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Gender and social dumping practices, as reflected in journalistic investigations on the construction and textile industries[1]

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Abstract

The present study sets out to explore two highly gendered, seemingly contrasting industries, construction and textile, with workforces that showcase distinct issues yet can be brought together by their mistreatment in the name of profit through labour made cheap by social dumping practices. The starting point for this research were four investigative documentaries on the two industries, uncovering a wide array of unethical practices: *Race to the Bottom* (2014), *In the Construction Pit* (2015), *The True Cost* (2015) and *Clothes to Die For* (2014). Hence, the impact of the pressures of profit-led globalised economies and the flexibility of labour longed for by the neoliberal and capitalist principles, disproportionately carried by the more vulnerable, will be addressed from socioeconomic and cultural perspectives, especially through the use of documentaries and existent journalistic work. Social dumping undertakings and the gender problematization will be exemplified by relevant case studies, namely Atlanco Rimec in the Netherlands, respectively the case of the second biggest exporter in the textile industry, Bangladesh. The former allows for a comprehensive look at social dumping practices in Western Europe's construction industry and helps give an account for gender considerations regarding masculine norms that can both represent a glass escalator

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and be toxically capitalised on, the hypothesis of worsening working conditions in the field due to the increased vulnerability of the majority of the workforce in light of evasive practices and the continued lack of openness to female workers. The latter case study was chosen due to availability of information and the tragic Rana Plaza factory building collapse, which illustrates the phenomenon of relocation of production, alongside the injustices and traumatic experiences of the predominantly female labour force, revealing debatable notions of both emancipation and exploitation, while confirming the continued preference to traditionally considered male gender norms and their domination even in typically female occupations.

Keywords: *social dumping, neoliberal capitalism, investigative journalism, investigative documentary, gender at work, offshoring.*

Introduction

"Please, pray for me, I am going to work", said Shopna Khatun on the morning of April 24th 2013 (Santana, 2015, 22:33). The garment worker did not want to lose her £2.30 in attendance bonus and her daily wage of £1.50. A few hours later, she was buried beneath the stories of the Rana Plaza building for 9 hours (idem, 23:36-39:57). All for a mere sum of £3.80. Around the same time, Polish construction worker Andrjez Szulczewski was battling his hiring company in court for not being able to access social security benefits in his home country after having sustained an occupational accident on a building project in France that crushed his leg and left him unable to work. After costly lawsuits, oddly enough, the Cypriot authorities had to be involved in order for the worker to receive some form of compensation (Bnnvara, 2015, 07:03-08:04; Van Brempt & Moreels, 2020, p. 65; Rasmussen, 2014). The latest economic developments of our world have shown us that profit-making has a cost.

The fast paced world we live in brought significant changes to the world of work, resulting in the undeniable success of the capitalist sphere. As globalisation settled and the world became more interconnected, the economy flourished on the shoulders of the working people and the environment alike. Demand in an overruling market entails rapid production while the chase

for profit is the fundamental process and scope. Success has often come at social costs that have been neglected, hidden or manipulated. Carelessness towards working conditions, long hours, little pay, evasion of social security contributions are some of the conducts that maximise profit. The concept of social dumping and the practices it entails allowed for even more elbow room regarding evasion, making use of overall cheap labour through different methods and loopholes resulting in opportunities for some companies to gain competitive advantage. Furthermore, this behaviour has given rise to a worrying phenomenon, termed as the “race to the bottom”, in which different entities rival in providing businesses the legal framework that allows for diminished wages, taxes, labour regulations and responsibilities. The capitalist drive for financial gain snowballs into the crossing of ethical lines regarding worker welfare. Most commonly, migrant workers are subject to exploitation while developing countries are capitalised on for their poor regulatory systems and the peoples' need for work.

This theoretical paper's objective is bringing together and analysing two industries, construction and textile, that have in common a highly gendered workforce, albeit of different sex and apparent contrasting environments, under the same umbrella of inadequate labour conditions and mistreatment in the name of profit through labour made cheap by social dumping practices. This approach will be the basis for a gendered lens problematization of the ways in which social dumping practices have brought about changes both within the world of work and outside of it. The construction sphere of activity tops unfortunate statistics when it comes to workplace danger and accidents, whilst the new dimension of social dumping adds to the industry's volatility, employment insecurity, unsafe conditions and defiance of Occupational Safety and Health procedures and the possibly destructive organisational culture due to ethnic fragmentation and toxic masculinity. The 2012 factory fires in Pakistan and the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh represented turning points in the textile industry. The accidents brought public awareness towards the safety of the workers employed in the garment sector, or lack thereof, and the conditions under which our clothing is being produced. The contrast between the industries is noticeable through the typically gendered distribution of workforce: the construction industry is essentially made up of men, while women represent the backbone of the textile industry. This specificity and the different types of social dumping practices present in these sectors allow for an interesting

exploration of gender issues and development in the globalised world. The methodology used encompasses qualitative research methods, using secondary literature data and information extracted from databases, legal documents, case studies, documentaries and articles that include interviews. The research question for this undertaking is the following: How have social dumping practices changed the construction and textile industries and what has been the impact of said practices on gender specific conditions encountered in the workplace?

