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## Afterword: Changing Work, Changing Migrations

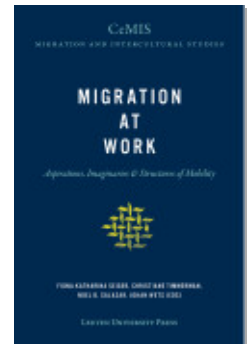
### Published by

Wets, Johan, et al.

Migration at Work: Aspirations, Imaginaries & Structures of Mobility.

Leuven University Press, 2020.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.78103>.



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[85.228.192.144] Project MUSE (2025-02-03 13:49 GMT)

# Afterword: Changing Work, Changing Migrations

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Russell King

Fiona-Katharina Seiger, Noel Salazar and Johan Wets opened this volume with a commentary on the current salience of international migration – always in the news, prominent in political debate and a major theme of academic research and scholarship. They also stated that there is no all-encompassing theory to explain international migration. I will try to answer this point by going back to one of the founder-figures of migration theory, E.G. Ravenstein (1885), who stated in one of his famous “laws”: “the major causes of migration are economic”. This statement, which I believe is as true today as it was in the late nineteenth century, helps us to unite the two keywords of this book: “migration” and “work”. Seeking work through migration, or moving abroad to find a job which holds better income and career-development prospects than the one currently being done, remains a key driving force for international migration the world over; hence the economic motivation for migration is still paramount. Even when the main reason for migration is thought to be non-economic, as in lifestyle migration or international student mobility, economic factors are usually still operative, albeit in a hidden form. For instance, students move abroad to study in order to improve their career prospects by attending a prestigious university (Findlay et al., 2012) or as a step to switching from “student” to “immigrant” after graduation (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Robertson, 2011). Lifestyle migrants, who are often international retirees, also do not overlook economic considerations: alongside their quest for a “better way of life” (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014), they relocate to places with cheaper property prices and lower living costs in order to get

better value for their incomes and pensions – a process of “geographic arbitrage” (Hayes, 2014).

The above introductory remarks are designed to reinforce my argument, *pace* Ravenstein, that the major driver of international migration is, indeed, economics. Most people move abroad to access work, higher incomes, improved career opportunities for themselves and their children and a better quality of life, the last of which is also reflected in a better material standard of living. Where migrations for family reunion take place, the reunifiers are usually joining family members who have already moved for economic reasons.

However, there is another dimension to the economics of migration: inequality. Economically motivated migration flows, built on aggregated micro-economic decisions about the costs and benefits of moving (cf. Sjaastad, 1962), are patterned across macro-economic structures of spatial inequality. At a variety of geographic scales, people move from economically deprived parts of the world, where incomes are low and unemployment is high, to economically advantaged areas where incomes and life-chances are significantly better. They move from the Global South to the Global North; within Europe they move from East to West, as well as from South to North; and within individual countries they migrate from rural peripheries to the major urban and industrial centres.

Within this landscape of economic inequality, which structurally underpins so much migration, both in the contemporary world and in the past, the role of work is fundamental: hence the well-known term “labour migration”. However, the relationship between work and migration is undergoing change and it is this process of change, in what we might call the work-migration nexus, which is the focus of the rest of this concluding essay. My key argument is that, as the nature of work and the labour market has changed, so too has the type or regime of labour migration, which has responded in terms of changing skill level, temporality and rights. In sustaining this analysis, I touch base with many of the foregoing chapters as supporting evidence. Yet, at the end of the day – especially in Europe in recent years – we observe an unfortunate contradiction. On the one hand, labour migrants are needed, mainly as a resource to solve a problem – the shortage of certain types of worker in a diversified and segmented labour market. Yet on the other hand, in the eyes of the public, politicians and the media, immigrants are presented as a “problem” which has somehow to be “solved”.

