European Immigrations: Trends, Structures and Policy Implications is one of the few attempts to conceive of the ‘Old Continent’ as a common economic and cultural space of immigration. Europe’s post-enlargement states, too, are presented as having a high degree of social and political coherence. New empirical evidence underscores their common experience, while disclosing factors and trends underlying their respective migrations, particularly from Southern and Eastern Europe. Key threads are the long-term transition that countries undergo from net emigration to net immigration, as well as developments in migrant inflows, integration and policy.

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“This book smartly conceptualises migration in different areas of Europe and offers insightful theoretical models to understand past and recent trends.”
Tim Elrick, University of Toronto, Canada

“An impressive team of internationally acclaimed migration scholars expertly take stock of and debate Europe’s latest round of migration trends... A rich blend of theory and empirical analysis.”
Russell King, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, UK

“The predominant focus on Southern and Eastern Europe enriches our understanding of European migrations as a complex and constantly evolving system of systems.”
Ferruccio Pastore, Forum of International and European Research on Migration, Turin, Italy
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4 Migration transitions in an era of liquid migration

Reflections on Fassmann and Reeger

Godfried Engbersen

4.1 Introduction

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to respond to the compelling contribution of Heinz Fassmann and Ursula Reeger. Their work demonstrates their ability to reduce the complexity of international systems in a very elegant way. Their conceptual model of a migration cycle offers an important heuristic device for analysing migration history. To further illustrate its applicability, I will apply it to my country, the Netherlands. However, this sort of application and a closer look at current migration flows to ‘old’ immigration countries will necessarily provoke one major question. This question is related to the emphasis given in their chapter to historical context and its effects on emigration and immigration. This includes, for example, a colonial past or certain labour recruitment policies in the 1950s and 1960s. The question is whether such a historical, ‘path-dependent’ approach offers an adequate explanation for contemporary, rather unexpected labour migration flows from Central European Countries (CEE) to Western Europe. The European Union enlargements of 2004 and 2007 have generated substantial labour migration from CEE through the successive lifting of restrictions to the majority of labour markets from the old EU member states. Hundreds of thousands of migrants from Poland, Romania and Bulgaria went to Western European countries as a consequence (Black, Engbersen, Okólski & Panţiru 2010). This issue, which is related to labour migration, does not do justice to the full complexity of the analysis by Fassman and Reeger. However, I think it is relevant to analyse whether the nature of contemporary labour migration differs from labour migration flows in the past.
4.2 Path dependency versus new pathways of migration

For decades, the Netherlands was – like Germany and Austria – a ‘reluctant country of immigration’ (Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin & Hollifield 2004; Muus 2004). Although the Netherlands has had a positive immigration surplus since the early 1960s, successive governments have continued to officially deny that the Netherlands was a country of immigration. It was not until 1998 that the Dutch government officially acknowledged the fact that the Netherlands had become an immigration country. The different stages in a ‘migration cycle’, as proposed by Fassmann and Reeger, can be applied to the Netherlands (Engbersen, Van der Leun & De Boom 2007).

Preliminary phase

After World War II, the Netherlands was a country of emigration. Many Dutch citizens emigrated to immigration countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, Brazil and South Africa. Between 1946 and 1969, nearly 500,000 Dutch citizens left the Netherlands. In the same period, the Netherlands was experiencing a massive inflow of migrants (repatriates and Eurasians) from the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) after Indonesia’s independence in 1949 (see Figure 4.1). More than 50 years later (in 2003), there were 400,000 people in the Netherlands who had either been born in Indonesia or had at least one parent who had been born there.

Figure 4.1 Net migration in the Netherlands, 1950-2009

Source: Statistics of the Netherlands; own design
**Transformative phase**

A new pattern arose in the early 1960s with the arrival of guest workers from the Mediterranean (especially from Turkey and Morocco). When guest workers started bringing their families over to the Netherlands, it finally began to dawn on the Dutch that many of them were going to stay. After Surinam’s independence in 1975, major flows of post-colonial immigrants from Surinam began to arrive in the Netherlands as well. In the 1970s, almost half of the non-Dutch immigrants to the Netherlands came from just five countries: Turkey, Morocco, Surinam, Netherlands Antilles and Indonesia. These migration patterns are perfectly aligned with the argument made by Fassmann and Reeger.

