee ahm but it's not. It's actually run by us in the playschool. So it's just the [staff] that are actually running it even though it is a community-based play school. Ah we haven't seen no committee members,

we haven't seen no chairperson in the last year and a half, so it's basically, yeah the school we're running it.

J: But they do exist do they?

G: They exist in writin' and there's the chairperson is there ehm but we haven't seen him or rarely he returns our calls, very hard to get in touch with him. But he has the bank book, yeah, yeah, that's it, yeah.

Neil had a recent experience of a more senior member of staff acting on Neil's behalf on the issue of pay without Neil's knowledge or agreement. Neil says he brought the issue of pay up with this member of staff who in turn took this issue to the manager. Neil says that this was done with the best of intentions but it left him feeling aggrieved that such an action was taken and it impacted on Neil who found what occurred as 'annoying as well and kind of my trust was a bit broken'.

Lack of representation and redress

In answer to my question about union representation both Grace and Neil said that neither have a union in their place of work. Both deal with issues in the same way that Shelley and Amy deal with them, by talking to a more senior member of the organisation. Of course as Amy told us the desirability of such a course of action is full of risk. Grace had problems with the other two more senior members of staff in her community pre-school as she felt she was being left with a heavier responsibility than she should have been expected to carry. There was nobody to turn to with this problem and she had considered leaving as a way of dealing with it. However, Grace stuck it out as she needed the work and there were no other options open to her. When I asked her if she had union representation this is what Grace had to say.

No, no. Ahm we do have the chairperson if you need to speak to him but it's very hard to get in contact with the person. So really if we have a problem we just have to deal with it ourself. We don't actually have anyone there as such, yeah, no.

(Grace)

In the absence of a trade union Neil's good personal relationship with his manager got him by. However, the resignation of the manager changed how Neil felt about his work.

And we don't have a union either, but [cough] I suppose my original manager, I clicked kind of clicked with him I suppose, he was into ... and I kind of took to that while I was doin' voluntary work there, ehm and he was kind of laid back about stuff and he was the one who actually pushed the board for my initial pay rise and so really I was okay with doin' the extra bit of work when he was there. ... I'm not as prepared to do what I would have done for my previous manager. [Removed identifying information, replaced with ...]

(Neil)

Neil concluded his point by observing that nothing really changes through discussion with senior staff.

So yeah I imagine there is support there alright but if you have an issue and stuff and you would be heard, that is one thing but the bottom line is the [laughs] bottom line doesn't change.

(Neil)

Rodgers' (1989: 3) understanding of social protection in work 'either by law, or through collective organisation, or through customary practice' apply in a very limited way to precarious Irish workers (Hendy, 2014). Workers' rights and representation in Ireland are weak and the workers in this research show how vulnerable they are to the dictates and neglect of their employers. The stories of Neil and Grace and all of the other participants in the research show that many of the working practices are unfair even if not illegal in Ireland. The best precarious workers can hope for is a kindly boss or senior colleague who will at least temporarily provide support for them, even if, as we saw in Neil's story this support is well-meaning paternalism. More often than not the worker is left to her or his own instincts for self-preservation where pragmatism is the over-riding philosophy for survival.

LARRY'S STORY - ECONOMIC

Introduction

Rodgers' (1989: 3) fourth dimension of precarious employment is the economic, of which he says '[a] fourth, somewhat more ambiguous aspect is income — low income jobs may be regarded as precarious if they are associated with poverty and insecure social insertion'. Larry's story is one of survival on a low income job and economic insecurity which impacted on his life beyond work. When I interviewed Larry he had been working for a large retail chain-store for four and a half months. He was very open about his experiences in this job and provided rich detail of his every-day work. In Larry's story there are two features that stand out, one is his level of income and the other is how he manages that income. In many ways what Larry has to tell us is not very different from the stories of the other research participants but in other ways it varies significantly. In his story we see someone who appears to be in an intolerable position. He is on-call all of the time with a high level of insecurity in his working hours (O'Sullivan et al, 2015 – If and When hours) and a very low level of income. Larry's story also brings up a new perspective that has not arisen in any of the other interviews, the treatment of young people in Irish employment law which allows for low pay for young adults. Furthermore, it highlights the treatment by the Irish state's social protection system which also penalises young people purely on the grounds of their age. His employment and social protection conspire to impoverish a young man who wants to live independently and to earn an income that supports him in doing that.

Earning an income

Larry was determined to get paid work after he completed his FETAC course. As he said

I tried very hard. I, I did. I handed in a CV in every place in the town. I did the, the, I've done a lot of work experience as well an' I had a good bit of experience and I've worked in, I've worked in other places too ye know. So I had a good bit on my CV and ah I had about 10 places of work between work experience and other places of work on my CV.

(Larry)

He handed in one of his CVs to a large retail store, following which he got a phone call and this led to an interview and the job as a retail assistant. Larry has a contract and that he said 'includes break entitlements, wage entitlements, holiday entitlements, aah, ye know aah. There's nothin' really statin' that you're guaranteed this you're guaranteed that, ye know. There's no set hours a week, ye know like some places'. On a number of occasions in the interview he stated that he was told he was getting a full-time job but has ended up with part-time hours that fluctuate enormously from one week to the next as the following extract shows.

I've been workin part-time. I'm down as full-time but aah I don't ever get a five day 9 to 5 - 9 to 5, very rarely. I didn't, haven't got one yet. Most I've got hours, I say like, I've got about 30 hours maximum a week but that's the most I've ever got and some weeks it goes down to 3 hours, some weeks it goes down to 6 hours, and 9 hours and so on and ehm, and eh I's not really reliable I'd say.

(Larry)

For Larry the situation was worse than fluctuating hours; he found out that his pay was below the adult minimum wage.

J: Ahm when they took you on did they say what that meant, did they say it would be full time?

L: I applied for a full-time job that when I went for the interview that's what they told me I was applyin' for and ehm they said to me ah they gave me a contract and they stated in the contract my wages, which is 7.50, it's not even minimum wage. 7.50 an hour which is a euro off the minimum wage. I think, I think the minimum wage is 8.50 an hour [J: 8.65]. 8.65 is still a euro off, if you ahm [coughs]. They told me I have a contract for three months on that. That finished in December. I got another contract there for six months, but the pay stayed the same. Eh [unclear] ehm they told me that I was full-time but aah the thing is even people that are down there for, for years haven't got a full-time job down there anymore. All hours have been cut. Really they didn't have any right in employing more workers. They didn't need them. They just want more flexibility I'd say. I dunno what the idea of that is. Maybe it's less wages or something but ehm. They didn't explain that no, that I was goin' to be like some hours some weeks ye'd only get nine hours some weeks ye get three hours or whatever. It just said you ah full-time job and you'll be on the roster and simple as that.

After our interview I checked out the hourly rate for minimum pay and found out that Larry was receiving a legally appropriate level of remuneration. He was not aware (nor was I until I checked) that because of his age and lack of experience his employer was legally entitled to pay him below the adult minimum wage and in fact was paying him above the legally required rate. Under the *National Minimum Wage Act 2011* an employee who is in their first year of employment after turning 18 years is entitled to €6.92 per hour (80 per cent of the adult rate) and in their second year the entitlement increases to 90 per cent of the adult minimum wage at €7.79.

In the previous extract Larry said about his employer: '[r]eally they didn't have any right in employing more workers. They didn't need them'. He says that he and two other young workers were taken on at the same time on similar contracts. This has led to conflict with some of the other staff who Larry said have had their incomes cut as well as not having enough hours.

L: They were sayin, 'aw yer taken my hours' an ye know, 'it is not fair and the shouldn't be givin' you a job because there's too many people here an there's not enough hours goin for the rest of us an'. I, I, I got a lot of negative like ehm negative ah, ye know ahm

J: Comments, strong

L: Comments yeah and ah energy from them like yeah. That's righ' [pause] when I first went in.

J: And has that eased off?

L: It has eased off a little bit but there's still sly remarks sometimes ye know. I don't, I'm not the type of person that has care like I just fly by me. I'm only there to do what I have to do and I'm gone ...

From his income Larry has to maintain his work uniform. Part of the uniform is provided free of charge by the employer but he is responsible for his trousers and shoes. For Larry this has proven to be problematic as this account of his encounter with a manager who took exception to the poor quality of his shoes demonstrates.

And I remember a situation [coughs] when I my, ah, my, I got a pair of shoes and the sole was fallin' off them an' I had to get a new pair. I didn't get a new pair these were, they were formal shoes but I, I just got a cheap pair in Penneys an, they were all black you know but they weren't, they weren't anything you'd wear goin' to a weddin' like ye know and ehm the I can't think of the type of manager she is but she's the, one of the managers down there anyway. She said they weren't acceptable an' get a new pairs of shoes and I tried to explain to her that look I haven't got the money to be buyin' new pairs of shoes like every, I was only there three months at that stage, ye know, not even that. Every three months like ye know, the cost money, ye know and something that I haven't got, like, ye know. Especially when I'm only getting' three hours a week. That's only some weeks, like, that's only €21 for a week on top of whatever I make from my dole or my job seeker's allowance, whatever you want to call it. Ehm I explained to her look, I'm, I haven't got the funds to be able to buy shoes an live in a house an pay bills and, ye know an buy food an everything. So she says look I can't, if I have to say it to you again she said I'll have to give you a written warnin' and then we'll have to bring you to a board and you'll, we might, the might get disciplinar, disciplinary ahm action might be after taken again ye so. Eventually I had to get a pair of shoes, but ye know. But that's just the type of things that they, they expect ye to do stuff when you have, if, if you haven't got the money they don't really care like you know

or if you haven't got the funds they don't care as long as they're okay you know.

(Larry)

Larry felt very aggrieved about the shoe incident as he is on a very low income. His income from work is so low and irregular that it is supplemented by the state's social protection payment, the means-tested Job Seeker's Allowance. Because of his age Larry receives a lower level of Job Seeker's Allowance than the standard adult allowance; he can only receive a maximum of €100 per week where the standard adult payment is €188 per week. How Larry manages is the next question we turn to.

Managing his income

How does someone Larry's age manage with the weekly income available to him? With great difficulty is the answer. I asked him how he manages and this was his reply.

L: Ah no I'll give you a good example like, like this week I didn't work at all, right an I thought I was gonna get sick pay. But because I'm not workin' there long enough they're not gonna give me sick pay, so now for the last, I, I, I, I depend on that money from work because I, I have a house an' I ah, I get rent allowance but I still have to have that other income to, to level it out or to balance it out to pay all the bills an to have money for myself otherwise I will not have money for myself. I just have to, to build money if ye know what I mean and I don't like leavin' bills build up, that's the type of person I am. I always pay my bills, that's one thing about me but I leave myself with nothing, if you know what I mean. So the bills are paid but there's no shoppin' or there's no, ye know, there's no, no food like or so on ye know. There's no life, there's no social life ye know.

J: How do you manage then in terms of food and that?

L: I normally what I do is I, I get, I get 100 I get 85, say €90 from the dole a week an my 55 rent allowance and, and ah that, so that leaves me 45. The house is a 100 so, I have to pay 45 for the house aah, 10, €10 for ESB, that's 55, €10 for Sky, that's 65 and €5 for ah the wheelie bins, that's €70 a week that comes out of my money and it's all direct debits so I have to have it in the bank. All my money goes to the bank except for my dole so eha ahm, [deep breath] then some weeks if there is not that much in the bank because I have to take out a bit an next minute a direct debit comes it's all wiped down to zero. All the money is gone because direct debit has come in and I haven't been ahead of myself to have money left so I'm, I'm dependin' on then the Tuesday or the Thursday to get paid again. But as I said this week I didn't get paid on Thursday, I only got paid on Tuesday so I had a €100 to last me from Tuesday to Tuesday and with €75 gone out of it that's €25 I had left for myself and ye know, that's not a lot for a week like ye know. And then you have to buy shoppin', that's without shoppin'. So even if you spend a tenner on shoppin' there's only €15 left. Fair enough I don't smoke and I, I go out the odd time but I haven't been out since I moved in I bu, when I get back workin' I'll, I'll be sorted again, I'll be okay like ye know.

J: Okay sounds, sounds like it's a fairly con-constant struggle.

- L: Yeah it is a constant struggle but when I was in the last house I was on top of things and I was grand and but now, now that I've moved out. It was the right decision movin' out, just that if I had been paid from work I would be grand but because I'm not workin' there long enough they didn't give sick pay, ye know [J: right] and ah that's not, I don't think that is very fair as well ye know. I'm workin' there nearly six months an [deep breath] ye know.
- J: And so, so this week then you only get your dole?
- L: My €100 yeah, I didn't get a €100 I got €85 on Tuesday. Yeah on Tuesday I got €85 yeah so and the bills were 75 so that's a tenner [J: yeah] that I had. Fair enough I had money in the bank but if but if it was just that, ye know that if a direct debit had to come this week I was bollixed like, ye know.
- J: You sound as if you're pretty well organised
- L: Well I, I wouldn't, some weeks I am ye know it depends on how it goes ye know. All depends on how much. If I had a lot of money I'd be organised but if you haven't got much money it is hard to organise when you haven't got much ye know.

The interaction between Job Seeker's Benefit Allowance payments, which is means-tested, and his work is complicated and depends on income received from his job and the number of days paid work is undertaken. Larry's income thus varies from week-to-week as he is unsure how many hours he is going to work. This is also a logistical challenge for him ('writin' in these times [work hours] an' just fillin', bringin' forms from work to the dole office. I'm constantly doin' that like') as he tries to account for his varied working pattern to the Department of Social Protection, for as he said

My current job goes over 7 days and it goes over any hours and there's no, there's no as I said there's no set hour, there's no set day. You just, it's inconsistently ah work. It's inconsistent work and ye just can't rely on any and you can't do nothing.

(Larry)

Furthermore, Larry said he has to be available all of the time for work.

- L: And the thing is on the contract it says that you can be called in at any time and you're obliged to say yes. You know that's what it says in the contract but you're obliged to say yes you're obliged to ye know ah be there eeh available ye know and that's not very fair like, is it?
- J: You're obliged, you're obliged to say yes?
- L: You're obliged to say yes and you're, you're obliged to say you'll be available. You're expected to be available, ye know. I don't know where they get the, where they, where they can actually have the right to say them things like but they do, [heavy breath] and that's what we were told when we started. Look he said, he said look if, if you're asked to come in do it because it was, it'll look, otherwise people will think that you're not bothered and they won't give you hours and at the end of the day it's the management that give you hours and you want to ye know lick them if you know what I mean. Ye know ye don't want to be negative again them, ye don't want to be sayin' no to them the whole time because it'll only, it'll only come back on yourself.

Larry is fighting against the odds and his life at the young age of 18 years is a constant struggle. This struggle is not just of earning a living and managing his

income it also weighs heavily on his social life. He cannot plan his time to the detriment of his involvement in the activities he loves. I had noticed a falloff in his attendance at the community project. From the time he got his job he only attended occasionally as work permitted. Yet he sees himself as being lucky in comparison to his friends.

I was very lucky. I, I, I've, I've a good few friends and not one of them have a job and not one of them ye know are, ye know have, have their own house or so or ye know they're all, they're all fairly struggling like ye know. I know they are, they are lookin' like ye know and they in the meantime they could do courses I suppose but ye know it's, it's very hard for them like as well ye know.

(Larry)

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to allow the participants in the exemplar narratives to tell their stories within the framework provided by Rodgers (1989). In so doing I have demonstrated that the lives of these precarious workers can be located within the existing international and Irish research on precarious employment. Their stories in many ways overlap as a range of factors associated with precarious employment connect them like a spider's web. Not only are their jobs and incomes precarious but as a result of their employment status they live precarious lives due to their insecure jobs and uncertain incomes. However, this presentation of the narratives of their working lives is much too narrow and leaves a lacuna to be bridged: their identity as workers and how this identity intersects with a greater, master narrative of paid work. I will return to this in Chapter 7 but in the next chapter I will reflect on the Irish state's social protection role as experienced by the workers.

CHAPTER 6

Narratives of paid employment: a turn to embedded precariousness?

We've been told that we had 20 CVs in the, in the press. You walk out the door you're goin to be replaced, you're, you're no loss to us. They'd be someone more willin' to take your job.

(Amy)

INTRODUCTION

The precarious workers in this study are at one and the same time peripheral to the workforce and essential to it (Goetschy, 1999; Byrne, 2005; Davies, 2005; Moran, 2006). In the quote above, Amy sums up the workers' marginal position where as individual workers they may be replaceable but as a 'type' of worker they are needed. The workers in this study are on the margins of the welfare system too; although they are in employment, they are also in receipt of unemployment benefits. They straddle the world of work and welfare, not fully belonging to either. They have become the target of a narrative which claims that people in these working relationships are not adequately participating in the workforce and require activation, positioning them alongside other groups not actively engaged in the workforce, such as, the unemployed, lone parents and disabled people (Department of Social Protection, 2016).

The co-construction of the narrative of this study will continue in this chapter but by using a different tool, second order narratives (Elliott, 2005; Harling Stalker, 2006). This will have implications for the presentation of the lifeworld knowledge of the participants as their presence in the narrative will be incorporated into an interpretive storyline, *my* story of *their* experiences. The application of the concept of second order narratives as a working tool enables me to extricate from personal narratives individual experiences and relate them to 'theoretically significant categories that they exemplify' (Smythe and Murray, 2000: 325). Elliott (2005: 13) describes second order narratives as 'the accounts we may construct as researchers to make sense of the social world, and of other people's experiences'. She refers to Richardson's (1990) useful idea of the 'collective story':

The collective story displays an individual's story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs, rather than by telling the particular individual's story. ... Although the narrative is about a category of people, the individual response to the well-told connective story is "That's my story. I am not alone".

(Richardson, 1990: 25-26, cited in Elliott, 2005: 13)

The intention therefore is to present critical social, political and economic concerns plotted throughout the narratives of individual research participants in one over-

arching narrative, the narrative interpreted by the researcher (Smythe and Murray, 2000). The end result is to achieve an advance in knowledge co-constructed by researcher and research participants, done in a manner in which research participants both recognise their own story but see it as part of a more global and more powerful narrative.

The narrative to be explored in this chapter is the relationship between the theoretical and policy aspects of the primacy of paid employment and the experiences of the precarious workers. By examining the stories of the workers in this study the question to be addressed is whether or not the Irish case of labour market policy for those at the margins of the labour market constructs precarious employment. As we have noted in Chapter 3 there are a number of inter-related dimensions to this puzzle. Flexicurity and activation are the core pillars of the state's labour market policy for those regarded as marginal to the workplace based on a work-first model of welfare supports (Collins and Murphy, 2016). Intrinsic to these two pillars is a third pillar, the development of human capital, regarded as an essential element of social solidarity, an investment in the 'human potential' of the individual (Hansen and Triantafyllou, 2011: 202). Finally, there is the issue of the quality of work available to these and other workers in precarious employment. This dimension of the work relationship has receded in importance since it first appeared on the EU policy agenda in 1992 (Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007) and is now of peripheral policy concern.

FLEXICURITY – WHO BENEFITS?

The European Employment Strategy emphasises the benefits of flexicurity to the firm and the worker, the implementation of which would lead to an improvement in the bloc's economic fortunes in a competitive global economy. At the heart of the notion is a flexible worker supported by security in the labour market (EU Commission, 2007). As already noted in Chapter 3 there are four components to flexicurity: first, flexible and reliable contractual agreements for both employer and employee; second, lifelong learning strategies to ensure skill and knowledge adaptability for employees to ensure employability; third, effective active labour market policies; and fourth, modern social security systems to provide adequate income support (European Commission, 2007). In later sections in this chapter the components on lifelong learning (addressed under human capital) and active labour market policies will be considered separately. The focus of this section will be on the first and fourth components, the relationship between the employer and the employee and experiences of the Irish social protection system.

Relationship between employer and employee

In Chapter 2 the conditions and context that lead to precariousness in the Irish workforce were discussed and it was shown that across a number of factors associated with worker protection Ireland scores poorly. Due to a deficit of data on working arrangements in the Irish workforce it is not possible to ascertain the true

extent of atypical work in Ireland (O'Sullivan et al, 2015). However, Broughton et al (2010: n.p.) observe

In countries where there are fewer restrictions on non-standard working, such as Ireland, employers tend to make use of flexibility so that they can react to economic and labour market changes. Therefore, employers in Ireland resist any attempts to erode this flexibility.

Levels of pay are low (often at minimum wage levels) for workers in sectors connected to precarious work such as retail, wholesale, food and accommodation. These jobs are usually part-time, mainly consisting of female workers who work less than 20 hours per week (Collins, 2015b; see also Loftus, 2012). Moreover, Ireland has 'a relatively low level of employment protection regulation' (O'Connor, 2009: 104) placing Ireland among the states with the lowest protection regulation regimes in the OECD (OECD, 2013). Vulnerable Irish workers are in a weak bargaining position in relation to their employers. For those in precarious employment the construction by the EU of the premise of flexicurity, 'to promote and encourage the adaptability of firms and their workers' (Goetschy, 1999: 127) provides little advantage because flexibility is not, in general, of benefit to the precarious employee (Pocock et al, 2004; Nienhauser, 2005; Lallement, 2011; Loftus, 2012; McGann, 2012). The evidence from this study is that in this relationship the employer always benefits from flexible working arrangements while the employee only sometimes benefits. The main beneficial claim of flexibility is the availability of flexible hours to workers who cannot work full-time due to other commitments or who do not want to work full-time by choice (Doherty, 2009).

Flexibility can be used as a tool by the employer to assert power and control over the precarious worker (Jacobs and Padovic, 2015; see also O'Sullivan et al, 2015). There are a number of examples from the stories of the workers where flexibility is not advantageous to them and instead can exert a cost. Valerie has had to supervise self-service checkouts in the retail outlet in which she works, something she did not want to do but she felt she had no choice. She believed that if she turned down this request she would have been given the worst shifts in her normal role of a checkout operator and with a young child she could not work these shifts. The fixing of work rosters at short notice is another form of control over workers (Henly et al, 2006). Amy, Marian and Larry experience this in the retail stores in which they work, the implication of which is that extra-work activities are difficult to plan for (Jacobs and Padovic, 2015). This short-time horizon has impacted on Amy's volunteering activities which she had hoped would assist her as a route out of her current work into work related to her degree. Larry has had his social life impacted on, the sports he plays, time with friends and his voluntary activities. For Marian the challenge of roster changes affects her care arrangements for her son.

The flexibility required of the workers is not just their availability for the planned rostered hours; it is also in the requirement to be available at other times when their employer needs them. Larry regularly answers the call to work when he is off roster. He believes he must; he has to show willingness for his employers because he is afraid that refusing to work 'can give off a negative vibe ... and I don't want

that ye know. I'd be afraid it effects my hours as I can't afford that, ye know at the moment'. At another point in the interview Larry said 'you're obliged to say yes and you're obliged to say you'll be available, you're expected to be available ye know'. For Amy refusal to take on extra hours when the employer has the need is not an option as refusal is viewed as 'an unauthorised absence'. The requirement to work extra hours may arise as a result of cover for maternity leave or when someone is off sick. Amy says that she has no choice but to cover when asked in these circumstances; 'They just tell you the hours are there and if you don't do them it's down as an unauthorised absence and it'll go on your record'. On the other hand in quiet periods, such as in the January prior to our interview, her hours can be reduced to as few as eight hours in a week. The pressure on Marian to take on extra hours comes from other staff as much as from management. She says that 'if someone happens to be sick or whatever you could get a call at any time to go in. ... They ring you up and they literally expect you to go in'. We saw in Chapter 5 that Neil had an experience of being on-call in the early days of his work with his current employer where 'nothing was written down. There was no contract or anything'.

Flexibility can show itself in other ways too as Rita and Shelley's narratives inform us. In their care work they engage in a small number of hours over a number of days each week. For example, Shelley works nine hours over four days for one person and six hours over four days for a second person. On the days Shelley and Rita work, the contact with the person they care for is divided into segments of time, so they may spend a period working in the morning and again at night depending on the needs of the individual. These times are also flexible, as Shelley says, 'it can change at the drop of a hat'. When the person they are caring for is away (in hospital or on holidays) Shelley and Rita do not get paid. Rita says of one of the two people she cares for: 'Last night she was away so I was supposed to be there this morning so I won't get paid because I wasn't there this morning. So in that respect it's very unreliable'. Furthermore they do not get paid if they are sick, a feature of the working arrangements of all of the precarious workers in this study. Rita and Shelley do not get paid for their time travelling between the people they care for nor are they reimbursed for their travel costs.

For Michael flexibility means that he starts work an hour earlier and leaves an hour later than the scheduled working-day. He says, just like Larry above, this is expected of him to show the contractor that he is a willing worker. That flexibility costs Michael, an experience of 'time-theft' (Jacobs and Padovic, 2015: 77), as his working day is two hours longer and his pay does not reflect this extra time at work. Michael says that the contractor is paying the agency thousands of euro for a labourer's time 'so it stands to reason ... they want them there as early as possible in the morn and to stay as long as, ye know, to get good value for money'. While Ruth is satisfied with the structure of her hours at work she is expected to show flexibility in the type of work she does. She is not qualified for this work and feels uncomfortable in having to do it. Lukas recounts his most recent work experience where he thought he was employed for a welding job and it turned out to be a farm machinery repair job, of which he had no experience. He was also misled about the

pay he would receive, advertised at €13 per hour he received less than €11 – he left after about a month describing it as ‘an awful job’.

There is a thin line between flexibility and exploitation. Workers who are desperate to work are open to exploitation by employers, particularly in an employment environment where work options are limited, protections are few and the state supports a low-road labour policy ‘where any job is better than none’ (Murphy, 2016: 16). In their efforts to do the right thing, these workers live out the master narrative of their internalised beliefs about the goodness of work and personal responsibility for investment in their own labour experience (Streeck, 2009). In so doing the workers seemingly ‘gloss over the exploitative aspects of the relations with ... bosses’ (Walkerdine, 2005: 49). Lukas alone stands outside the narrative by quitting that ‘awful job’; he was not willing to facilitate his own exploitation.

EXPERIENCES OF THE IRISH SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

To demonstrate the story of Neil and Grace’s precariousness one element of Rodgers’ (1989) dimension of protection was used through first-order narratives in Chapter 5. Rodgers (1989: 3) writes

[P]rotection is of crucial importance: that is, to what extent are workers protected, either by law, or through collective organisation, or through customary practice — protected against, say, discrimination, unfair dismissal or unacceptable working practices, but also in the sense of social protection, notably access to social security benefits (covering health, accidents, pensions, unemployment insurance and the like).