Economic perspectives of gender roles at work

Women's work has historically been closely linked to the home, taking care of the family's establishment, children but also responsible for the agricultural activities of the family and the production of consumables, such as personal hygiene products, as well as clothing and shoes. The Industrial Revolution made for women and their female children's move from producing goods in the house, to the factory, but the Victorian era brought about changes in their status as workers, considering them incapable of working in factories. During that time, women established themselves as nurses, educators and clerical workers. The more they were absorbed into these positions, the more wages decreased, alongside prestige. Even though a helpful labour reserve during the First World War, most of the women returned to their homes. Although it was expected from them to do the same after the Second World War, a majority of women did not, especially married women, which gave way to significant tensions and changes in relationships, families and societies. By then, men were already settled in their earner roles. From then on, women had to manage the infamous juggle between family life and work life, resulting in the work-family spillover. The domestic work carried out by women in their families is all unpaid work. Because it is unpaid, it has been largely ignored on the economic scale. Regardless, this labour is the foundation of any economic debate since no man or woman would be walking or talking without it. Despite the fact that it is illegal for employers to base their hiring decisions on marital status and age of children, they often discriminate in such a way. Interestingly enough, married men with children are thought of as an asset to the company, but married women with children are considered to be unreliable and less committed. Gender stereotypes affect hiring, firing, advancement opportunities and decisions and perpetuate the image of female labour as a highly flexible pool of labour that can easily be discarded. The gender roles serve for the

rights and responsibilities of both sexes, although both men and women consider men superior, their privilege outweighing that of women's (Lindsey, 2015, p. 316-326).

Behavioural expectations link occupational roles to the gender roles traditionally socially imposed. As such, occupations that require empathy and nurture, such as nursing, counselling or social work are considered as "natural" for women, while detached, risky, leading positions are linked to men, exemplifying "the stereotype that 'women take care' and 'men take charge'" (idem, p. 338). The latter situation is "instinctively" more prestigious and paid accordingly. Even though there are some difficulties to overcome, when males enter typically female jobs, they benefit from more structural advantages, higher positions and higher pay, which translates to the "glass escalator effect". This effect also takes into account the quicker advancement of men in these careers, as they rapidly move up to at least more technical or supervisory positions. Even in female occupations, the work of women is under the subordination of males, further translating into hierarchical segregation that comes in the way of equality. If men take the escalator up, women encounter the "glass ceiling". The concept of glass ceiling emphasises the barriers put in place by male management that women face regarding advancement. It is usually done through their isolation, their denied access to informal information and networks or the lack of focus on their training and constructive criticism. As such, women cannot move up hierarchically neither in female dominated jobs, nor in those of male dominated jobs. Gender typing, occupational segregation, the glass escalator and the glass ceiling have effects on women's pay. The ensuing wage gap still holds globally, regardless of race, ethnicity, or education level (idem, p. 326-348).

As regards masculinity, according to Chapter 9 of L. Lindsey's work (2015), the gender status prescribed for men encompasses values such as physical strength and toughness, leadership, courage and bravery, sexual prowess, individualism and independence, while the role of father implies ideas of a disciplinary, authoritative figure, the breadwinner and decision-maker of the house. These characteristics and norms of masculinity were set by those who acted out as the most influential men in society, meaning white, middle-class and heterosexual. The standards and informal guidelines that have transpired and perpetuated have turned into institutionalised norms, harming both the men that do not fit into the categories mentioned above, and women, since they are portrayed as the opposing party. The

anti feminine norm which denounces the stereotyped female traits has implications for the relations men can and do create, in which vulnerabilities and emotions are seen as a sign of weakness. This bolsters toughness and aggression norms by renouncing any form of submissiveness, a female characteristic. Success and intellectual success are norms sought after, especially through financial achievement and security. Show of strength and risk-taking are also desired. In the workplace, this can hinder men's performance, as well as their safety (Lindsey, 2015, p. 279-282). These norms, which can often translate into toxic masculinity and tending to the image of masculinity comes at a great cost for the wellbeing of men and oftentimes exposes them to greater vulnerability than one imagines or is aware of.

Social dumping

As the world became more interconnected, the need for a single market that allowed freedom of movement and establishment became more acute. Labour migration is currently viewed as beneficial to both destination and origin country, especially through supplying workforce shortages for the former and the sending of remittances and knowledge gained for the latter. The European Union has made the necessary efforts to provide the benefits of the Single European Market to all of its Member States by removing some taxes and tariffs, bureaucratic barriers or border regulations. However, the optimization of social costs and administrative or financial burdens are becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate from fraudulent behaviour. Cross-border employment of low-skilled workers poses some legislative loopholes that can be taken advantage of, together with some partiality when covering policies and provisions. A short explanation of social dumping is due so as to locate and understand the concept with more ease and build upon it thereafter. Social dumping is an approach in the world of work in which employers are utilising cheaper labour than they normally would employ in their country of operation. Authors Alber and Standing give an account of social dumping as "situations in which standards in one country are lowered relative to what they would have been because of external pressure" (Alber & Standing, 2000, p. 99). Magdalena Bernaciak defines the phenomenon as "the practice, undertaken by self-interested market participants, of undermining or evading existing social regulations with the aim of gaining a short-term advantage over their competitors" (Bernaciak, 2015, p. 82). Social dumping often implies the use of foreign work, a categorisation of two general branches: using migrant

