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Publisher: Routledge  
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## Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713433350>

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Online Publication Date: 01 July 2008

To cite this Article: Favell, Adrian (2008) 'The New Face of East-West Migration in Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34:5, 701 — 716

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/13691830802105947  
URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691830802105947>

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# The New Face of East–West Migration in Europe

Adrian Favell

*In order to contextualise the papers in this special issue, this paper presents an overview and framework for understanding the importance of East–West migration in Europe associated with the EU enlargement process. The new patterns and forms of migration seen among East European migrants in the West—in terms of circular and temporary free movement, informal labour market incorporation, cultures of migration, transnational networks, and other phenomena documented in the following papers—illustrate the emergence of a new migration system in Europe. Textbook narratives, in terms of standard accounts of immigration, integration and citizenship based on models of post-colonial, guestworker and asylum migration, will need to be rethought. One particularly fertile source for this is the large body of theory and research developed in the study of Mexican–US migration, itself a part of a regional integration process of comparative relevance to the new European context. While the benefits of open migration from the East will likely triumph over populist political hostility, it is a system that may encourage an exploitative dual labour market for Eastern movers working in the West, as well as encouraging a more effective racial or ethnically-based closure to immigrants from South of the Mediterranean and further afield.*

*Keywords: European Union; Regional Integration; Labour Migration; Eastern Europe; Migration Theory*

The enlargements of the European Union eastwards in May 2004 and January 2007 completed a geo-political shift in post-1989 Europe that—in terms of the migration and mobility of populations—poses the biggest demographic change in Europe since the devastation and flux at the end of the Second World War. The Cold War was finally over, and Europe united again, with new East European citizens able to access, now or in the near future, the same free movement rights that have been enjoyed for years by their West European counterparts. Freedom of movement of persons from the new member-states remains a contentious issue, and some borders remain in

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place: not all temporary accession limitations to free movement are yet down. West European states have shown themselves to be far less keen on the movement of people westwards than they are on the gold rush of Western capital East. Yet, one by one, formal restrictions on the free movement of East Europeans are being given up, in many cases enabling legal regularisation of migration and mobility that has long been occurring in practice. Borders are coming down, and a new East–West migration system is being established on the continent.

These dramatic changes represent a new frontier in European migration research. Most of the studies completed before the enlargements focused on large-scale demographic trends or their political framing (Favell and Hansen 2002; Wallace and Stola 2001). Less has been done on the micro, ethnographic level: on the lives, experiences, networks and social forms that this new migration in Europe has taken. Fresh research is called for on the ‘human face’ of this migration (Smith and Favell 2006), and this is being answered in large part by a new generation of East European researchers, themselves often academic migrants pursuing education and careers in the West. This special issue showcases the work of a number of these scholars, based on a conference organised as part of the KNOWMIG project (‘Expanding the Knowledge Base of European Labour Migration Policies’), now based at the University of Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> In this introduction, I offer a framework and overview for understanding the importance of this new research, emphasising two key points. The first is that our tried-and-tested narratives and models of postwar immigration in Europe—the standard discussions of immigration, integration and citizenship, based on post-colonial, guestworker and asylum models, and historical distinctions between pre- and post-1973 trends—are finished. The second is that the new East–West migration finally provides scholars with a European context comparable to the Mexican–US scenario that has inspired the largest and most sophisticated body of migration theory and research available in the social sciences. East–West migration, as these contributions here show, can be read through these theories, providing a rich body of empirical material that will enable the development of better, more comparative views on the driving forces of international migration, as well as on the role of free movement and migration in regional integration processes taking place around the globe today.