In Neil and Grace’s narrative we focused on the workplace protection but in this section we are exploring the second aspect of protection, the social protection offered by the state through its social security system. The experiences of the Irish social protection system by the workers in this study raise questions about the nature of the system, which requires modernising to meet the needs of these precarious workers. Murphy (2010; see also Kirby and Murphy, 2011) argues that in comparison to other EU member states Ireland spends significantly less of its GDP on social protection. She makes the point that ‘[t]he rationale behind flexicurity is that people cannot take risks about work transitions without a base line guaranteed security’ (Murphy, 2010: n.p.). She continues that the levels of protection in Ireland are below the relative poverty levels and as a result ‘[t]he absence of an even adequate social welfare payment is a significant weak link in an Irish pathway to flexicurity’ (Murphy, 2010: n.p.).

Lukas is complimentary about the Irish welfare system describing it as far more generous than the welfare system in his native country. Marian, Amy, Grace and Neil all recall a more benevolent social protection system before the economic crisis. In that period Marian describes her life as being ‘fairly comfortable’ on the mix of pay from work and benefits. When completing her undergraduate degree Amy says she ‘had the extra bit with the grant, even though I was spendin’ it on, on photocopying

and whatever else was goin' on in college. I did have some sort of extra money'. Likewise Grace and Neil discuss how increases in taxation, specifically the universal social charge, have cut into their income. They refer to a better time pre-recession.

N: And I have to say when I went back to adult education it was 2006 or 7 ... the climate was very good like. Do you know the government back then ... grants were high. You could also maintain some sort of social welfare income as well as the grant.

G: We were more well-off then weren't we in college?

N: Actually we were well-off like (G: in college) in the degree like (G: yeah) you know because like ... everything seems to have been pulled from under people's feet.

The expectations of what it means to be 'fairly comfortable' or being 'sort of lucky to have some extras', or 'well-off' as described by the last four contributors are by any standards modest. The discussion on social protection in the interviews was primarily about three specific issues: the complex and perceived unfair processes of deciding on benefit entitlements, delays in the processing of claims and out-dated systems of addressing claims.

The complex and perceived unfair processes of deciding benefit entitlements

As soon as Larry began to work, the uncomplicated weekly collection of his dole changed to a much more complex weekly chore which for him on his If and When contract brought with it intense stress.

J: So it's very complicated the whole thing?

L: Well, well it's not complicated now but you can imagine like when you're first doin' it, like fair enough for a man who is on it for years but I was only on it [referring to the 'normal dole'] three months ... I was on the normal dole, goin' down to the post office, collectin' my €100 a week, then all of a sudden I got the job and I get a cheque sent out ...

For Larry and some of the other participants the social protection system does not work well. The system appears to struggle with the unexpected changes in the number of hours or days worked in a week. While flexibility is expected of the workers in their workplace the same flexibility is not afforded to them by the social protection system leading to irritation, stress, delays in payment, mistakes and a constant watchfulness on the part of the workers to make sure they receive the correct payment. Watchfulness is needed too so that they do not inadvertently provide inaccurate information which could result in serious repercussions for their benefit claim and for them. This apparent inability of the social protection system to respond flexibly to his circumstances irked Michael enormously. He was eager to talk about the Department of Social Protection (DSP) which he describes as a 'nightmare'. He said that 'you're difficult for them [DSP] because ... you are workin' and you're not workin''. Michael spoke at length about his interactions with officials from the DSP and his views on how it deals with him as an agency worker working flexible shifts.

The people who work in the Department of Social Protection for instance must have seen all this before. I'm not the first agency worker who walked in. ... that's why you try so hard to get full-time work or with an agency. You, you constantly hassling them for, for full-time work cos it is so difficult goin' in to ... social welfare and sayin' ... I worked four days I was off so you're keeping a log of when you worked.

(Michael)

So I don't actually know it's, it's a whole new way of thinking because this is, whether they like it or not or we like it ... lot more companies are in to agencies. They ... suit companies just fine because ... it's transient workers. They have no commitment to them ... What I've seen anyway is that if you're on a three day week so you're signin' for three days and you're workin' for three days you're lovely, ye just hand in your slip. They [Department of Social Protection] know that that's grand; a cheque goes out religiously but if you're workin' for four days one week, three days the next week and so on that totally puts em out altogether.

(Michael)

So if you get overpaid then they could suspend your claim or hold your claim because you got overpaid. No fault of your own. ... I only found recently ... they told me initially that I was paid Tuesday. So I assumed Tuesday was the pay day so I would always tell them, ye know, before Tuesday. But no, no, no, if I worked from Friday I thought it would be okay to tell them Monday that I worked Thursday and Friday. No actually ye have to tell them Thursday that you worked Friday ... I tried to put across I don't know if I'm workin' Friday.

(Michael)

There is a real sense of frustration in Michael's voice and demeanour as he recounts these experiences. He is doing his best to provide for his family and he encounters constant obstacles along the way which he thinks should not be there. It adds to his stress to have to continuously battle in this way to have his situation understood as he attempts to regularise his income. He observed

We know we're goin' a get paid off the Department [Department of Social Protection]. Eh, ah the Government bodies will pay us what we're owed once we have the documentation and all the rest but it is the fact is it's there is no stability. You might get paid this week; you might get paid next week. When that cheque comes through the post nobody knows, ye know. It depends.

(Michael)

This uncertainty and not knowing when his money will come through from the agency (Michael explains the agency is unreliable in paying him his wages) has a knock on effect for him and his family. Michael says that the family worry about him and that he tries to conceal his worries about his income from them. This financial uncertainty impacts too on a practical level. Michael says his wife can manage the day-to-day budget when they know what money is coming in but, *you* 'can't actually budget something you don't have ... when you dunno know when you're getting it, how much you're goin' to get, right?'

Rita comments on the continuous negotiation with the DSP about time worked and the complexity of signing on and off welfare for overnight shifts, beginning as they

do on one day and running into the next. She also explains that the benefit rules restrict part-time or casual workers from working more than three days per week. She is restricted to working three days a week if she wants to claim any of her job seekers benefit. If she goes into a fourth day even for an hour's work she loses the benefit entirely. As she explained

If I got an extra day I'd have to sign off and then I get nothing because it's gone into the fourth day ... even though it might be only an hour. ... I could lose the whole thing. For three days you get €75 but instead of cutting you another 30 somethin' they cut you the whole 75 if you're workin' the four days even though for the fourth day I'd only get €28 [laughs].

(Rita)

The equity of the way welfare payments are structured appear to be questionable, calculated as they are over a number of days rather than by the hours worked. Rita and Larry work and are paid by the hour rather than by the day and so this means they could potentially lose money (Citizens Information Board, 2012). For instance Larry is at times caught in a payment/dole trap where he must sign-off benefit to work but when he does this the number of hours worked can be so low that he gets less money working than he does from his job seekers allowance. Like Rita he cannot claim the allowance for the days he is at work even if this work is for only three hours per day once his "working week" goes over three days. In effect Larry's actual working week could be 12 hours over four days, or three hours per day, and he is then not entitled to job seekers allowance. However, his pay for those 12 hours only comes to €90 (12 hours by €7.50) while his full job seekers allowance is €100, a loss of €10 to him. Frustrated, Larry says 'the system is just completely wrong'.

Another apparent "anomaly" in the payments system which arose for the lone parents on OFP and FIS is that the assessments of both of these payments take place on the highest aggregate income available to the assessors. This income may have been raised due to unusual circumstances but FIS and OFP are adjusted downwards in the current year. Marian explained that the year before our interview she and the other staff were asked to take on extra hours late in the year while their employer sought cover for colleagues on maternity leave.

So that meant at the end of the year my wages went up and my FIS this year is been assessed on last year's wages even though my wages have now come back down to where I was all the time. And the same with the lone parents, so if, if they were to go on my weekly money at the moment I would be getting more on me lone parents and more on me FIS an I'd have me wages but they're goin' on last year's.

(Marian)

Amy recounted a similar experience.

It is difficult because ... say the lone parents ... I get reviewed in April and at that time if it is busy I could be getting the 20 hours or the 21 hours an' then they'll calculate ... what they're goin' to give me for the year based on my payslips that I give them. But then if it [her wages] drops they don't reimburse me for the ... hours

are ... down because they just don't have the time to be just choppin' and changin' it. It's a set rate.

(Amy)

Shelley has had a similar experience with FIS. She has not applied for it in her current job but she expects to have to do so. In her previous work in the nursing home she said that the FIS office could not figure her out because

S: With the nursing home job I could never say exactly that amount of hours every week and they can't figure that out and then, when they do figure it out they can either figure it out from your P60 or your payslips and they will work it out on the lowest one.

J: Right, right, they never give you the benefit of the doubt?

S: No, no, no. They will take all the information from you and then they will figure it out to their advantage to the lowest ... for example, the second last year I worked in the nursing home I would have been ... averaging out 30 hours and then the next year it would have been averaging out at 36 hours. So rather than go with my P60 as they had done the previous year when my hours were lower they went with my payslips cos I was doin' the few extra hours, you know.

The women do not question the need for assessment and a fair adjustment to their income. What they do have a problem with is that by aggregating their income in the most advantageous way for the DSP and using it as the base-line for the current year they are left on a lower level of income. The income from the previous period may be a one-off but their current weekly income is negatively affected by the assessment. Kate's experience was of losing her FIS with the reduction of her part-time hours. After almost eight years in her job her hours were halved from 20 hours to ten and with it went her FIS (which she had previously had for six years) and a substantial part of her income disappeared.

As a lone parent I was allowed work the 20 hours and then I discovered after a couple of years that I qualified for FIS as well. ... But when you lose your hours you lose FIS ... that's when you need it most ye know, so it's kind of ah rough [laughs]

(Kate)

Delays in the processing of claims

Earlier in the chapter reference was made to how Lukas spoke of Ireland's generous welfare system. However, that does not mean that it is necessarily speedy in assessing and processing claims. The processing of Lukas' claim for job seekers allowance after his period of benefit expired took some time as he explained.

When I ... lost the job I ... I did for 12 months for job seeker benefit. After that I applied for job seeker allowance. It was a different story because they ask for everything you know, for how much money I've in account and if, everything what I have you know. If I owned that house or and it ... took about a couple of months, maybe almost a half year I think. Plenty of time maybe, four of five months to, to make decision you know, before they made decision you know. So I spent a lot of money you know [laughs] for that, because I, I got nothing you know during that

period. But after that, maybe after four months or five months I don't know how many months it was that so I got ohh huge money, they pay me.

(Lukas)

Lukas and his wife lived on their savings and her part-time work while they waited for his job seekers allowance claim to be processed. He was very understanding of the delay as he followed up by saying 'they were busy ... there are many people unemployed so I understand that'. Marian was not so forgiving for delays in the annual assessment of her FIS. She pointed out that OFP is also assessed annually but payments continue while the assessment is taking place. This is not the case with FIS.

Whereas the FIS you apply for it, they send you out the form maybe four weeks before your payment is due to stop an' they'll go through it. Your payment will stop then and until they decide or reach on your particular form you could be waitin' two, three, four, five. Last year I was actually waitin' nearly six months.

(Marian)

I asked Marian if it would be worth her while taking on a full-time job at her place (if one were available) to which she answered probably not on the €9.90 an hour she earns, but then she reflected on life on FIS and the worry she experiences every year as she waits for her FIS to come through.

Yeah on the income that they pay I probably wouldn't work out any better off than I am now. Probably would be a little bit less better off than what I am now if I, if I was doin' a full week's work [Joe: mmm] there on the, on the rate that, that they're payin'. But at the same time I often think to myself, ye know. Is it worth it, watchin' your back all the time as regards social welfare? Is it worth goin' without your FIS for six months of the year and fillin' in forms an' sendin' it off to your employer, because my employer their head office is not in the same town that I'm livin' in. Is it worth sendin' off the form for them to fill it in and worryin' will they get it in the post and worryin' how long will it take them to fill it in and send it back to me? And then worryin' and sendin' it off to the social welfare, will they get it and then you're waitin' on the letter to come to say that they've received it. All these things they might sound really small things and stupid things to be worrying about but ye do worry about them because at the end of the day it's your income. At the end of the day it's what puts food on your table. So the social welfare need to look at their policies as well and like get extra people in if possible to, ye know, so that the payments will go out quicker because considerin' it's a payment that you get for when you're low paid like it is ridiculous waitin' on it for six months.

(Marian)

Shelley has had an experience of FIS that improved over the years as she reports her very first application took 25 weeks while her most recent claim was processed within two weeks. She also highlights how quickly a benefit was taken from her when she informed the DSP that she was no longer a lone parent.

When I went on it [FIS] the first year it took 25 weeks to get it from the time I applied until I got it. This is goin' back years. At the time I went on it I was on lone parents, and now with somebody else that's gone but at that time I was on lone parents, it took them six days to reduce my money and it took FIS a week short of six months to increase it. So they were quite quick at taking it but not at giving but

that has gone down and has gone down. The following year it was 17 weeks and last year I think it was only two weeks. So they obviously must have got somebody in from the other department they can work quicker, that it is going down.

(Shelley)

Rigid and out-dated systems of addressing claimants' needs

For the research participants with the most uncertain hours we have seen examples of rigidities within the social protection system that do not meet their needs as “flexible” workers in relation to pay. But the inflexibility of the system runs deeper than this. The workers expose a rigid and out-dated system of addressing claimants' needs, even simple needs like responding to a request for information as Shelley explained, are met with a poor service.

The people behind the computers obviously haven't caught up with that [the answer to her query] and don't realise a way of figuring it out. ... And again some of them are not bothered either. I have rang, I have actually gone in in person with questions and just been told 'don't know'. Not that I'll find out or I'll ask but 'don't know'. ... And that was it. Three questions I asked, don't know, don't know, don't know. That was the answer to the three questions.

(Shelley)

Both Marian and Michael are scathing of the times they have to contact the DSP by phone and are left hanging on for long periods of time at a cost to them. In the following quote Marian turned to the issue of making contact with the FIS office.

And that's another thing when you ring up about it [her FIS application] they have you on hold for nearly an hour before they actually answer ye. Which is crazy, because you're thinkin' like, you get FIS because you're a low paid worker. They keep you hangin' on the phone for nearly an hour. That costs an' you have to do without your money for six months.

(Marian)

Michael shows a particular insight and frustration into his ongoing efforts of trying to deal with an inflexible social protection system and the very real difficulties it poses for him. His narrative exemplifies the challenge for flexible workers in dealing with the state. First, on the issue of the DSP's information requirements he says that he is asked for documentation that he has already given them, information he says they already know about him. Second, when a problem arises with his payments he must make direct contact with the Department which can be problematic because he may be working when they seek information and not in a position to call to the local DSP office or talk to them on the phone (and just like Marian above, making phones calls are a financial cost to him). Third, he puts his situation in the context of the social protection system's concern with fraud rather than in supporting him and honouring his 'rights'. Fourth, he believes that because he is an agency worker he is under suspicion more than the person 'on full-time social welfare' and he has to go and explain himself every time there is a break in his work. Fifth, he says that you have 'to annoy these people' [staff in the DSP] to get anything done. Sixth, some of the information provided by him does not meet

the standards required by the DSP but he has no control over that as he passes on what he is given by his employment agency. Seventh, the welfare officers will not accept emails or other forms of online communication in their dealings with him. Eighth, Michael says the officers he deals with in the DSP do not understand the nature of agency work.

This is the hand you're dealt with and you must go out and do this work and you go in to social welfare and they ... are just sayin' ... "how many days will you work next week?" I don't [laughs] ... know, ye know. "What company is it anyway?" It's an agency. "Are ye self-employed?" No. It's an agency. "Have you got a full-time contract with them or a part-time contract with them?" No it's an agency. The whole idea of an agency and you're explainin' it to them you know? It's not the first time they have ever heard of an agency, ye know. "Cos I need a form, I need a letter from your employer." The employer has over 2,000 workers. He's not goin' to start writing out letters. So you go in there every time and you ring your employer and your employer will say okay that guy is too much hassle. The agency says that guy is too much hassle, I don't know what he's up to, ye know.

(Michael)

Michael is very critical of the absence of the possibility to communicate online with the DSP. He says that if you send an email query to the Department someone will get back to you and invite you to visit the local DSP office to discuss your enquiry. He compares the DSP to the Revenue Commissioners and its online facility which Michael describes as 'excellent - ROS online is absolutely perfect. You go in there and you can do all your business'. He finds the lack of an online presence by the DSP as unfathomable.

I'd give them my email address, I don't have a Facebook account, but skype address the whole lot, phone number everything. And they're shaking their head. Just give me your phone number, that's all. It's so outdated ... So ye know I just can't understand ... most people when you're lookin' for work you're online so if you get an email you can actually respond if they want to know anything or you have a query. ... Now they're still dealing with paper, big box of files. I come in and they know exactly where I am but that's it. It's paper. I give them forms ... if I have to download something I have to print it off.

(Michael)

The conceptualisation of flexicurity and its two components, flexibility and security, may have its attractions as an ideal type or as a possible successful policy practice. Such has been the claim of the experience in Denmark and the Netherlands (see Viebrock and Clasen 2009 for a critique of flexicurity), where the conditions of flexicurity are closer to the ideal than in Ireland. It is evident from the narratives of the precarious workers in this study that flexibility applies to them. But this relationship is one-sided with the concept of flexibility benefiting employers without a quid pro quo for employees. In the theoretical framework of flexicurity the provision of a generous social security regime is a central element of that concept (Murphy and Loftus, 2015), but for these Irish workers this is not the case. The Irish

social protection system is ungenerous overall (Murphy, 2010) and the structural problems the workers in this study face in their dealings with Ireland's social protection system are not at all unusual (Citizens Information Board, 2012; Murphy and Loftus, 2015). Murphy and Loftus (2015) catalogue the changes (and lack of reform in certain areas) in Irish employment protection legislation and social protection policies which lead them to conclude that instead of a system of flexicurity the Irish system can be more accurately characterised as a system of 'flex-insecurity', in which workers at the margins of the labour market bear the brunt of economic restructuring. 'Thus, many observers might be forgiven for suspecting the term [flexicurity] to be little more than an instrument of an old agenda aimed at making labour markets more flexible and curtailing employees' rights' (Viebrock and Clasen, 2009: 325).

ACTIVATION

None of the participants in this study have experienced formal activation. Each time the question arose in my interviews the answer was always the same; the participants reported that there had been no effort on behalf of the state's employment services to engage with these workers at all. It appears that any attempt to find training, education, voluntary work or other employment was initiated by the workers themselves. These interviews took place in 2013-2014 and as noted in Chapter 3, the Irish state's policy on activation has changed with the publication of *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* (Department of Social Protection, 2016). These precarious workers and others like them can expect to be the targets of activation as the new policy is rolled out. The new policy aims at extending 'the approach of activation to other people who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 4). Although there is no specific reference to atypical workers in the new policy these 'other people' include 'part-time workers' and FIS recipients (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 17). This would include the workers in this study, as they all, in effect, work part-time apart from Lukas. This section highlights some experiences of activation policies by three of the workers in this study which give some indication of the challenges of this policy framework. In the interviews internships were referred to by three of the workers, Sophie, Lukas and Shelley and the Community Employment scheme was brought up as an issue by Shelley.

Internships

None of the study's participants have ever been on a formal internship but Sophie and Lukas have considered the possibility of one and Sophie was on a voluntary internship for some months when we met for interview. Shelley also has some views on internships as they impact on opportunities for low paid jobs. The Irish state, through the DSP, supports a national internship scheme called JobBridge and Sophie had some experience of trying to access the scheme when she finished her college degree in legal studies. There is a requirement to be in receipt of a welfare benefit

or allowance for at least three months to access the JobBridge programme. Sophie was claiming Jobs Seekers Allowance for the hours she was not working when she applied for a suitable internship in a location 30 minutes away from her home town. Because of her part-time work hours she did not meet the criteria for JobBridge as she had not claimed enough hours to make up three months' worth of claims.

I was tryin' to do, I was tryin' to get a job [internship] straight away because there was actually one in [names location] I wanted to do in a legal office. But because I was not on the dole long enough I couldn't do it, I had to have make up, I do Xs and Os and I do get half social welfare. So I had to have, I had to have a certain amount of days made up before they'd let me do it. Nine months, well it was longer because I only get paid for three days a week. So I had to wait 'til I had that built up and sure but I didn't have that built up by the time I was goin' to apply for the job in [names location]. And then I got, they were givin' me the Jobbridge in [names location] but I couldn't apply for it because ... I hadn't got enough days made up.

(Sophie)

Sophie was very keen to do an internship as she saw it as providing her with experience and would hopefully lead her to work as a legal executive. She thought the system was stupid and that she should be supported in her efforts to get experience. An opportunity arose to do a voluntary internship in her home town. Sophie unsuccessfully applied for a temporary job for maternity cover, in a solicitor's office which she saw advertised in her local newspaper. She was subsequently contacted by the manager of the law firm who asked her if she was interested in helping out on a specific project in their offices which would teach her other things as well. When I interviewed Sophie she had spent almost five months working eight hours a week over two half days in this voluntary internship for which she received no payment. I asked her if there is any possibility of her getting paid work from this firm.

I don't think so. I don't know, they said that if anything comes up they'll let me, they'll gi- me ask me, they'd offer it to me. They think that I'm okay in there but there are only all on three or four days down there, so. He haven't even got a receptionist, they all work on the reception one day a week and the job that I went for she was only coverin' maternity leave. So she could be gone now when the person comes back so.

(Sophie)

Sophie is very positive about the internship as she likes the people she works with in the solicitor's office describing them all as 'lovely'. She also likes the work and she sees it as an opportunity to add to her CV - 'I just want it for the experience for my CV'.

When Sophie went to the DSP to sign for jobseekers allowance after she completed her degree she had to register with FÁS and this is what ensued

S: They didn't really help me with much [breath].

J: Did they offer you anything ye know?

S: No. I just went in and signed up and they just told me look on the internet for jobs and that was it.

J: So that's

S: I went over, I went over over Jobbridge and they sent me back up to the ah, they sent me on over to Obair and they sent me back up to social welfare. They didn't even barely speak to me because they know I had a job like. So I don't know, I don't, I don't know whether it was cos of that, I went it, they just I went to the two of em and they just sent me back to social welfare office to ask them.

J: So, so you did it because you had to do it.

S: Yeah, well I went to the Citizens Advice and they [social welfare office] didn't understand what the whole thing was about like so I went to the Citizens Advice. They just explained to me that because I was workin' part-time I wasn't entitled to Jobbridge unless I made up them days.

Sophie said that there are no suitable JobBridge opportunities available in her own home town. She knows that there are some openings available in neighbouring towns but it would cost her too much to go to these other locations by bus as she does not drive. She says it would be a lot out of her wages as she only gains an extra €50 per week from an internship. The cost of travel for an internship was also brought up by Lukas.

Lukas completed a FÁS course in thermal insulation, described by him as 'the most interesting training I attended'. I asked him if he tried to get work in that area after he completed his training.

For, for as a insulator I found only one thing. I, I finish that course in Oct, October last year 2000, 2013 and since then I have only one offer for a job. It was ehm internship [J: alright]. It was only, it was in [names town 30 minute drive away]. They will pay, they will pay you €50 which isn't you will pay, you will pay petrol even more than for €50. Maybe they will be, you will get some experience you know for that you know ehm, I didn't ask for, you know I didn't apply for that job you know.

(Lukas)

Shelley sees internships as a threat to low paid jobs and she feels squeezed as she is in direct competition with them (Indecon, 2013; Doorley, 2015; Murphy, 2015). She said at one point in the interview that she may have to look for what she describes as 'a proper job again where I'm guaranteed 30 hours a week or 40 hours a week or whatever. But again like you said they're harder and harder to find'. I followed up by asking her if these jobs are available, jobs that are not part-time and it was at this point she brought up the issue of internships.

S: Very little. They're very little. I was looking at nursing homes again, when I left the other nursing home and they were taking on interns and everything rather than taking on staff that are already qualified or anything. So it is hard to get in that way [Joe: yeah]. Ye know, it's comin' up against a block, even, I worked in catering for years and restaurants and pubs and hotels and whatever, again nine out of ten are looking for interns rather than someone with experience. So you know it was quite difficult.

J: So, so your options are [unclear] are getting narrower

S: They're getting narrower and narrower, yes.

Shelley is 'very shocked' at the extent of the use of interns. She continues

One of them was to work in a coffee shop and they were looking for an intern, to work in a coffee shop, which surprised me. Or a chipper was another one, looking for an intern to work in a chipper. ... I was surprised about. Whatever about an intern to work in an office or accountants or something like you know but, but menial jobs like that they would be looking for interns.

(Shelley)

When I asked her what she thinks is happening she laughed and said it is cheap labour, but it is not just interns who are a threat to properly paid work. In her opinion, Community Employment (CE) schemes also threaten the jobs of low paid workers.

S: [Laughs] Well it's cheap labour isn't it in my view. They're getting an intern for €50 a week they'd have to pay the likes of me a whole lot more, so you know the lowered skilled jobs are being phased out like, they're not there really, I don't, very few of them. Because when you look on what, well what used to be the FAS you know, there are interns for everything. Any shops that I would have, shop, coffee shop, you know, restaurant, care work, they're all being ahm taken over by these internships.

J: So what you're saying is that in the past you'd look on these, look on the FAS and you would have seen a range of these jobs and they're not there anymore [S: no] as paid jobs.

S: They're not there no, no. Now they're all interns or CE schemes because there's a, a kind of a day care centre for the elderly about a three minute drive away from my house but it's only CE employment there. There's nobody actually working there other than on a CE schemes. And I know that there's people that work there who don't want to be there but they were told they have to, so they're there. But it kind of bugs me that there's people like working there who don't work there when I'd love to work there and I could walk there, I could cycle there you know it's only over the road and I'd love to do and it would, the hours in that place would suit me perfectly with the children and everything but it's a no-no, because only people on CE schemes are employed there.

Later in our interview Shelley returned to interns and CE schemes. She said that these are in place to massage the live register figures however it negatively impacts on people like her who want these as paying jobs but they are no longer available.

Of course it massages their figures and makes it look good because I'm assuming that if people are on internships and CE schemes they're not actually on the live register, so it makes that look a whole lot better but, it could put the likes of me on the live register, because I can't get that kind of work that I'm used to, that I have experience in because it's the same amount is not there like three, four years ago you'd look on FAS at that stage and they'd be reams of these jobs that people didn't really want. And now you look at them and they're all internancy, internancy, so like I said my jobs skills like, are, the jobs just aren't there for me anymore.

