

# Transnational Labour Migration and the International Sex Trade

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## Transnational Labour Migration and the International Sex Trade

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ANON, FEB 27 2011

In this article I will discuss transnational labour migration in contemporary Europe giving particular attention to the inequalities generated in the sending and receiving countries. I will explore this by considering the Russian Federation as the sending country, and the United Kingdom as the receiving country. Before discussing labour migration between Russia and the UK it is necessary to explore migration theory, in this section I will provide a historical overview of migration as a subject of study, I will then set out the current theories of transnational labour migration. Following on from this discussion of migration, I will provide an overview of the general effects on sending and receiving countries. I will also provide an overview of neoliberalism, which is currently the dominant economic doctrine of both contemporary Russia and the UK, as I believe this to be a major contributing factor to current migratory trends. The case study I have chosen to develop my arguments is the international sex trade and trafficking, focusing specifically on the relationship between Russia and the UK. The international trade is often absent from discussion about the international labour market, which as I will argue is a mistake. In the course of reading for this essay I have attempted to utilise Russian sources in order to compensate for my inevitably Western perspective when researching.

### Historical Perspectives on Migration

Transnational migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is currently at a higher level than the world has ever witnessed, it is estimated that 'the number of immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers living outside their country is rising by two to four million annually.' (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 96) However migration is not a novel phenomenon and the history of migration can be divided into four periods; *the mercantile period, the industrial period, the period of limited migration and the post-industrial migration period* (Massey 2003: 1-3). *The mercantile period* (1500-1800) 'was dominated by flows out of Europe and stemmed from processes of colonisation and economic growth under mercantile capitalism.' (Massey 2003: 1) The period was characterised by Western European settlers who emigrated to the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania. The period also involved the forced migration of African slaves from colonies to work on plantations which radically altered the demographic features of the Americas (Massey 2003: 1). *The industrial period* of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century resulted from the industrial revolutions beginning in the UK but eventually spreading throughout the world, which saw the 'spread of capitalism to former colonies in the New World.' (Massey 2003: 1) It is estimated that almost 48 million emigrants left Europe during this period, indeed Britain in particular saw 41% of its population emigrating in this period (Massey 2003: 2). Importantly the period from 1800 to 1929 'represents the first period of economic globalisation, characterised by massive flows of capital, raw materials, and goods back and forth between Europe, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific. Associated with this expanding global economy was the large-scale movement of people, itself rooted in structural transformations that overtook successive European nations as they industrialised and were incorporated into the global trading regime.' (Massey 2003: 2-3) The First World War precipitated *the period of limited migration*, this was augmented by the Great Depression in 1929, and the outbreak of the Second World War further limited migration although there was some migration in the form of refugees fleeing war (Massey 2003: 3). *The period of post-industrial migration* represented a change in flows of migration; from the mid-1960s Western European countries,

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previously countries of emigration, began to experience immigration as a period of decolonisation took place and former settlers returned to their homelands (Hollifield 1997: 35). The former colonies also began to send workers to the former 'motherland' countries to become 'guest-workers' or 'gaisterbaiters'; 'the central feature of these policies was the concept of rotation, whereby unmarried male workers could be brought into the labour market for a specified (contractual) period, and sent back at the end of this period.' (Hollifield 1997: 36) Guest-workers could have their initial work permits renewed and 'with renewal came the right to unify one's family, and a trickle of migrants and their families settled.' (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 99) Most of the main sending nations are now no longer Western European nations, but nations located in the Third World, and while this may suggest that it is the poorer nations which send migrant workers actually 'international migrants tend to originate in nations whose economies are growing rapidly and fertility rates falling as a result of their incorporation into global trading networks' (Massey 2003: 5).