### **Political and Policy Context**

Nearly all the policy advocacy on East–West migration, as well as all the credible demographic and economic scholarship, nowadays suggests that the West has little to fear from post-enlargement migration. Early predictions in the days after the Berlin Wall came down—usually by German or Austrian scholars—did suggest that there was a huge pent-up demand for East–West migration that might provoke a flood to the West (Bauer and Zimmerman 1999; Fassmann and Hintermann 1997; Hönekopp 1991). Much of this research was based on surveys of migration intentions among a population recently freed to dream about being part of the West. Later scholars

rightly pointed out the unreliability of this work. A much better guide to future enlargements were the past enlargements involving southern and Mediterranean states (Kupiszewski 2002; Wallace 2002). The accession of Spain, Portugal and Greece did not lead to floods of new migrants, but to manageable flows, positive development trends in the new southern member-states, and high levels of return or circular migration. The integration of these nations into the European fold in fact stands as an unqualified success in the history of the EU—as well as a clear inspiration to later enlargements.

The consensus today—reflected above all in the most influential policy advocacy in Brussels (ECAS 2005, 2006; Kelo and Wächter 2006)—is that Europe as a whole is only likely to benefit from a greater degree of manageable East–West movement. Western Europe is going to receive a new influx of highly educated, talented or (in any case) ambitious East Europeans, driven by the very positive selection mechanisms working in the European context (Borjas 1999). These migration trends are also quite different from the post-colonial, guestworker and asylum immigration that has proven such a long-term political issue of contention in Europe. East European migrants are in fact regional ‘free movers’ *not* immigrants and, with the borders open, they are more likely to engage in temporary circular and transnational mobility, governed by the ebb and flow of economic demand, than by long-term permanent immigration and asylum-seeking.<sup>2</sup> Many East Europeans in any case were able to move and work in the West before 2004; official enlargement simply regularises a situation well established in practice on the ground, as Miera and Garapich both point out in their papers in this special issue.

For all the good arguments to encourage open borders and free movement, the political calculation on these issues seems to reflect a different rationale. There is in fact great electoral reward to be had by populist politicians using the ‘threat’ of open doors eastwards as a tool for berating the impact of the EU, in particular the liberalisation of West European labour markets or employment legislation. The ugly French debate about the ‘Polish plumber’ during the EU constitutional vote in May 2005 was but the most visible example of this phenomenon. Little matter that the handful of Polish plumbers in France has been vastly outnumbered by their Polish counterparts who chose Britain instead, and who now dominate this sector in London or Manchester—or that the British economy in the last few years seems to be doing much better than the French on the back of this workforce. It was the failed Bolkestein directive on freedom of movement of services that opened the spectre of European nation-states no longer being able to control employment legislation on their own territory. France balked at the possibility of the rights of workers or the rules of the working week now coming under the jurisdiction of, say, Polish or British law, both of which are more lax. Critics call this competitive imbalance in the system ‘social dumping’, or ‘a race to the bottom’. In reality, though, what is not harmonised (and thereby regulated) by the EU with planned legislation, may instead simply get accomplished by the free market, which is now able to freely post workers *within* Europe wherever and whenever in the absence of meaningful border controls.

As regards the countries which joined in 2004, West European nations have one by one accepted the inevitable and brought down transitional barriers to freedom of movement for these new member-states. As things stand, the trend seems to be clear, after much lobbying from the European Commission. Initially only three countries opened their borders: Ireland, Sweden and Britain. All reaped economic benefits from the inflows that followed; indeed, these benefits have proven higher than expected in the Irish and British cases. By February 2007, the Netherlands had become the ninth country to drop restrictions to the EU10 member-states, joining Finland, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Denmark have in the meantime reduced barriers. Only Austria and Germany—where hostility to East European migrants post-1989 has always been greatest—have continued to say that they will maintain restrictions until at least 2011. Numbers of such workers are, however, high in both these countries, whether legal or not. Recently, on the other hand, Britain led the way in announcing that doors were to remain officially shut to Bulgarians and Romanians when these two countries joined in January 2007. Spain and then others quickly followed suit, even though it will simply mean that large numbers of workers already present in these countries will not be able to regularise their status—or begin to pay taxes.