(Shelley)

We do not know what the practicalities of the Irish state's new policy on activation will mean for workers such as the precarious workers in this study as it has yet to be implemented. On the one hand there is obvious merit for workers to improve

their human capital (see the next section) and the majority of the workers in this study show a commitment to their human capital development, being willing to take on personal responsibility for investment in their own labour market progress (Streeck, 2009). Nonetheless, questions arise about this activation approach as insights from the narratives above of Sophie, Lukas and Shelley demonstrate. Their observations are supported by Doorley (2015: 79) in his analysis of the Irish state's intern programme, JobBridge, where he raises concerns about the exploitation of interns who are 'used for free labour and leading to job displacement' (see also Indecon, 2013; Murphy, 2015; Collins and Murphy, 2016).

It is also not clear how the more punitive aspects of activation (Boland, 2015) will play out in the new regime for precarious workers. How will workers like Amy and Marian who cannot plan their time from one week to the next due to short-notice rosters, or those who await a phone call to be called into work such as Michael and Larry, or people like Shelley and Rita whose small number of working hours are spread over the full day and a number of days of the week, be accommodated within this proposed activation system? We have been informed by the workers that the social protection system is already inflexible in meeting their needs. It is therefore legitimate to question how this system will support these workers with another layer of official scrutiny to overcome.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Lifelong learning is a touchstone of Europe's Employment Strategy and is also one of the ten dimensions of quality of work laid out in the EU's Employment Guidelines (Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007). Further education and training has long been regarded as having a central role in employment expansion because of its importance for employment. This started with the White Papers, *Charting Our Future – White Paper on Education* (Government of Ireland, 1995) and *Learning for Life – White Paper on Adult Education* (Government of Ireland, 2000) of which Maunsell et al (2008: 1) say it 'marks the adoption of lifelong learning as the 'governing principle' of education policy in the Republic of Ireland'. There followed a Task Force on Life Long Learning which reported in 2002. Lifelong learning was then referred to in successive social partnership agreements, national development plans and national employment action plans.

Lifelong learning is also a concern of the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs, which published the strategy, *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy* (2007). It has been given a place in the *Action Plan for Jobs* (2012) and the *National Reform Programme* (2015). In fact its presence is ubiquitous throughout all macro-economic, development and employment strategies for almost twenty years. The main providers of further education and training were previously the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and FÁS, the former under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills and the latter under the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. Both the VECs and FÁS have been replaced by Education & Training Boards (a reduced number of them) and SOLAS, the name for the new

Further Education and Training Authority, established in 2013, under the aegis of one government department, the Department of Education and Skills. What has all of this policy activity on lifelong learning meant for our research participants?

What emerges from the collective story of the research participants is that education and training is very important to them. Participation in education and training is primarily driven by the individuals themselves rather than as a support offered by their employers or the state's agencies responsible for social inclusion. Their narrative indicates that what has been available to them is poor as it offers very limited choice and does not lead to improved work opportunities. Employer provided in-work training, according to the participants is almost non-existent. In general where it is available training is limited to what is absolutely necessary, for example, manual handling courses. Even where specific training is required employees are routinely expected to either pay all or part of the cost of the course; workers in the employment agency sector are most affected. A number of the participants are well-qualified up to degree level and beyond in two cases. Third-level education grants were instrumental in helping these graduates successfully complete their studies but all had to engage in paid employment to supplement these grants. They also had to manipulate hours (or even to reduce working hours as in the case of Sophie) and take holidays to organise time to fit in attendance at lectures and work placements, which was not an easy task. The workers' narratives on education and training will be addressed under the following two headings: employer-supported training, state-provided education and training.

Employer-supported training

As is to be expected there are a range of experiences of employer-supported training. Ruth has had no employer-supported training for her current role in carrying out tasks that require community and youth work skills and knowledge. She was originally employed as a cleaner/caretaker and continues in that role along with community and youth related work. The lack of funding for the community organisation she works for makes demands on Ruth as an unskilled worker which she feels uncomfortable with. She said

You're expected to do things like but you have no trainin' or anything like that. So you kind of have to remind them sometimes that, ye know. Sometimes I think I rather just do the cleanin' because [laughs].

(Ruth)

But she subsequently said that she would like to work in this area if she had the training, although she did not think this would happen. Some years previously, before the project entered its perilous state, Ruth did take on a part-time youth work course. She enjoyed it but she had a new-born at that time who had some health problems, and she also had a toddler. The course was too demanding and with her two young children to care for she felt under a lot of pressure so she did not complete the course.

Marian's employer changed two years before the interview when the company she worked for was taken over by another business. The first company she worked for sent staff on training courses every two years or so and she did manual handling, fire courses and HACCP (Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point – food safety management system) courses. The new company hadn't sent her on any courses to date but she had just learned that staff were to be sent on a fire course in two weeks. Amy said that she has not received any training during her years working for her employer

No, we haven't, the only trainin' we got even if you could call it trainin' is how to use the fire extinguisher. Like, like my manual handlin', even though I'm liftin' boxes every day, I've done manual handlin' in [names a multinational corporation she worked for]. I was workin' there a few years ago. ... There's members of staff never shown how to pick up box properly. And they're just goin in ... to work down there. You're basically shown the shop and ... they tell you how to like merchandise stuff but there's no real trainin'.

(Amy)

In contrast, Valerie says that 'you couldn't fault' her company as it provides constant training, all of it provided in-house and directly related to the enhancement of the business. Neil has to attend training for his work during his own time as he works one long shift at the weekend, over 24 hours. However, he has the backing of his employer for further studies he is undertaking, including financial support. Michael has to present his "tickets" before he can enter a building site. These are to certify that he has essential basics to work on the site such as manual handling and safe pass, requirements for health and safety and insurance purposes. He says that on one occasion he turned up for work on a site and his manual handling ticket was out by one day and he was turned away. He said that if his tickets are not up to date he does not work.

Oh you, you can be assured that if you don't have the tickets first when you contact with an agency they will say "ok give me your safe pass number", "give me your manual handlin'", "what date is on your manual handlin' cert". Your cherry picker, whatever it is, whatever you got ... otherwise they won't talk to you.

(Michael)

Michael said that keeping up-to-date with these tickets is an extra cost for someone whose work with an agency is not regular.

You pay for your own manual handling cert so to actually go out there and work out of your social welfare payment you take €50s out of it and travel to the local manual handlin' course wherever it is

(Michael)

Michael and Shelley, who also must provide certain certificates to work, recounted how they can cut the cost of a course if they can do one where there are a number of other people doing it. Michael explained

Well ah ah if you can get a couple of guys together, more than four, the cheaper it gets. So you ... try to look out before your cert is out three months before your cert is out you look around and say okay ... manual handlin' course or you ring the local company and say ok have you got any course comin'? Could I get in say with the local council or could I get in with ye know. ... And a lot of time they will let you in or else the company ... that's providin' the course they will say "look it we're runnin' one on in [names location] at the moment, it'll be on Tuesday if you come in you can join in with us".

(Michael)

In answer to my question if the organisation she works for gives her any training Shelley said

Give you, no, provide you, yes. You pay for half. ... The likes of manual handling, first aid, AED, all that, everything has to be renewed every two years, so once your time is up they will pay for half, you will pay for half. Generally what they do is they try and get a big group together and they will get it provided cheaper, ye know in a group setting and then they will pay half so it doesn't cost, ye know, a fraction you know of what it would cost if you were to go out yourself and find the training.

(Shelley)

Shelley paid €20 for her last training session as part of a larger group. The cost depends on the type and length of course and the service provider, but it never goes over €50. She says she does not mind having to pay for these courses, 'because you have to keep these things updated', and the employer is paying half and making it cheaper by grouping people together. Michael says it costs him about €100 a year which he concedes is 'not massive money' but it is out of his own pocket and it all counts when as he says 'everybody wants a piece ... of you'.

State-provided education and training

In my interview with Sophie we engage in a considerable discussion on training and I put it to her that the state seems happy to supplement her part-time work by making up the balance of her income through the dole. Her response echoed the views of the other participants; the state appears to have little interest in training for precarious workers, at least for these precarious workers.

They're not helpin' ye, they should, they should be getting you into trainin'. When you finished college you should like help to get into what you want to do ... You're stuck in a rut basically like. Unless you just go out and find the experience yourself.

(Sophie)

This is what Kate has done. From early on in her interview she let me know that she has returned to part-time education at the local adult education centre. The younger of her two daughters had started secondary school in the September prior to our meeting.

I decided it was the right time for me to sort of get back to education and it's, it's the onus is really on me cos that situation [referring to work] is not going to get

any better d'you know and ... that's what I started to do. I went back to, ye know, basic education course. I'll follow up on over the years. ... It'll be a long term situation.

She is only at the beginning of this education path which is a long-term commitment for her. Kate described the programme as a back to education course and she was inspired to take this route when she realised there was no work available to her with her level of education and experience and she had to return to education to expand her options. Going down this route has not been easy for her but she does enjoy it.

K: So I decided, ye know really, at the back of my head I knew I have to get some training, ye know. I'm not really qualified for any particular job and [Joe: yeah] ye know do I want to stay in this environment for the rest of my life an, d'you know, so ehm I decided that really education was the way to go.

J: And where are you going? What's your, what's your goal?

K: Well ye know for the moment I, I computers is, is the thing, that I know how to turn them on and off, your very basic stuff. There is computers in this course that I'm on right now. We've done your basic introduction to basic computers and word processing. Ehm we just started spread sheets. So ehm, actually where I was before I got here I was enquiring what I can do in the meantime. So there is and ECDL I can do, so ehm I'm looking into that.

J: And are you enjoying being back at this?

K: I am actually but I was very nervous in the beginning you know because I'm at an age where I'm older than everybody else there. It was kind of nerve wracking in the beginning, but you know I'm there and I'm keepin' up and ye know ehm.

Lukas has had experience of training through FÁS and took every opportunity since he became unemployed to improve and expand his skills and range of options. He told me he took five training courses through FÁS since he lost his welding job.

There was arc welding, then I attended ahm eh thermal insulation course and FÁS course, you know which was only one of [unclear] of safe pass, of safe pass course by FÁS. It was only one day. Before these three then I fork lift driver course, and tech welding course. I think five courses since I lost my job.

(Lukas)

I asked him if the courses have been of any benefit to him. He answered negatively and said that what he most needs is advanced training in welding but he has only ever been offered a basic training programme. He has applied for an advanced programme twice but was not successful.

J: And have they been of benefit to you?

L: No because to be honest no, no benefit. Because it was only, if I talking about the welding course, it was basics. I, I have plenty of years' experience of welder but not tech welding, it's different story but I always lookin for job as mig welder or arc welder but because it is only basic courses you know, it's eh, people now looking for intermediate courses, eh [unclear] welder with certificate you know. So ahm, many, now companies want prefer coded [unclear] welder which I have no certificate for that, so I think that it's not to my benefit you

know. I, it, to be honest it didn't help, the, the courses they didn't help me to find job.

He believes that more and better training is the answer to his and other people's unemployment difficulties. However, he says that the training should be relevant to the work experiences of the unemployed as he met people from other backgrounds such as chefs on the welding courses he completed.

Michael agreed with Lukas' sentiments on how basic the welding courses are and he has his own take on this.

M: The whole country went crazy on welding courses, [J: mmm] ye know, there, there, there was em the Department of Social Protection said okay we're goin' to get em courses like to go on a course okay so you go to your local FAS office or go on line an [deep breath] and it seems welding, welding, welding ye know for men and childcare for women.

J: [laughs] and is that recent?

M: Yeah, yeah, it still goin', yeah, yeah, yeah. They kind of get a kind of a turnover every aah it's during the summer the welding starts. Ehm it must be costing the state, the tax payer a fortune in electricity because welders are very, very heavy on electricity and ye got and it just ehm and you get the arc welding, the basic welding. Now it's over ehm an eight week course so you're not goin' to be any good to an employer [Joe: yeah] at that point unless you've had previous experience and you just want to upskill.

Just as Lukas said that there is a need to move welders on to the next level Michael also makes a similar point about the need for more specialised training but he says that 'ye never seem to ... go on to the next course'. He believes it is a tick-box exercise for the employment service provider.

Just bang, get him on a course. We'll sign his little box, yeah he got on well and he passed the course and ye know. You don't actually get a qualification for this.

(Michael)

Outlined in the introduction to this section are a number of policy commitments and documents about life-long learning and human capital development. These are significant for the enhancement of the contributions of workers to a competitive economy and for the potential opportunities for workers themselves to improve their personal economic circumstances. The narratives of the workers in this study show an undoubted commitment to training and education. As reported by the workers, their training and education experiences are mainly self-directed with little support from employers or the state's social protection and employment services, highlighting the marginal position of these workers as learners.

QUALITY OF WORK

'Quality of work represents a core element of the European social model, but the protection and promotion of quality of work does not figure high on the EU's

employment policy agenda' (Bothfeld and Leschke, 2012: 338). The same can be said of the Irish employment policy agenda. I outlined in some detail in Chapter 3 the policy context of the quality of work within the EU and Ireland. References to quality played a significant role in the earlier EU policy documents and these references were repeated in Irish policy but to a lesser extent. Over time the quality dimension of employment policy diminished. In my earlier review I found that there continues to be occasional references to quality at both EU and Irish policy level but the current intermittent and non-specific references can hardly be defined as a policy on quality of work. The original features of quality of work as identified by the European Commission are as follows:

Quality of work includes better jobs and more balanced ways of combining working life with personal life. This is to the advantage of the individual, the economy and the society. It implies better employment policies, fair remuneration, an organisation of work adapted to the needs of both companies and individuals. It is based on high skills, fair labour standards and decent levels of occupational health and safety and includes facilitating occupational and geographical mobility. (European Commission, 2000: 13, emphasis in original)

Even a cursory comparison between the European Commission's position on quality of work and the experiences of the workers in this study show that the ideal is far from the reality of the participants' working lives. In spite of the claims, for example by McCoy (2015), that flexible work is desired by workers, and undoubtedly it is for some, the conditions of employment for the workers in this study do not meet the description of a more balanced way of combining work life with personal life (European Commission, 2000: 13). Throughout the precarious workers' narratives combining work life with the needs of their personal life is a constant struggle and these working arrangements do not 'advantage' the individual workers. I have already recorded a number of stories about the inadequacies in the quality of work that workers are faced with: how they lack control over their work; have poor to limited training opportunities; poor in-work protections; and live on low and insecure incomes which make it difficult to manage the financial aspects of their lives. The pay of the workers is also at low levels with three of them (Neil, Shelley and Rita) marginally above the living wage threshold of €11.45 per hour and under the OECD threshold of €12.20 per hour (Collins 2015b) while Valerie and Grace earn €14.50 and €15 per hour respectively.

The European Commission's (2003: 13) statement on the quality of work calls for 'more balanced ways of combining working life with personal life'. The narratives of a number of workers, such as Larry, Amy and Rita highlight the problems they face in achieving work/life balance and how difficult it is to plan anything. Valerie's story in particular exemplifies the challenges for precarious workers of achieving a balance between her working life and her family life. Prior to giving birth to her baby girl Valerie had got into a pattern of covering evening shifts to try and meet both her work and college commitments. When she returned from maternity leave she had a battle to try and regain some day shifts which suited her better in her new role as a mother. It was three years later when I interviewed Valerie and this is what she said about what transpired on her return to work.

- V: I'm still doin' a lot of evenins' but the odd day, I get an odd day which is better than all evenins'.
- J: So just tell me a little bit more about that then. What was the problem about getting days back?
- V: They just [pause] they're, they're not obligin'. They're, they're not there to help ye, you know like other jobs. I don't know what, I don't know how to explain it. They just say "well that, that's what you signed up to, that's what you wanted". But I like, as I tried to explain to them my circumstances have changed. Yeah I wanted to ah better myself to go to college but now I had a child and I wanted to go home and be with my child and my partner in the evenings and have dinner and be normal. I used to have to leave the baby in my mother's and [names partner] had to collect her in my mother's so we were literally just passin' ships. He collected her when he finished in my mam's then I'd I wouldn't be home 'til half 10 and she'd be in the bed. The next day we were barely seein' each other and then he had every weekend off. I was working the weekends. I could be on all day Saturday and then if I was in on a Sunday I'd be gone on a Sunday that I'd be the weekend after passing and we weren't be after doin' anything together either.
- J: So it wasn't very family friendly (V: No) and is it still like that?
- V: Ehm, yeah to a certain degree. As I said I get a few more during the weeks than what I did but it's still a good bit like that yeah, unsociable hours and I'm there longer like than most of the people there and you'd think they would give me some little bit of leeway but no.

Valerie was on a contract of up to 25 hours per week at the time of our interview but she was normally rostered to cover only 20 hours which suited her better. However, recently her managers had increased her roster to 25 hours, the maximum of her contract. Staff who had left were not being replaced so there was 'extra work and pressure' for the remaining staff. This added to the stress of Valerie's work and family life.

As recorded in this chapter and earlier in Chapter 5 the temporal and organisational aspects of their work, basic work protections and economic reward are issues across all the narratives of the participants. The stories of the workers are supported by the Irish academic literature (Murphy and Loftus, 2015; Collins, 2015a and 2015b; Boland, 2015; Boland and Griffin, 2015) which leads one to conclude that quality of work is not a priority of employers or the state in Ireland and as a consequence decent work remains beyond the grasp of precarious workers.

CONCLUSION

The premise of social inclusion is founded upon participation in the paid labour market (Levitas, 2005) and the workers in this study have shown their belief in this master narrative. Yet, for all of their efforts at work and the pursuit of developing their human capital through training and education to try and improve their employment options, they remain peripheral (but necessary) to the labour force (Byrne, 2005; Shildrick et al, 2012). They straddle the world of work and unemployment; they are not unemployed but due to their particular employment

circumstances they receive benefits and have a relationship with the state's social protection services. They are not only precarious in their working lives their precariousness also reaches into their relationship with the DSP. In this relationship the workers are under constant scrutiny with endless demands for information (see Boland and Griffin, 2015) and their incomes are subject to delay and change in a system that cannot cope with flexible, low paid workers. In summary, the flexibility of the workers, regarded as a necessity for economic growth and competitiveness, is rewarded with low incomes, poor working conditions, poor quality work, little or no training except what they provide at a cost to themselves and inadequate labour protection policies.

The Irish Government's *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* policy will only add to the precarious lives of these workers. These precarious workers, along with others who are not regarded as contributing (or in the case of precarious workers not contributing enough) to the labour market, will be required to take part in activation schemes. This approach promises little to the precarious workers in this study except more of the same for as Murphy (2016: 12) says, '[t]he work-first Irish activation model accepts low pay as the starting point for activation. Policy reinforces the sustainability of low-paid jobs by commodifying and pressuring people to accept such jobs'. If this was a first step to better work it may be palatable but there is no evidence to support this view (Broughton et al, 2010). The policy direction of *PtW 2016-2020* is surely a turn to embedded precariousness.

CHAPTER 7

Identity and the master narrative of paid work

An inescapable conclusion is that necessity, along with people's willingness to work - their acceptance of poor work - drives its offer and continuation, trapping individuals in vulnerability and insecurity.

(Shildrick et al, 2012: 195)

INTRODUCTION

Why do people who have precarious jobs persist with that type of work? One part of the answer is because of 'necessity' (Shildrick et al, 2012: 195) or because there is no other work available to them (Loftus, 2012). In this study a number of the research participants have sought other work and had drawn similar conclusions from their search for enhanced work opportunities. Other more secure work was not available to them and the alternative to their current employment was more of the same with a different employer. Sophie, Kate and Amy refer to this dilemma in their interviews

I was tryin' to get work in other places but I couldn't get other work. I tried [names large multinational retailer] and places around the town, part-time work and I couldn't get it. But sure I said I'd keep it [her job] cos I had nothing else.

(Sophie)

Yeah, yeah, so I think ye know really if I switch from a job now I'm really switching from one part-time job to another part-time job. Ah, I'm not really improving the situation, d'ye know what I mean ... so you know I just have to upskill and do whatever, ye know.

(Kate)

I'm, I'm at the moment I'm stuck [laughs] I'll, I'll, like I don't see it getting any better unless I decided to move into another job and the only job I'd probably more than likely get is another job in retail so ..., it would be the same thing it's just a different company. ... The same contracts, the same set up. Cos I have friends that work in different shops ... and it is the same thing.

(Amy)

There is a prevailing and popular media narrative that the social welfare system is too generous and is a disincentive to work. For example, McWilliams (2014) reflects on this in an article with the rather restrained title 'If a person is better off on the dole then we have a problem'. He writes his article in response to 'getting a lot of emails from people who feel that our welfare system is acting as a disincentive to work' (McWilliams, 2014: n.p.). Whatever the popular view of this issue, evidence from a Savage et al (2015) study for the Economic and Social Research Institute confirms that most Irish jobseekers would be better off in employment than claiming welfare.

The British media, readily available in Ireland, is not so restrained as McWilliams' article as the following headline and sub-headline from the *Daily Express* (Caunter, 2013: n.p.) newspaper demonstrates:

£17k benefits couple say we are better off than working

A SCROUNGING young family who claim £17,680 a year in benefits say they do not bother looking for work because they would be left worse off.

The newspaper begins the article by naming a young couple who 'live in a comfortable two-bedroom flat.' The article continues '[t]hey spend their time watching a 47 in flat-screen television and smoking 40 cigarettes a day on their leather sofa – all paid for by the taxpayer' (Caunter, 2013: n.p.). 'Inflammatory' and 'crassly judgemental' (Hanley, 2014: n.p.) British television programmes like *Benefits Street* (Channel 4) and *Saints and Scroungers* (BBC) play an active role in feeding into popularising the anti-poor sentiment that is also reflected in British politics (Shildrick et al, 2012; Toynbee, 2012; MacDonald, 2015).

In Ireland a less vitriolic narrative towards those in receipt of social protection is used in national media. However, in recent years an Irish government emphasis on combating social welfare fraud has led to media reporting which feeds into a populist anti-welfare narrative. The *Irish Sun's* headline and sub-headline 'Minister Joan Burton praises "zero-tolerance" approach: SNITCH calls outing benefit cheats have QUADRUPLED in the past three years, the Irish Sun can reveal' (Nolan, 2013: n.p.), uses a discourse that is similar to that used in the UK media. The basis of the discourse on welfare fraud is misleading. According to the Department of Social Protection it 'has estimated that the level of fraud and error in the social welfare system is in the range of 2.4% to 4.4% (an average of 3.4%) of total annual expenditure' (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2011b: 7). Furthermore, 'a larger proportion of funding tends to be lost to administrative and customer error than individual fraudulent activity' (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2011b: 9). The media coverage of this issue is disproportionate to the actual occurrence of fraud even if it appears popular to claim otherwise.

The discourse on the generosity of the welfare system and how it acts as a disincentive to work finds its way into the Irish government's flagship work activation policy, *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* (Department of Social Protection, 2016). The *PtW* document in a section headed 'Making work pay – Incentivise the take-up of opportunities' states '[i]t is important, however, that they [income supports] do not become a barrier or disincentive to take up work – either because the payments are too high or because the in-work earnings, after tax, are too low' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 27). Why if welfare is so generous do the precarious workers I have spoken to not take up this option? Why do they continue to work with little, if any financial gain? For example, Sophie's gain from her work is marginal, 'I'm workin' three days for €50, like ... it's for 50 for €50 extra like. So you're more or less workin' three days for €50'. There are broader issues at play in answer to the question of why these precarious workers continue to work.

WHY DO WORKERS CONTINUE TO WORK IN JOBS THAT ARE PRECARIOUS?

When one reflects on the often, at best, marginal financial gains for precarious workers and add to it the undoubted difficulties experienced by workers in so many of their work interactions and relationships, it does give rise to a serious question as to why precarious workers continue to engage in this form of work. This question goes beyond the calculation of simple financial returns referred to above and touches on processes that have much deeper significance. In this section I will explore some possible explanations as to why precarious workers continue to work in jobs that are precarious by touching on two different but related themes, identity and work (Bain, 2005) and master narratives (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004) of work. In the final section in this part of the chapter I will reflect on insights gleaned from this discussion as they apply to the experiences of the workers in this study.

Identity and work

Bain (2005: 26-27) quotes the following from Keith Thomas's (1999: v) preface to his edited tome on work, *The Oxford Book of Work*:

[w]ork is a virtually inescapable part of the human condition. Many of us spend most of our waking hours engaged in it. It absorbs our energies and preoccupies our thoughts. It involves us in close relations with other people and gives us our sense of identity.

The centrality of work as part of adult identity is well recognised in the literature on work. Doherty (2009: 84) maintains that 'work remains a significant locus of personal identity' (see also Sennett, 1998; Bain, 2005; Bauman, 2005; Kalleberg, 2009; Riach and Loretto, 2009). It provides a sense of self within and beyond the private sphere of the family and impacts on how we construct and transform our view of ourselves and others in the wider world. It is not clear why precarious workers would continue to work because the evidence from empirical research by Pocock et al (2004) and Bujold and Fournier (2008) suggests that one of the outcomes of precarious employment is its negative impact on workers' occupational identity. Bujold and Fournier (2008: 345) found in their research that precarious employment 'was linked to difficulty in constructing a clear, positive occupational identity'. Work identity is distinct from personal identity but does work identity continue to be as crucially important as implied by Beck's (1992: 139) proposition that '[w]age labor and an occupation have become the axis of living in the industrial age'?

The model of work identity that Beck (1992) and other authors refer to existed in the employment arrangements of the era of the SER, but if the basis of this model is disintegrating as is suggested by some scholars, including Beck, what becomes of this form of work identity? The claim is that identity in the workplace is no longer based on a collective identity but on an individual one formed from a responsabilised notion of self, in keeping with the philosophy of individualism which

is at the centre of neo-liberal capitalism. Walkerdine (2005) locates these changes in identity in an analysis of neo-liberalism through narratives informed by psychological discourse.

The changes in the labour market which accompany neoliberalism are lived through a set of narratives, informed by psychological discourses, that underpin practices of self management through which new work identities are produced and lived. Those identities, by placing the burden of responsibility for work on the personality of the worker, sidestep and hide social and economic issues concerning exploitation and poor working conditions.

(Walkerdine, 2005: 59)

This shift of responsibility from the collective to the individual and its impact on identity is bound up in the master narrative of work.