labour and the relocation of production. The workers are at disadvantage as they are provided substandard pay and working conditions according to the national law and agreements (EC, Migration and Home Affairs, social dumping: definition). Examples of social dumping include evasion of social security taxes, disregard towards directives, collective agreements, Occupational Safety and Health regulations or lack of written contracts and disobedience of workers' rights in order to gain profit. These outcomes are wanted to maximise profit and are achieved through a series of practices related most commonly to the posting of workers, temporary work agencies, letterbox companies, self-employment, subcontracting chains and relocation of production.

The construction industry, Atlanco Rimec and considerations on gender

The construction industry is one of the oldest and most profitable industries of all time, yet blessed or burdened by its reactivity to economic conditions. However developed, the general idea remains the same: people using natural resources to build the structures they need. The construction process nowadays is complex, from designing to building, including studies on substances and materials, specific construction based on the end users' needs, standards on safety, management, assembly, coordination of workers, quality control, renovation, repair, maintenance and the list goes on. The scope going further is for the industry to focus more on issues such as sustainability, energy conservation and mindful use of resources. But is this sector's employment and modus operandi what we would call sustainable? A booming sector, ever growing numbers and extraordinary buildings. What are the costs?

In order to exemplify the social dumping practices that take place in Europe and the realities of construction workers, the case of Atlanco Rimec shall be observed. Its activity in the Netherlands is chosen because of the availability of material, both written and visual, produced by determined reporters that have found and recorded the means of evasion used by the company, workers' stories and government response. The documentaries used are the investigative reports entitled "Race to the bottom" and "In the construction pit". The former, although unavailable in English, is available in Danish under the name "Østarbejdernes bagmænd" [Generated translation by Google Translate: "The Masterminds of the Eastern Workers"]. It is a 2014 documentary by DR1, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation television

channel, created by Director Poul-Erik Heilbuth, Georg Larsen, with Jonas Bach and Dagny Björk Kristiansdottir as co-organisers under the production of Sidsel Marie Jacobsen. The latter documentary, originally under the name of "In de bouwput" [Generated translation by Google Translate: "In the construction pit"] is a 2015 work by Hanneke de Jonge and carried out with the help of Jos van Dongen and Manon Blaas for the Zembla documentary programme within the sphere of the Dutch BNNVARA broadcasting association (IDFA, Race to the Bottom; Bnnvara, 2015). The case study also exemplifies issues of Occupational Safety and Health defiance and the migrants' more vulnerable position to workplace accidents, job insecurity and tensions within the national and foreign workforce, alongside evasion of social security contributions through nonpayment or profitable regime shopping and what this practically means for the construction workers, defiance of national labour law, collective agreements and the Posted Workers Directive.

Atlanco Rimec was started in 1994, established in Ireland by Michael O'Shea and acting as a human resource agency, supplying labour. In the Netherlands, the building of Maastricht's A2 tunnel started in 2012. Even though the €600 million publicly funded project had been in prospect for a long time, due to the ongoing economic crisis at the time, it was decided that an investment in infrastructure and the resultant jobs would benefit the health of the economy. The project had to supply employment for the local people. The main contractor for the two and a half kilometres undertaking was Avenue2, an association between Ballast Nedam and Strukton, two Dutch businesses. Avenue2 subcontracted Atlanco Rimec for the provision of construction workers (Cox, 2015). The latter further used its Portuguese branch of business and employed a majority of Portuguese workers. Information regarding unfair practices unfolded with the article written by journalist Rob Cox and published by the newspaper De Limburger, entitled "De slaven van de A2" [Generated translation by Google Translate: "The slaves of the A2"] in November 2013. The journalist received a tip regarding the workers' pay and, when checking the payslips, noticed a high deduction for "appojo logistico" [Generated translation by Google Translate: "logistics costs"], of €968, half of their initial wage. This reduction was justified by the lodging and transportation costs provided by Atlanco. Analysing the surroundings, Rob Cox noticed that the housing was right next to the construction site, therefore no transport was needed, meaning an estimated €11,000 were paid for accommodation each year by each worker, around €900 per month. An entire house only

cost €450 per month and it accommodated at least 4 workers. As such, an alleged profit of €3,200 was made each month, summing up to almost €39,000 a year per house (ibidem; Sjölander, 2014; Bnnvara, 2015, 02:19-03:43). Another problem was represented by the lack of compliance to the collective labour agreement as regards to pay. It was apparent that Atlanco Rimec was using a legislative loophole that allowed them to do so. The "Technisch Bureau Bouwnijverheid" [Generated translation by Google Translate: "Technical Office for the Construction Industry"], formed of unions and employers' organisations, started investigating Atlanco and had reason to believe that pension contributions were also not paid. As it is often customary, Atlanco Rimec went on a suing mission, in order to buy some time and some profit. The company sued the technical office, one of its employees, one employers' organisation and a construction union, alongside two union officials. The pension fund involved in this situation found that indeed contributions were not paid. And so, they were also sued (Norberg, 2015).