The slow political acceptance of open East–West borders confirms the underlying fact that Europe in future has an almost desperate *structural* need, in both demographic and labour force terms, for increased intra-European population movements. For the next 20–30 years, regardless of what happens to birth rates, this demand will persist; and if more countries come to resemble the Italian or Spanish rates of birth, the situation will get worse. These demands notably have not been satisfied by the intra-EU movement of West Europeans, with regional disparities between the North and South evening out through development, structural funds and welfare provision. Intra-EU migration among West European countries has only risen slightly over the 30-year period since the ‘migration stop’ of the 1970s, despite the extension of freedom of movement rights through successive EU treaties (Favell 2008; Recchi 2005). Labour markets instead have looked East. European economies—with some variation according to how much they continue to preserve nationally-specific welfare-state provisions and employment legislation (Esping-Andersen 1999)—are increasingly coming to resemble the USA, in which immigrants fill a vast range of low-end service, manufacturing and agricultural work that nationals no longer accept. Who better to fill these 3D (‘dirty, dangerous and dull’) jobs, than fresh-faced European neighbours from the East, who are likely to be temporary rather than permanent, and are ethnically ‘similar’ and/or culturally ‘proximate’? There is a strong suspicion here that West European states might be quite happy to reduce their reliance on non-white, non-European immigrants by the development of a more internal and regional European labour market. This new migration system in fact might well extend beyond the nominal frontiers of the official member-states, to include candidate countries and other near neighbours. The European Neighbourhood Policy, although noted normally only for its security aspects, is also creating

regulated cross-border markets along these lines, in some cases to enable new member-states (such as Poland) which are losing their own workforce, to replace them with migrant workers from their immediate East (such as Ukrainians). The EU thus must be seen as a concentric, territorial project in regional integration, that has used its external partner agreements to set up new mechanisms of managing regional migration flows, while closing doors to others (Favell 2005; Rogers 2000).

Idealist pro-EU federalists see the economic migration of East European as a win-win-win scenario. West European economies benefit from dynamic labour-market effects, East European movers cash in on the premium of working in the higher-paid West, and East European economies develop through the two-way circulation of talent and capital. The EU, they think, can successfully govern and manage this scenario if political action is pooled at the supra-national level. These rosy visions have been celebrated especially in the European Year of Mobility of Workers (2006), organised by the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in Brussels, which has lobbied hard for the breaking down of transitional barriers.<sup>3</sup> Neo-liberal economists share their optimism, but are much happier to let the whole scenario play out in terms of the international 'competition for the brightest and the best', where the more powerful Western economies may indeed benefit disproportionately from the 'brain drain' of the most employable talent and skills from the East (Borjas 1999). The political rationality in the meantime hangs in the balance: national politicians are tempted by populist rhetoric towards hostility, while all the economic, demographic and geopolitical arguments point in the opposite direction.

### **European Research and North American Theory**

A whole new generation of researchers from East and Central Europe are now completing fascinating PhDs in sociology, anthropology and human geography on the new East–West migration—many at prestigious West European academic institutions. Their careers are themselves the fruit of the EU's forward-looking inclusion of candidate member-states in European-wide education mobility schemes well in advance of full membership. These young scholars, who themselves have lived through the momentous changes they are studying, are now documenting the migration systems of Poles, Hungarians, Romanians or Bulgarians in Britain, Ireland, Germany, Spain or Italy. Their efforts make the case once again for grounded ethnographic and interviews-based research as an essential part of the repertoire of international migration studies.

Above all, what they document, as it is happening, is the emergence of a new European migration system. It is perhaps ironic that Douglas Massey and his colleagues completed their round-up of the postwar European system in a global context at the moment when everything was changing again (Massey *et al.* 1998). The standard textbook story of postwar colonial and guestworker immigration driven by industrial growth, followed by post-industrial closure and the contested emergence of

multi-ethnic nation-states, multiculturalism and new conceptions of citizenship (i.e. Castles and Miller 2003; Hollifield 1992) now has to be rewritten—on this, see especially King (2002). The paradigm of immigration and integration, in particular, becomes redundant in the face of the emergent, regional-scale, European territorial space. Within this, European citizens—old and new—can move freely against a wider, transnational horizon that encourages temporary and circular migration trends, and demands no long-term settlement or naturalisation in the country of work. Post-colonial theories of race, ethnicity and multiculturalism—that clutter the shelves of bookstores and the pages of syllabi in the Anglo-American-dominated field of ‘ethnic and racial studies’—are also ineffective and largely irrelevant in relation to these new movements in Europe.