Labour migration in Europe has been facilitated by the *Single European Act* of 1985 which 'set in motion a new round of European economic integration, which included the goal of 'free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital,' in effect the establishment of a border-free Europe.' (Hollifield 1997: 40) Obviously the end of the Cold War was a watershed moment for migration which 'set off a state of panic among governments and publics in Western Europe that there would be a flood of (economic) refugees from Eastern Europe – sensational headlines such as 'the Russians are coming!' were splashed across Western Europe.' (Hollifield 1997: 40-41) While large-scale migration from East-West did not occur, there has been labour migration particularly since former Soviet and socialist states joined the European Union which has allowed for free movement of European citizens between member states.[1]

The contemporary period of migration is characterised by a second era of globalisation which involves 'the return of extensive cross-national flows of capital, goods, raw materials, and information.' (Massey 2003: 5) This second era of globalisation has been augmented by the hegemony of the United States which has helped to guarantee security and accelerated free trade between nations (Massey 2003: 5). Labour migration in Western Europe is now largely being replaced by skilled workers who 'are replacing settler migrants as the most important international labour migrants, their outstanding characteristic being their willingness to move between countries regularly.' (Boyle et al. 1998: 84)

## Theories of Migration

The reasons for contemporary migration can be contentious, and this is compounded by data issues; 'the quality is often poor. Comparable figures are in short supply. The scale of international travel makes it difficult to measure that small fraction of movement which should be considered as "international migration."' (Coleman 1997: 122) For example 'the United Kingdom experienced about 48 million international arrivals and departures in 1992 ... only about 200,000 of these in each direction could be described as international migration.' (Coleman 1997: 122) The reasons for moving between countries and the lengths of stay in different countries vary greatly from person to person (Coleman 1997: 122).

The reasons for migration are generally accepted to involve a basic combination of three different factors which include: *demand-pull*, *supply-push* and *networks*. *Demand-pull* originates within 'industrial countries, as employers there, with or without explicit government approval, recruit and employ migrant workers.' (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 99) Similarly, as previously mentioned, workers will often try to reunite their family in the receiving country which increases migration again. *Supply-push* is characterised by a lack of opportunities in the sending country; 'about five in six of the world's workers are in the world's poorer nations, and every year another 80-85 million workers join the 3 billion strong work forces there.' (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 100) This is obviously a huge strain on the developing countries to create jobs; inevitably there are insufficient opportunities which can lead to labour migration. *Networks* are utilised by migrants to travel to the receiving countries, as Martin and Edward-Taylor (2001: 102) explain, the *demand-pull* and *supply-push* factors themselves do not produce migration, it is the *networks* which provide this. *Networks* most often consist of friends and relatives abroad 'who can provide credible information about job opportunities there, perhaps, finance the trip, and often provide shelter and employment to

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migrants after their arrival.' (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 102) Furthermore these networks are augmented by the communications revolution, the transportation revolution, and the rights revolution (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 102). The communications revolution (the telephone, the internet etc.) has vastly increased knowledge of opportunities for migrants. Similarly television programmes portraying comfortable life-styles in receiving countries have been catalysts for migration (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 102). The transportation revolution has enabled travel between the farthest reaches of the globe and travel is also becoming increasingly affordable further facilitating migration (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 102). The rights revolution is reflected in the fact that 'all of the industrial democracies have strengthened personal rights vis-à-vis government agencies, and most have signed treaties and conventions that commit them, for example, not to return foreigners to their countries of origin if they would face persecution there.' (Martin and Edward-Taylor 2001: 103).

There are more complex and competing theories that attempt to offer a full explanation of migration, these include *neoclassical economics*, *the new economics of labour migration*, *segmented labour market theory*, *world systems theory*, *social capital theory*, and the theory of *cumulative causation* (Massey 2003: 11).

*Neoclassical economics* argues that labour migrants move permanently from the poorest regions to the richest in order to reap the benefits of wage differentials. However in reality 'wage differentials often do not produce international movement (witness the lack of movement between south and north within the European Union) and migration often ceases before wage differentials have disappeared (witness the case of Puerto Rico and the United States) ... in addition, the massive flow of remittances catalogued around the world (and the uses to which they are put) are anomalous under neoclassical theory' (Massey 2003: 14).

*The new economics of labour migration* can be 'interpreted as being guided by a family-based risk-reduction rather than as an individual income-maximising action ... it is fundamentally built upon risk avoidance.' (Boyle et al. 1998: 74) This can be the migrant moving abroad temporarily to earn and send remittances home to reduce risks at home. Where a bifurcation in the labour market in developed economies occurs jobs in the primary sector are generally filled by native workers, and secondary sector jobs which 'offer low pay, little stability, and few opportunities for advancement, [repel] natives and [generate] a structural demand for immigrant workers' (Massey 2003: 15) is emblematic of *segmented labour market theory*. *World systems theory* sees migration in the context of the growth of the global capitalist economy; 'economic variation reflects the uneven character of capitalist development. International labour migration is a response to this unevenness and its geographical segmentation into core and peripheral areas, defined by the sorts of economic activities that go on in each.' (Boyle et al. 1998: 69) Essentially migration occurs from the peripheral to the core capitalist areas.