After their Christmas holiday in 2013, the workers returned on site in Maastricht to see they were employed by another company, Oradeo. Although not possible to prove, as the company is owned by two other businesses in none other than the tax haven British Virgin Islands, union representatives and journalists believe that Oradeo is still Atlanco Rimec, only under a different name. Both Oradeo and Atlanco share the same subcontractor, Atop, have similar projects and methods of employment. Moreover, recruiters from Atlanco are found on the payrolls of Oradeo, as journalist Anna-Lena Norberg states, "he should have [kicked] out all the people. He did not. People who [have] been working for Atlanco [are] now working for Oradeo. So it's many [kinds] of links" (Bnnvara, 2015, 29:05-30:07; Cox, 2015; Van Brempt & Moreels, 2020, p. 71).

In the inquiries of the "In the construction pit" documentary, the creators received a tip on other projects. They continued their research in Nijmegen, where a €350 million project was underway. The company Dura Vermeer was the main contractor, while Atlanco was subcontracted for supplying labour. Portuguese worker Theodoro Homem made his April 2013 payslip available, showing that he was working over 60 hours a week, above the 48 hour week regulation, while €937.50 were deducted from his wage. By November 2014, a payslip shows that another worker was still working close to 55 hours a week, while €937.50

were still deducted from his wage, even after the Maastricht A2 tunnel allegations were public for a year. When asked for a reaction, the municipality and company stated that they ended their collaboration with Atlanco Rimec and started a new partnership, formally announcing their new collaboration with Oradeo. When confronted with the claims that Atlanco Rimec is likely to be behind the new company, they responded by saying this allegation has not been confirmed by research, while Rijkswaterstaat, the executive organisation of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management which assists the government by awarding construction projects, offered an email statement, saying: "When awarding contracts, Rijkswaterstaat does not focus on the internal operations of market parties. Companies themselves determine which additional parties are needed in subcontracting to carry out the work" (idem, 26:51-32:37; Rijkswaterstaat, n.d.). And so hands become clean.

The strategic use of bankruptcy, alongside the freedom of transferring employees to other subsidiaries at any time can present advantages in court for the company, in case an employee decides to sue them for any reason. And indeed, reasons do come up. Andrjez Szulczewski is a former Polish employee of Atlanco Rimec, who was working on a construction site in France and sustained an injury to one leg as a beam crushed it. After spending 2 months in the hospital and covering his own medical costs, he was sent back to Poland. Requesting to access social security benefits, due to his inability to work, he found out he is not entitled to them, as his social insurance had been paid in Cyprus, since that is where he was employed, although having never been there. This explains why he had received and signed a contract written in Greek at the beginning of his employment. The company's choice of jurisdiction may seem strange, but it becomes more coherent when learning that the country has the cheapest social security rates in the European Union. After costly lawsuits, he was advised to stop pursuing legal action (Norberg, 2012; Bnnvara, 2015, 07:03-08:04; Van Brempt & Moreels, 2020, p. 65; UK Parliament, 2014). DR1 later corrected the information in the documentary, stating that the worker had received some compensation from the Cypriot authorities (Rasmussen, 2014).

Atlanco Rimec was also accused of blacklisting when journalists received evidence of 3000 workers' names and status alongside comments including "No. Not a reliable person.

Contacted unions' ', "troublemaker, always complaining about everything, bad attitude", "big mouth' ' (UK Parliament, 2014; The cpworld, 2014, 47:11-48:25). This is an illegal practice that discriminates against workers for becoming union members or raising working conditions and safety concerns. One of the most grave accusations was covered in the documentary "Race to the bottom", in which the abduction of Paulo Andrade was presented. Unfortunately, legal loopholes and grey areas, together with a tolerance of abusive use of temporary work agencies, letterbox companies, subcontracting chains offer the conditions to circumvent for profit, while the exploitation of and crimes against workers are still present. Atlanco Rimec is only one case out of the many in the construction industry.

With this context in mind, it is time to consider the gendered aspects of the workforce. Within the industry, the male workforce represents an overwhelmingly larger proportion, while "[m]asculinity is still an almost permanent hallmark of the professional identity of construction workers" (Vogel & ETUI, 2016, p. 10). Even though it is bound for masculine traits and norms to be reinforced and keep perpetuating in such a highly gendered industry, with debatable levels of harmful behaviour towards the individual and the group, I argue that the changes of employment brought about by social dumping practices put workers to greater danger by promoting toxic masculinity and capitalising on it.