## Historical perspectives on the economics of the work-migration nexus

Although labour migration is centuries old – including the brutal transatlantic slave migrations and the semi-forced migrations of indenture which succeeded them (Potts, 1990) – I start this historical account with the “boom” in labour migration in Europe during the early post-war period. For more than two decades, until the onset of the first oil crisis in late 1973, Western Europe witnessed the functioning of a classic regime of demand-driven labour migration. According to theories of dual labour markets (Kindleberger, 1967) and Marxist political economy (Castles & Kosack, 1973; Piore, 1979), these migrations sustained the growth of industrial capitalism by providing a “reserve army” of foreign, mainly rural-origin, workers drawn from the agricultural peripheries of Europe, especially to the south – Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey and the three Maghreb states of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Other countries involved in this boom era in labour migration were Ireland (to Britain) and Finland (to Sweden), influenced by older relations of coloniality and proximity. Industrialising economies such as Britain, France and the Netherlands also drew labour supplies from their (ex-)colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia and elsewhere, completing the more global-scale spatial division of labour which sustained economic reconstruction and expansion in the “core” economies of North-West Europe (Massey, 1984).

Fielding (1993) called these mass migrations of the early post-war decades the migrations of Fordism in the sense that they supported the mass production of standardised goods for mass consumer markets. Whilst the colonial metropole countries mentioned earlier operated an open-door policy towards workers from their respective colonies (at least for a while), West Germany put in place a different recruitment model, that of *Gastarbeiter* (“guestworkers”) who were regulated and rotated according to the needs of the economy for heavy-industry, manufacturing and construction workers. Starting around 1960, bilateral recruitment agreements with the Southern European and Maghreb countries fed supplies of manual labour to drive the German economy forward. Through the policy of *Konjunkturpuffer*, temporary migrant workers were used as a buffer to dampen the destabilising effects of economic cycles. They were imported on short-term work contracts when there was a boom period – as there was throughout the post-war years until 1973 – and sent home (by not renewing their contracts) during a slump. In this way, German workers could be protected from

the worst effects of a recession. This mechanism of using migrants to cushion the impact of an economic downturn was seen in practice during the short-lived slump of 1966–1967 and in the longer recession which lasted for several years through the mid- and late 1970s and the early 1980s.

The ending of the model of organised recruitment of foreign labour by the industrialised countries in the early to mid-1970s was not a mere conjunctural phenomenon to be solved by the temporary repatriation of guestworkers. Rather, it reflected a longer-term and wider-scale restructuring of the system of (industrial) production and hence of the labour market (Castles & Miller, 1993, p. 77). In Fielding's analysis (1993, pp. 12–14), economic restructuring was the hallmark of the passage from Fordist mass production based on national sectoral specialisation and its corollary of mass migration, to a post-Fordist economic landscape of deindustrialisation, decentralisation, flexible production and a new "hierarchical" spatial division of labour which geographically separated different elements of the production process. In this new international division of labour (Fröbel et al., 1980), headquarter functions gravitated to major cities, research and development moved towards high-amenity regions and routine production was related to low-wage sites in European peripheral regions or the developing world. As, now, jobs were migrating to the workers rather than workers to the jobs, Fielding concluded (1993, p. 14, printed in bold in the original to emphasise the point) that the most important feature of mass migration under post-Fordist forms of production was its absence!

Soon, however, a new "age of migration" was portended by Castles and Miller (1993), shaped by the changing nature of the European and world economies and new trends in the supply and reproduction of labour. These authors (1993, p. 77) listed the following as relevant factors: the changing geography of global investment, including the transfer of low-skill production to low-wage regions; the mechanisation and computerisation of manufacturing processes, reducing labour needs; the decline of traditional manual skilled trades, such as carpentry (cf. Moderbacher, Chapter 7); the expansion of the service sector, with demands for both high-skilled and new types of low-skilled labour; the expansion of the informal sector in many countries, along with the casualisation and the precarisation of the workforce; and the increased segmentation of both labour supply and demand based on ethnic, citizenship, gender and age criteria. Accordingly, the geography and typologies of the new migration age exhibited different features from the mass migration flows of Fordism. Following again Castles and Miller (1993, p. 78), the main new trends included: a growth in

family reunion and marriage migration; a surge in the movements of refugees and asylum-seekers; an increasing mobility of highly skilled and professional migrants, including students; an escalating migration to oil-rich countries, especially the Gulf States; continuing migration to the “settler” immigration countries (the USA, Canada, Australia); within Europe, the transition of southern EU countries from emigration to immigration; and, after 1990, the growth of East-West migration within Europe.