*Social capital theory* symbolises the importance of networks as 'labour recruitment becomes superfluous, for once begun, immigration displays a strong tendency to continue through the growth and elaboration of migrant networks ... the concentration of immigrants in certain destination areas creates a 'family and friends' effect that channels immigrants to the same places and facilitates their arrival and incorporation' (Massey 2003: 15).

*Cumulative causation* argues that migration is self-perpetuating 'because each act of migration creates social infrastructure capable of promoting additional movement' (Massey 2003: 16). Essentially each of these theories offer a competing explanation of reasons for migration, yet each of them may be appropriate to explain a certain case.

## Some General Effects of Migration on Receiving and Sending Countries

There are some basic effects that are observable in sending and receiving countries in response to labour migrants, often however these are sometimes not distinct from reactions to other sorts of migrants such as asylum seekers and refugees for example. In receiving countries migrant workers often 'occupy the lower strata of the working class, sometimes called an underclass ... the de facto differential incorporation of immigrants/ethnic minorities cause[s] them to suffer from discrimination in terms of their access to housing, education, health and welfare, social mobility and consumption.' (Joly 2000: 30) As the lowest strata of the population they are often subject to discrimination and

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become scapegoats for the natives of the receiving country, perhaps best demonstrated in the UK by Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968.[2]

One of the most important impacts of migration in the receiving country is that of the migrants themselves; 'their mode of interaction is not conditioned solely by the parameters of the migration causes and the majority society, but also by the baggage they are carrying ... they often reconstitute entire communities with their institutions and associations, kinship networks, religious organisations, pressure groups, political organs' (Joly 2000: 30).

Sending countries are also influenced by migration; 'there is a strong possibility of an asymmetric model which includes brain drain to the detriment of sending societies.' (Joly 2000: 35) Remittances sent by labour migrants may lead to a 'dependency syndrome' whereby these remittances become important but fragile parts of the sending economy (Joly 2000: 35).

## The Importance of Neoliberalism

The effects of the implementation of neoliberalism are essential to the movement and displacement of people, particularly in Russia. A neoliberal state favours 'strong individual private property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade.' (Harvey 2005: 64) Above all the market rules supreme in the neoliberal state, everything is subordinate to the market and there is an emphasis on 'privatisation and deregulation combined with competition ... [which] eliminate bureaucratic red tape, increase efficiency and productivity, improve quality, and reduce costs, both directly to the consumer through cheaper commodities and services and indirectly through reduction of the tax burden.' (Harvey 2005: 64) Virtually anything has the potential to be privatised from railway systems[3], or even doctors' surgeries[4], profit becomes fundamental and inevitably this has consequences for those exposed to the neoliberal system.

The Soviet Union operated under a centralised economic system, which limited consumer goods in favour of heavy industry, but in 1991 the Soviet system collapsed and the Russian Federation moved to emulate the Western economic model (Krasilshchikov 2007: 61). The implementation of neoliberalism was enacted by the *nomenklatura*, the privileged classes of the Soviet elite who allied themselves with 'people engaged in activities in the shadow economy ... they were linked to the *nomenklatura* mainly through corruption. This social group pushed for the legalisation of its accumulated assets, and dreamt of being released from any restraints.' (Krasilshchikov 2007: 61) The effects of the introduction of neoliberalism and restructuring of the economy in Russia away from heavy industry towards consumer goods have had catastrophic effects characterised by massive unemployment, poverty and a massive drop in GDP of almost 50 per cent (Krasilshchikov 2007: 63).