Master narratives and work

The study of identity is close to the heart of narrative inquiry for individuals' stories 'give meaning, unity, and purpose to the major events and memories of their lives' as individual identity is recalled through these memories, life histories and autobiographies (Bhatia, 2011: 347; see also Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). The meaning given to one's life through narrative forms is not isolated and individual but shaped by cultural settings and macro-social influences (Bhatia, 2011; Ezzy, 2000; De Fina, 2008). All individual narratives are consequently segments of stories of the collective, glimpses of the big stories (the cultural settings and macro-social influences that define society). Hammack (2011: 313) describes this as a master narrative and it 'represents a collective storyline which group members perceive as compulsory — a story which is so central to the group's existence and "essence" that it commands identification and integration into the personal narrative'. Master narratives help to define society's moral and cultural positioning as they represent strongly held beliefs and practices of the individual in the everyday world (and can thus be described as 'hegemonic', according to Ewick and Silbey (1995: 212)). Andrews (2004: 1) summarises the significance of the master narrative:

One of the key functions of master narratives is that they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience. In this way, such storylines serve as a blueprint for all stories; they become the vehicle through which we comprehend not only the stories of others, but crucially of ourselves as well. For ultimately, the power of master narratives derives from their internalisation. Wittingly or unwittingly, we become the stories we know, and the master narrative is reproduced.

This apparent linear and one directional dominance of the description of the master narrative is not the full story, however. Culture and history are mediated by counter-narratives and resistance helping to re-shape master narratives and creating space for fluidity in the face of normative expectation (Andrews, 2004; Bamberg, 2004).

Bauman's (2005: 5) positioning of paid work as a societal expectation and the 'commandment', as he puts it, 'to work is good, not to work is evil', reflects the essence of the master narrative in relation to paid employment. An observation by Beck (1992: 139) invokes the master narrative as he retells the story of the meeting of two strangers where the question of "what are you?" is the first question to be asked. He says that 'if we know our interlocutor's occupation then we think we know *him* or *her*. The occupation serves as a mutual identification pattern, with the help of which we can assess personal needs and abilities as well as economic and social position' (Beck, 1992: 139-140, emphasis in original).

But what occurs when work is no longer an option? Pederson (2013: 302), in his article on how job loss shifts attitudes towards the American Dream ('working hard to achieve success'), explores work, and its loss, as identity construction through this quintessential example of the master narrative. Pederson (2013: 309) detects disruptions in the master narrative of the American Dream through counter narratives. He reveals that the identities of the unemployed always 'positioned individuals in relation to others, and within and against the cultural backdrop of the American Dream master narrative'. In other words our identity, even when it is in conflict with the master narrative is still positioned within the context of that overarching narrative, because it is that which gives meaning to our identity, our relationships with others and ultimately to our lives. Bamberg (2004: 363) observes that we never stray very far beyond the dominant narrative; in fact even our counter-narratives are partially constructed 'from within'.

[T]here are always certain aspects of dominant stories that are left intact, while others are reshaped and reconfigured. Speakers never totally step outside the dominating framework of the master narrative, but always remain somewhat complicit and work with components and parts of the existent frame 'from within'. ... Speakers do not present a simple counter story but seem to be juggling several story lines simultaneously.

(Bamberg, 2004: 363)

Are the discourses of master narratives so hegemonically imbued that the scope for undermining them is limited? Pederson (2013: 318) believes not, because together with the counter narratives of others, narratives of disruption 'are the drivers for changing the dominant discourses that propel master narratives within a cultural landscape'. Pederson (2013) says that the experiences of unemployment and the narratives told of individual rupture has not brought to an end the master narrative of the American Dream but it leads individuals to question it through their counter narratives. Counter narratives are infused with opportunities for self-understanding and social change because the meanings given by individuals to their stories are not only personal but have social and political consequences (Hammack, 2011).

The work of Ewick and Silbey (1995; 2003) demonstrates the power of subversive stories and resistance for individuals and they (the authors) also extrapolate macro-political and social possibilities. Individual narratives, according to Ewick and Silbey (1995: 199), 'bridge the gap between daily social interaction and large-scale social structures ... In other words, stories people tell about themselves and their lives

both constitute and interpret those lives; the stories describe the world as it is lived and understood by the storyteller'. Central to their thesis is that narratives can 'sustain hegemony or alternatively can subvert it' (Ewick and Silbey, 1995: 200). The use of narrative is however, not a neutral form devoid of political meaning (Hammack, 2011), no more or less than other forms of social interactions, as narrative mirrors the organisation and structure of power in society (Ewick and Silbey, 1995). Narrative can exhibit its hegemonic form in a number of ways: by being used as a 'mechanism of social control'; by its ability to 'colonize consciousness'; and by its capacity to 'conceal the social organization of [its] production and plausibility' (Ewick and Silbey, 1995: 213-214). One of the conditions of countering the hegemonic is the marginality of the narrator, the force of the lone voice. Lone voices link their particular story to the general organisation of society and its master narrative challenging as it does the taken-for-granted hegemonic – for '[s]ubversive stories are those that break the silence' (Ewick and Silbey, 1995: 220). The stories of the workers in this study are in Ewick and Silbey's sense subversive. The lone voices of these workers expose the master narrative of work, 'to work is good, not to work is evil' (Bauman, 2005: 5), by retelling tales of their precarious employment. The stories of the workers call into question the dominant narrative of paid work, a narrative which makes the claim that paid employment, whatever its outcomes, is good for the worker.

PRECARIOUS WORKERS, IDENTITY AND MASTER NARRATIVES

The relevance of the literature on identity and master narratives for the precarious workers interviewed for this study will be teased out in this section. For ease of presentation each body of literature will be addressed thematically although there is overlap between the concepts, as we have seen in the previous sections.

Precarious workers and identity

There are two inter-related aspects to precarious work and identity; one is connected to work and identity (Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Foster, 2012) and the second is to work as a social norm (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2005). The literature on precarious employment tends to emphasise a strain on or even a fracturing of occupational identity (Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Standing, 2011) leading to, according to Standing (2011), a denial of the right to be acknowledged and accredited to a profession. The perceived lack of commitment associated with precarious employment, by the employer to the employee and in turn by the employee to the job at hand (Pocock et al, 2003) is encapsulated in the following quote from Bauman (2005: 35).

The flexible labour market neither offers nor permits commitment and dedication to any currently performed occupation. Getting attached to the job in hand, identifying one's place in the world with the work performed is neither very likely nor to be recommended given the short-lived nature of any employment.

The reality of the experience of work is much more nuanced than suggested by Bauman (Smithson and Lewis, 2000; Smith and Neuwirth, 2008; Doherty, 2009). Ambiguous commitment to their jobs is a feature of the stories of the participants in the current study but there is little evidence to suggest the primary concern of the workers was to have a specific occupational identity (Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Standing, 2011). Nonetheless, there is a commitment to the idea of work in the narratives of these precarious workers that point to the existence of a “worker” identity (see Foster, 2012).

This characterisation of identity is not a relational one in the Marxist sense of the collective identity of the working class (Frase, 2013). The worker identity in evidence here is embedded in a personal narrative of a normative and moral expectation that one should work for pay, whatever the nature of the work. This version of a worker identity sits comfortably in a more individualised and atomistic model of work and society. This appears to be the experience of the precarious workers who participated in this study. The workers are very isolated, some more than others depending on the work organisation they are attached to (Murphy and Turner, 2014). Their working lives are awash with peppered examples of individual effort, stress and coping where notions of collectivism do not function. That is not to say that the workers do not find friendships or experience kindnesses from work colleagues; they do, but these are random and episodic social interactions rather than characteristics that derive from a collective occupational identity.

The workers in this study have gone to extraordinary lengths to get work, to keep work and to plan for work into the future. The youngest participant in the study, 18 year old Larry, was so determined to get work that he tried very hard and by his own admission tried harder and was more determined than any of his friends who were still without jobs. ‘I did, I handed in a CV to every place in town’. Work was scarce and his expectations were low and yet he was determined, a sentiment that permeated throughout his interview. ‘[B]ut it’s hard, it’s hard to be determined to be like that when ye know there’s not much goin’ like’. And Larry took the first job he got which turned out to be a disappointment to him. It was not what he thought it would be, offering only infrequent and unplanned hours at the minimum wage, leaving him with little money and a disrupted life outside work. Yet, he persisted and was available to his employer whatever the cost to himself so that he would ... ‘not give off a negative vibe ... and I don’t want that ye know. I’d be afraid it affects my hours an’ I can’t afford that’.

All of the workers have histories of work effort, some starting even younger than Larry, when they were at school, such as Amy and Sophie. The majority of the workers want more hours; Sophie and Rita are working two jobs each and in Sophie’s case one of the jobs pays nothing. She has volunteered to do an internship in the hope that at some future point this investment of her time and labour will be repaid. Ruth has worked two jobs; Rita works two jobs. Amy has worked two jobs and attended college at the same time. Shelley works three jobs, for a care agency, in a pub and cleaning a house. Michael takes health and safety risks, shows up early

and has to stay late to show willingness to a contractor that he is committed to his work. He does not belong anywhere, neither to the agency nor to the contractor. He describes the agency: 'they're faceless people ... there's no human contact as such'. There is no permanency. Shelley and Rita have contact with human faces but they are contracted to the individuals they care for not the agency; if anything happens to their clients, if they spend a night in hospital or take a holiday Shelley and Rita do not get paid. Marian has to lift goods that are too heavy for her. Amy got a supervisor's job with a 50 cent per hour wage increase and now earns €9.35 per hour, the first increase since she began working for this employer six years before. Valerie works a supervisor's job without extra pay or recognition. Lukas meets an employer who expects him to work for a wage less than the one advertised. Kate loses work hours to a family member of the shop to which she has given seven years of service. Grace does not get paid for the long summer break in the pre-school where she works. Neil has to attend training sessions and meetings at his work without pay. None of these workers get paid when they miss work due to illness.

Ten of the thirteen workers have tried to improve or are in the process of improving their employment and career potential through training and education outside of their work. Lukas has undertaken a number of short FÁS training courses to give him greater options. Kate has returned to adult education because she says 'I'm not really qualified for any particular job and ... ye know do I really want to stay in this environment for the rest of my life? ... So ehm I decided that really education was the way to go'. Rita, Shelley and Larry have all completed FETAC programmes in recent years to give them specific skills (in Rita and Shelley's case) and to open up access to college (for Larry). Sophie has a degree and to give her practical experience she has, as we have noted, taken on a voluntary internship. Valerie is two modules short of completing her degree. Grace completed her degree as a mature student only four years before the interview. Amy has a postgraduate degree as has Neil and he is currently engaged in other studies. And while Michael does not see further education as a route for him he believes in it for his children as his oldest, a daughter has attained a master's degree and he has two sons in college completing degrees.

These workers are clearly not alienated from the idea of work but the organisation of work has atomised them and their experience of work has been degraded. After 11 years in her job Valerie uses terms like 'not a good feeling' and 'feel sick' when she speaks of her workplace. Time and again the workers express frustration and dissatisfaction about the organisation of their working lives, their poor treatment and the lack of commitment by their employers to them. Reactions to their circumstances vary with some workers more phlegmatic than others. Standing says (2011: 20) this reaction, '[t]hey will be angry but usually passively so', reflects a group of people characterised by defeat, fear, worry and stress who are 'uncertain and desperate in their behaviour'. However, as I have recorded above, the workers may be stressed and fearful but, contrary to Standing's (2011) claim, they are far from desperate and defeated and instead use their own sense of self and agency to counter the state of anomie that should befall them.

The workers develop their own strategies to counter their precarious work situations and these are short and long-term. Of great importance to them is the capacity to make sense of their world of work and this is described in different ways by the workers. Discontent leads Marian to begin her interview by stating 'It's not what I want to do for the rest of me life'. Kate is not happy with her work situation but it is a matter of putting up with it and 'go with the flow, ye know. Don't rock the boat because I need these hours'. For some there is a palpable sense of vulnerability within their jobs. Michael's description of his employment was book-ended with the word "disposable". Early in the interview he said ... 'but it's simple, you're disposable. You are disposable labour'. Towards the end he repeated this term when questioning the large number of workers the agency had on its books - 'just don't have them disposable'. Larry uses strong language to reveal his sense of disillusionment and of being used.

They do push out the boat a bit, they, ye know they fuckin' they, they take you for granted a lot. They know they can use ye because they know you're not goin' to say no ... I think they take advantage of it alright yeah, they use us a bit.

(Larry)

Sophie believes 'I'm just a number there too', while Neil expresses his anger 'I get a bit angry thinkin' you know your employers are, are kind of, kind of exploiting that' (referring to his belief that because people are struggling employers can treat people in an exploitative way). Alternative employment is not a way out of their predicament as some have found. Shelley wants to work more hours but cannot get them from her employer and has looked for other full-time work but she says this kind of work is 'harder and harder to find'. Kate, Ruth, Amy, Lukas and Sophie all have looked for other jobs but without success. Amy's final summary observation in her interview invokes both a master narrative of our time and the historical reality of precarious employment.

It's at the moment I think the way people are lookin' at it is you have a job count yourself lucky [Joe: right, yeah]. You have a job. At I, I couldn't see much bein' changed at the moment, maybe in years if things do get better. There might be some changes but I just think the line of work I'm in anyway I don't think it's ever goin' to change I think it's always been the same. Ehm and that's just the way it is.

(Amy)

Streeck's (2009) paper, 'Industrial relations today: Reining in flexibility', is a helpful referent point for comprehending the processes described in the narratives of the workers. Streeck (2009) traces the change in the organisation of work, practically and philosophically from the Fordist period to the present preoccupation with flexibility and flexicurity, giving particular attention to the cultural and moral transformation that followed the liberalisation of markets since the 1970s. He argues

The new round of liberalization at the end of the twentieth century entailed a gigantic program of cultural and moral re-education, and indeed one that must appear astonishingly successful seen from the perspective of the 1970s.

(Streeck, 2009: 26-27)

Features of this 'cultural and moral re-education' are the suspicion of 'collective solidarity and egalitarian provision' that may benefit those who are regarded not to have contributed their share and thus free-ride on the backs of those who have (Streeck, 2009: 28). An outcome of this rejection of the collective solidarity and egalitarian provision is the advent of the '*Arbeitskraftunternehmer* - a "labor power entrepreneur"' - who is an individual worker responsible for their ongoing investment in their own labour power at a financial cost to themselves and with no guarantee of success (Streeck, 2009: 24). In short Streeck (2009: 27) argues that the post-war system has been dismantled with ease because 'people were not just resigning themselves to the inevitable, but were broadly embracing capitalism as a way of life, and markets as sites of opportunity rather than uncertainty'. The evidence from this study suggests that Streeck's analysis is, at least for one segment of the labour market, broadly correct as the workers struggle in isolation to survive in and improve their world of work with little apparent success and at significant economic, personal and social costs. The workers have at least partially bought into the cultural and moral transformation of liberalisation, because, as we shall see in the following paragraphs, some of their own analysis reveals a certain ambiguity towards it.

In one dimension of employment-related activity there appears little ambiguity for these workers; I refer to the lack of solidarity and collective action in the workplace. Three of the twelve workers in employment were members of trade unions. Only in Valerie's case has the experience of union membership been helpful to her in her place of work. This was when the union prevented wholesale re-writing of contracts to the detriment of pay and conditions of existing employees. However, it could not prevent some changes to these contracts, now less advantageous for current workers, and furthermore, it could not avert the introduction of poorer pay, terms and conditions of employment for new employees. On other matters of concern for Valerie about her day-to-day working environment, the union, she said, could do nothing. Michael was a member of a trade union but he is not an engaged member. Michael says 'I'm payin' union dues. I don't know who, I've never met a shop steward ... while I've been on the sites I've yet to see somebody go lookin' for a shop steward'. Larry appears to be very uncertain about his union membership.

There is a union yeah, but I, I'm not, I wouldn't be, if there is a union an I'm in it I don't know about it, and I don't partake and if there is any meetins or there's any, ye know, if there's any ehm organisation down there for that I don't know about it. I or I have heard about it, I've heard we're in one but I, I dunno.

(Larry)

The other workers report that they are not members of trade unions and this appears not to be an issue for them as they responded to my enquiry mainly with a

'no', without any follow up explanation. Marian says that she had been a union member in her previous job (with a state-agency) and when she asked about joining a union in her current place of employment she was told 'we weren't allowed to join a union'. Amy also says that the workers in her retail store are not members of a union. She explains

Ehm there was issues before. There was one member of staff that joined the union and ehm the area manager said you can join, go ahead and join whatever union that you want but we don't recognise them. That's what we were told.

(Amy)

The strong anti-collectivism of the two employers for whom Marian and Amy worked is matched by the general disinterest of the workers themselves in union membership. It could be contended that these positions reflect Streeck's (2009) and Walkerdine's (2005) arguments referred to in the previous sub-section about how neo-liberal beliefs in the workplace and society generally has altered the nature of identity in the workplace. It is no longer based on a collective identity but on an individual one. This individual identity is formed from ideas of personal responsibility and self-management which are at the heart of the philosophy of individualism which is at the centre of neo-liberal capitalism. The individual worker identity of these precarious workers conflicts with Standing's (2011: 7, emphasis in original) thesis on the "precariat" described by him as a '*class-in-the-making*'. There is no evidence of the evolution of that collective identity from the stories of these workers as demonstrated in this research. Findings from Shildrick et al's (2012) study also refute Standing's class-in-the-making proposition.

[W]e found little evidence of interviewees strongly identifying with, or belonging to, a specific class- or status-based group work identity, which of course, has implications for the extent to which we might regard the informants as representatives of a new class called the precariat.

(Shildrick et al, 2012: 27)

Precarious workers and master narratives of paid work

To remind us of the meaning of master narratives I will again quote Hammack (2011: 313) who describes a master narrative as follows: it 'represents a collective storyline which group members perceive as compulsory — a story which is so central to the group's existence and "essence" that it commands identification and integration into the personal narrative'. The foundations for the shape of this section have already been laid in the previous section in our discussion on identity. Theoretically, Streeck's (2009: 27) tale of 'a program of cultural and moral re-education' which he claims has led us to the acceptance of the normative values of capitalism is borne out, I would argue, in the stories of the research participants. Streeck's claim uncovers an archetypal master narrative, as defined by Hammack (2011), with global as well as national and local consequences. That master narrative has import for the precarious workers in this study. It is based on the hypothesis that the values of the workers are fully assimilated into the belief system

of Irish society in relation to the primacy and morality of work. Shildrick et al (2012) report a similar ethical commitment to work among the working class people in their study in the North-East of England.

There is overwhelming evidence from the workers in this research that they have a commitment to paid work. Eight of the workers, Marian, Grace, Kate, Sophie, Ruth, Neil, Valerie and Amy, have spent between three and a half and 11 years in their current positions. Rita and Shelley had worked for a number of years in their previous employment, also precarious, before losing their jobs and they quickly found alternatives. Shelley currently works three jobs and Rita two. Lukas worked continuously from the moment he arrived in Ireland in 2004, moving around the country to take up temporary work for some months before he got a permanent job later the same year. He worked in this job for over six years until he was made redundant. His efforts to get any kind of sustainable work have not succeeded but he continues to use whatever training opportunities come his way to keep him in touch with the labour market and to help develop and expand his skills. Larry's story of work is well-documented already; at 18 years of age he made a huge effort to get work and he succeeded within three months of finishing his post-Leaving Certificate course. Michael's story of employment shows that he has worked in a variety of jobs for thirty years from the moment he left school and he worked in one of those jobs for 14 years. He persists with his efforts to get work through the building employment agency he is registered with.

Michael made a comment during his interview about his work situation which struck me forcefully, '[s]o it's not a whine about "oh it is so hard" and all the rest. No it's just reality'. There is an expectation that workers receive financial gain from their work, the primary benefit of paid employment based on the master narrative that "work should pay". Yet, for the workers, if there are financial gains these are marginal as we saw in Sophie's case referred to above, earning an extra €50 for three days work. In assessing the financial benefit for Michael from his work he is 'talkin' about €6s a day more than social welfare'. The level of Neil's income is sometimes an embarrassment to him of which he says '[s]o I'm in my early 40s now and sometimes when, if I'm in a certain mood, I'm almost embarrassed that I'm only on €12s an hour'.

We know from the cases of Rita and Larry that their overall income can be negatively affected if they do not monitor carefully the number of days they attend work. Michael, Lukas, Rita and Sophie all spoke of not taking jobs or internships beyond a certain distance from where they lived because financially they would not gain as the travel costs would exceed the extra income they would earn. Grace refers to the limitations of the financial benefit of her work. 'But that's it you do, you work hard but we don't reward ourselves ... because financially you can't'. A number of the interviewees spoke of the limitations on their social lives due to their low incomes and that whatever extra does accrue from their work is kept for the rainy day or goes toward necessities. But it can even be more basic than that, for as Rita says: '[I]t's just, ye know if you want to buy somethin' that you're not lookin' at

the pennies to see and all that like'. Although she does not work full-time the structure of Rita's working week makes it feel as if she is working full-time and she says 'I would only do it because of the money'. Yet, later in the interview she referred to the limited financial benefit of her work, saying she is lucky her husband works full-time, because even so they are only getting by (Lister, 2004). Valerie too uses the term 'we get by' although her partner works full-time, because between them they have little to spare. Rita's comment sums up her and Valerie's situation.

I suppose I'm lucky in that my husband work full-times, full-time an' his wages is kind of steady [Joe: right] and he, he pays for all the bills and ye know other people mightn't be as lucky doin' this work, ye know, [Joe: mmm] ahm now the hours I'm getting is enough to get by as such.

(Rita)

The master narrative of the primacy of work is bound up in a second master narrative, the morality of work, 'to work is good, not to work is evil' as Bauman (2005: 5) informs us. Not all of the participants in this study expressed views of work in terms of morality. Yet, for the majority of the workers there was an undoubtedly strong moral dimension in their view of paid work and in particular how they perceived their work effort in comparison to others who claimed welfare benefits as their only source of income. Shildrick et al (2012: 168 emphasis in original) locate similar findings in the debate around the '*deserving*' and the '*undeserving*' poor (see also Lister, 2004; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Shildrick and Rucell, 2015).

The master narrative of the morality of paid work has a long history and was legislated for in the Poor Law Acts of the 1830s in Britain and Ireland in the form of the notion of "less eligibility" (Silver, 1994). While the underlying moralism of this liberal idea never disappeared the development of the post-War welfare state in Britain did reduce its power. This did not occur to the same extent in Ireland because of the nature of its less-developed welfare system and political and religious conservatism (Fanning, 1999). With the elevation of the liberal ideas of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman through the political twin-force of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, neo-liberalism came to dominate (see Peck (2013) for a discussion on the vagaries and complexity of neo-liberalism(s)). It is focused on individualism, the reduction of the role of the state and the moral imperative of work over welfare and has remained as a political, economic and social imperative ever since (Ampuja, 2011).

This particular master narrative has triumphed for the moment as it combines both Thomas' (1999, cited in Bain, 2005) claim on the nature of work as an inherently human condition and Streeck's (2009: 28) argument about the 'cultural and moral re-education' of society and its (society's) embrace of capitalism. There are three dimensions to how this manifested in the smaller individual stories of the participants in this study. Firstly, some of the participants' views are cased in the morally loaded frame of the master narrative; how their efforts as individual workers contrast to the lack of effort by those who claim benefit as their source of

income. They characterise non-workers as happier to claim benefits than to make an effort by going out, finding a job and working for a living (see Marian below).

Secondly, this widespread moral view also produces, at least in part, the incentive to work so that the individual is spared the moral condemnation of being one of those who lives on welfare rather than working for a living. A third dimension of this moral positioning is to give example to their children. As parents the moral understanding is that they should provide a good example to their children by going out to work, which for some is a continuation of the position of their parents before them (Macmillan, 2010; Shildrick et al, 2012; Shildrick and Rucell, 2015). The following extracts exemplify these differing positions, all of which are strongly influenced by a master narrative of the capitalist age – the moral relationship between paid work and welfare benefits and the supremacy of the former over the latter. These comments reflect a combination of Levitas' (2005) discourses of MUD and SID.

Marian was the most forthright in expressing views that most closely reflect the master narrative. In a discussion about reductions to her OFP she diverted to give her views on those who do not work.

So, ehm like this is what I was sayin' to you earlier on about been penalised for goin' to work [Joe: mmm]. Ehm like people that are not goin' to work and decide to sit on their arses all day and goin' drawin' the dole their income stays the same but I'm getting up and I'm goin' to work and I'm payin' for child mindin' and all the rest of it and I'm payin' me taxes [Joe: mmm] and they're penalising me for it.

(Marian)

A little further on in the interview Marian turned to this issue again and aired her grievance about the unfairness of the impending loss of her OFP when her son turns 15 years. Because she is a lone parent the moral of her story is less absolute and more conflicted in the next extract than it was in her earlier reference. Nonetheless, she does take a moral stance and shows anxiety about the impending loss of income.

I think the, the, government need to sit down and sit down and see who is really makin' an effort about goin' out to work [Joe: mmm] ye know. Getting up early in the morning, goin' to work you, you are makin' an effort and you're getting your child minded or whatever. I mean at a €148s, when that was the, the amount that you were allowed to earn then things weren't so bad [Joe: mmm]. But I mean to cut it down to €90s, I mean who's goin' to go out and work for €90s to keep their full benefits. I mean you're talkin' about maybe a day and a half [Joe: mmm]. Nobody is gonna do that [Joe: mmm]. Ahm I just feel that they, they shouldn't be penalising us as much as we are [Joe: mmm]. And not only that, now they're comin' along the last couple of years and they're sayin' that they want to phase out lone parents [Joe: mmm]. An in fairness like for a long time people were sayin' 'oh lone parents are getting everything'. I don't agree with that. Some people might have all these children because they want to get all this money and they're getting' the, ahm, ahm their children allowance and ye know, if you have 8 or 9 children it's over a €1,000s a month. But some of us don't choose to be lone parents. We didn't have a choice in it. Ye know. Ahm. I, I just think that they, they should be a little bit more lenient with us [Joe: mmm] and now like I said, they're, they're tryin' phase out the lone parents and in my case when my child turns 15 I lose the lot [Joe: Right] and I

dunno how I'm gonna live then [Joe: yeah]. And I don't think that's fair. I don't think that's fair for anybody. At 15 I'm gonna lose my lone parents and the I'll probably won't be entitled to my FIS either an he still needs to be educated. He still needs to have shoes put on his feet and clothes put on his back and he still needs to be fed [Joe: mmm, mmm]. That's not fair.

(Marian)

Rita does not recount at the same length or with the same depth of emotion as Marian does about her opinion on the paid work and welfare mix. In reference to her payment for her daughter's nursing degree she says that half of her daughter's university registration fee is paid for by the state but '[w]ell it is like because I, I, I do think that if I wasn't workin' at all we would get the full ... the full thing' [reference to the registration fee]. Later in the interview Rita returns to the lack of incentive to work when she returned to what she believes she would be entitled to if she did not work.