The highly masculine environment can generally promote the notion of breadwinner and ideas of virility, bravery, competitiveness, dominance, violence. These are conditions in which accidents are prone to happen, especially by overlooking safety measures, and are likely to go unrecorded, as one may not officially declare an incident, his need to be hospitalised or take sick leave under the pretext of not appearing weak. Both national and foreign workers are subjected to high levels of anxiety on the grounds of the dangerous nature of their work, alongside the concern of losing their job. But the latter can impact the former. Fear of unemployment and actual joblessness, which challenge the image of breadwinner, can have a psychological impact that is prone to manifest through modifications in risk-taking behaviour. A heightened risk tendency, alongside "masculine strength interfere with safety and performance in a potentially deadly environment, especially when men try to prove themselves through toughness" (Lindsey, 2015, p. 289) and such is the case for the construction industry and its workers. However, for migrant workers, which make up the

majority of the construction workforce, the situation is far more volatile. Their vulnerability, the scarcity which they come from, their heavy reliance on the employer and uneven power relations make it so that they are more exploitable. In order to not lose their job, their work or residence permit, they become docile to working in all weather conditions, working overtime, injured or sick with no or little protest. The tensions brought about by the ethnic stratification of the workforce, the racialisation and the strain created between national and foreign workers can create a hostile atmosphere in which competition and individualism can have potentially dangerous consequences. As such, no protest to working conditions and collective bargaining can actually take place. To the already vulnerable circumstances of migrant workers, an increased tendency to risk-taking, collective tensions and individual pressures, little or no safety and health understanding, exhaustion due to long hours and inadequate housing, poor working conditions are all added in a hazardous concoction. Migrant workers' heightened susceptibility to nonpayment of social security contributions can translate to their failure to receive health, disability or any other form of social assistance in case of occupational accidents, of which they are already more prone to.

The small number of women employed in the construction industry is often formulated within the argument of biological traits and preferences, namely that women are not interested in this field and are not built for it. However, the number of organisations and women speaking out about this segregation and the issues encountered in entering the labour force shows us that there is a level of interest that may not be accurately represented by just 1 per cent. Sexism is prevalent each step of the way to a career in construction. Most women working in this field hold desk and secretarial positions, an estimated 86.7 per cent, but these off-site positions do not imply higher roles, since only 14 percent of staff executive positions are held by women and 7 per cent are employed as line executives (BigRentz, 2022). 60 percent of women report having been the victim of sexist discrimination and abuse, while most women report feeling excluded from social events and believe they were overlooked when advancement opportunities occurred, because of their gender. As for safety, the female labour force is at higher risk of injury due to safety equipment that is ill-fitting (ibidem). What is more, the construction industry's gender pay gap is one of the largest out of all occupations. In 2021, in the US, women earned 94 cents for every dollar earned by men (Zippia, n.d.). In the UK, women earned "38% less than men" (George, 2022).

In her book entitled “Gender roles. A sociological perspective”, Linda Lindsey (2015, p. 338) details how once women enter typically masculine jobs, “they tend to adopt the behavioural traits that retain the masculine qualities”. It is worth to note 2 instances that exemplify the need to showcase a typically male behaviour in order to be accepted: “if you’re a woman in construction, you keep your head down, don’t talk about it and pretend you’re a bloke” (Williams, 2015); “I have a very masculine mind. I don’t cry … I don’t gossip. I don’t complain” (Hanan, 2020). In unfortunate irony, I find that the latter example, which is found in an article meant to demonstrate that the construction industry is progressing with regards to gender stereotypes, is actually contributing to stereotyping women and advancing ideas of toxic masculinity by discriminating against women or men showcasing emotion or statements of discontent. As such, we have seen exemplified occupational segregation, the not-so advantageous positions of women in male dominated jobs, concepts such as glass ceiling, wage gap and how traits associated with masculinity persist as desirable while stereotypes can keep perpetuating even in good intentions.

The textile industry, Rana Plaza and considerations on gender

Whether called the garment, clothing, apparel, or textile industry, the overall undertakings of this domain of manufacturing cover the processes of “research, design, development, manufacturing and distribution of textiles, fabrics and clothing” (Sayed, 2015). Like shelter, clothing fulfils an essential human need. If at first meant for covering and protecting the body and adapting to different weather conditions, climates and environments, clothing evolved to not only contain, but be defined by its social and cultural attributes.

The general atmosphere of this industry was characterised by predictable production, a constant and stable supplier and two collections per year with fairly standardised products. The processes of production were also spatially close to the consumers. Until the late 1980s and 1990s, the United States of America and countries in Europe were great producers in the garment sector. In the years to come, this formula notably changed: more seasons, more styles, more distinct brands resulted in strong competition which lead to another dynamic: the designing, marketing and selling of products stayed in the developed countries, while the manufacturing was moved in developing countries, where the labour costs are low and the

production is fast. The offshoring and subcontracting of fabrication lead to the industry value added dropping in the United States and European countries in some cases with more than 30 per cent, with United Kingdom taking a hit with a decline of 63 per cent, while for four countries, China, India, Indonesia and Brazil, it meant recording great profits in response to these global shifts in manufacturing, growing by over 100 per cent, China alone gaining 66 per cent. Even though profit is not extensive, some developing countries deeply count on the opportunities offshoring provides for them in order to enter markets and improve living standards. The textile industry is currently described as being unpredictable, profoundly volatile and competitive. This approach of relocating production has generated millions of jobs in the developing world and especially represented new, welcomed and culturally acceptable job opportunities for women, who make up the majority of this deeply labour intensive industry and are usually coming from low education backgrounds, seldomly highly skilled (ILO, 2014, p. 12).