The specific form of neoliberalism in Russia was shaped by these forces which pushed for the privatisation of assets and power, ultimately the predominate form of neoliberalism in Russia 'presupposed a violation of 'the laws of justice' and rejected any equality of individuals' rights ... it proclaimed 'the law of the jungle' with *homo economicus* being interpreted as an egoist capable of destroying the whole world if this destruction were to be advantageous for him' (Krasilshchikov 2007: 62). The importance of this is it exemplifies the increasing commodification of neoliberal societies, to the point that even people become commodities who can be bought, sold and be used in international markets, in short virtually everything is for sale.

## Case Study – The International Sex Trade from Russia to the UK

The study of the international sex trade has been frequent in areas such as criminology and or gender studies, rarely, however, is it included in studies of migration (Agustin 2006: 29). The reasons for its absence is not clear, I would argue however that the sex trade, or migrants who sell sex, should be a legitimate field of study with migration research, as it is indeed a form of labour migration, albeit often coerced or forced. A discussion of the sex trade will

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demonstrate the validity of including it in migration studies. A further problem is that while the international trade in women for sexual purposes reappears in criminological and gender studies, men, transsexual and transgender migrants is barely discussed leaving gaping holes in the literature concerning the sex trade (Agustin 2007: 30). However while addressing this issue is beyond the scope of this essay, it is illustrative of the problems within migration studies, and also highlights an area that requires further study. I intend to focus on women in the sex trade.

While some migrants do move voluntarily and voluntarily become involved in the sex trade in the UK (Agustin 2007: 36) (Mai 2009: 4), many of the women are forced into the sex trade and trafficked across borders. Defining trafficking can be problematic, the UNHCR defines trafficking as:

## Article 3

*(a) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;*

*(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used; (UN 2000)*

The trafficking of women for the sexual exploitation 'is a multi-billion dollar shadow market ... the value of the global trade in women as commodities for sex industries is estimated to be between US \$7 and \$12 billion annually.' (Hughes 2000: 625) People are commodities and the international trade is driven in the same way that any market is driven, by supply and demand; 'countries with large sex industries create the demand and are the receiving countries, while countries where traffickers easily recruit women are the sending countries.' (Hughes 2000: 626) Prior to 1991, Asian countries such as Thailand were sending countries, but following the collapse of the Soviet Union a new group of sending countries emerged and now the most valuable women are from Russia and Ukraine (Hughes 2000: 626).

As previously mentioned, the introduction of neoliberalism in Russia resulted in a huge decrease in GDP, unemployment and poverty. These socio-economic conditions are the factors that facilitate trafficking and exploitation. Furthermore privatisation and liberalisation policies 'have created wider and more open marketplaces throughout the world ... [and] computer communication of international financial transactions, increases the opportunities for transnational crime and decreases the probability of detection and apprehension.' (Hughes 2000: 630) Furthermore countries with significant participation in grey or informal economies are effective areas for traffickers to operate (Basakakova et al. 2005: 5). Since the collapse of the USSR women have been hugely affected by the economic downturn, with the collapse of industries women were often the first to lose their jobs and there has been an increasing 'feminisation' of poverty in Russia with women coming to represent the poorest citizens (Corrin 2005: 543). Women have simultaneously become increasingly marginalised in migration and the reasons for this lie in 'the economic sphere in the first instance, and in the character of the work which female migrants are involved in, and their role in the economic structure of society' [*my translation*] (Turukanova 2005: 2). Typically it tends to be women who are disproportionately affected by trafficking, young women looking to escape their circumstances are particularly vulnerable (Basakakova et al. 2005: 5). This is emblematic of the inequalities that give rise to contemporary migration and the inequalities that are apparent within migratory processes. It also demonstrates that within the sex industry there are also *demand-pull* and *supply-push* factors at work as in other forms of migration.

There is a constant demand for new women in the receiving countries which facilitates trafficking by continuing to make it profitable. Many women are recruited through false advertisements for jobs such as waitresses or nannies abroad, through marriage agencies or traffickers use her passport to enter countries legally and then she is trafficked (Hughes 2000: 635). Most, however, use informal *networks* as other labour migrants would use, and are deceived by acquaintances, or even by women who were formerly trafficked themselves (Hughes 2000: 635).

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Not all women who are trafficked 'are uneducated or from rural areas. In Russia, many trafficked women hold college degrees and come from large cities.' (Corrin 2005: 547) Therefore migration in the sex industry does not tend to adhere to a *neoclassical* perspective of migration theory, but is more emblematic of *new economics of migration* which accounts for migrants from countries with more developed economies. Similarly the fact that some former victims of trafficking may go back to the sending country to recruit new victims is suggestive of *cumulative causation* in that the processes become self-perpetuating.