Rather, to theorise and interpret the new East–West migration in comparative context, researchers have turned to the most substantial existing body of theory and research in international migration studies: work largely developed in relation to studies of Latin American, especially Mexican, migration to the US. This is no coincidence: the question of East–West integration, and the movement and mobility it encourages, is directly parallel to the regional integration processes in North America, which have led Mexican migration to the US to be the single largest international migration flow in the Western world, and the biggest migration-related component of the US economy, itself the world’s biggest. Like Europe, the US wrestles continually with the political pressure for more effective closure of its southern borders, while—again, like Europe—being dependent on the undepletable reservoir of cheaper skilled and unskilled labour that the countries to the south provide. It is a relation above all characterised by the profound cross-border, territorial, regional embeddedness of the US South–West with Mexico, at every level of the economy and demography.

The Mexican Migration Project (MMP), for example, headed by Jorge Durand and Douglas Massey, is the single most ambitious empirical project ever developed on a major international migration system.<sup>4</sup> With roots in an ethno-survey methodology, reflected in the early anthropological-style work on sending communities (Massey *et al.* 1987), MMP has since 1982 developed and elaborated a huge, freely accessible quantitative database, centred on surveys of potential migrant populations in key Mexican sending areas and their patterns of movement to the US. As well as providing the biggest source of data about Mexican migration to the US, it has also been the basis for Massey’s concerted attempt to summarise, frame and extend migration theory into a more comprehensive networks-based migration system approach, that illustrates the exponential dynamics and social structures beyond simple push–pull explanations (Massey *et al.* 1993). On the back of this research, these core migration theories were pushed to encompass the whole globe (Massey *et al.* 1998).

A second body of work, hailing from economic sociology, has focused rather on the direct impact of these migration flows on the US economy and its internal labour market dynamics (Portes 1995; Waldinger 2001). The free-flowing, massively

informal labour markets of California for domestic work, agriculture, household and construction work—the dynamo that powers this, the largest corner of the US economy—are proving a model for the rest of the post-industrial world, as it shifts increasingly into a highly informalised and structurally unequal dual labour market model (see Piore 1979). While this is a boon for capitalist exploitation of cheap mobile labour, it can also be read as leading to a potential ‘globalisation from below’, as pointed out in literature on ethnic economies (Portes 1998). Domestic work, and the feminisation of migration it underlines, is a key sector in which these processes play out (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). These theories also link in with attempts to show how the emergence of networks and territorially-based ethnic economic niches are often the primary channel of incorporation of migrant labour into the post-industrial economy (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light and Gold 2000). These developments also point the way forward to future limitations of US urban change in even the most global of cities (Light 2006), and to emerging new labour market conflicts with the Latino workforce (Milkman 2006).

Rather different in style, but no less influential, has been the body of work grouped together under the rubric of ‘transnationalism’. Again, the extraordinary cross-border flows, social forms, economic and political structures that have developed among Mexicans in the US, particularly in California, have provided the material for a thorough rethinking of the nation-state-centred immigration/assimilation paradigm, that sees the phenomenon only through the receiving country’s eyes (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Levitt 2001; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). This work has gone on to detail the interpenetration of Mexican and US political, economic and cultural dynamics (Smith 2006; Smith and Bakker 2007), and changing patterns of Mexican migrant settlement in the US as they penetrate ever further the receiving society (Zúniga and Hernández-Léon 2005).