Finally, in this scoping of the new age of migration which spanned the period from the late 1980s into the new millennium, we can note how the technology of travel and communication changed, facilitating new regimes of mobility and staying in touch. This was closely linked to two new “turns” in migration research in these decades: the transnational paradigm, built on fundamental work by Nina Glick Schiller and her colleagues in the 1990s (see, for example, Glick Schiller et al., 1992; 1995), and the mobilities turn pioneered by John Urry in the 2000s (Urry, 2000; 2007). These changes in the way that migration was conceptualised and actualised were not unrelated to new interrelationships between migration and work. Faster, cheaper and more frequent travel enabled more flexible work-related regimes of circular and seasonal migration, transnational business development, “commuting” migrants and gender-specific forms of labour migration linked to burgeoning demands in the globalised market for care.

## Migration, contemporary labour markets, gender and care

In the contemporary world of globalised, yet hierarchically ordered and segmented, labour markets, labour-related migrations and mobilities exist in many forms, as the foregoing chapters exemplify. The editors point out in their Introduction that mobility is a complex and contradictory form of freedom, closely related to national and international regimes of migration control and to the needs of global capital, especially the neoliberal demand for employment flexibility. The freedom to migrate is a right or privilege to be enjoyed or denied; conversely, poverty and unemployment may compel people to move, denying them the right to be immobile. Or immobility may be “forced” by visa regimes and other barriers to movement, as Carling (2002) has demonstrated for Cape Verde. The chapters in this book demonstrate the tensions between migrants’ aspirations and imaginaries on the one hand and their migratory endeavours, achievements and disappointments on the other. Migrants’ achievements may

illustrate the synergy between spatial and socio-economic mobility but, often, this “success” comes at a price: family separation, cultural uprooting, linguistic challenges and deskilling.

One of the biggest challenges is how to combine migrant work with the responsibilities of transnational family care. The complex interrelationships between labour migration, paid care work and family duties of care emerge most clearly in the first two chapters. Lulle (Chapter 1) argues that labour migration regimes and theories need to be read through the lens of care, whereby employers’ ideals of profit conflict with family ideals of togetherness and care. This conflict reaches a particularly poignant, even ironic, level when migrant women engage in paid care work for children and the elderly in a migration country but need simultaneously to manage the care and wellbeing of their own children and elderly parents in their home countries. Whilst, on the one hand, neoliberalised structures of flexible employment may blend well with mobile regimes of labour migration, on the other hand they do not always accommodate the flexibility needed to provide transnational care. Creative solutions based on collaboration and networking may emerge, such as in Marchetti’s (2013) interesting study of job-sharing amongst Eastern European women who pair up with each other to be able to take alternate periods catering for their employers’ needs in Italy and caring for family members at home.

The care lens continues in Chapter 2 by de Sousa Ribeiro, where the emphasis is on the “emancipation” of migrant health workers, both those immigrating to Portugal from Eastern Europe and Portuguese health professionals emigrating in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. In focusing on the “infrastructures of emancipation” (recruitment fairs, regularisation schemes for residential status, recognition of qualifications, social-media networks, etc.) the author is able deftly to fill a conceptual gap between migration and national regimes of labour-market regulation.