I do believe if, if I wasn't workin' we would get more towards the grant [daughter's registration fee] and I often say that ye shouldn't feel like that about workin', ye know that, ye know an or ye know that if, if [names husband] was unemployed here ahm we would definitely get the grant [Joe: mmm] and we'd get back to school books and we'd get everything goin'. There, there is no [laughs] incentive to work.

(Rita)

Larry refers to cuts in the annual state budget which for him seem to have gone on for a lifetime. For Larry, the narrative of the Irish economic crisis does seem like a life-time experience as this dominant narrative has been part of his consciousness for the most recent third of his life. His young age determines an emplotment of life experience distinguishable from the other participants (Walkerdine, 2005). Age is among a number of factors, such as gender, class, migration, (dis)ability and education status which are elements of categorisation that work with narrative emplotment in formulating identity (Foster, 2012). Categorisation of itself is not the crucial element; it is the narrative or life-story that informs identity. Larry's identity as a precarious worker draws him into the same collective narrative described by all 13 workers in this study even though his life-course to date is different from the others. The same can be said of all of the workers (on gender, age or ethnic grounds), categorisation and emplotment may be different but the essential narrative of precarious work is consistent throughout their stories (Walkerdine, 2005). In a long piece Larry talks of reductions in income and how hard it is for people to do well with such cuts. He then said

[T]hey're takin it away, ye know. And they're takin' it away from the people that I think that, that made it, ye know. Ehm obviously there are people that take advantage too but the same time ye know I think they should look at the people that are makin' efforts an' they should, they should ehm ye know reward them, ye know what I mean.

(Larry)

He returns to the idea of effort in a section about why he has succeeded in getting work when his friends have not. He is very loyal and careful not to criticise his friends but there is an undoubted moral dimension to how he constructs his effort

at finding work. Some of the following extract has been quoted earlier but it is worth quoting again to demonstrate Larry's view on his attempts to get work, all of which is underscored by the morality of his desire and drive to find work.

L: I was very lucky. I, I, I've, I've good few friends and not one of them have a job and not one of them ye know are, ye know have, have their own house or so or ye know they're all, they're all fairly struggling like ye know. I know they are, they are lookin' like ye know and they in the meantime they could do courses I suppose but ye know I's, it's very hard for them like as well ye know.

J: What's the difference then between you and your friends that you've done a course that you've managed to get work? Is there?

L: I don't think there is any difference but if I, if I was to say one difference it would be ehm it's just, it's just ah [pause] I don't know like we've all looked for work, ye know. We've all handed out CVs an' not all of us has done courses. Ou-out of I've, I've, I've a few of us have done courses alright but I dunno maybe it's a consistency in tryin'. I don't think they try very hard, ye know. I tried very hard. I, I did I handed in a CV in every place in the town. I did the, the, I've done a lot of work experience as well an' I had a good bit of experience and I've worked in, I've worked in other places too ye know. So I had a good bit on my CV and ah I had about 10 places of work between work experience and other places of work on my CV. I had a course an eh, it probably looked like I was tryin' a lot harder than most of them compared to if, if I was to compare like the CVs or whatever or if it was compare to see what they've done, I'd say look the guy was, I tried a lot harder an' that I was more determined say. That, that's the only really difference but it's hard, it's hard be determined to be like that when ye know when there's not much goin' like.

Kate is quite tentative in her opinions on the morality of work and welfare. She does not refer to the morality of work in the same forthright manner as some of the other workers but she refers to the onus being on the individual to seek out and engage in education to improve their skills and work options.

The onus always seems to be on the person really and if you're quite happy to sit home alone and do nothing only twiddle your thumbs you're allowed do that it seems like. But ehm ye, ye, I had to kind of search out, you know what I mean. It was an advert in the local paper that I saw last summer, that if you wanted to get back into education but there was no letter from the government sayin', these courses are on in your area and we'd like you to pick one, d'ye know what I mean. So I think now there, there's a new inspector around that ehm. He's goin to pull people off the register and more or less to force them into a course. But of me the, the onus was really on me.

(Kate)

Amy, like Marian, expresses very blunt views on the morality of work and welfare as can be seen from the following extract. But Amy's assessment does not only incorporate the master narrative because in her explanation she expresses a counter-narrative (Bamberg, 2004) which places responsibility on employers to provide decent work, pay and conditions. In her description the master and counter narratives both play a role in influencing the circumstances of people like her who are on a low income.

Well, ye know at the moment from, from my experience of bein' on income from social welfare ehm the less money you're earnin' from a job the better because you can get a medical card, your rent stays down low or ehm you get more off the social welfare for working less. There's no incentive for anyone at the moment to go out and get a full-time job, even though there's not many of them around but if there is, cos the minute you do that there's like, there is a back to work scheme or whatever but I don't know the ins and outs of that now where they taper your money, you're in, you're entitled to keep your medical card. Ehm if you're lucky enough to get a sort of a decent job where you could do that. Ehm but the, the way from what I can see is you're better off bein' poor becau- a, and I know it's terrible attitude to have. Like I can see where, this Benefits Britain or whatever because there is no incentive ehm to better yourself because the way you're being treated whiles in work, the hours you're getting, the conditions, the pay, why would you go out and do that to yourself when you can stay at home all day for maybe the same money for what you went out and worked for a week.

(Amy)

The second dimension of the master narrative about work and welfare is its dissuasive impact, where participants work because they do not wish to become the butt of the master narrative (Shildrick et al, 2012). They do not wish to be seen to be dependent on welfare or as Amy put it she does not want to be 'just one of them spongers on the dole'. Similarly, Kate does not want to be stigmatised because for her there is a stigma attached to being on welfare. She said that this fear of stigma makes her work. Amy considers her action of going to work as an act of defiance, a gesture similar to the narratives of resistance explored by Ewick and Silbey (1995; 2003) where she challenges the master narrative in a way that gives her a victory (even if pyrrhic) against the dominant belief system and structures in society.

There is also the mentality, oh look at the wan claimin' all the money, the lone parents. And it is a bit of defiance like, I can go out and I can work and I don't need it an' I'm not sittin' at home and I'm not doin' this and I am goin' out, out an' workin' and I'm not just one of them spongers on the dole. Like there is a bit of that in the background; where it would be just not to have anyone sorta talkin' about ye, talkin' down about your circumstances.

(Amy)

In the third dimension on morality there is a work ethic handed down from one generation to the next (Shildrick et al, 2012). As Kate says it was 'the way I was brought up'. Kate has said it; Michael and Amy say it too. Amy explained why she works even though she is only marginally better off working.

J: And why do you work then?

A: Cos I couldn't not work. That's just me personally, I couldn't sit at home all day and do nothing because I'll go off my head plus I don't think it's a good example for, for my son, that he sees me sittin at home and bein ah, a lone parent and doin nothing and that's the sort of attitude he's goin to have, goin out into the workforce [Joe: okay] or goin out into life when he's a bit older.

J: And, and have you always worked since [Amy interrupts]

A: I've al-, I've worked since I was 16, even when, I was pregnant when I was 16 and I worked when I was 16 and I haven't not worked [Joe: right]. I've always worked.

J: And where does that come from? I mean, okay you say, you know I do it because I have to, and I don't want him to see me not working [Amy: yeah], But, but where do you think that comes from, is it through family?

A: Ehm, it's a bit of, of me own s-, like I work. Ehm me father worked in the glass factory, me uncle worked in the ESB. Ehm so they would be a sort of a work ethic comin' from me family anyway.

Then Amy continued by speaking of her defiance about her work role, referred to above, demonstrating a range of inter-related and complex reasons for working rather than not but all in some way connected to the moral master narrative of paid work being good. Michael too works for diverse reasons: to protect his own sanity, for his family's sanity and for the moral motivation that his children see him go out to work. In a commentary on trying to juggle income and make everything add up, Michael's narrative turned to why he does it – why he works.

But it, its, its, just as its [pause] its people say to you, "sure why would you do it"? But for sanity I, I can't sit at home and just wait until I send off CVs every day of the week looking for jobs. ... But just I can't sit at home like. If I get work [pause] I'll, I'll, I'll take it [Joe: mmmh] ye know. I'm, it's not, I don't make, you don't certainly do it for money. But you actually do it for your own sanity. For the family's sanity you just, ye know [deep breath] you, you have to ehm set some, some sort of standard in the family that the, the, your, your children actually see you goin' out [Joe: uhuh], which is I think it is very important that if the ye know if the the children see some one of the parents go out [Joe: mmm] and interact with the, the workforce and this is how ye know [Joe: huhem] and there should be rewards for doin' ye know ye'd expect you'd be rewarded for goin' out ye know.

(Michael)

ARE THERE BENEFITS FROM PAID PRECARIOUS WORK?

In the extract above Michael passionately explains why he does it, why he goes out to work – for his own sanity and to set a standard for the family. He ends by saying there should be rewards for going to work. He is referring to financial reward but are there benefits beyond financial reward for these precarious workers? The stories of these workers imply there is some benefit from the work they do. So dominant is the master narrative that it has become incorporated into identity formation and is a forceful driver of the commitment to engage in paid work. When Ruth thought she was going to lose her job some months before our interview she said she went 'mad lookin' for jobs'. The following extract from Ruth shows how the need for work drove her over a period of a couple of weeks or so when she thought her place of work was about to close down.

Yeah, we, we thought, we thought it was goin' to close, goin' to close down so, ehm I actu-, I, I went lookin' for other work and eh for a couple of weeks I was, I think even of [partner's name] at home said to me eh I was gone mad into lookin' for jobs, ye know like every day. I was there, we may get a job, we may get, may get a job an' ringin' loads of people and send, sendin' loads of CVs an' for to [names big town] and [names another big town] and everywhere I was. Ehm it was kind of like pressure ye know, I was under pressure to get a job.

(Ruth)

Ruth put enormous pressure on herself to replace her part-time precarious work on the minimum wage with other similar work. But she made no reference to the other option of claiming benefit as a sole source of income. Ruth felt she had to have paid work and she did succeed in getting other employment. For a time she worked in two jobs until it was confirmed that her current place of work was not to close. When she learned of this Ruth chose to stay in her existing employment.

This research did not set out to ascertain what positive benefits participants like Ruth got from her work. We have seen that for Kate and Amy, the fear of being stigmatised and labelled did have an impact on them but was not the only factor. Both also referred to the expectation learned from their families that they should work for a living and not be dependent on welfare. Michael talks of working to make a contribution to society when he says 'you're goin' out there and you're doin' your utmost, ye know to go out there and to be part of society, be part ye know the revenue collection'. Financial benefits to the workers are limited if not poor but there appear to be other positive benefits and rewarding aspects to their work. These benefits can go unnoticed and they seem to contest some of the precarious employment literature which emphasises negative outcomes for the workers in precarious jobs (Bujold and Fournier, 2008; McGann et al, 2012). The 'company' of Valerie's shop-floor colleagues is one of the aspects of her work she enjoys and customer interaction gives both Valerie and Marian satisfaction. I asked Marian if she enjoyed her work and she replied

Sometimes. Yeah I enjoy meetin' people. Ahm I've got to know a lot of our customers, I've got to know them an you know ... I get to know people, I get to know things about them. I even some of them I know what they, exactly what they want and have it on the counter when they come in and that kind of way. Ehm, and you know if it wasn't busy they'd stop and they they'd have a chat with you whatever like. I enjoy that part of it, yeah, yeah.

(Marian)

In caring jobs, like the ones Shelley, Neil, Ruth and Rita do there is also satisfaction to be had from the work itself. Shelley told me she likes the job and then later in the interview she said 'I'd like to keep doing this but I don't know if I will'. Both of her comments were contingent on the uncertainty and insecurity that surrounds her work and the possibility that she might have to do something different. Rita spoke of the importance of work to keep her busy. She said that even if she won the Lotto she would not give up work because she would 'go mad' and that she needs to do something. Grace needs to work for her independence and feels like a lesser person every summer when she is not paid as she is placed in a position of dependency on Neil.

I've been dependent on Neil now for the summer because I'm not getting' paid from playschool and that actually does a lot for you as a person you know. It kind of makes you feel like a lesser person cos I was so independent and I always had my money and you know but yet this summer I had to rely on you [she turns to Neil].

(Grace)

As noted, there are some benefits for these workers from their precarious employment which I believe should be acknowledged, such as the interactions with colleagues, customers and clients, the benefit of work for preserving 'sanity' and the limited, but yet important, financial independence it gives. However, it is not my intention to justify precarious employment as an acceptable form of employment on these grounds. Studies of precarious employment report that work of this kind causes predominantly negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety, poor health (both physical and mental health) and poverty (Pocock et al, 2004; Bujold and Fournier, 2008; McGann et al, 2012; Loftus, 2012; Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015).

CONCLUSION

There is a strong connection between the identity of the precarious workers in this study and the master narrative of the inherent goodness of paid work which is portrayed through an underlying morality of long historical standing. These moral underpinnings are made explicit by the workers through their views on those who do not work and are dependent on welfare benefits. They are also shown by the dissuasive stigma attached to being on welfare and by the importance of providing a good example to their children as they reflect on the example of the work ethic often provided in their own upbringing. Not all of the participants verbalise their commitment to work in these terms, although their actions, such as their long-term commitment to their employers, working a number of jobs, of trying to get better work and by engaging in training and education, all indicate a commitment to the master narrative of paid work which dominates our society.

Kalleberg's (2009: 1) comment on the essential importance of work to people's lives - '[i]t is central to individual identity' - is borne out in the contributions of the participants in this study. The findings show a definite commitment to a worker identity. The financial benefits of this precarious work may be negligible for most of the participants and working in precarious jobs may even cost them in other ways - personal, family and social - but there are some benefits to be had from being employed even if the employment is precarious. Standing's (2011) class-in-the-making thesis does not have resonance in the narratives of the workers in this study. It appears that, rather than moving towards a collective identity, the workers have taken on the prescribed identity of the neo-liberal master narrative, characterised by individual responsibility (Walkerdine, 2005; Streeck, 2009). The consequences for the workers are profound as it makes them very vulnerable to what Murphy and Loftus (2015: 106 and 109) refer to as a 'pincer movement' of weak employment protection and the 'problematic, complex and ambiguous' relationship between atypical work and social protection in Ireland. The next part of our puzzle is to connect the Irish state's relationship to these precarious workers through its social inclusion policies, founded as they are on the narrative of paid work.

CHAPTER 8

Social inclusion or embedded precariousness?

I suppose really ... even the people I work with or family or friends are pretty much in the same position as ourselves ... You don't feel excluded ... you know that much, because I think ... most people are struggling at the moment.

(Grace)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the meaning of the Irish policy of social inclusion for precarious workers. It is ironic that for low-paid, atypical workers, who are committed to work, such as the participants in this study, the Irish state's policy of social inclusion is likely to compel them into what I call embedded precariousness. By the term embedded precariousness I mean that the Irish state, through its social inclusion and employment policies, encourages and maintains a structure of marginal employment for precarious workers. The necessity of compelling workers into embedded precariousness is based on a premise that those who are marginal to the workforce are needed because they as 'a more fragmented ... workforce' are 'integral to the EU strategy of job creation' (Goetschy, 1999: 135). At the same time the marginal, "under-employed" worker is now regarded by the state like the recalcitrant unemployed worker and must be targeted, cajoled and forced into paid work irrespective of the quality of that work (Boland, 2015). This belief is under-pinned by the morality that 'to work is good, not to work is evil' (Bauman, 2005: 5), the master narrative of work discussed in the previous chapter.

Morality is deeply entrenched within the work narrative but it is equally rooted within the narrative of social inclusion and exclusion. I will begin this chapter with a short discussion to contextualise the morality of social inclusion before questioning some of the core elements of social exclusion against the testimonies of the workers in this study. The four core dimensions of social exclusion are multi-dimensionality, cumulative disadvantage, the relational and the dynamic (the dynamic indicates movement in and out of social exclusion and will not be discussed as it does not arise in the narratives of the workers). The purpose of presenting the storyline in this way is to show the limitations of the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion and their application to these precarious workers. I will then argue that instead of improving the lives of the workers the Irish state's application of social inclusion is being used as a tool to embed them in precarious employment.

MORALITY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

As discussed in Chapter 3 morality is an underpinning feature of both Silver's (1994) three paradigms of social exclusion and Levitas' (2005) three typologies of social exclusion. Silver (1994) attributes the idea of 'moral integration' to her 'solidarity' paradigm with its ideological foundations in Republicanism and Catholicism. In her review of the 'specialization' paradigm Silver (1994: 555) also recounts the early history of the moral dimension of welfare in early 19th century Britain and the principle of "less eligibility", which she says continues to 'stigmatize [welfare] recipients as undeserving or morally unworthy'. In Silver's (1994) final paradigm, 'monopoly', there is no direct reference to a moral dimension yet she highlights that the discourse of social exclusion used within the monopoly paradigm refers to new poverty, inequality and the underclass, which, as Levitas (2005) points out, is a morally loaded concept cast in cultural terms.

Morality is also an essential element in Levitas' (2005: 186) typologies of MUD, RED and SID, for as she says they 'all appeal to moral precepts'. 'The character of the new political discourse [SID]' is the discourse of the EU on social inclusion (Levitas, 2005: 178). According to Levitas (2005: 178), it 'very clearly reflects the language of Durkheim, with its appeal to social integration, solidarity and social cohesion'. There are two elements to social integration, 'integration through work and moral integration' and these are not necessarily independent characteristics, for work has a moral function as well as social and economic ones (Levitas, 2005: 179).

This brings us back to the master narrative of paid work. In the master narrative of EU social policy, social inclusion in the guise of paid work is the proposed answer to social exclusion, just as work has traditionally been proffered as the solution to poverty. Yet, the literature on social exclusion embraces a whole range of problems associated with marginal groups that extends far beyond those experiencing poverty through a lack of paid work. Silver (1994) produces an extensive list (a list that includes the poor, the precarious worker and the low paid) of the potentially socially excluded, based on research studies carried out on the following social categories:

the long-term or recurrently unemployed, those employed in precarious and unskilled jobs, especially older workers or those unprotected by labour regulations; the low paid and the poor; the landless; the unskilled, the illiterate, and school drop-outs; the mentally and physically handicapped and the disabled; addicts; delinquents, prison inmates, and persons with criminal records; single parents; battered or sexually abused children, those who grew up in problem households; young people, those lacking work experience or qualifications; child workers; women; foreigners, refugees, immigrants; racial, religious, and ethnic minorities; the disenfranchised; beneficiaries of social assistance; residents of rundown housing or disreputable neighbourhoods; those with consumption levels below subsistence (the hungry, the homeless, the Fourth World); those whose consumption, leisure, or other practices (drug or alcohol abuse, delinquency, dress, speech, mannerisms) are stigmatized or labelled as deviant; the downwardly mobile; the socially isolated without friends or family.

(Silver, 1994: 548-549)

Silver (1994) clarifies that these characteristics do not always lead to social exclusion. Some individuals who experience these characteristics enjoy normative lives, including social and economic expectations of well-paid employment, a stable family life and political participation. The casting of the social exclusion net so far and wide, notwithstanding Silver's caveat, greatly limits the usefulness of the concept and allows for its manipulation by those with the power to do so. Moreover, with morality at the heart of the social exclusion discourse a space is opened to use punitive measures for anyone who does not fit within the morally-set boundaries of the master narrative of paid work.

STORIES OF PRECARIOUS WORKERS AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

The universal acceptance of the concept of social exclusion is intriguing in the context of its origins and its very real limitations. In its favour the concept is lauded for its dynamic and multi-dimensional properties in contrast to what is regarded as the stagnant and uni-dimensional term, poverty (Levitas, 2005). However, it has been argued that the positive features of social exclusion can be over-played and much of the academic research and commentary on social exclusion comes with a warning about its limitations (Berghman, 1995; Lister, 2004; Byrne, 2005; Levitas, 2005; Béland, 2007).

In this section I will argue that the social exclusion and inclusion discourses draw in precarious workers into a categorisation that does not essentially describe their true position in society. These workers are marginal to the workforce, but are nonetheless necessary to it (Goetschy, 1999; Byrne, 2005). Yet, they are far from marginal as citizens as they make an important contribution across a range of the norms expected of active and committed citizens. The problem encountered by the workers in this study, in common with other precarious workers, is poor quality work and the poor income generated from their work effort (Shildrick et al, 2012).

In Chapter 3 the common features of social exclusion were outlined and summarised - it is multi-dimensional; there is a process of cumulative disadvantage; it is relational; and it is dynamic. The meaning of these terms overlap and explanations of them are vague but these are the essential aspects of social exclusion and I will therefore explore their relationship to the narratives of the precarious workers (apart from the dynamic as already explained). The following quote is a reminder of Levitas et al's (2007: 25) definition of social exclusion, which is

a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

Multi-dimensionality

It is nigh on impossible to either quantitatively or qualitatively assess the extent of (Silver, 2010) ‘the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services’ (Levitas et al, 2007: 25) for the participants in this study. However, consideration of the workers’ employment position, the role of the state and the workers’ personal consumption in the market place can give us some clues as to where the participants fit in this notion of multi-dimensionality. The workers’ employment position is substantially recorded in earlier chapters in this thesis. They have shown a commitment to work and training to improve employment and life opportunities and yet the workers’ lives have not improved despite their efforts, a finding that resonates with the studies by Pocock et al (2004) and Courtois and O’Keefe (2015). These workers have pursued the master narrative but work insecurity continues, as do poor levels of income and the concomitant threats to their well-being.

The problem then is not with the workers, it is with the “poor jobs” in which they are employed (Standing, 2011; Shildrick et al, 2012). Employers bear responsibility for their part in the creation and perpetuation of precarious employment (Kalleberg, 2011) but so too does the state. The lack of robust employment protection and regulation in Ireland is outlined in Chapter 2. There is a lack of rights for these workers in the workplace but they do receive what is permissible by law – all are entitled to legally prescribed holiday time or holiday pay and the minimum wage. Beyond this there are few protections for the workers in this study. For example, in relation to sick pay Marian reflects the situation of all of the workers when she recalls the following incident.

M: So regardless of being sick or not unless you’re dyin’ you feel like you have to go in. I mean tha’ I went in to work last, last year with shingles, you know and I got to a point where I just literally fell down and I couldn’t keep goin’. And then they knew in that case they knew by me I was genuinely sick. So I got time off, but I only took one day off really.

J: That’s all?

M: Yeah, one day with shingles. I was sick for nearly four weeks and I still went to work, but then as well on the other hand you don’t get paid if you didn’t go to work.

The levels of income earned at work and received through additional state benefits are comparatively low, reflecting Ireland’s position among the liberal economies of the world (Murphy, 2010; Collins and Murphy, 2016). The workers are entitled to a range of state benefits, if their income levels fall below ungenerous means-tested criteria – guided by low levels of decommodification (Esping-Andersen, 1990). But as we have seen in Chapter 6 the social protection system finds it difficult to cope with workers who are outside regular full-time or part-time hours and there are many barriers to claiming benefits in a system that is suspicious and not user friendly. Shildrick et al (2012) confirm similar problems in the British system.

Even where positive social policy measures are put in place, such as FIS in Ireland, they too sustain precarious employment by subsidising employers to maintain low paid work (Collins and Murphy, 2016). They are also delivered in a manner which creates exclusion. This was seen in Kate's story when her hours were cut and she lost her FIS. The lack of work-related rights combined with minimum levels of state welfare and work-support policies contribute to a lack of or denial of resources, rights and services. But these are structural problems that arise from inequalities and inequities in the macro socio-economic system and state policies rather than failings in individual effort (Veit-Wilson, 1998). It raises questions about the relationship between the excluders and the "excluded" and whose interest the use of the concept of exclusion really serves (Fraser, 2010).

With an increased emphasis on the market as a provider of goods and services, the nature of precarious work and insecure income does of course lead to reduced access to the market for precarious workers. It is clear that their lower income levels deny them the same market access as other workers on higher incomes. Shildrick et al (2012: 50), referring to young people's employment transitions, argue that "[e]conomic marginality", rather than exclusion, characterised their churning, non-progressive movement around low-level jobs, training places and time on "the dole". The notion of economic marginality expresses well the experiences of the low-paid precarious workers in the current study. Marian struggles financially, as she recounted, in the following piece.

It's a dead end job. It's not goin' anywhere. ... I do struggle financially and I don't want to be struggling financially for the rest of me days.

(Marian)

In a broader story about the stress on his family Michael told me of the pressure he experiences because he is so badly paid.

I know people do have hard lives and ... it is very difficult and pressure and all the rest but its I think [pause] when you're so badly paid that I think the pressure actually ... is severe at times but ... yes there is ... stress.

(Michael)

In the next extract Michael told of the practical implications of his poor pay.

M: Will we go somewhere? No, just eh you know it just takes I, if you have to wait until you get proper wages the following week or back money you're sayin' ok no we won't drive [Joe: mmm] to the [pause] cousin's house ye know 20 miles away or something like that ye know. We'll do it next week [Joe: R-i-ght]. I know it sounds j-just it sound like whining but it, it's just [Joe: yeah]. That is you're that's the life you live an', and ah [Joe: yeah], ye know.

J: So you're constantly watching what money you have and what you can spend it on and that then

M: Yeah, cos it is no. If ya don't watch the budget ehm [pause] that's ok everything is it just, ye know from the past [heavy breath] the impact it can have if ya don't. Everything must be slotted into place, righ'. Ahm if there isn't ah a part of the

jigsaw you'll have to wait until next week until you get part of the jigsaw to, to actually complete that whole, ye know.

When Kate had young daughters she found the round of school birthday parties a financial challenge. She did not have enough income to put money in the cards for the birthday present; in fact, she could not even afford the cards. Kate is a careful manager of her finances guided by the motto of not buying what she cannot afford.

K: So little by little I squirreled away enough to get a car, ye know and it was ye know a car that was practically given to me, d'ye know what I mean, an it was d'ye know [Joe: ummm] little things, just you'd have the eye on the ball. We'd save up and we get that, ye know.

J: So, so that's how you manage [unclear], you save [Kate: yeah] rather than borrow.

K: Yeah, yeah, no I don't have a credit card, I don't, anything I buy I pay in cash [Joe: ummm] ehm if, if I can't afford it I don't get it. I don't have loans out anywhere. I don't have a money lender coming. I, I can't afford the pressure in my head, d'you know for that sort of thing. I just, I just couldn't live like that, ye know.

Amy on the other hand uses a money lender when she is confronted by unexpected costs. In the following extract I asked Amy about her income and she told me about the unexpected need for dental treatment for her son and a stolen car key which she had to replace.

J: Ye know, from what you said and how you described your income, it's, it's low income [Amy: Yeah]. How do you manage all of that?