A fourth relevant literature is the work of labour market economics inspired by the Mexico–US scenario. These studies focus on the question of selection mechanisms, and the conditions under which receiving societies best capitalise on the potential human capital of immigrants, or even are able to select for the ‘unobserved skill’ that is carried by the most motivated and dynamic immigrants (Borjas 1989; Chiswick 2007). Borjas argues that the US’s ability to select the ‘brightest and the best’ is declining, as policies have increasingly favoured family reunification and migrant networks over demand-driven criteria; he does however see great potential for positive selection dynamics in the European scenario (Borjas 1999). The European context in fact has seen the emergence of a much ‘purer’ open borders system, in which the conditions of an ideal cross-border labour market are better achieved. Here, the dilemma is likely to be the threat of ‘brain drain’, and its negative effects on sending countries. On the other hand, developments with the American system as regards other migrants who have a preferential access to the American economy and American jobs, show that classic brain drain is just as likely under global conditions to lead to positive development dynamics (Stark 2004). Free-moving entrepreneurs can use their sojourn working in the US to develop ideas, networks and sources of

capital that will allow successful entrepreneurship to be established back in their home country—as has been graphically the case with recent Chinese and Indian migrants (Saxenian 2006).

### Documenting the New Face of East–West Migration

East–West migration is a fruitful context for the elaboration and modification of all these bodies of theory and research. The enlarged Europe in fact offers a rival model of regional integration to the North American one. As an institutional construct, the EU can boast a much more developed corpus of policy and legislation seeking to politically govern the underlying economic processes that are rapidly constructing an interpenetrated, regional and international labour market—along with its social and cultural consequences—in both parts of the world. European Union migration trends, because of this, might be expected to attain a more manageable and more rationally organised form than the largely informal and desperately unequal relations that characterise the Mexico–US border. As yet, little work has been done with this broad comparative view of the European migration system: Favell and Hansen (2002) make this point, arguing for the primacy of market-led forces over political efforts at control; Michael Samers (2003, 2004) has developed a broad political economy analysis of Europe’s tacit reliance on undocumented and irregular migration; and Franck Düvell and Bill Jordan have recently explored the necessary emergence of migration networks to facilitate and structure an East–West migration taking place largely ‘beyond control’ (Düvell 2005; Jordan and Düvell 2002).

These broader perspectives offer many starting-points for the papers which follow in this issue. The question of networks facilitating irregular migration, for example, is an approach picked up here by Tim Elrick and Emilia Lewandowska as part of the KNOWMIG project, in which they detail the migrant networks and agents that facilitate Polish domestic worker migration in Italy and Germany. A telling criticism of Massey’s networks-based theory that they and others make (Collyer 2005; Krissman 2005) has been the emphasis on networks being conceived predominantly in terms of family and friends. This leads to an over-emphasis on symmetrical community-based dynamics of reciprocity, and an over-weighting on supply-side factors at the expense of the structural and contextual impact of economic and political ones. This critique points to the fact that networks almost always facilitate business demand as a factor, often explicitly via the role played by Mexican bosses in the US looking for migrants to fill certain needs (the ‘*padrón*’ in Krissman’s critique), as well as the role of migration agents in making border crossing possible, and matching migrants to jobs (the ‘*coyote*’). A migration industry emerges, in particular centred on the necessary financial flows and transactions needed to make this labour market work. Migrant agents, sponsors and go-betweens have a bad reputation: they are often associated with trafficking and illicit international activities, and have become the target of many moralistic crusades in recent years. However, they may

well be a necessary part of any and every informal migration system facilitating movement across formally closed borders.

Michał Garapich, in this issue, illustrates the potential beneficial effects of an emergent migrant industry: in this case, the extraordinary developments centred on the Polish community and new commercial activities linked to migration in London. As he argues, the market-led dynamics behind these emergent social and organisational forms in fact provide a channel for political activism and inclusion—an outcome that has both changed the face of migration in Britain in recent years, and questioned the classic opposition of economic and political rationality encapsulated in standard accounts, such as James Hollifield's well known 'liberal paradox' (see Hollifield 2004), in which the political pressure for exclusion is contradicted in Western states by the structural demand for open migration.