Although de Sousa Ribeiro does not elaborate on this point, Portugal is a particularly interesting case in terms of its labour-market and migration dynamics in that it is simultaneously a labour-exporting and a labour-importing country, even in the same employment sector. How is it that Portugal can both export and import healthcare workers? We see the same phenomenon in the construction sector: Portuguese construction workers have a tradition of migrating to other European countries, notably France, Germany and Switzerland; meanwhile, vacant jobs in the building industry in Portugal are filled by migrants from the Portuguese ex-colonies – such as Cape Verde – and from Eastern Europe, notably

Ukraine. The answer lies in hierarchical, spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1984) and different wage levels for the same kind of work in different assemblages of countries (North-West Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and Portugal's African ex-colonies). Portugal has a dual position within the global economy and migration system: it is peripheral to the "core" economies of North-West Europe – which offer higher wages and better job prospects – and is the centre of a former colonial empire and thus a traditional destination for labour migration flows from its ex-colonial periphery (King, 2019).

The focus on gender, migration and access to work is continued in the remaining two chapters of Part 1. In Chapter 3, Ncube and Mkwanazi pose a dual question. Does migration empower women economically by enabling them to access employment, increase their independence and break the glass ceiling of the country of origin? Or does migration act to reinforce traditional gender roles and inequalities and expose women to new vulnerabilities in an unfamiliar environment, including their precarious position in an exploitative labour market? Further questions ensue. How valid is the "triple jeopardy" hypothesis that migrant women suffer three exclusions because of their migrant status, their gender and their ethnicity/colour? Or is migration an escape route from multiple exclusions and abuse in their home countries? The authors sensibly reject extremes of answers to these questions and take a more nuanced view, based on their "capabilities approach" to research on Zimbabwean and other black African migrant women in South Africa. Reflecting neoliberal labour values, the authors found that resilience, networking, adaptability and entrepreneurial skills were instrumental in migrants accessing work in South Africa and in creating jobs for themselves which enabled them to both sustain their lives in the host country and support family members in their home countries through remittances.

Chapter 4 (Wajsberg) switches the focus to six West African men and the way in which their experiences of intra-EU mobility are interwoven with different residence statuses, increasingly restrictive national and EU migration policies, access to different kinds of work, and decisions to onward-migrate. The six men exemplify "moving stories" of "status mobility" ("legal" worker, undocumented worker, asylum-seeker, refugee, student, tourist) in which successive moves from one country to another were a logical response to constantly changing circumstances. This chapter, albeit based on only a few case studies, demonstrates the fluidity of the interaction between mobility and work, as it evolves across an increasingly hostile terrain of EU and national regulations for third-country nationals from poor countries. Repeat onward mobility is seen as a navigational



tactic in which both the actors (migrants) and their environment are moving. Yet episodes of involuntary immobility – “waithood” – often punctuate their lives, when they get stuck, wasting time and not advancing their livelihoods and careers in any way.

## **Imaginarities of work, place and migrants**

The nexus between work and migration is mediated by a variety of intervening elements: aspirations, perceptions and mediating actors – above all, employers. Place also plays a fundamental role, since work is spatially specific, even if the work itself is mobile. Migrants have idealised images of “other” places where, metaphorically, the streets are paved with gold and riches are easily acquired. These images, provided through films, television and the global media, may be further distorted by previous waves of migrants who exaggerate the success of their migration project. For their part, employers also have idealised imaginaries of “desirable” migrant workers – generally young, healthy and reliable but also docile. These images are gendered, racialised and ethnicised and are dependent on the type of work to be performed in the current segmented labour market, where different “niches” require different skills and attitudes.

The second part of the book focuses on the imaginaries mediating the two-way relationship between migrants and the labour market: on the one hand, migrants’ imaginaries of different types of work and of the places where that work takes place; on the other hand, employers’ imaginaries of different types of migrant, based on gender, age, skills endowment, nationality/ethnicity and so on.