The Rana Plaza factory collapse is considered to be the most tragic incident in the apparel industry and a turning point with regards to people's awareness of the conditions in which their clothing is being produced. The incident occurred in Savar, a Dhaka district, early in the morning of 24th of April 2013, killing 1,134 people and injuring close to 2,600 workers. Many survivors recount that once the generators had been started, the building started rumbling beneath their feet. One day prior to this disaster, the workers noticed structural cracks in the building and were evacuated. Upon inspection, the building was deemed unsafe for use, but the building manager and factory owners pressed employees to start working the following morning. The establishments situated on the lower levels of the 8 story building, a bank and a few shops, remained closed. But for the garment workers, it was indisputable that they get back to work if they would like to receive a paycheck and keep their jobs. After the horrific incident, it was established that the building was constructed on a filled in pond, made out of poor materials and with an unauthorised, supplementary addition of 4 floors. A 9th floor was also under construction at the time. Corruption and bribery were responsible for much of what happened that day (CCC, n.d.; Marriott, 2013). In terrible circumstances, Rana Plaza has offered lessons to be learnt and has left a legacy that continues to inspire new measures taken by governments, organisations, and non-governmental organisations. Even though progress has been made since the Savar factory collapse, it is important not to forget

about the people most affected by it. The following section will present the stories of garment workers and the Rana Plaza employees with the help of two documentaries, "The True Cost" and "Clothes to Die For" and a 2018 New York Times article by journalist Dana Thomas.

"The True Cost" is a 2015 documentary directed by Andrew Morgan that portrays both social and environmental implications of fast fashion. It covers a variety of relevant topics, from the pollution caused by processes of production and its effects on nearby communities, genetically modified cotton, the use of pesticides and the introduction of seed monopoly with farmers committing suicide over their indebtedness, the Rana Plaza disaster and protests in Cambodia, psychological considerations of consumerism, marketing persuasion, capitalism and globalisation. The documentary also follows the life of Shima Akhter, a Bangladeshi garment worker who exemplifies much of the industries' problems. She was 23 at the time of filming and disclosed to have received a mere $10 a month at the start of her working in the garment industry (Moconomy, 2022, 19:28-20:15). She managed to form a union and become its president and recalled an incident at the factory she was working in: "we submitted a list of demands and the managers received it. After they received the list, we had an altercation with the managers. After the altercation, the managers locked the door. And along with them, 30-40 staffers attacked us and beat us up. They used chairs, sticks, scales and things like scissors to beat us up. Mostly they kicked and punched us and banged our heads on the walls. They hit us mostly in the chest and abdomen" (idem, 21:38-22:30). Because of the long working hours, the toxic substances and heat, she cannot take her daughter to the factory. However, the Labour Act enacted in 2013 requires all factories of more than 40 employees to provide childcare facilities, which are widely unavailable in the garment industry. The sector is especially affected by failure to act in accordance with this law, as the majority of its workers are women. Weak maternity protection, challenges for breastfeeding, the working mothers' poor health conditions and informal child labour are affecting the children associated to the garment sector (UNICEF, 2015). In Shima's case, the added lack of childcare provided by the factory or the community means that for the most part, she is separated from her daughter, who she sends back to her family in the countryside (Moconomy, 2022, 20:47-21:04). The low pay, the long hours, strenuous working conditions, lack of gender-sensitive benefits, the hindrance in collective bargaining activities and the violence encountered by Shima efficiently sum up the problems of an industry.

"Clothes to Die For" is a 2014 documentary providing an in-depth look at the Rana Plaza factory collapse and its victims, directed by Zara Hayes and produced by Sarah Hamilton for the BBC (Santana, 2015, 58:36-58:43). With the focus of the Bangladeshi export almost entirely on the garment sector, it was inevitable for this profit-making opportunity to turn corrupt. The relocation of production also offered the proper conditions in which to do so. Even though the suppliers were meant to abide by the ban of underage work and excessive hours, the sheer number of providers, subcontractors and different factories made it impossible to track and ensure their compliance to regulations. A garment worker, who was 15 when she started working, said "[t]hey would hide the young girls in the toilet when buyers visited" (idem, 8:16-13:54). The working hours were also unreasonable, another worker mentioning, "[s]ometimes we would finish at midnight. It would be 2am before we got to bed. Then we'd wake up again at 5am" (idem, 15:51-16:00). On the morning of April 24th 2013, Shopna Khatun said to her mother, "Please, pray for me, I am going to work" (idem, 22:33). She did not want to lose her £2.30 in attendance bonus and her daily wage of £1.50. The workers were forced in, with promises that the building would last another 100 years. A few hours later, once the fateful moment had arrived, the building was down in less than 90 seconds (idem, 25:44-28:47). Shopna was buried beneath the stories of the Rana Plaza building for 9 hours (idem, 23:36-39:57). All for a mere sum of £3.80. Among other horrific accounts of that day, Rojina Begum, recalls "I never thought that I'd have to amputate my own arm". At the start of her third day trapped in the remains of the building, the doctor could not reach her, so she gathered all her strength remaining to do it herself (idem, 43:06-43:53). This disaster permanently scarred the survivors and the families of those who lost their lives, alongside the Bangladeshi garment workers' community.