Frauke Miera's focus, meanwhile, is on the Polish population in Berlin, especially their effect on the economic life of small and medium-sized businesses in the city. Germany plays a deceitful political game, denying formal access to Poles, while relying on a *de facto* and largely accepted temporary Polish presence in the country. Miera develops both the US-inspired work on ethnic economies, and its European derivations that focus on the notion of 'mixed embeddedness', where the urban context and institutional policy frameworks interventions are factored in (Kloosterman *et al.* 1999), as well as an emphasis on the spatially driven transnational and circular flows that have been studied by scholars of Polish and East European migration (Morawska 2002; Okólski 2001; Williams and Baláz 2002). Using these references, she draws a very effective comparison with the more visible, but less extensive Turkish entrepreneurial activity in the city. The research substantiates concretely the kind of broader theoretical arguments that have been put forward on globalisation and networks effects (ie. Faist 2000; Portes 1998). Here is a very real instance of an emergent, spatially organised, transnational ethnic economy that has a clear influence from below on regional integration—and in direct opposition to the stated national German policy.

Another legacy of the early ethno-survey work on Mexican sending communities was the focus on the 'culture of migration': getting inside the minds of migrants, understanding their local options *vis-à-vis* migration choices and the local economy, the pressure of peers and family, and the allure of Western wealth. Here, István Horváth's subtle study on the culture of migration presents the case of Transylvania, itself cut across by inter-ethnic conflicts and an ambiguous territorial relationship with the Hungarian and Romanian nations cf. Brubaker *et al.* 2006). The emphasis he puts here, however, is on the structural context of de-industrialisation and rural depopulation, cross-referenced to the social psychology of youth processing signals from their peers, the local economy, and the West during their difficult transition to adulthood. This echoes the work of another associate of MMP, Rubén Hernández-León (2004), on the de-industrialising context of Monterrey, Mexico and the dynamics of migrant networks with Texas and Georgia. The other, receiving side of the Romanian story is then provided by Remus Gabriel Anghel's similarly rich

ethnographic portrait of Romanians in Italy in this issue. Documenting both the practical social forms that they have established and developed in rich northern Italy, the receiving context of the city of Milan, and the social role of migrants when they return to their home villages, Anghel's study is extraordinarily reminiscent of US transnational studies—particularly the 'second generation' of these studies which have moved to localise the transnationalism observed (Smith 2001). Anghel usefully presents his work with these reference points to hand. Similar studies to this vivid portrait of Milan could and should now be made of East Europeans in Bilbao, Brussels, Dublin, London, Stockholm, Vienna and so on . . .

Thus far, in terms of labour market destinations, most of these East European migrants—who are far from uneducated or unskilled—appear destined to languish in undervalued roles in temporary and low-paid labouring, domestic, agricultural or construction work; although some may also be making use of the EU's parallel freedom of establishment laws to set up their own ethnic businesses or go into self-employment. These sorting mechanisms offer very positive returns for West European economies, exploiting a relatively skilled, hard working, ethnically unproblematic and highly available labour source for low wages and little or no job security. The British and Irish economies have been the most spectacular beneficiaries of these selection processes, and of the apparent willingness of East European migrant workers to accept work there under these conditions. But the East–West story is also one of high-skilled migration, and accordingly two contributions are included which explore these dynamics. Whether these selection processes are fair and effective, and whether the outcome is one of brain drain, or some other more virtuous dynamic, are the questions here. Krisztina Csödö's extensive London-based research homes in on the recognition and rewarding of 'skill' in the global city of choice. The economic literature has often worked with fixed notions of 'objective' human capital, but here she argues forcefully that social context and power relations construct what is perceived as 'skill', evaluating what is worthy and what is not. London may be one of the most open labour market destinations in Europe, but even here the 'brightest and the best' are potentially undervalued and relatively 'wasted' in their labour market participation—largely because of residual language and cultural barriers. In the worst scenarios it can lead to a downward assimilation into lower-end labour market positions typically marked out for ethnic minorities—as often found in US assimilation research (Portes and Zhou 1993). At best an outcome can be achieved that is some way short of the win-win-win scenarios on which global and regional theories are based. Meanwhile Jessica Guth and Bryony Gill—whose work is embedded in the MOBEX2 project on 'Promoting Balanced Growth in an Enlarging Europe'—attack the vexing issue of the apparent dramatic brain drain of scientific personnel from Bulgaria and Poland, laying out the costs and benefits of opportunities that have emerged for mobile scientists in Britain and Germany.<sup>5</sup> They temper the more cataclysmic accounts of the westward flux, noting the return and circular benefits that continue to accrue to the sending countries, while also