A: Well bein' honest ehm there a few weeks ago ehm [names son] had to, that's my son, he had to get a root canal [Joe: right]. Ehm it's €250s so I had no medical, it doesn't even cover it anyway. The choice was if I wanted to I could get his tooth pulled for 90 or get the root canal for 250 I had to get a loan off the [names money lender] [Joe: right]. That's just the way it was I got a loan because me car key actually got robbed so I had to get a loan off [names lender], €500s. I got a loan off and I'm payin' back 650. So I'm payin' back €25 a week for 6 months to pay a root canal and a key that got stolen out me house.

I asked Amy about getting caught financially.

J: Yeah, yeah and does that happen very often where you, where you, where you get caught?

A: Oh I get caught. I always, I just unfortunate that I get caught for somethin' like that. Ehm an' it generally, Christmas more than likely I'll have to do it again [Joe: yeah] presents and stuff like that. Ehm that's the [names money lender].

The workers lead restricted social lives. This is referred to by a number of the research participants and an example of how this affects Michael and his family is given above. Choices are made about what social activities can and cannot be enjoyed, accompanied by disciplined financial planning. Shelley provided a very good example of how the discipline of hard work and exacting financial management still do not prevent her from losing out as her social life becomes more restricted.

- J: Okay so, so trying to plan and that is difficult. What about big major events then you know I mean over the years, you know things like birthdays and all those first communions?
- S: Yes, yeah well you just put by, you know when times are good you put by as much as you can and when times are lean then you know, you can't really ahm. But birthdays, Christmas kind of like, ye know they're comin' so I just kind of have to scrimp and save as much as you can, while you can in case things go wor-, get worse or hours drop or whatever, just or if you have a few extra hours or if someone's on holidays or something rather than go out and blow it, ye know. Keep that for whatever event is comin' next. Most people always take holidays or ring in sick or whatever, so if you cover any extra shifts just put that aside and hold on to it.
- J: Ahm so you, so you're, you're constantly planning then?
- S: Constantly planning ahead, yes, yeah. It's the only way.
- J: And how do you find that I mean is, do you find it yeah. How do you find it?
- S: Sometimes I find it really annoying because sometimes you would just love to go and just go and buy stuff without havin' to think about it but you can't because you have to think about it because otherwise if you buy it now what's goin' to happen next week. You know, you know. If it's something that is non-essential, like I'm not talkin' about the essential stuff. The essential stuff obviously, you know is got, but non-essential stuff like, if you just feel like blowin' the money on something you can't really.
- J: So there's no kind of, oh I'm going to go, I'm out and I'm buying something and I'd say oh I going to have a meal or something like that, you just, you can't really do things like that?
- S: No very rarely, no, because like that, it's a tight ship so I have to.
- J: So do you manage to get out or at all yourself?
- S: Very rarely, very rarely, less and less as time goes on. I think the children are probably becoming more expensive, the wages is gone down so something has to give so it has been the goin' out thing that suffers.

Their precarious employment leads to their economic vulnerability and marginality which curtails their ability to participate in aspects of social, economic and cultural life. In this respect they are undoubtedly at a disadvantage when compared to people of greater financial means. But the multi-dimensional features of social exclusion are countered in the narratives of the workers in this study. All of their efforts drive them towards the normative expectations of society rather than on a path to social exclusion. Whatever exclusionary processes are in train, they do not originate with the workers but instead with the failings of the socio-economic structure in which they live and work. These failings are multi-dimensional and generate: economic marginality due to poor pay with too few and or infrequent hours; a system with diminished workers' rights and protections; and a social protection system that cannot adequately meet the needs of workers while it provides subsidies to employers to support low paid work. As we shall see, the participants do not experience cumulative disadvantage either, the second characteristic of social exclusion.

Cumulative disadvantage

Paugam (1995: 56) argues that those in precarious employment are at risk of social exclusion when he says

[t]he strength of the links between the employment situation and other dimensions of economic and social life (family, income, living conditions and social contacts) could suggest that those people in situations of occupational precariousness – whether they are in an insecure job or unemployed – have a good chance of becoming excluded from society.

However, Paugam (1995) qualifies his analysis by claiming this is not an exercise in social determinism and acknowledges the possibility of social compensation, such as family solidarity, which can offer protection for persons generally characterised as socially excluded. One way in which family solidarity is demonstrated is through the distribution of earnings within the household. The work of Collins (2015b) and Watson et al (2012) show that being a precarious worker on low pay does not inevitably lead to experiences of poverty or social deprivation (see also Shildrick et al, 2012). These outcomes are mediated by the level of income generated within the household of which the precarious worker may only be one contributor (Collins, 2015b). This current study did not assess household income distribution but it is evident from my interviews with the workers that the majority are the primary earners and in cases where they are secondary earners, such as in the case of Rita, the additional income helps the family to ‘get by’ (Lister, 2004; Shildrick et al, 2012). Gallie et al, write that social exclusion can be described in diverse ways but

most usages are concerned with the implications of a situation of multiple disadvantage in terms of labour market marginalisation, poverty and social isolation. These different dimensions of social exclusion are seen as mutually reinforcing, generating a vicious circle that leads to a progressive deterioration in people’s social situation.

(Gallie et al, 2003: 3)

The authors state that the generally held view is that the main influence on social exclusion is in relation to insertion in the labour market: ‘it is protracted loss of employment (or entrapment in a precarious sector of the labour market marked by recurrent unemployment) that starts the process of decline’ (Gallie et al, 2003: 3). Interestingly, the authors found no correlation between unemployment and a lack of sociability which they say contradicts the general view of social exclusion, the prediction of a decline in contacts with relations, friends and neighbours and associational involvement in community. In fact they found that those at work were more likely to experience this decline. In the context of precarious work it is the specific types of work that most impact on negative experiences of sociability (Gallie et al, 2003). Moreover, they found, in relation to Ireland, being unemployed made very little difference to contacts with friends (although Delaney et al’s (2011) qualitative study on the experiences of the unemployed is more ambiguous on this issue).

In their study, Gallie et al (2003), as does Paugam (1995), make the important point that cultural differences have a mediating effect on the course of social exclusion, particularly in relation to decreased sociability which is regarded as an important dimension in the spiral towards social exclusion. They claim that a combination of a culture of weak family structures and poor social protection systems were most likely to expose individuals who are unemployed 'to the cumulative deprivation of poverty and social isolation emphasised by social exclusion theory' (Gallie et al, 2003: 27; see also Lister, 2004). The authors conclude that a vicious circle of disadvantage does exist. People can become marginalised from employment but poverty is the central factor that underlines this process.

This dimension of social exclusion, cumulative disadvantage, is indeed a complex one. There are evidently individuals and groups that experience cumulative disadvantage leading to, in extreme cases, a 'rupturing' of the social bond (Silver, 2007: 1). Precarious workers are one of the groups at risk of cumulative disadvantage according to the literature reviewed above. Core characteristics associated with cumulative disadvantage are unemployment, poverty and social isolation. In that literature, unemployment is referred to as a dimension of precarious work, where the worker moves in and out of paid employment. In contrast, a notable characteristic of the precarious workers' lives in this study is the stability of their jobs as medium to long-term activities lasting over a number of years. Not all experiences of precarious employment reflect this stability (McGann, 2012; see also Shildrick et al, 2012) but some do, such as Hanniff and Lamm's (2005) study of precariousness in call centres in New Zealand as well as Courtois and O'Keefe (2015) in their research of precariousness in Irish higher education and Loftus (2012) in her study of Irish retail workers.

There are numerous unstable and insecure aspects to the work of the participants in this study but, apart from one participant, Lukas, being "unemployed" is not one of them. As we have noted in Chapter 7 the majority of the workers in the study have been in the same paid employment for more than three years. The participants could certainly be described as being underemployed and in common with the unemployed these workers have regular interactions with the offices of the Department of Social Protection; in some cases even more contact because of the nature of the hours worked and the variety of state welfare supports available to the workers. None of the workers who claimed welfare to support their work efforts referred to themselves as unemployed. Instead they regard themselves as workers and their attitudes towards work and those who do not work (see Chapter 7) reflect their position as being an insider rather than an outsider in relation to paid work.

The trajectory of cumulative disadvantage is a downward spiral (Paugam, 1995) leading to, at its most extreme, a rupture in social bonds (Silver, 2007). The evidence to support this negative course is at best confusing and certainly not convincing. According to Paugam (1995), precarious employment can be accompanied by a process of distancing from social relationships and family who live outside of the household. Social isolation and withdrawal into oneself may

result (see also Gallie and Paugam, 2002). In the current study there was no specific attempt to establish the level of social isolation experienced by the participants. There are documented examples of how economic marginality reduces social activities for the participants but in itself such marginality does not necessarily lead to social isolation.

We have seen an example from Michael where the lack of income can prevent him from making the journey to visit relatives. However, the structure of working hours can also impact on social engagement with families and friends. Neil said that the structure of his working hours, which he negotiated to allow himself time for his studies, means that he misses family events that mainly take place at weekends, the days he works (Gallie et al, 2003). Larry told of how his voluntary commitment and involvement in sport are reduced as a direct result of the uncertainty of his working hours. Perhaps over time, as the literature suggests, this may lead to social isolation. However, as already noted many of the workers have been in their current precarious jobs for a number of years and there was no other evidence to suggest that they were socially isolated. Perhaps this reflects Gallie et al's (2003: 15) claim about the protective features of certain cultures and their finding that the status of the unemployed in Ireland had little impact on the frequency of contacts with friends. The participants in this research are precarious workers but yet they engage in a range of family, social and community activities as we shall see below.

The nature of the paid work carried out by the participants, however infrequent or uncertain brings with it contact with others: work colleagues, customers and clients. This facilitates social integration and is an antidote to possible social isolation. From my contacts with and knowledge of a number of the participants work is not the only provider of social contacts and integration. For example, having gotten to know Ruth, Sophie and Larry over three years as a volunteer with the community project I am aware of some of their social interactions, the obvious one being Sophie and Larry's volunteer work with the same project. Often I spoke to Larry about his other interests, in sport, his local GAA club and his membership of the local snooker club, his hiking and camping with other young people, his hunting with family members and friends. I am aware of Ruth's interest in distance running and we often talked of the road races she has taken part in. I also know of Ruth's young teenage son who is a member of a number of sporting clubs. Neil has been associated with community projects as a volunteer for many years. Grace was engaged in voluntary activity previously but that activity was restricted due to having a young child. Before giving birth to her child Valerie was a member of a local running club but this was not sustainable after her baby was born even with the active support of extended family members. Amy volunteers in a local youth organisation and talks of the importance for her and her son of family support from different family members who live nearby. I put it to Amy that she had a supportive family who are always willing to help out.

They are yeah ... me mother is on one side of the street, me nannie is on the other side of the street. Me sister is around the corner. So there's always someone if I'm stuck.

(Amy)

Amy also refers to her son playing soccer and watching him train in the evenings when she is not working. Marian too has strong family contacts and supports and I know that she provides care and assistance for family members who need that support. Her son has been a member of different clubs over the years and is supported by Marian in his passion for horse riding. Lukas and his wife often have family members and friends from their home country to visit them and they take their children home annually to see grandparents and other relatives. His oldest boy is a member of the local scouts group, they are all active users of the local library and they love to go camping. Lukas enjoys mountain climbing and travels abroad when possible in pursuit of this activity. Kate is a scout leader in her local area. Michael has played indoor football once a week for years with a group of older men. Whatever challenges the workers face in their daily lives, the preceding testimony shows that there is engagement with family, friends and community. This engagement may be reduced at times but the evidence does not support the idea that these workers and their families are socially isolated when the opposite is the case; they are active and engaged members of society.

The relational

The relational dimension of social exclusion is defined by Levitas et al (2007: 25) as 'the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas'. The economic is more easily defined and there is a preponderance of the measurement of economic indicators in the literature on social exclusion, however, there is a lack of development of social indicators (Silver, 2010). Relational issues, the social, cultural and political, are much more difficult to define (Room, 1999). This also brings into play the questionable nature of the relational with its inferences for notions of integration into so-called "mainstream" society. These are, as Silver (2010: 191) points out, "ideological or culturally meaningful" and within such interpretations the master narrative of work resides comfortably. The participants are fully committed to the work narrative and as we have already discovered they are committed to the economic, social and cultural arenas, within the means available to them.

I do not know if these workers participated in the political system as members of political parties or through voting in elections and referendums. They did not introduce the topic nor did I ask them about formal political involvement. However, in some interviews where I thought it relevant at the time, I asked participants what they thought government could do to assist them as precarious workers. The

responses showed a level of political understanding which was not outside the norm, ranging from practical suggestions to improve training (Lukas and Sophie); to an exhortation to look after those who need to be looked after (Ruth); to a view that the onus is on the individual because government cannot or will not help (Kate and Neil); and finally the opinion that nothing will be done because precarious work serves a purpose (Amy and Michael). I asked Shelley about what should be done about government policy on internships and CE schemes, an issue of concern to her detailed in Chapter 6, to which she responded that it is about massaging unemployment figures.

I don't know what should be done, but I don't think it's a great policy. Of course it massages their figures and makes it look good because I'm assuming that if people are on internships and CE schemes they're not actually on the live register, so it makes that look a whole lot better.

(Shelley)

In none of my interviews did I ever get a sense of the workers being unwilling to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to everyone else in the community (Levitas et al, 2007). In a practical way this is clear in their commitment to work, in how they respond to their personal affairs and in their aspirations for themselves and their families. Activities and aspirations may have been restricted due to a lack of finances but these choices did not place the participants outside relationships and activities regarded as the norm by wider society. All three of the parents with older children have aspirations for them by supporting them through college. Michael has two sons attending third level colleges where they are completing degree programmes and a daughter with a post-graduate degree. Rita has a daughter in a university in Dublin where she is studying nursing. This has been costly for Rita and her husband as their daughter changed her mind about the programme of study she wished to pursue during her first year and the cost of this change set them back thousands of euro for which they had to take out a bank loan. While demonstrating their commitment to their daughter this debt has implications for Rita and her husband.

Well at the moment what happens is that my husband ... what he brings pays all the normal bills and what I earn then is for the rent in Dublin and ah a bank loan that we have. So that's the way that we're workin' it like you know. ... But it'd be just nice if at the end of the month you could say ah sure we'll go, we'll go off for a night or we'll go into the cinema or something you know, but you can't, you can't just say oh yeah we'll do that without checkin' kind of first you know.

(Rita)

Rita's daughter has inherited her mother and father's work ethic as she works in a fast-food restaurant chain in Dublin to help support herself. Her grandfather also makes a weekly contribution towards her costs. Shelley's daughter has just completed her Leaving Certificate and wants to go to college in Dublin to complete a degree programme. Shelley wants her daughter to go to college but this increases the pressure on Shelley to look for a job that gives her more working hours and she acknowledged that this type of job is not readily available.

As already noted, some of the literature on social exclusion incorporates precarious workers into the category of the socially excluded (Silver, 1994; Paugam, 1995). I have no doubt it is the case that *some* precarious workers become socially excluded and they live through the range of negative life experiences that are associated with this concept. However, this does not arise for the workers in this research. To generalise in this way and to define all precarious workers, such as the participants in this study, as socially excluded removes the power of individual agency and neglects the power of the master narrative of work and normative participation within society that are so deeply held and acted upon by these workers.

Only once throughout the course of the interviews did I pose the question about feeling socially excluded. I asked Grace and Neil if they feel excluded. This is what they had to say.

No, I suppose really because even the people I work with or family or friends are pretty much in the same position as ourselves, do you know like that? You don't feel excluded to that, you know that much, because I think, you know, I think most people are struggling at the moment (Neil: mmm) mmm, yeah.

(Grace)

I don't know about feeling excluded in terms of the wages and stuff an, but ehm like what Grace was sayin' just because everyone, everyone else seems to be goin' through this there's not its, it's kind of comfort, there's a comfort (Grace: mmm) in that like, you know.

(Neil)

Grace and Neil make an important observation in their reply. They do not feel any different to other people they know because as they see it 'most people' (Grace) or 'everyone else' (Neil) is in the same situation as them. These comments return us to Fraser's (2010: 365) question from an earlier chapter: 'But what exactly are the excluded excluded from?' In reality they are not excluded, for Grace and Neil are part of the norm among their extended peer group, family, work colleagues and community. It is inequality based on their class position that negatively affects Neil and Grace's work effort and not social exclusion. Both Grace and Neil, in their response to my query, explained their position in terms of income. Byrne (2005: 87) notes that '[t]here is a deal more to class than just income, but it will do as a dimension around which to explore inequalities'. Atkinson (2010: 414, emphasis in original) argues that success in the labour market is '*differentiated according to class*. Low-paid, low-skill manual workers overwhelmingly suffer instability and fragmented pathways to a greater degree than professionals'.

Grace and Neil are hesitant in their responses as Grace says 'you don't feel excluded ... that much' and Neil similarly says 'I don't know about feeling excluded in terms of wages and stuff'. There is naturally a doubt in their minds about their socio-economic status; they wish it could be better, a sentiment they express in the interview. This is a part of the desire to progress, to achieve and to improve their lives for themselves and their young son. In the master narrative of a consumer-driven society these expressions of doubt are the norm (Bowring, 2000; Bauman,

2005; Streeck, 2009). The views expressed by Grace and Neil replicate a similar conclusion by Shildrick et al (2012). These authors state that over-qualification is a facet of under-employment common in the new economy where '[l]ow-paid, low-skilled work remains abundant, and even workers with high skills (for example, graduates) are now finding themselves having to do such work' (Shildrick et al, 2012: 199).

SOCIAL INCLUSION OR EMBEDDED PRECARIOUSNESS?

The political, social and economic world into which the concepts social exclusion and inclusion were born has altered dramatically over the past 40 years. The concept began its journey in embryonic form in the 1970s, fulfilled its role as the replacement for the idea of poverty in the 1990s and reached its zenith in the 2000s when it became a centre-piece of social policy for the governments of the EU through the Lisbon Strategy and its successor Europe 2020 (Room, 1995; Atkinson et al, 2005; Kröger, 2007; Daly, 2006). The origin of the concepts was politically driven and the acceptance of social exclusion and inclusion is attributed to its capacity to broaden our understanding of poverty (Sen, 2000; Silver and Miller, 2003). It has long been argued that poverty is a one-dimensional concept, fixed on the income and material well-being of individuals at the expense of other aspects of the experience of poverty (Townsend, 1979; Room, 1999), while the use of social exclusion and inclusion supposedly rectifies this imbalance (Levitas et al, 2007).

Instead of achieving the aims of those who believed in and contributed to the development of these concepts, the conceptual framework has been subverted to support a neo-liberal welfare model. As pointed out in Chapter 3 the concept of social exclusion is firmly rooted in discourse (Levitas, 2005) and ideology (Silver, 1994), reflecting different political positions on the nature of poverty and work (paid and unpaid). The political positioning within the EU (the driver of this policy framework) has turned increasingly to the right and supportive of neo-liberal ideology (Silver, 2010). The consequences for social inclusion and employment policies have seen an increasing shift towards a work-first model of social protection and greater conditionality (Van Oorschot, 2002; Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2004; Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007; Barbier, 2012; Murphy, 2016).

In this section I will present an argument to support my belief that the idea of social inclusion has not only failed to meet the needs of precarious workers through this policy turn but has become a tool of the Irish state in the embedding of workers' precariousness. In her discussion of the Irish government's activation policy Murphy (2016: 16) observes that they have 'adopted neo-liberal low-road approaches which assume that any job is better than none, [and] that low wages are acceptable'. It is from this political position that precariousness becomes embedded.

From the beginning, the use of the concept of exclusion, led by Renoir (1974) in France in the 1970s, has been indiscriminately expansive. We have referred to the range of social groups Silver (1994) identifies as socially excluded, including

precarious workers. This extensive catch-all categorisation underpins the limitations of the concept and feeds into a discourse more attuned to that of the underclass (Byrne, 2005; Shildrick et al, 2012) than a concept that purportedly was to counter this contested notion (Levitas, 2005). Room (1999: 171) makes an important contribution to the debate when he calls for a clear understanding of the meaning of social exclusion, one that he proposes is significantly at odds with the more general use of the term as a “synonym” of disadvantage’.

In short, then, to use the notion of social exclusion carries the implication that we are speaking of people who are suffering such a degree of multi-dimensional disadvantage, of such duration, and reinforced by such material and cultural degradation of the neighbourhoods in which they live, that their relational links with the wider society are ruptured to a degree which is to some considerable degree irreversible.

(Room, 1999: 171)

In this portrayal by Room (1999) social exclusion is quite catastrophic in a number of different ways for the individuals to whom this description applies as well as for the neighbourhoods in which they live. It leads to such isolation that their relations with wider society can be characterised as ruptured and largely irreparable. In Room’s (1999) account there is a qualitative difference between those who are socially excluded and the rest of society. Poverty is seen as the cause of social exclusion. The precarious workers in this study cannot be described as socially excluded using Room’s (1999) description of the concept. Their circumstances are far from the catastrophe and rupture of Room’s explanation. If social exclusion is to add value it surely must at least do more than replace the terms “under-employment”, “economic marginality” or “low income” (Room, 1999; Lister, 2004). The concept must offer something more sophisticated than that to warrant its use in the case of these precarious workers, but it does not.

There is a lack of or at best dubious, empirical evidence to support the notion of social exclusion as an ‘undifferentiated phenomenon’ (Lister, 2004: 87; see also Burchardt et al, 1999; Daly and Silver, 2008). It is also questionable as to whether social exclusion is anything more than another term for poverty (Lister, 2004) that has taken on the mantle of something substantially greater. Daly and Silver (2008: 557) write that ‘social exclusion draws upon a discourse of social problems’, but social problems are almost always characterised as the problems of individuals and rarely as the problems that come from unequal and unfair political, social and economic structures. By drawing the precarious workers from this study into the terrain of the problematic, the discourse of social exclusion ignores their true position in society as individuals who identify with and follow the moral norms of the prevalent master narratives of work and not as outsiders on the margin of society. They are not set apart in either Room’s (1999) sense of rupture nor are they excluded because they are marginal to the workforce as proposed in Sen’s (2000) understanding of the concept.

Their participation in the workforce, however unsatisfactory that may be for the workers is one of inclusion in the scheme of capitalist social relations. Their

particular role as marginal workers is essential to the profitable operation of the businesses for which they work (Goetschy, 1999; Byrne 2005; Streeck, 2009). The social and economic positioning of the precarious workers is therefore ambiguous with little recognition for their dual role. On the one hand the workers maintain lives that are integrative and on the other hand they experience economic marginality not of their own choosing or making. As a result, these precarious workers are not socially excluded, but due to the precariousness of their employment their life experience is one of insecurity of income, economic marginality and consequent uncertainty (Shildrick et al, 2012).

None of the workers in this study identify themselves as poor but there are references to impoverishment (Michael) and being poor (Amy) (Bowring, 2000; Shildrick et al, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Only one of the workers, Lukas, is unemployed although Kate suggests she does not really have a job after her hours were cut from 20 to 10 per week. Even with these caveats all of the participants in the study regard themselves as workers and are totally committed to the master narrative of work, including Lukas and Kate. Some features of their lives are similar to people who are unemployed with experiences of the same phenomena, for example, their 'social welfare status' (Delaney, 2011: 25) or their experiences of 'everyday hardship' (Shildrick et al, 2012: 169). The discourse of social inclusion policies by the EU and Ireland are directed at the unemployed who are judged as being poor, a result of their unemployed status and dependency on welfare. Precarious workers who experience under-employment and low incomes, even though they too are at risk of poverty and are in many cases dependent on welfare support to enhance their low incomes, have not to date been included in this policy framework. This policy direction is to change as the implementation of *PtW 2016-2020* will apply activation to these workers from 2017 onwards.

The EU and Ireland's approach to social exclusion and inclusion is very narrow and certainly does not reflect the more extensive usage of the concept referred to earlier in this chapter and in some detail in Chapter 3. This narrow view is a combined version of Levitas' (2005) theoretical configurations of SID and MUD. In these two configurations paid work and moral integrity are the key to combating social exclusion and bringing about social inclusion. The precarious workers in this study are in paid work and are morally committed to it and yet they are categorised in the broader social exclusion literature as socially excluded (Silver, 1994). There is a need to re-imagine the relationship between social exclusion and inclusion and its generally problematising function by using the concept in a much more accurate way. Central to the process of re-imagination, the relationship between social exclusion/inclusion and poverty has to be re-thought. To be poor or at risk of poverty does not necessarily mean to be socially excluded. Individuals can be poor or at risk of poverty and still participate actively and positively in society.

Lister's (2004) conclusion to her comprehensive review of the nature of the relationship between poverty and social exclusion summarises the problem and the

potential benefit, within clearly delineated boundaries, of the concept of social exclusion.

[w]hile it is possible to identify processes of exclusion and even states of specific forms or dimensions of exclusion, we currently lack empirical evidence of a clearly distinguishable, more generalized phenomenon of social exclusion. Instead, other than in its most acute form (which appears to be rare), social exclusion is better understood as a potentially illuminating concept and as a set of political discourses with a range of policy implications. Provided social exclusion is not treated as an alternative to poverty, it can serve a useful conceptual function as a lens, which ... sharpens the focus on a number of important aspects of poverty.

(Lister, 2004: 98)

The approach to social exclusion by the EU and its member states is at best ambivalent. The concept of social exclusion is used in a far-reaching and generalised way when it is defined by the EU institutions but in practice the policy response is quite narrow concentrating on paid work as the answer to poverty and social exclusion (both concepts are paired in this generalised inter-related way in the Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2000; European Commission, 2010)). Policy success for tackling unemployment and combating poverty has not been achieved with levels of high unemployment persisting throughout much of Europe (Eurostat, 2015). This is particularly so amongst certain groups of workers and poverty 'is on the rise in the EU' (Jessoula, 2015: 491; see also Cantillon, 2010 and 2011). These enduring problems of poverty and unemployment can be and should be treated separately and individually from the issue of social exclusion (and that is not to deny that separately or as part of a combination of a broad range of social problems they may lead to social rupture (Room, 1999)).

Precarious workers are on the fringes of un/employment and poverty (Shildrick et al, 2012) but Irish national and EU supranational policies do not address the issues they face. The policy path taken by the Irish state and the EU contributes to their marginalisation. There are three relevant inter-related employment/social policy issues: quality of work, flexicurity and activation. Much was made of quality of work in the Lisbon Strategy with its commitment to "more and better jobs". This commitment 'implies better employment policies, fair remuneration, an organisation of work adapted to the needs of both companies and individuals' (European Commission, 2000: 13). Goetschy (1999) criticised the EES for its emphasis on the number of jobs to be created as it overlooked the quality of these jobs. She predicted an increase in precarious employment as a result of the EU's policy approach when saying

'[t]he development of precarious forms of employment, a more fragmented ... workforce ... is integral to the EU strategy of job creation. The demand for a disposable workforce and flexible labour markets is taken for granted; its ideological content is no longer perceived'.