Not only is the trafficking of women representative of major gender inequalities in migration and poverty, the sex trade also develops inequalities between sending and receiving nations, and negatively impacts upon these countries. The treatment of trafficked women highlights serious problems in the legal structures of receiving countries as following police raids victims of trafficking are often treated as illegal immigrants and deported back to their country of origin (Hughes 2000: 637). While Russian immigrants to the UK are possibly not as likely to be subject to racial abuse as other more obvious ethnic migrants, women from the CIS working in the UK have become 'essentialised' and are described as 'Russian' or referred to as 'Natasha' (Hughes 2000: 629) when they may be from Ukraine or other countries, which is suggestive of 'orientalist' attitudes towards Eastern European countries.

The profits in the sex industry can be huge; Oksana Rynieska who ran a brothel in Essex which housed Eastern European women had made £130,000 in eight months before being arrested (Hughes 2000: 640). However any money made in the sex industry does not go to benefit the sending or receiving country (or the women forced to work for it) as it is 'laundered through bank accounts of criminal bosses in financial centres, such as the United States, or Western European countries or in off-shore accounts.' (Hughes 2000: 641) Similarly the profits made from illegal activities increase the potential for corruption in both sending and receiving countries as exemplified by the fact that Russian government officials have been found to be complicit in trafficking activities (Hughes 2000: 639).

Furthermore there are huge public health implications for the trafficking of human beings who are then forced into sexual exploitation; in the Russian Federation some reports have estimated the level of HIV prevalence to be as much as 1.1 per cent of the population (UNAIDS 2004), whatever the true figure it is certain that the level of HIV in the CIS since the collapse of the USSR has increased rapidly (Axmann 1998: 589). Obviously it is impossible to calculate the levels of HIV prevalence among those involved in the sex industry, but they are obviously at risk of contracting HIV if they are not already infected which may cause levels of the disease to rise in the receiving country.

## Conclusion

As been discussed labour migration in Europe has a long history spanning several centuries. Migration is a complex phenomenon which is influenced by a number of factors including globalisation and neoliberalism. Migrants move due to a variety of factors which influence each other, these can be loosely described as *demand-pull*, *supply-push* and *networks*. There are also a number of competing theories which attempt to give a comprehensive overview of migration which include *neoclassical economics*, *the new economics of labour migration*, *segmented labour market theory*, *world systems theory*, *social capital theory*, and the theory of *cumulative causation*. Essentially there are aspects of each of these theories in different forms of migration, but none of them provide a definitive account by themselves.

The international sex trade has often been overlooked in migration studies, often 'disappearing' only to reappear in criminological studies or in gender studies. Migrants engaged in the sex trade, whether voluntarily or not, do constitute a legitimate subject of study within the field of migration studies as they exhibit many of the classic features of labour migration. Furthermore the sex trade arises out of deep-seated gendered inequalities in the sending country, in this case Russia, and these inequalities have been exacerbated by the introduction of neoliberalism which has led to economic dislocation and widespread poverty in Russia, particular for women and there has been an increasing feminisation of poverty. Women hoping to escape poverty at home in Russia have been targeted by smugglers and often sold into virtual slavery to work in the sex trade abroad often in the UK.

While the sex trade has these obvious micro-implications, there also macro-implications for both the sending and receiving country; sex migrants from the CIS are often 'essentialised' which augments and furthers 'orientalist'

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notions in Western European countries vis-à-vis the East. Furthermore the sex trade facilitates the growth of corruption in both sending and receiving countries due to the lucrative nature of the business. The sex trade also raises important legal issues in the sending and receiving countries; that victims of trafficking can be classed as illegal immigrants and sent back to their country of origin is illogical. Finally the movement of women across borders to engage in forced sexual activities raises serious issues regarding the transmission and prevalence of HIV and other STDs, particularly in the case of Russia given the high prevalence of HIV.

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**Date written:** January 2011

[1] See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2266385.stm>

[2] See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>

[3] See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/982037.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/982037.stm)

[4] See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7219274.stm>

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