contributing a nuanced account of the 'economic' motivation of such migrants in the context of broader issues of training, experience and career building.

### **The New European Migration System**

With such a wealth of new research on the table, it is to be hoped that international migration researchers begin to look to East–West migration in Europe as a potential source for comparing and modifying theories that have been built exclusively on US-centred scenarios. Because of EU enlargement, the European migration system is probably the most dramatically evolving and changing context of migration in the developed world. It offers reason to question the common assumption that the US is the automatic paradigm of immigration for the rest of the world, while also posing the issue of whether Europe is in fact sliding closer to the US–Mexico migration model.

In sum, what do these studies add up to? What is the big picture here? Taken together, along with other more systematic surveys underway, such as PIONEUR—a major three-year EU-funded network, whose results are now available online—and MIGSYS—a cross-Atlantic project funded by the International Metropolis—a much less happy scenario than those promoted by advocates of EU integration is suggested.<sup>6</sup> I close by synthesising the view of the European migration system that might emerge from a broader reading of these various studies.

Both higher- and lower-status migrants from the East are attracted by the West, and certainly see their movements as temporary, opportunistic and circular. In fact there is little evidence that formal borders or barriers have made a lot of difference between, say, Poles and Romanians, although the latter are more likely to find themselves in precarious situations for want of official papers. But where their experiences are strikingly similar is in their strong sense of exclusion and exploitation. Many of these migrants accept sharp downward mobility in terms of status and qualifications in order to fill some low end niche in the labour market, that is grimly justified in terms of its payoff for family back home. The jobs they take are the ones that the West's citizens no longer want—those 3D jobs that have become a familiar range of employment 'opportunities' in the post-industrial service economy. Where there is conflict with the 'natives' over jobs and resources, the reaction gets expressed in populist and xenophobic terms. Where there is not, they slip into the background as an invisible but functional 'secondary' part of the economy. In Britain today, for example, it is almost impossible to be served dinner or drinks in a rural pub, or get your bathroom fixed in a big city, without encountering an East European worker. Many accept jobs they would not have dreamt of while studying at school back home. The attractions of London may offer short-term benefits in terms of experience and wisdom. But these ambitious 'new Europeans' are in danger of becoming a new Victorian servant class for a West European aristocracy of creative-class professionals and university-educated working mums.

Professional and college-level East Europeans, meanwhile, attracted West for educational opportunities, also find themselves blocked in their careers. For them, too, the emergent structure is of a discriminatory labour market that keeps them provisional and precarious in order to better extract cheaper labour. The payoffs, if any, are in terms of their status in relation to their peer group back home. That might be enough to dampen the feeling that they are treated as if they do not belong in the West, or that their hopeful European mobility might lead to serious long-term consequences in terms of social isolation.