Underpinning these imaginaries, once again, are basic economic principles and perceptions – above all regarding wage levels. The prospective incomes that migrants (think they) can earn must be sufficient to incentivise them to migrate, discounting the financial and psychological costs of the move. There may be trade-offs to be calculated between short-term and longer-range prospects. Target-earners, who aspire to earn as much as possible in a limited time, will go for higher-paying jobs, including the possibility of overtime, in order to accumulate the sum needed for a particular purpose – to build a house in their home country, to finance children’s education, to set up a business or to pay off a loan. Other migrants may sacrifice short-term gain if there are good chances of career development through training, language learning, on-the-job experience, etc. This is part of the notion of “migratory careers” (Martiniello & Rea, 2014)

used by Di Martino, Maiztegui and Aristegui (Chapter 5) in their analysis of European and Latin American women's working lives in the Basque Country.

Di Martino et al. open up an important discussion on the definition and measurement of "skill" in migrants who transfer from one national labour market to another. The dichotomisation between "skilled" and "unskilled" (or "higher-skilled" versus "lower-skilled") migrants is hugely problematic. This is so even in a non-migratory context. The conventional criterion for highly skilled (possession of a tertiary-level educational qualification, typically a bachelor's degree) is controversial since it makes a double assumption – that a graduate is automatically "skilled" and that an experienced professional such as a business manager is not highly skilled if they finished their education at secondary level. In reality, many people possess what could be regarded as "medium" skills, which are accumulated over a period of training and experience (such as carpentry – see Chapter 7 by Moderbacher) but which do not require higher education.

The issue of skill becomes more complicated with migration, leading to the common syndrome of "deskilling": migrants are classified as highly skilled in their home countries but are able to perform only unskilled or lower-skilled jobs abroad. The wide gap in wage levels between rich and poor countries is the economic justification for deskilling. In my own research on Albanian migration to different West European countries, I came across multiple examples of this – teachers working as child-minders or cleaners, academics working as chauffeurs and graduate agronomists working as casual gardeners. Barriers of language, the non-recognition of qualifications, and social and employer prejudice prevent migrants from transferring their human capital and diplomas to an equivalent job abroad (King & Mai, 2008).

Returning to the interesting results of Chapter 5, Di Martino et al. find that highly skilled women from Europe and Latin America face challenges in "job-matching" when they move to Spain, partly due to their gender and ethnicity and partly reflecting their wish to create a satisfactory work-life-family balance. Three arrival pathways are noted, which surely hold resonance for other studies of migratory women. These are: (i) women who moved to Spain for sentimental reasons – by definition, with or to join a romantic partner; (ii) those who moved for professional reasons, often on their own; and (iii) those who fled situations of oppression and violence in their home countries. The first and third categories, especially, end up doing jobs for which they are over-qualified. Whilst, for those seeking to escape an abusive situation, the improvement in their life is tangible, for others, frustration and disappointment are the dominant reactions.

The interplay between structural opportunities and obstacles on the one hand, and personal lives and coping strategies on the other, produces a diversity of “migratory careers” which are rarely linear and progressive but subject to frequent changes and “bifurcations” – significant choices and dilemmas over which path to take. An initial period of deskilling may be followed by recouping trajectories of “upskilling” (regaining or recognition of the skills lost and advancing them further) or “reskilling” (switching to a new skillset related to existing employment opportunities). However, reskilling may not always be successful, as Moderbacher’s poignant portrait of Guinean migrant Cisé (Chapter 7) demonstrates. Retraining as a carpenter was seen as a waste of time for this long-stay immigrant, with the result that his protracted life in limbo in Belgium turned into a “waiting room” for something to happen, which it never did.