Besides the ones that passed away in tragic circumstances, there are their children and family members who were dependent on them and the survivors that are left behind. In a 2018 New York Times article, journalist Dana Thomas presents a snippet of the long-term consequences of the event. Presenting the lives of Mahmudul Hassan Hridoy, a man who worked in the factory for just a couple of weeks before the collapse and now suffers permanent damage to his legs; Shiuli Begum, who has her spinal cord crushed and can no longer have children; Shila Begum who has her arm and kidneys crushed and therefore can no longer work and afford education for her daughter. But the effects of these physical

injuries do not stop there. One of the survivors interviewed pulls his hair out at night, while another is addicted to sleeping pills and at least 2 of the survivors of the collapse have committed suicide. One of the women interviewed recalled: "I passed out and came to my senses 27 days later" (Thomas, 2018) and mentioned to have received no compensation from the government or brands, but some from nonprofits. Another said: "You had to lobby for the money [...] And I was too infirm" (ibidem). Mr. Hridoy was one of the survivors that managed to receive $600, which can be a questionable sum when considering his life-changing ordeal. Issues of compensation were, and still are, disputed.

The recent measures of relocation of production as a way to increase the profits of western companies has generated work opportunities for a lot of women in developing countries and represented a chance at their emancipation by offering employment outside of the home, the status of worker and economic player and a higher level of autonomy, especially in patriarchal societies. However, scholars have been questioning the extent of this emancipation and pointing out extents of exploitation. It is of interest to consider the cultural and social norms that shape gender and occupational expectations. Women are overrepresented in this industry because it is considered to be a feminine job, although underrepresented in higher paid and higher skilled professions, because of the continued preference of what are considered masculine traits over feminine traits (Ahmed, 2006, p. 120). In 1999, Mary Beth Mills (p. 7) stated: "In part, women's labour is attractive to international capital investment because of persistent assumptions by employers regarding what kind of workers women make [...] women workers are more likely to put up with low pay, limited benefits and long-term job insecurity. Their youth and gender also suggest a work force already schooled in obedience to (parental) authority, hard work, and the patience and dexterity required for many domestic chores (such as weaving and sewing). As a result, women's character and skills are often seen to be particularly well-suited to the fine detail and endless repetition of textile and electronics assembly work". A 2016 article entitled "Feminization of Employment and Gender Inequality of Bangladesh Labor Market: The Case of Garment Industries" supports similar ideas, but introduces the element of patriarchal characteristics which are specific to some developing societies: "capitalist interests along with patriarchal norms and values influence the use of women as a cheap, flexible and docile labor to earn the maximum profits at the minimum possible cost" (Islam, p. 157).

The status of primary caregivers has not been challenged. As core reproductive agents, even though more women are employed and provide for the household, more men are not contributing to the care economy. Because of this juggle between paid work and care work, an on and off movement, it is more likely for women to engage in informal employment (Ahmed, 2006, p. 116). Unequal pay and advancement opportunities, lengthy and unpredictable working hours, unsafe working environments, job insecurity, lack of maternity protection and childcare facilities, limited collective bargaining power, sexual, physical, verbal and mental abuse indirectly produce more strain on women and make them subjects of exploitation at work, as well as in the home (ILO, 2014, p. 12). In my opinion, emancipation is too strong of a notion, since the traditional views of women have not been challenged. Still seen as docile, flexible, submissive workers, employers profit from this plentiful and cheap labour force. Sexual harassment just for women to continue working and the offering of sexual favours to receive overtime is hardly emancipatory.

It is common for men employed in traditionally female occupations to encounter stigma. But the perceived masculine inclination for technological intelligence, together with the technological advances of the industry, have made for more men to be employed in the garment sector, and as such, in what are considered more culturally and gender appropriate positions. Particularly for the textile industry, discrimination against men is also common during the recruitment stages, since men are seen as "troublemakers" (Janssen & Rossi, 2018, p. 4). However, in most cases, cultural and gender norms and stereotypes concerning the characteristics and abilities of the sexes favour the male worker. Implicit traits such as leadership and decision-making allow for a glass escalator effect to perpetuate within the industries' supervisory, managerial or quality control positions. And this happens at a noticeably high pace. As Bangladeshi worker Sima recalls, "I joined this garment industry twenty-eight months ago along with five other girls and two boys on the same day. All of us were unskilled and this was our first time job [...] after one-year between the boys one became supervisor, another boy became line chief, but we all the girls are still working as the sewing operator" (Islam, 2016, p. 160). In the documentary "Clothes to Die For" it can also be noticed that the men interviewed held higher positions than the women interviewed. Mr. Dipu held the position of production manager (Santana, 2015, 14:16), Shariful Islam of supervisor (idem, 17:06) in the Rana Plaza factories and volunteer Kazir Monir Hossain is a

businessman who set up a factory as a cooperative owned by Rana Plaza survivors (idem, 55:52-56:19).