(Goetschy, 1999: 135-136)

Goetschy was shown to be correct and reference to quality of work at supranational policy level and in National Reform Plans was side-lined as increasing employment became the primary aim irrespective of its quality (Dieckhoff and Gallie, 2007; Heyes and Lewis, 2014).

The second issue, flexicurity, consists of a flexible labour market and a generous welfare system (Hansen and Triantafilou, 2011). The notion of a generous welfare system is somewhat illusory given the neo-liberal policy approach contained in the EU demands for restructuring of social protection (Barbier, 2012) which are readily enforced in the Irish welfare model (Murphy, 2016). The flexible labour market is supposedly of benefit to both employer and employee, but 'increasingly, these claims are challenged as workers find their promises unfulfilled' (Owens, 2006: 336). Within the employer/employee relationship, as we have seen from the testimonies of the workers in this study, precarious workers are relatively powerless and have limited say or control over any aspect of their work. According to Barbier (2012) activation policies, which supposedly help those out of work back into the labour market, are more often about stricter eligibility criteria for beneficiaries of welfare (see also Boland, 2015; Boland and Griffin, 2015; Murphy, 2016). There are also spill-over effects of this policy approach. In her interview Shelley highlights a perverse consequence of activation policies when she speaks of the difficulty of trying to get certain jobs once available to low skilled workers. Many of these jobs are now offered as internships or CE positions thus curtailing labour market options for her and others like her (Doorley, 2015).

The rhetoric of the EU and Ireland on social inclusion policies is thus at odds with the experiences of the participants in this study. For the EU and Ireland social inclusion is calibrated to address the issues of unemployment and poverty. However, paid employment does not lead to a life free of being at risk of poverty if that work is precarious, low-paid and the main source of income for the individual or family. This nettle has yet to be grasped and re-imagined by the policy makers but the indications from the current policy turn in Ireland is that the opposite is about to happen.

In *PtW 2016-2020* precarious employment is formally embedded in the policy framework as the boundary between social inclusion and work activation becomes blurred even further with the introduction of the concept of 'social/active inclusion' by the Irish state (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 13). The *PtW 2016-2020* activation strategy 'is not designed solely to address labour market issues per se but is also informed by recognition of the role which occupational activity and financial independence plays in improving the quality of life of people with disadvantage(s) or with a restricted ability to take up employment without State assistance' (Department of Social Protection, 2016: 13). This statement assumes that the end result for those who are activated is financial independence and an improved quality of life through employment. This, as we know from the narratives of precarious workers, does not follow. Nor can it follow from the low-road social inclusion and employment policies epitomised by the state's activation policy. As

Murphy (2016: 12) says '[t]he work-first Irish activation model accepts low pay as the starting point for activation'.

Critics suggest that instead of targeting groups for activation there should be less conditionality and 'more focus on demand-side issues including low pay, quality work, distribution of employment and removal of barriers to employment' (Murphy, 2016: 1). According to Boland and Griffin (2016, n.p.), '[c]onditionality means increased surveillance and monitoring of job-seeking'. Is this what precarious workers face into the future? Are their lives, already under regular scrutiny by the state, to become further embedded in an unrelenting surveillance relationship based on a punitive notion of social/active inclusion? Precarious work, like unemployment, is now formally categorised as 'a deviation from the social norms' (Jørgensen, 2015: 8) in Irish social policy. Jørgensen (2015: 8), referring to unemployment, says that it is 'framed as an individual problem, and governments develop policies that sanction and punish groups believed to be a burden'. With the embedding of precarious work in the policy discourse of social/active inclusion this observation can justifiably be applied to the new policy path for precarious workers in Ireland.

CONCLUSION

In an exploration of its core features of multi-dimensionality, cumulative disadvantage and its relational aspects, the concept of social exclusion fails to convince that its merit lies in an all-embracing replacement for poverty (Room, 1999; Lister, 2004). Not only limited as a replacement for poverty, social exclusion is, through its dragnet approach, an over-reaching concept embracing groups that do not warrant automatic inclusion, such as the precarious workers in this study. Moreover, the core features of social exclusion have little resonance with the life experiences of the study's participants. The lives they lead, due to their poor quality jobs and inadequate incomes, are precarious but they could not be described as excluded from the mainstream of Irish society. They experience economic marginalisation based on their class position and their lives could disastrously unfold at any time due to the nature of their precarious employment. Their work may be precarious but they are integrated into the capitalist system which requires 'a disposable workforce and flexible labour markets' (Goetschy, 1999: 136; see also Byrne, 2005; Davies, 2005). The terms "precarious" and "integration" used about the same workers may seem like an oxymoron but this is the reality for them in the system of capitalist labour. Of course the integrative nature of precarious employment as a more general characteristic of the capitalist system is quite distinct from the supposed integrative nature of paid employment prescribed in EU social inclusion policies.

Levitas (2005) describes the social integrationist model of EU social inclusion policy through SID but O'Brien and Penna (2008) and Moran (2006) question the EU's policy approach. O'Brien and Penna (2008: 85) ask if the construction of the labour market and the welfare state by the EU as "integrative" mechanisms and "inclusive

spaces” are not at the same time “disintegrative” and “exclusive”. Moran (2006: 184) argues that social inclusion through paid employment is questionable when ‘labour markets themselves are deeply implicated in the process of “exclusion” through the generation and reproduction of material, social and political inequalities’. The narratives of the workers consistently support the notion of lives that endure persistent inequalities derived principally from their position within the labour market. The material limitations imposed on them as a result of low incomes are the most telling consequences of these inequalities. But care is required in generalising beyond this particular factor and attributing outcomes from Moran’s (2006: 184) ‘process of “exclusion”’ to the social and political consequences that may or may not arise directly from their precarious work. In a class, gendered and racially divided society, social and political inequalities are the norm with precarious employment as one entrenched aspect of these divisions. Social and political distance or disengagement are as likely a consequence of wider social relations and structures as they are of precarious work. The SID version of social exclusion and inclusion as practised within the EU is therefore not a satisfactory integrative policy response.

The stories of the workers in this study show that theirs are narratives of participation and belonging and not as some of the literature paints precarious workers, socially excluded from society (Silver, 1994; Paugam, 1995). Their marginal, but essential role in the workplace (Goetschy, 1999) greatly limits their capacity to earn an income to the extent that they would want for themselves and their families. As a result their economic and social participation are compromised. The narrow social focus of the EU’s Lisbon Strategy and its successor Europe 2020 offers little of consolation to these workers within the ideological moral imperative to force the unemployed into low-paid and flexible working arrangements. The quality of that work and other demand-side aspects of employment appear to be irrelevant (Goetschy, 1999; Murphy, 2016) as the numbers of those engaged in precarious work increases (Heyes and Lewis, 2014).

The Irish government’s re-calibration of the concept of social inclusion to social/active inclusion in its *PtW 2016-2020* will further embed precariousness with the inclusion of atypical workers into its activation model. This policy turn is not what precarious workers need. They will not be assisted by more intensified monitoring and coercion by the state, additional stress in their lives and being labelled as a problem for society. The precarious workers who took part in this study do not exist outside the norms of Irish society. They may be economically marginalised but their stories are drawn from the master narratives of our time; they believe in the morality of work. The problem is not the workers but the type of work available to them (Byrne, 2005; Shildrick et al, 2012). For as Amy says:

I just think the line of work I’m in anyway, I don’t think it’s ever goin’ to change. I think it’s always been the same. Ehm and that’s just the way it is.

CHAPTER 9

Concluding thoughts – time for new beginnings for some old stories?

INTRODUCTION

The scholarly community may dispute the nature of work (Rifkin, 1995; Baumann, 2005; Sennett, 1998; Gorz, 1999; Beck, 2000; Doherty, 2009; Doogan, 2009) but of one thing I am certain, work is enormously important and central to the lives of the 13 people I interviewed for this study. For them the end of work has not arrived but neither can it be said that work offers them the security of the Fordist tradition of secure long-term employment. The workers whose stories fill the pages of this thesis are indeed precarious workers, whose lives and incomes are insecure as a result of their position within the labour force. As we know this small group of workers are not alone in their insecurity as workers. The sectors in which they work have tens of thousands of people in similar circumstances in Ireland and in even greater numbers and in other sectors across the globe (Standing, 2011; Kalleberg, 2012; Munck, 2013; Low Pay Commission Ireland, 2015; Low Pay Commission UK, 2016). The stories of the 13 precarious workers are indicative of the circumstances of others like them (Pocock et al, 2004; Hanniff and Lamm, 2005; Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Loftus, 2012; McGann et al, 2012) and their expertise on precarious employment and their insights about their relationship with the state's social protection system present a challenge for academics and policy makers alike.

In this concluding chapter I wish to reflect on what the insights and expertise of the 13 workers in this study offer to sociological scholarship and the administration of social policy. My interpretation of their contribution leads to the demand for new beginnings to old stories. These old stories include the workers' relationship to their employment, the re-elevation of poverty as a defining concept in its own right and the nature of the state's protection for precarious workers. Finally, I will outline what I believe to be my contribution to the Irish and international literature on precarious employment.

NEW BEGINNINGS FOR SOME OLD STORIES?

This section reflects on the stories of the 13 workers who took part in this study. The voice of those who participate in research often goes unheard, obscured in the research process itself and lost in the transition to the shelf on which it will gather dust. I hope that at the very least the voice of each participant is heard in the process of this research study. The following three themes resonated with me, arising from the inter-play of the experiences of the workers in the study and the scholarly literature. They are: the implications of precarious employment for workers; the re-elevation of poverty as a defining concept; and social protection for precarious workers.

The implications of precarious employment for workers

Amy's insightful comment, 'I understand that they're trying to run a business. But there is fairer ways to run a business' touches on the crux of the implications of precarious employment – fairness in the relationship between employer and employee. Throughout the stories of the workers in this study the issue of fairness in this relationship is consistently to the fore even if not always stated with Amy's clarity. Kalleberg (2011; 2012) argues that in the past employers employed core workers and then if the need arose the employer took on casual workers for a period of time to help during busy periods. However, Kalleberg (2011; 2012) says that hiring casual workers as extra staff to be called upon when needed is no longer how employers operate in certain sectors. Some core staff may be retained but the majority are casual, disposable workers with precarious terms and conditions; a dramatic shift in the way the employer views workers (Hutton, 2015). Larry made such an observation about his place of work when he said

[t]hey told me that I was full-time but the thing is even people that are down there for years haven't got a full-time job down there anymore. All hours have been cut. Really they didn't have any right in employing more workers. They didn't need them. They just want more flexibility I'd say. ...

(Larry)

This lack of commitment by employers to their workers is a serious challenge for both workers and society and it is not an experience unique to Larry. As I write this final chapter the multi-national retail giant Tesco exemplifies the lack of commitment to its workers. It is attempting to change contracts and conditions (loss of bonuses, cuts to working hours and changes in patterns of work) of 1,000 of its longest-serving employees in Ireland as well as reduce their pay by 15 per cent (Mandate, 2016). The problem for workers in the arrangements described by Larry, as we have learned from the stories in this study, goes beyond the temporal to which Larry refers, to issues like insecure wages, a lack of paid sick and maternity leave, few training opportunities and a host of other potential problems that derive from these work-related ones (Pocock et al, 2004; Bujold and Fournier, 2008). The problem for society from these working arrangements is the inequalities that follow in their wake, the insecurities it brings to individuals and families and the possibility of the impoverishment of significant numbers of the population.

Governments have a responsibility to protect their citizen workers by improving employment legislation and regulatory frameworks. Pressure for such changes traditionally came from workers themselves and their representatives in trade unions but these channels are becoming more and more restricted. The power of trade unions has been curbed in many states (Hendy, 2014) aided by an oft-times virulent anti-trade union media as well as the increasing atomisation of society driven by individualism which has turned workers away from responding collectively to their problems (Doherty, 2009). However, collective civil society power is not yet dead as protest movements have had victories on many political, social, environmental and economic issues across the globe in recent years including in

Ireland (the passing of the Marriage Equality Referendum in 2015 is one such notable success for civil society groups in Ireland (Healy et al, 2015)).

Precarious employment has been the focus of some of these protests (protests against Irish Ferries in 2005 and Dunnes Stores in 2015 are two examples of tens of thousands of people taking to the streets to protest against poorer employment conditions). Any attempt at restructuring the balance of power between employer and employee is an enormous task that will demand new energy and new alliances over a long time and concerted effort by a range of civil society groups and individuals. One of the biggest challenges is to convince precarious workers that their interests lie in collective action, a challenge that will be slow to overcome without trustworthy and inspiring leadership, innovative modes of communication and protest and ultimately a change in political philosophy (Standing, 2011).

One of the most revealing aspects of the findings from this thesis is the commitment of the workers in the study to the idea of engagement in paid work, which I have argued is as a result of a contemporary master narrative. This master narrative has long historical roots, primarily based on notions of the morality that 'to work is good, not to work is evil (Bauman, 2005: 5) and the imperative of individual responsibility for one's own welfare (Streeck, 2009). The question of why the workers continue to work in precarious jobs for marginal if any material gain is teased out in Chapter 7. The answer I argue rests with the idea of "worker identity". Bauman (2005; see also Sennett, 1998; Pocock et al, 2004; Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Standing, 2011) argues that the nature of contemporary working life in the flexible labour market is such that workers show little commitment to their occupation. However, the findings in this study accord with the academic scholarship which indicates the contrary, work does provide an identity and purpose (Strangleman, 2007; Doherty, 2009; Kalleberg, 2012) but is manifested in a "worker identity" and not necessarily in an "occupational identity". In their study Shildrick et al (2012) arrive at a similar conclusion:

While it is the case that precarious sorts of work can undermine a *secure* work-based identity, they do not necessarily undermine work ethics. Our study found that *despite* work insecurity and a barrage of exhortations from welfare agencies and employers, individuals hold on to strong work motivation and work identity.

(Shildrick et al, 2012: 26, emphasis in original)

An important and related question raised by Shildrick et al (2012: 24) is the impact on the worker of what they term 'poor work', which they describe as 'not only low paid and insecure, it is poor-quality work'. Possessing a worker identity is one thing but what are the implications for workers of this type of work? In Shildrick et al's (2012) study they conclude that poor work risks leading to poor health, which in turn negatively impacts on work and life opportunities and chances. They make the point that '[t]he orthodox position, established by research over several decades, is that unemployment is bad for personal health and employment is good for it' (Shildrick et al, 2012: 164). They are less certain however, about the implications of poor work over no work. They cannot make a causal link from their study on this

relationship although they do refer to Coates and Lekhi's (2008: 6 cited in Shildrick et al, 2012: 164) claim: '[w]hile it is clear that unemployment has a corrosive effect on physical and mental health there is equally strong evidence to show that a good job is better than a bad job'.

Shildrick et al (2012: 18) studied people who experience cycles of unemployment and poor work, with their research participants 'churning' between the two. In the current study I have established that the participants are in low paid precarious work, but in general the workers have maintained employment over a number of years. A sense of resilience and strength emanates from the testimonies of the workers in this study, which may suggest that despite the uncertainty of their poor quality work and low pay they do actually gain something from their work. Strangleman (2007: 100) makes an important observation when he says

I want to suggest that work still provides structure and meaning in people's lives however imperfectly this may occur – one only has to look at the obverse of people without work to see the reality of this. ... How are people making sense of these new situations they find themselves in?

Workers are not passive victims (Strangleman, 2007: 100) without agency in these 'new situations'. Throughout this thesis we have seen evidence to support this assertion; workers show initiative, persistence, judgement and insight into their circumstances and act accordingly in their own and their families' best interest but always within the master narrative of work. The domination of the master narrative is at the core of the problem; the workers are willing to work and make the most of their poor quality jobs and low pay and where possible seek out new opportunities to improve their lives. However, these efforts are bounded by the structural limitations of what is available to them and not by their desire and determination. This is a recipe for exploitation, as there is no pressure on government or employers to do anything other than maintain the status quo.

In the Irish case, I have argued that a policy turn to the embedding of precarious employment has occurred, making the state a willing participant in this exploitation whatever the cost to certain groups of workers. To draw such a conclusion is not to promote a static, deterministic view of the world of work leading ultimately to an accusation that the workers are complicit in their own exploitation (Strangleman, 2007). My analysis does not lead to such a simplistic conclusion. What I am suggesting is that in the context of the master narrative of paid work, an overwhelming universal truth (Hammack, 2011), it is not realistic to expect individual workers to step outside of this narrative and the structures put in place to maintain it. Instead what the workers do is use their agency whenever possible to challenge the narrative within the bounds of what is conceivable to them. This they did in their interviews with me when they took up the opportunity to show agency in their critical analysis of their own precarious employment.

My findings point to a lack of protection for marginal workers which is similar to other Irish research on precarious employment. Two Irish research studies have

been completed on precarious employment (Loftus, 2012; Courtois; O’Keefe, 2015 (2015) and two other studies on work included findings relevant to precarious employment (Doherty, 2009; Mandate, 2015). The scale of these four research studies is much greater than the current study and all of the studies had a significant quantitative research dimension to them, with three of the four using survey as their sole method. Notwithstanding the variations in the research approaches in these studies the findings from my research reflect the concerns voiced in these larger projects. Concerns raised include the requirement for worker flexibility and the personal financial and social costs of these arrangements; costs associated with low pay, uncertain hours and consequent stress. The evidence from these studies also shows that women are more likely to be in situations of precarious employment in the retail and higher education sectors. Both Loftus (2012) and Courtois and O’Keefe (2015) fear that for the employees in their research the status of precarious employment could lead to poverty. Loftus (2012) contextualises the findings of her research in the economic crisis and recession which began in 2008, claiming that these macro-economic circumstances exacerbated the workers’ problems. She says that a number of basic protections for vulnerable workers came under pressure during the recession and the period of austerity which followed. Loftus (2012) cites the impact on the minimum wage, an alteration in the tax regime for low paid workers and the diminution of social protection rights and entitlements. Loftus (2012) is of course correct to point to these negative changes, some of which were referred to by the participants in my research. However, the marginalisation of vulnerable workers did not begin with the recession; features of precarious employment were in place for a lot longer than the period beginning in 2008 as the stories of the workers (Amy, Valerie, Marian and Kate) in my study who were employed by the same employers before the onset of the recession. It is evident from their narratives that there has been a greater squeeze on them in their work and in their welfare benefits since the recession but there is an argument for suggesting that there were more fundamental changes afoot which preceded the economic crash as O’Farrell, (2015a) argues.

Ultimately, the employment framework in which these workers are embedded will not alter if employer-centric policies continue unchallenged at the expense of their employees. As I have outlined in Chapter 2 Ireland performs poorly in a number of areas of worker protection and the narratives of the workers in this study generally concur with these claims. For example, according to Broughton et al (2010) there is a high use of flexibility in the Irish labour force. They assert employers use flexibility by employing non-core workers to meet fluctuations in demand; I cannot support or challenge this claim by Broughton et al (2010) because this data was not produced in this study. However, it is evident from the narratives of many of the workers that flexibility was an expected part of the employment relationship. Larry questioned the number of employees his employers took on, observing that they had no right to take him on, as there was enough work for the existing staff, who were not given enough hours. He was also expected to attend work when required even at an hour’s notice. Michael’s circumstances were similar where he waited for a call to tell with details of his next job, which could be for no more than a day’s work. In Michael’s area of work, the building sector, the idea of core and no-core

workers seemed to apply as he spoke of those who worked directly for the contractor, usually a small number of workers, while the rest of the workforce was provided by agencies. He also worked for a time before and after the official working day to show that he was a keen worker, for which he was not paid. Amy's employer expected flexibility in the number of hours she was required to work; more when the store was busy and reduced hours when not. A number of the participants referred to the expectation that they would work extra hours to cover those who were on annual leave, out sick or on maternity leave (Marian, Amy, Larry, Shelley and Rita). Flexibility is particularly relevant in retail as Valerie, Amy, Marian and Larry referred to the practice of being informed of their weekly work rosters with only a few days to a week's notice of the times they were due to work. Shelley and Rita were expected to be flexible in their work by working split shifts to facilitate the needs of their individual clients. They were not aware of anyone working as full-time carers in the organisations which employed them; all workers were in similar situations as themselves, dreading the thought of losing a client as they might not be given alternative work for months if at all.

In Ireland there are low levels of employment protection (O'Connor, 2009) for workers with weak regulation of temporary contracts and low to intermediate protection against individual dismissal (OECD, 2013). These particular issues were not addressed in any detail in this study, however, there was a sense of vulnerability from the all of the workers in their relationships with their employers who they believed could do as they wished and there was little that as workers they could do to prevent this. Valerie and Amy spoke of how, without reason, their hours could be changed at a whim if the manager or supervisor felt like doing so. Larry referred to an incident where he was warned about disciplinary procedures being taken against him if he did not wear the proper footwear, even though he could not afford to buy this footwear. Amy was threatened that she would be shown the door if she re-merchandised goods without the manager's permission. Kate's hours were halved when the employer she worked for decided to give work to a relative. Lukas applied for a job that had been advertised at a certain hourly rate of pay but when he arrived to take up the job the rate had been reduced.

Hendy (2014) argues that there are low levels of collective bargaining in Ireland. Additionally, there is low membership of trade unions particularly in the more vulnerable private sectors and amongst the most exposed groups of workers: women, young people and immigrants (D'Art and Turner, 2011; Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2011a). The majority of the interviewees were not members of trade unions. Only Valerie and Michael were members of trade unions and Larry was not sure. Valerie was positive about her membership of a trade union as it had protected the staff from renegotiated and poorer terms and conditions but it did not protect workers from day-to-day difficulties which confronted them in their work. Michael was a very disgruntled union member and was not sure why he paid into a union with which he has had no contact. Larry was not sure if he was a member of a union and even if he was he was not particularly keen about the idea. Both Marian and Amy were told that their employers did not recognise unions. None

of the others were members of unions and did not express any interest in joining one.

Another feature of the employment of marginal workers is their low pay, with 25 per cent of Irish workers on hourly pay below the living wage threshold of €11.45 (Collins, 2015b; see also Murphy, 2016). The majority of the workers were paid well-below the living wage threshold. Only Shelley, Rita, Grace, Neil and Valerie earned above this hourly rate. Grace earned €15 an hour from her employment, which was the highest rate of pay among all of the workers. However, she only works 15 hours per week and cannot take on more hours with the pre-school organisation she works for because there are no more hours available and she does not get paid during the summer months when her place of employment is closed. While Grace's income and the incomes of the others over €11.45 may seem "generous" when compared to the lowest paid worker, Larry who earns €7.50 per hour, none of the workers work full-time. Their overall income from their paid work is therefore low and certainly not possible to sustain a livelihood. The incomes of the workers are mainly supplemented, where there is an entitlement, by welfare payments of one kind or another. With these unfavourable conditions precarious workers face an uphill struggle to achieve decent work and enjoy decent wages and conditions.

The re-elevation of poverty as a defining concept

The idea of poverty is an old story but one that appears to have lost its appeal to the general public (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013), the scholarly community and policy makers, especially in the EU. Historically the Irish perspective on poverty, just as with the British, has its roots in the Poor Law legislation of the 1830s. The *Poor Law Act (Ireland) 1838* defined the policy approach on poverty in Ireland until the emergence of the concept of social exclusion during the Third European Anti-Poverty Programme in the early 1990s (Room, 1995; see also Shildrick et al, 2012). While it would be inaccurate to claim that these new concepts have totally supplanted the notion of poverty they certainly have replaced its dominance at theoretical and policy levels (Lister, 2004). It has become the norm in academic papers and policy documents to refer to poverty alongside social exclusion, as if the two concepts are so entwined as to be inter-changeable (see Byrne's (2005) opening chapter as an example). There may be a relationship between poverty and social exclusion but they can and should be treated as distinct concepts (Lister, 2004).

My views on the limitation of social exclusion are made clear in earlier chapters and I agree with Levitas (2005: 7) when she says '[t]he term social exclusion is intrinsically problematic. It represents the primary significant division in society as one between an included majority and excluded minority'. But society cannot be so simply divided into a binary categorisation of this kind, omitting as it does the inequalities and differences between the so-called included (Levitas, 2005).

Moreover, the characterisation of “the poor” as socially excluded in an undifferentiated way is also untenable.

But there is a more fundamental problem with the term social exclusion as Coats et al (2012: 20-21) point out, it ‘could be viewed as shifting the burden of responsibility on to those living in poverty: you are poor because your own behaviour and choices have led to your exclusion from society’. Levitas (2005) presents three different perspectives on social exclusion linked to political discourses, RED, MUD and SID. She suggests that not all interpretations of social exclusion are the same. Yet, she acknowledges that moral judgement plays a part in all three. In the two most dominant political discourses on poverty since the 1980s, MUD and SID, presented in the context of the debate on social exclusion, the essence of the moral message is that paid work is good. Those who are poor on the other hand are morally defective as a result of their behaviour and choices (Coats et al, 2012) and this is especially true of the poor’s attitude to work. However, Shildrick et al (2012) found that the attitude of the participants in their research on low pay, unemployment and poverty was of a strong commitment to paid work but the problem was the lack of reliable, properly paid employment which resulted in intermittent periods of work and unemployment. The outcome for those caught up in this ‘churning’, is not one of social exclusion but of economic marginalisation (Shildrick et al, 2012; 18) that leads to poverty.

Social exclusion is a useful concept when used as a contextual tool but when it is applied in an all-encompassing way to draw in a vast range of social groups without clear criteria and evidence to support their inclusion, it is most certainly problematic (Lister, 2004; Levitas, 2005). Thus the generalised and undifferentiated naming of precarious workers as a socially excluded group (Silver, 1994; Paugam, 1995) is questionable. The application of Levitas et al’s (2007) definition of social exclusion (multi-dimensionality, cumulative disadvantage and the relational) leading to social rupture (Room, 1999; Silver, 2010) cannot be assumed just because the workers are in precarious employment. My interpretation of the narratives of the precarious workers in this study (see Chapter 8) shows this clearly.