The notion of a migratory career is also implicit in Chapter 6 (Dimitriadis), which looks at the imaginaries of Albanian construction workers in Italy and Greece regarding their onward migration to somewhere “better”. Taking Salazar’s (2011) definition of imaginaries as “socially shared and transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people’s personal imaginings”, Dimitriadis interrogates the narratives of Albanian building workers against the background of economic recession in the host countries. Actual or potential unemployment, reduced hours, falling incomes and worsening labour conditions are the recession’s main impacts on workers in a vulnerable economic sector like the building industry. In contrast to other studies of onward migration, which survey respondents who have actually moved on to a new destination (e.g. Della Puppa & King, 2019; Ramos, 2018), Dimitriadis interviews only those who have not (yet) moved. Whilst this might be thought a limitation, it enables the author, through the words of his interlocutors, to draw a nuanced picture of the positive and negative imaginaries of moving on to the likes of Germany, Sweden or the UK. Economic advantages (higher wages, more secure contracts, better working conditions) are balanced – and often outweighed – by the costs and upset of moving, the perceived more “boring” lifestyle, the colder weather and the feeling that social life and the lives of their children are better in southern Europe, closer to Albania.

Important research still needs to be done on the imaginaries of different categories of migrant worker held by employers, recruiting agents and host societies at large. Whilst large-scale comparative research across many countries and migrant ethnicities would generate some useful broad parameters, Chapter 8 (Ayaydin) is an intriguing case study of how one migrant nationality and

one gender (Filipina women) achieve the coveted status of “desirable migrant” for the job of domestic helper and childcare-giver in Turkey. This example fits the framework suggested by Findlay et al. (2013) for the social and cultural construction of the “good migrant” as the “ideal worker”. Findlay et al. pose two questions. First, how is the “goodness” of the migrant worker represented in bodily form and psychological make-up on the part of significant actors and agencies within the migration system? Second, how is “goodness” enacted, performed and produced in the recruitment process?

For the case of the Filipina “nannies” employed by upper- and middle-class families in Turkey, recruitment agencies create an image of Filipinas as “supermaids” and therefore able to earn higher wages than other nationalities, including Turkish rural-origin women, who are regarded as “rough” and “uncivilised”. Amongst the specific embodied features of the Filipinas, as portrayed on employment agency websites, are their generally high levels of education, knowledge of English (hence “free” English lessons for the children of the family) and behavioural and attitudinal characteristics: calm yet hard-working, trustworthy, clean, meticulous, patient and sweet-tempered. In short, in the globalised commodification of women’s labour, which siphons millions of women from the Global South to “serve” in the Global North (including Turkey and Middle Eastern countries with substantial wealthy classes), Filipinas are seen as *the* ideal nannies, not just as workers but also as valuable items of consumption linked to the demonstration of status and upward mobility.

## Conclusion

This Afterword has attempted to draw together some of the key threads woven through the chapters of this book and to present them in a broader frame of history and economics. The evolution of regimes of labour mobility is seen to be closely linked to a sequence of macro-structural economic trends, notably those relating to systems of production and the changing character of national, European and global labour markets. Fordism, post-Fordism, economic restructuring, globalisation and neoliberalism are the key stages in the development of the work-migration nexus over the past 70 or so years. In this brief overview, I have touched on colonial-era migrations, continued in the post-colonial era; “guestworker” migrations, many of which matured into migrations of permanent settlement as family reunion replaced temporary labour migration;

and the much more diverse regimes of mobility co-involved with the “new age of migration”, linked to the globalisation of production, consumer demand and labour markets, new regimes of migration control, the rise of the service sector and its demands for post-industrial workers, and the neoliberal turn which requires flexible labour regimes and arguably looser systems of control.

Encased within these longer-term developments in global political economy are more discrete events which also provoke episodes of migration and mobility – and their perceived need for control. From a European perspective, some obvious examples are the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007, which revolutionised intra-European migration flows, opening up new reservoirs of reserve-army labour in ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe; the 2008 economic crisis and its aftermath of austerity policies which likewise had a profound impact on migration trends, especially in those countries hardest hit by the crisis, such as Greece, Spain and Portugal; the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015–2016 which saw Europe struggle to cope with the sudden influx of more than one million refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan; and, most recently, the decision of the UK to leave the European Union.