Solutions and conclusions

We have seen how these highly gendered but contrasting industries have been brought together under the same umbrella of humanly indecent working conditions, while social dumping practices have heightened the vulnerability of the employees. If in the past, women were seen as a flexible, docile and cheap labour army, we can notice that at least the male labour in the construction industry is starting to be transformed into similar conditions. Workers in both industries are put in positions of vulnerability, making them more exploitable with no or little protest while capitalising on some biological traits of the sexes and on traditional norms and expected behaviours of the genders.

Regarding possible solutions, if neoliberal and capitalist principles that hold flexible work to high regards are still desirable, it is clearly the case that more encompassing, better coordinated and improved enforcement of regulations and efforts are needed in order to offer employees the safety, security and decency they all deserve. Regarding the construction industry, better coordination between the member states of the European Union is highly desired, from a more unified understanding of terms to consolidated labour laws and allied correction of grey areas and loopholes while the detection of illicit, bogus or artificial employment, inspections and independent audits, provision of proof and reporting should become more thorough. The joint effort of public institutions, inspectors, and social security authorities to ensure that migrant workers have all the necessary information they need in their language can go a long way in not only improving their safety on site, but also their safety net. Furthermore, ways must be found to facilitate, guarantee and safeguard the workers' right to collective bargaining, the access to and non-discrimination of union association (The European Federation of Building and Woodworkers, 2010).

As for the textile industry, the dumping of production in developing countries is, needless to say, extremely profitable. Ideally, and with quite a utopic implication, all developing countries involved in the industry should stand together in imposing the same regulations regarding labour, while western businesses pay what would be a decent wage.

However, this solution is bordering on the inconceivable. A possible answer would be for the clothing companies in the developed countries to simply pay more for the products they order and to demand and ensure the workers are in turn paid more. Measures such as investing in constant inspections carried out thoroughly, the rehabilitation of factory buildings and their emergency infrastructure, the training of workers in safety protocols, the provision of safe factory child care and guaranteeing non-discriminatory, non-abusive practices and gender-sensitive welfare could truly be life changing for garment workers. The clothing companies have the power to demand these conditions when ordering their products. Currently though, they are not pressed to do so and are aware that this resolution may decrease their profits, while factory owners do not demand more in fear of losing business. But consumers have the power to press companies to provide products that are created in conditions of decency. Once these individual decisions will affect profit, companies may budge towards equitable practices. Public attention is and will be more and more valuable. The use of media of all parties, such as companies, journalists, labour inspectorates, member states, nongovernmental organisations in order to report misconduct, to nudge and peer pressure all the participants in the entire industry to care about its workers and to raise awareness and help develop more responsible communities that can in turn challenge demand in the market and put pressure on businesses may move the current state of affairs in a much more respectable place.

As concluding remarks, it is worthy to note, once more, the importance of productive, sustainable, fair work and strive for universal humane conditions, in this “new labour-unfriendly international regime” (as Jens Lerche refers to the current state, 2007, p. 446). All people should benefit from labour that allows conditions for living and for rest, for quality time, to be creative, to pursue their passions and to improve their skills. As a final response to the research question, namely “How have social dumping practices changed the construction and textile industries and what has been the impact of said practices on gender specific conditions encountered in the workplace?”, my conclusions accommodate a somewhat pessimistic view on the impact of the pressures of profit-led globalised economies and the oftentimes ensuing social dumping practices in the two industries because of the worsened working conditions of the highly gendered workforces, the continued preference for masculine norms that can both represent a glass escalator and be toxicity capitalised on,

alongside the overall poor development of employment conditions and advancement opportunities for women. It is apparent that the flexibility of labour longed for by the neoliberal and capitalist principles is disproportionately carried by the more vulnerable. The poor working environments and substandard employment rights of the labourers are time and again justified by their existing insecure economic conditions and their lack of choice. The lack of other decent working opportunities implies a precarious set of living conditions, not a factor in legitimising taking advantage of the vulnerability of these situations in the name of profit. One cannot help but notice how many companies in the western parts of the world, let to some extent by legislative loopholes and grey areas, capitalise on workers coming from scarcity. This can oftentimes translate to attributing a lower value to the lives of people with little economic power.

I think work life is strongly related to quality of life. And I believe that each person carrying out paid and unpaid work should do so in conditions of decency and good spirit and be economically empowered enough to benefit from basic needs as a bare minimum. It is essential for their worries for the unexpected and the future to be at least partially put to rest by the safety of social security and to feel enough contentedness, confidence and ease so that they can practise creativity, a sense of belonging, the choice "to be and do things in life that they value" (Sen, 1999, p. 285). A life lived with dignity is nourished by decent work, determining the possibilities of lives lived to their fullest potential by happy human beings.

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