The analysis of the participants’ narratives in this study suggests that Shildrick et al’s (2012) term ‘economic marginalisation’ is more apposite than social exclusion in explaining the circumstances of this group of precarious workers. All of the evidence, from their low pay, ongoing relationship with the Department of Social Protection for income supports, the constant financial planning and having to forego certain social and economic activities, leads me to conclude that the workers experience economic marginalisation. As I stated in my introduction to the thesis there is a great deception at the heart of the EU and Ireland’s social inclusion policies underpinned by the belief that paid employment leads to social integration or economic inclusion. The validity of this idea is in itself dubious (Levitas, 2005) but it might have some merit if the available work was of good quality with favourable pay and conditions. But for many who find themselves distant from the labour market or even in the labour market (as do the participants in this study),

the chances of gaining access to good quality employment for some groups of workers in certain employment categories are slim. The employment situations of the precarious workers who participated in this research are not aberrations; the workers are employed in sectors where their experiences are currently the norm and not the exception (Düll, 2003; Collins, 2015a).

As a result of their economic marginalisation the participants are in the definitional sense “at risk of poverty” where their incomes are below 60 per cent of the median income in the state (CSO, 2015), although none of the participants defined themselves as poor (Shildrick et al, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). The re-elevation of poverty as a defining concept independent of social exclusion is needed but it must be located within the broader discourse that informs it. I agree with Lister’s (2004: 36) argument ‘for a focused material definition of poverty in order not to lose sight of what is unique to the phenomenon’. It is of interest that the indicators of social exclusion used by the EU and member states like Ireland refer to the material dimensions of poverty. For all of the definitional and measurement problems associated with the concept (Lister, 2004; Coats et al, 2012) it is a great deal easier to establish a baseline for poverty than it is for the many dimensions of social exclusion.

The basis of our understanding of poverty in this material way is already in existence but it is clouded by its association with social exclusion. It would also be easier to call politicians to account by using a ‘focused material definition of poverty’ (Lister, 2004: 36) and it would be more difficult for them to hide behind this unlike the more amorphous and pliable terms such as social exclusion and social inclusion. Such a turn would be in the interests of precarious workers whose low incomes would be seen for what they are in a more transparent material definition of poverty.

Social protection for precarious workers

I have argued in this thesis that the precarious workers who took part in this study are not socially excluded (see Chapter 8). Their incomes are low and as a result of their economic marginalisation they are at risk of poverty. The expression of social inclusion in use in Irish social policy, a form of SID with a strong dollop of MUD, to use Levitas’ (2005) conceptualisation, offers little by way of addressing the most pressing issue for the workers, their financial need, because the participants are after all in “employment”. These workers may be in employment but they also straddle the world of unemployment in their interactions with the Irish social protection system. This is particularly the case for the workers who are on low, If and When contracts and whose hours change from week to week, thus bringing them into weekly contact with the Department of Social Protection (Murphy and Loftus, 2015). Yet this system struggles to deal with their difference as workers/unemployed because they lie outside of the normal binary between structured employment (full-time or regular part-time) and unemployment.

The working age schemes which require state surveillance (Boland, 2015) are rooted in the Poor Law philosophy of less eligibility (Shildrick et al, 2012) and reflect low levels of de-commodification (Murphy, 2016). This narrow and restrictive institutional approach to welfare provision in Ireland is out of kilter with the sentiment accompanying flexicurity on which the premise of social inclusion in the EU is based (Hansen and Triantafillou, 2011). Precarious workers in Ireland provide labour flexibility but they are not guaranteed security of employment or income (Heyes, 2013) and the welfare system takes a minimalist approach to encourage their work efforts. For instance, in recent changes to the OFA system, the reduction in the age limit of children to whom the benefit applies and the cumulative dilution of the earnings discard over recent years add to precariousness of income for this group of marginalised individuals, the majority of whom are women (Murphy, 2016).

In their study, Shildrick et al (2012) argue that reductions in these types of welfare supports in the UK lead precarious workers back to unemployment. They are thus short-sighted policies and instead of reducing poverty actually increase levels of poverty. This example of the tightening of welfare supports demonstrates that within the Irish state's policies of social protection, precarious workers who are lone parents will have increasingly squeezed incomes for their insecure and low paid work thus putting them at an increased risk of poverty. Moreover, in future *PtW 2016-2020* will require all atypical workers to participate in activation programmes which will add to additional intrusion and monitoring of their lives by the state (Boland, 2015) as well as embedding further their status as low-paid precarious workers (Murphy, 2016).

It is not just an issue of strategic policy-making that negatively impacts on the precarious workers. The structures and processes of engagement with the various sections of the Department of Social Protection is also challenging for the workers. The participants in this study have shown how insecurity of income is demonstrated in their daily lives and that this insecurity (and the attendant stress) could be lessened if the system of social protection was more user-friendly. Michael becomes particularly animated about his treatment by the system and the people who work in it - the continuous requests for information already provided, the lack of understanding of the nature of atypical/precarious employment, the delays in receiving payments from the Department, the sense of how he is distrusted by the staff in the welfare system and the outdated modes of communication in which modern technology seems to play no part.

Other issues brought up by Rita, Larry and Michael are the complexity and stressful nature of the "Xs and Os" (the signing-on system) for those who work irregular hours. They also highlight the unfairness of this system based on days worked rather than hours worked because it can lead to a reduction in income. Delays in processing claims can also be a problem, for example in the payment of FIS as Marian and Shelley inform us. Shelley and Michael also discuss how poorly informed welfare staff can be and how some are disinterested in providing up-to-date

information. These findings are not new for those who must interact with the welfare system as studies on unemployment in Ireland have shown (Delaney et al, 2011; Boland and Griffin, 2015).

What do the experiences of the workers in this study and the move towards increased activation tell us about the Irish social protection system and its relationship to precarious work? The activation model is well-established within the EES but Ireland was less than committed to the implementation of this model (Grubb et al, 2009). This changed, however, when Ireland entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Troika in 2010 and labour market activation became part of the agreement (Murphy, 2016). With this came the beginnings of more intrusive conditionality. There are, according to Brodtkin (2013), three components to activation, which she identifies as enabling policies, compensation packages and regulatory policies. Enabling policies include the various supports required to assist an individual back to work such as training, education or child care. Interventions that make work pay are at the centre of the compensation packages and the regulatory policies are those that sanction workers and force the unemployed into paid employment (Brodtkin, 2013).

Activation regimes tend to use a mix of all three components but with different emphases depending on the institutional policy approach (Brodtkin, 2013; see also Collins and Murphy, 2016). In its earlier iteration Irish policy on activation favoured the enabling and compensation components but this has changed since the Troika bailout programme (Murphy, 2016). While enabling and compensation remain in place in Ireland the new prominence of the regulatory dimension has led to the greater use of sanctions (Murphy and Loftus, 2015). According to Brodtkin (2013) this is what tends to happen and policies become more punitive. Boland and Griffin's (2015) research confirms this disciplinary trend in Irish activation policy and they are critical of the punitive nature of the state's interactions with the unemployed.

Given these trends in activation policy it is not surprising that atypical workers like the precarious ones in this study are being drawn into the activation process in the Irish government's *PtW 2016-2020*, for as Michael tells us the DSP treats him with suspicion. Michael's position and that of the other workers is a 'deviation' from what is expected of the "normal" worker and he is perceived as a problem, a burden on society and is therefore worthy of sanction and punishment (Jørgensen, 2015: 8). Ignored by this logic is the lack of quality work. In this supply-side model quality of work is not a priority. *PtW 2016-2020* and the various action plans for jobs published by the Irish government in recent years, including the *South-East Region Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017*, are employer-centric proposals which do not consider the needs of low-paid workers in the most vulnerable sectors of the national and regional economies.

The engagement of the workers with the master narrative of work is also ignored in the logic of the new activation model. In this model there is an absence of

understanding of the commitment to work as shown by precarious workers in this research and supported in the broader research on precarious employment (Pocock et al, 2004; Loftus, 2012; Courtois and O’Keefe, 2015) as well as highlighted in the research of Shildrick et al (2012). The precarious workers in this research pursue the master narrative of work and demonstrate a worker identity in their commitment to this narrative. Furthermore, the new turn towards embedded precariousness, in the now openly acknowledged Irish social inclusion as activation policy (Department of Social Protection, 2016), workers who are outside the perceived “norm” of employment relationships will be subject to surveillance and conditionality.

This development appears to ignore the reality of the conditions of the labour market in Ireland. It assumes that a standard employment relationship exists for these workers and is available to all who want to avail of it based on well-paid, quality work within a supportive regulatory framework. The reality however, is far removed from this assumption; for many workers the option of the standard employment relationship does not exist as they strive to make the most of work opportunities in a labour market where power is not distributed equally between Irish employers and employees (see the discussion by O’Sullivan et al (2015: 42) on this issue). This disparity is underpinned by the Irish employment regulatory framework (Murphy and Loftus, 2015). There is little doubt that the *PtW 2016-2020* social inclusion/activation policy pursued by the Irish government will lead to greater labour market inequalities further embedding precarious employment.

MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

The aims of this study, referred to in Chapter 1, are to:

1. Co-construct a narrative of precarious employment with a group of 13 Irish workers;
2. Contribute new knowledge to the understanding of precarious employment in Ireland;
3. Contribute original knowledge on the relationship between precarious employment and the policies of social inclusion in Ireland;
4. Explore the usefulness of the meaning of the concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion as they relate to precarious employment.

The most significant contribution I have made in my thesis is in relation to point two above ‘contribute new knowledge to the understanding of precarious employment in Ireland’. This contribution concerns the employment status of most of the workers I interviewed. This status confirms a level of continuity in their employment which contrasts with much of the research findings on precarious employment not only in the Irish literature but the wider international literature.

Where there is evidence of continuity in employment such as in Hanniff and Lamm (2005) and Loftus (2012) the finding is not pursued as an issue by those authors. Rodgers (1989) refers to temporality as one of the four dimensions of precarious employment (see Chapters 2 and 5). Temporality denotes paid work with a short time horizon and a high risk of job loss, where 'there is uncertainty as to its [the job's] continuing availability' (Rodgers, 1989: 3). Much of the literature on precarious employment follows in the same vein (see for example Bujold and Fournier, 2008; Vosko, 2010). In Chapter 7 I referred to the extent of the commitment to paid work by the workers I interviewed. Eight of the 13 workers have spent between three and half and 11 years in their current employment. Two other interviewees had worked for a number of years in a previous job before losing those jobs and quickly finding alternatives. Another participant had worked continuously for six years before losing his job two years before the interview but had not stopped seeking work in the interim and availed of every training opportunity that came his way to assist him back into the workforce. The youngest participant in the research, Larry, got work when he left school and in spite of all the financial difficulties and restrictions on his social life he perseveres with his precarious job. Michael, an older worker, has a long history of commitment to work, having worked in one of his jobs for 14 years. He too, like Larry, still persists with his If and When employment and has not given up hope of increasing his working hours or finding some better alternative.

Rodgers' (1989) view of precarious workers and temporality is not the only feature of precarious employment challenged by the experiences of this group of workers. The literature also characterises precarious workers as a group who are socially excluded and on a downward spiral towards rupture (Silver, 1994; Paugam, 1995; Gallie et al, 2003) or as Shildrick et al (2012) refers to the marginalised workers in their study who they say 'churn' in and out of work or as Standing (2011) claims precarious workers are passive and defeated. The workers in this study defy all three of these characterisations; none of the workers was socially excluded or on a downward spiral nor were they churning in and out of work and they certainly were not passive or defeated. When one considers the obstacles encountered by the workers in their employment and the impact on them of recession and austerity in Ireland in recent years, they have shown extraordinary capacity to cope and remain engaged with their employment and with wider society. This resilience is founded on the moral imperative of the master narrative of work which is driven by the responsabilisation of individual workers and is at the heart of neo-liberal thought (Walkerdine, 2005; Burrows, 2013).

The employment base of the workers is in the South-East of Ireland where there are limited opportunities available to improve their working lives (see Chapter 4), a point that Amy, Kate and Sophie referred to in their interviews. As these participants observed there are few alternatives to the jobs they have and a move would probably be to another similar job in the same sector, in their case the retail sector. The wholesale and retail sector is the biggest employer in the South-East (Miliévić, 2014) which does not bode well for a more advantageous alternative if the wages and conditions reported by the participants in this study are indicative of

the sector as a whole (Loftus, 2012; O'Farrell, 2013a and 2013b). Two of the participants worked for different large-scale retailers, two worked for smaller but significant Irish national and regional retail chains, one worked in a multinational franchised convenient store and one worked for a local family-owned corner shop. The experiences of these six workers were for the most-part similar: little or no control over working time, poor wages, little opportunity to train and improve skills, subject to erratic or unreasonable management behaviour with no recourse to challenge such actions and no benefits beyond statutory obligations of employers. I cannot of course claim that all workers in the retail sector in the South-East of Ireland have the same experiences but by using this collective case and other research and academic analysis completed on this sector (Loftus, 2012; O'Farrell, 2013a and 2013b) I can legitimately conclude that it is likely that for many more workers in retail these terms and conditions are similar. Moreover, it is not only workers from the retail sector that are confronted with such poor working conditions and precariousness, workers in other sectors told of similar experiences. The narratives of Shelley and Rita who worked in the multi-national franchised and local care sectors recounted that neither they nor any of their colleagues had long-term contracts with the companies for which they worked. Michael who was one of a large number of workers on the books of a construction agency described similar practices. The work experiences of Ruth, Neil and Grace in the not-for-profit voluntary community and education sectors showed that in these different employment sectors there appears that potentially many, many jobs in the South-East are built on precarious employment as the preponderance of available work is in these sectors (Miliévić, 2014). The lack of alternative employment may explain, at least in part, why the workers in this study continue in their employment in these sectors.

The workers in the study continued to work in precarious jobs over many years with little or no room for improved work opportunities, suggesting that precarious employment is part of the normalised structure of paid work in the South-East region. The collective case of these workers adds another layer of complexity to the idea of precarious employment (Cambell and Burgess, 2001; Hanniff and Lamm, 2005). Their case does not fit easily into the notion of temporality of precarious employment as defined by Rodgers (1989) and used and built upon subsequently by other scholars (Craanford, 2003; Hanniff and Lamm, 2005; Vosko, 2010). Nor does this collective case concur with the characteristics associated with this form of employment: social exclusion, rupture, churning, passivity and defeat, as presented in a range of important contributions to the literature on precarious employment. This case of the 13 workers in the South-East of Ireland leads me to conclude that there are different forms of precarious employment (including among the 13 workers) and there are also a variety of responses by workers to their experience of precarious employment. The response of these workers is to hold on to what they have and make the most of it, as work (however limited and limiting it is) gives them a sense of identity which is based in a moral understanding of the role of work in their lives.

It is a legitimate question to ask if this case is an outlier in the way these precarious workers manage and think about their working lives. If I had interviewed a different set of precarious workers would I have arrived at the same conclusion? The short answer is I do not know. Yet it is possible that there is a cohort of precarious workers who do not fit the normal characterisation of precarious employment, as I have found. Further research is required to determine if there are other precarious workers who have shown similar responses to their employment circumstances as the participants in this study. Shildrick et al's (2012) findings suggest very different outcomes for the participants in their research in the North-East of England where marginal workers experience churning in and out of work and a lack of hope for their long-term employment prospects. The workers in this study do not churn between employments nor do they lack hope. The opposite is the case; there is continuity in the workers' employment experiences as they hope and strive for better working lives. Does the ongoing connection to the workforce and employment by the participants in this study give rise to better social and psychological outcomes for the workers? Shildrick et al (2012) point out that poor jobs are normally associated with poor health and well-being outcomes which in turn negatively impact on future work prospects. Is a cultural dimension relevant (Gallie et al, 2003) to outcomes for workers, reflecting different social expectations and supports? Are varieties of capitalisms at play in these case studies (this case study and Shildrick et al's) based in two distinct liberal political-economies including different welfare regimes? These are some of the questions which require further investigation.

In the co-construction of a narrative on precarious employment with the participants in this study I have added to the literature on precarious employment, particularly in Ireland. This was achieved by using extended vignettes of narrative about the participants' experiences of precarious employment, and developing a discussion on work and identity and the master narrative of work. This study differs from the existing Irish and international literature on precarious employment where surveys and segmented themes normally form the basis of analysis. I believe the approach taken in this thesis adds a richness and depth to our knowledge which is not normally available in studies on precarious employment. Significantly, it shows how the narratives of the 13 participants in this study recount a storyline which is consistent with Irish and international research findings in the everyday experiences of precarious employment. However, there are important differences in the interpretation of the storyline between this study and the broader literature.

First, the co-construction of the narratives in the analysis offered in this thesis gives a new dimension to the study of precariousness because the views of the workers on their precarious employment play a central part. The normal presentation of segmented narratives (by interview or survey) in other research tends to project the workers as lacking in agency. The methodological approach I have taken demonstrates that workers consistently show agency as they interpret *their* stories of *their* working lives. This gives a better understanding of their lives as precarious workers and illuminates how they interpret and address the everyday challenges posed by their precarious employment. It also aids the co-construction of their

stories by me as the responsible author of this research because I am conscious that the workers themselves and other readers can use the raw materials from the interviews to assess my interpretations of their stories.

Second, the findings from this study contest the claims of Standing (2011) and Bujold and Fournier (2008) about occupational identity. For these authors occupational identity is negatively impacted by precarious employment. This study offers an alternative interpretation of the process. Occupational identity is not the crucial source of identity for the workers in this study, but a worker identity is. All of the participants identify themselves as workers and not by their occupation. They demonstrate this by their commitment to work, for their priority is to work and occupation is a secondary consideration.

Third, there is little evidence from the narratives of the workers that they are a 'class-in-the-making' (Standing, 2011: 7) thus contesting, as does Shildrick et al (2012), Standing's significant contention. I argue that the workers who participated in this study identify themselves as workers but based on an individualised notion of being a worker rather than in the Marxist sense of a worker as part of a collective identity. This is important because it demonstrates the extent to which the workers have inculcated the neo-liberal master narrative of paid work as an individual responsibility rather than a collective one (Streeck, 2009).

Fourth, while the master narrative of paid work is not a new idea, as it has a policy antecedent going back to the Poor Law, my contribution is its linkage to precarious employment. In particular my argument that the master narrative of paid work permeates the thinking of precarious workers has not been raised before in the literature on precarious employment. Ideationally it is of the utmost importance as it potentially does two things. One, workers will accept almost any form of pay and working conditions because they believe that they should work and two, it permits employers and government policy to neglect quality of work issues because workers accept prevailing pay and conditions. The dominance of a neo-liberal model of economy, with its influence on society and its emphasis on individual responsibility allows this master narrative to succeed. Neo-liberal thought is what drives precarious employment (Walkerline, 2005).

Fifth, I contest the literature on social exclusion and precarious employment. This literature is relatively small (Silver, 1994; Paugam, 1995) but it is significant because it locates precarious employment as a form of social exclusion. In Chapter 8 I challenge the premise on which this is based and use stories from the workers to make an argument against the use of precarious employment on its own as a category of social exclusion. I have also added to the literature on precarious employment by directly engaging in an analysis of the concept and policies of social inclusion and its relevance to precarious workers.

Sixth, in this study I have brought together empirical evidence and theoretical argument to counter the model of social inclusion/activation pursued by the Irish

state. In pursuing what Murphy (2016) describes as a ‘low-road’ model, I conclude that the expansion of activation as proposed in *PtW 2016-2020* (Department of Social Protection, 2016) will lead to embedded precariousness, with the state encouraging and maintaining atypical workers in this form of marginal employment.

CONCLUSION

MacDonald (2015), in a blog piece titled ‘The power of stupid ideas: “three generations that have never worked”’, cuts to the core of the myth about economically marginal people. He argues that those with political authority in the UK use misinformation, prejudice and disdain toward the unemployed. MacDonald (2015, n.p.) concludes that these attacks are ideologically driven and says ‘we are witnessing the resurrection of the age-old phantom of the ‘undeserving poor’, trotted out to ease the way for further welfare cuts’ (see also Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Shildrick and Rucell, 2015).

There are parallels in the Irish state’s punitive and conditional social inclusion/activation policies for the unemployed (Boland and Griffin, 2015; Boland and Griffin, 2016) and in its latest turn to activation for precarious workers. To borrow from MacDonald (2015) I suggest there are three ‘stupid ideas’ at play in the intersectionality of social inclusion, activation and the promise of the ideal employment relationship for marginal workers. The first is a story whose myth has been exploded. Irish social inclusion is named for what it truly is, activation, and gravely undermines whatever benefits there may have been associated with the concept of social inclusion.

The second ‘stupid idea’, drawing precarious workers into the activation net, is the consequence of the latest iteration of that inclusion story. The workers in this study are morally converted to the master narrative of paid work and the idea of inclusion as activation for these workers will surely shake their belief in this narrative, targeted as they will be in the same way as the unemployed with whom they do not identify. The third ‘stupid idea’ is a myth that workers can move from precarious employment into the SER, when in the sectors in which they work insecure hours and low pay are increasingly the norm rather than the exception (Broughton et al, 2010; Collins, 2015a; O’Sullivan et al, 2015).

The narratives of the 13 precarious workers demonstrate that a number of old stories should be re-considered and re-cast if the employment and income needs of these workers and others like them are to be met. Narrative inquiry has helped to place the themes of this study in the political domain by giving the workers space to express their voice on crucial issues which impact on their lives. Their powerful narratives and analyses of their own precariousness bear witness to a group of insightful workers who ought to be listened to for their important contribution to the debate on one of the major issues of our time, the nature of paid employment. The stories of these workers inform us of their desire to work even when the financial gain is at best marginal. By engaging in the activity of employment they

construct identities for themselves as workers through the master narrative of paid work. Yet, this master narrative is oppressive and has historically only briefly delivered on the (gendered) promise of paid work for all who sought it in western societies. It is now entrenched in a pervasive global neo-liberal ideology and one can only hope for the 13 precarious workers in this study and countless millions like them that this epoch will come to an end sooner rather than later. The telling of their stories is an essential ingredient in achieving such an outcome when one believes that the power of stories can shape our world (Ewick and Silbey, 1995).

APPENDIX

INFORMATION SHEET

Precarious employment and social inclusion in Ireland

Researcher: Joe Moran, Doctoral Student, Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland Maynooth

1. Introduction

I am carrying out research on the subject of 'precarious employment and social inclusion in Ireland'. I am doing this research to find out about the experiences of workers who are in precarious employment and what they think the Irish state should do to support them and improve employment conditions. Workers in precarious employment are workers who experience insecurity in their work and related income.

2. What is the research about?

The research is trying to examine a number of questions and to come up with answers to these questions.

1. The research is attempting to find out about the daily life experiences of workers who are in precarious employment.
2. It is also about what people in precarious employment think about the supports of the state (education, training and welfare supports) available to help them in their current employment circumstances.
3. It is about what workers in precarious employment believe should be done to improve their employment situations.

3. Who benefits from this research?

- I will benefit from the research because it will help me to gain a higher degree - a doctorate from the National University of Ireland Maynooth.
- While there is absolutely no guarantee I hope that those who participate in the research will benefit from it. I would like to think that the government and our politicians would listen to the stories of the people who participate in the research and that they would make policy changes to improve the lives of people in precarious employment. But that is a hope more than a promise. I hope that at a minimum that those who participate in the research will have more knowledge about themselves and their circumstances. I hope that they will have a better understanding of how decisions are made which can have an impact on their lives.

My commitment to those who participate in the research

I am committed to being up front and honest with the participants and I will do the following:

- At all times I will be sensitive to the rights of participants and will place their well being before any other objectives, personal or otherwise.
- I am committed to involving the participants in all aspects of the research process in so far as this is possible.
- I will not put pressure on anyone to take part in the research if they do not wish to do so, and I will not put pressure on anyone to discuss any issues that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Any participant can at any time withdraw from the research.
- I will inform participants about how I intend collecting information and will not use any means of collecting information without the prior agreement of participants.
- Information will be collected from participants through individual interviews and focus groups. Participants may be asked to take part in more than one form of information gathering, but they can decline to take part in more than one if they so wish.
- I will explain my findings and my analysis to the participants.
- All participants will be given the opportunity to read draft copies of my study or for those who may have literacy difficulties I will provide verbal feedback.
- Where a participant believes that what I have written may affect their privacy, identity them or breach their confidentiality, or if what I have written is inaccurate, such material will be re-written or withdrawn. Likewise if a participant believes that any material planned for use in podcasts may affect their privacy, identity them or breach their confidentiality, or portrays them in a way which they believe is detrimental to them that material will not be used.
- All interviews and group meetings will be audio-taped for ease of data collection and where relevant for use in later dissemination of information (in written or broadcast form), only by agreement with the relevant participants.
- The information gathered will be for the purpose of research only and will not be given to anyone else. The information will be used in a thesis, possible publication, possible podcast, for teaching purposes and for conference papers.
- Most of the information will be stored electronically in a password protected system and other typed or hand-written materials will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office.
- The information gathered will be held for five years after I complete my thesis, then it will be destroyed (apart from the information already in the public domain for which agreement has been granted).

Many thanks for participating in this study.

Joe Moran
Postgraduate Student
Department of Sociology
Maynooth
National University of Ireland Maynooth
Maynooth
Co Kildare

Ph: xxx xxxxxx

Supervisor: Dr Mary Murphy
Department of Sociology
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PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN IRELAND

CONSENT FORM

TO BE SIGNED BY PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The research is trying to examine a number of questions and to come up with answers to these questions.

4. The research is attempting to find out about the daily life experiences of workers who are in precarious employment.
5. It is also about what people in precarious employment think about the supports of the state (education, training and welfare supports) available to help them in their current employment circumstances.
6. It is about what workers in precarious employment believe should be done to improve their employment situations.

CONSENT

- I have read the information sheet (or I have had it read to me) informing me about this research and I fully understand it.
- I understand that the information I give will be confidential, for the purpose of the research as explained, and will not be given to anyone else.
- I can decide to stop participating in the research at any time of my choosing.
- I do not have to discuss any issues I do not want to.
- I give my permission to have the information gathered in this research used for a thesis, for possible publication, possible podcast and use in conferences, on the understanding that before any of this information is used I will have the opportunity to read or listen to any part of it which may impact on my privacy, identity me or breach my confidentiality. I also understand that if I am unhappy about how information portrays me I can withdraw my permission for its inclusion in the thesis or in any other publication, use as teaching material, podcast or in conference papers.
- I understand that most of the information will be stored electronically in a password protected system and other typed or hand-written materials will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office.
- I understand that the information gathered will be held for five years after the completion of the researcher's thesis, and then it will be destroyed (apart from the information already in the public domain for which agreement has been granted).

I give my consent to take part in this research through an individual interview.

Signed (Research participant)

Date

Signed (Researcher)

Date

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Ph: xxx xxxxxx

Ph: xx xxxxxxx

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

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