The parallels between the cross-border American and European labour markets are striking. American notions of freedom of movement and its economic benefits still seem to be driving the opening of the European economy, for all the emphasis placed in Europe on governance and the rational political management of the economy. Europeans may well ask whether this is the kind of society they want to see built in the name of economic growth and competitiveness—the mantra of the Lisbon Agenda (2000), that puts mobility and the liberalisation of labour markets at the heart of its strategy. In most major cities in the USA today, the faces likely to be flipping burgers, cleaning cars, tending gardens, or working as *au pairs* for young children are Latino; in Europe today, these same figures speak with Balkan or Slavic accents. There is perhaps one more irony built into this apparently inevitable asymmetry between East and West, and the structural inequalities it reinforces. These new migrants may sometimes face hostility, but from the point of view of populist politicians, they are much more desirable than other, more visible, actual and potential immigrant populations. It might be speculated that, in the long run, West European publics are likely to be more comfortable with the scenario of getting used to Balkan and Slavic accents, rather than seeing black and brown faces in the same jobs, or (especially) hearing them speak the language of Allah. There is indeed a racial and ethnic logic inherent in the EU enlargement process: borders to the East will be opened as they are increasingly rammed shut to those from the South. Perhaps the East can for now provide the population resources to tide Europe over a time of big demographic change. Demography, though, has a sting in the tail. East Europeans may well be willing to move on a regional scale well beyond the reluctant numbers of West Europeans so tempted. But their birth rates, both under communism and after, are little different to some of the lowest ones in the West. East–West migration is thus unlikely to be a long-term solution to the West’s coming demographic crisis.

In an environment in which there are electoral gains to be had from talking tough on immigration, it is no surprise that most research on migration focuses on policies of immigration control or security. But, just as in the USA, much of this discussion is in fact a game of political ‘smoke and mirrors’ (Massey *et al.* 2002), to mask how little control governments or the EU have over migration and mobility trends, let alone the globalising international labour market. The underlying political economy of Europe, rather, is one that is not closing but *opening* borders to the East. Debates on immigration policy would therefore benefit from paying more attention to the demographic trends and labour market dynamics that underwrite the policies that

politicians defend. As a first step, they would do well to consider the ethnographic evidence amassed by those researchers closest to the ground where it is happening.

### Acknowledgements

This paper builds on presentations made at the Hamburg Institute for International Economics in November 2005, in a conference organised by the KNOWMIG project, and at the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, in October 2006. Thanks to Christina Boswell and Tim Elrick for the original invitation to Hamburg, to Philip Muus for his contribution to the discussion in Copenhagen, and to Simon Turner (DIIS), my co-editor Tim Elrick, and the *JEMS* reviewers for their comments.

### Notes

- [1] See their website <<http://www.migration-networks.org>>
- [2] A recent report for the Rowntree Foundation (Spencer *et al.* 2007), based on interviews with East Europeans resident in the UK before and after enlargement, was presented by the British press as evidence that more of them were now intending to settle in Britain than expected. In fact, only around a quarter state this intention, the others still engaging in dominantly circular and temporary mobility patterns. Intentions in migration are notoriously unreliable, and the presentation says nothing about the everyday transnational practices that have been made easier by the regularisation processes, as documented in this special issue by Anghel and Garapich. The report's interpretation is also influenced by the heavily normative integrationist perspective of the COMPAS (Oxford) researchers involved.
- [3] See their website <[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/workersmobility\\_2006/index.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/workersmobility_2006/index.cfm)>
- [4] See their website <<http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu>>
- [5] See their website <<http://www.law.leeds.ac.uk/leedslaw/GenericPage.aspx?ID=244&TabID=4&MenuID=41&SubMenuID=65>>
- [6] I have been a research network partner in both projects. PIONEUR (2003–6) 'Pioneers of European Integration "From Below": Mobility and the Emergence of European Identity Among National and Foreign Citizens in the EU', EU Framework V project, directed by Ettore Recchi, Università di Firenze. See the website <<http://www.obets.ua.es/pioneer>>; MIGSYS (2006–7) 'Immigrants, Policies and Migration Systems: An Ethnographic Comparative Approach', International Metropolis-funded project directed by Anna Triandafyllidou, ELIAMEP, Athens. See the website <[http://www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/content/home/research/research\\_projects/migsys/en/](http://www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/content/home/research/research_projects/migsys/en/)>

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