In all these stages and events, if migration is “the story”, it is for good reason. That reason is economics. The exception might be refugee flight, but even refugees are concerned in most cases to seek asylum in countries which offer them the best economic opportunities. When speaking about economics, I do not follow any one single orthodoxy. As far as migration is concerned, equally relevant are the neoclassical perspective of push and pull factors, supply and demand, costs and benefits; and the neo-Marxist school which stresses the dominance of global capital, class relations and the high levels of socio-economic and spatial inequality which both shape migration flows and are reinforced by them. As Shamir (2005, p. 199) states, mobility regimes are “constructed to maintain high levels of inequality in a normatively homogenized world”.

It is also the case that, as far as migration is concerned, imaginaries dominate realities. I illustrate this final point with reference to the vexing issue of Brexit, uppermost in my mind as I am writing these words in the days immediately following the official exit date of 31 January 2020. Immigration played a leading role in the Brexit debate in the months leading up to the referendum of 23 June 2016 and has re-emerged as a live issue now that the departure has formally taken place.

The referendum itself was called by the then-Prime Minister David Cameron, who had been spooked by the electoral success (at local and European elections)

of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and its outspoken leader, Nigel Farage, alongside the increasingly vocal Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party. The idea was to neutralise this threat by winning the referendum with a “Remain” majority. Farage and the far-right “Tories” succeeded in creating a “moral panic” over immigration, supported by a trio of high-circulation tabloid newspapers (the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and the *Sun*) which manipulated the populist vote to “Leave”. The image was relentlessly created of a Britain overrun by EU migrants from the “East”, putting British workers out of jobs, creating pressure on housing and health services and changing the character of British towns and cities. As soon as the referendum was announced, in February 2016, a feeding frenzy over immigration developed, with the “Leave” campaign and its tabloid mouthpieces deploying all the standard negative tropes about migration – exaggeration of numbers, military metaphors of “armies” and “invasion”, frequent reference to “uncontrollable floods” and links to criminality (drug-smuggling, sex-trafficking, abuses of the benefits system etc.). The reality was that EU migrants, the vast majority of whom came to the UK to work and to study, made a significant net contribution to the economy, especially in sectors such as agricultural labour, the food processing industry, hotels and catering, construction and allied trades, the health and care services, finance and business, and academia and research.

Fast-forward four years to February 2020 and we witness the UK Home Office’s first attempts to formulate a post-Brexit immigration policy which respects the referendum pledge to “take back control” of the UK border against “free-movement” migration from the EU. Home Secretary Priti Patel aims drastically to reduce low-skill immigration – and overall net immigration – by setting a minimum income cap of £25,600 per year and selectively favouring higher-skill migration. Under the proposed new points system (at least 70 points are required) three criteria are mandatory: a job offer from an approved sponsor (20 points), a job at an appropriate skill level (20) and the ability to speak English (10). Other points, needed to get to the threshold of 70, can come from the level of salary of the job (over £25,600, 20 points), a job offer in a “shortage occupation” (20) and a PhD (10 points – 20 if it is in science, technology, engineering or maths). Effectively, this set of criteria means that the UK will be closed to unskilled and low-skilled workers.

Quite apart from whether the Home Office has the administrative capacity to handle the change to such a radically new and complex immigration filtering system, a bigger question arises as to how the labour market will cope with the dramatic fall in labour supply. In response, Patel argues that large numbers of the

8.5 million “economically inactive” people aged 16–64 in Britain will take up these erstwhile “immigrant” jobs in agriculture, the care sector, hospitality and construction. Two objections can be raised against this supposition. First, the vast majority of the 8.5 million are students, full-time homemakers/carers, retired or sick. Second, as past experience has shown, British-born workers tend not to offer themselves up for these tough, low-paid jobs which are generally undervalued by society. In other words, the UK government has not understood the relationship between migration and the labour market, the subject of this book.

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