**From the adaptation phase to a new initial phase?**

After the transformative phase, there was indeed in the Netherlands a stage of adaptation. However, in the 1990s, the percentage of the five major migrant groups steadily declined to less than 25 per cent of the foreign-born immigrants. Large groups of asylum seekers came to the Netherlands, especially in the period 1990-2000. Today, there are nearly 60 immigrant groups of at least 4,000 to 5,000 persons in the Netherlands. The total number of different nationalities in the Netherlands is around 180. The new immigrant groups come from countries to which the Netherlands has had rather limited political or economic ties, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Poland, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. Migrants from the former Yugoslavia, for example, are now the fifth main migrant group in the Netherlands. There are also a number of smaller migrant groups from Somalia, Ghana, Egypt, Vietnam, Pakistan and Hong Kong. Steven Vertovec makes similar observations about Britain in his recent work on ‘super-diversity’. In the 1950s and 1960s, almost all migrants in Britain came from colonies or former colonies or Commonwealth countries. Today, migrants come from practically every country in the world. The city of London harbours people from some 180 countries (Vertovec 2007: 1029). The same is true for Dutch cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. Amsterdam and The Hague are among the 25 cities with the largest number of foreign-born residents in the world (Samers 2010: 31).

Another fundamental development is the rise in labour migration from CEE. According to the official migration and population figures of Statistics Netherlands, around 4,500 CEE workers moved to the Netherlands in 2003. In 2008, 26,000 immigrants from CEE countries came to the Netherlands, primarily from Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. As a result of this immigration, the number of CEE nationals officially residing in the Netherlands increased more than sixfold since 1996, from just over 10,000 in 1996 to
nearly 65,000 in 2009. Within this category, the Poles make up a clear majority (De Boom, Weltevrede & Engbersen 2009).

Apart from the migrants who settle officially in the Netherlands, there is a large category of labour migrants who do not appear in the official population statistics, because they do not or cannot register in the Municipal Personal Records Database (Gemeentelijke Basisadministratie Persoonsgegevens, GBA). Figures from the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) show that, in December 2008, there were 87,000 employees from CEE countries working in the Netherlands who were not listed in the GBA. In addition, there were around 7,000 employees of Polish-German nationality and approximately 7,700 entrepreneurs from one of the CEE countries in the Netherlands who were not registered in the GBA. Accordingly, the number of CEE workers in the Netherlands at the end of 2008 who were not listed in the GBA – and therefore not included in the official population figures of Statistics Netherlands – was estimated at more than 100,000. If we add these 100,000+ labour migrants not registered in the GBA to the nearly 65,000 migrants listed in the GBA, the number of CEE nationals residing in the Netherlands on 1 January 2009 was approximately 165,000 (De Boom et al. 2009). Nobody foresaw that so many migrants from Poland would migrate to the Netherlands, or even earlier to rather new destination countries like the UK or Ireland (Black et al. 2010). In other words, migration theory, with its strong emphasis on historical embeddedness and path dependency, faces difficulties explaining these new pathways of migration and settlement.

4.3 The invisibility of current flows of labour migration

How should we evaluate the current temporary, circular forms of labour migration from CEE? As the case of the Netherlands shows, contemporary labour migrants are often not registered in official migration statistics as compiled by national statistical bureaus, the United Nations or Eurostat. The missing aspects of these ‘liquid’ forms of migration can be illustrated with official Eurostat data on the inflow of nationals from CEE countries into four ‘old’ EU member states (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK). These data show a steep increase in all the selected countries, but the figures do not capture the rise in temporary labour migration from CEE countries (Figures 4.2). The UK offers a clear example. The data of the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) – which does not include the self-employed – show that between May 2004 and December 2006, 328,000 Poles, 55,000 Lithuanians, 52,000 Slovakians and smaller groups from Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia and Slovenia were registered (Baueere, Densham, Millar & Salt 2007). These numbers do not seem to match the official inflow data.
Moreover, the OECD data for Spain and Italy – two new immigration countries – do not provide reliable information on the inflow of migrants from Romania, though this is one of the largest migrant populations. According to OECD (2008: 278) sources, more than 500,000 Romanian migrants were in Spain in early 2007. Romanian sources state that there are about 968,000 legal Romanian migrants living in Italy, while in Spain that number is 770,000 (Romania Libera 5 April 2010) out of a total of roughly 2 million Romanians living abroad. The Spanish and Italian
figures are rather low with respect to the inflow of Romanian migrants (see Figures 4.3). The precise nature of contemporary forms of temporary migration is difficult to capture with the current measurements of flows. Large groups of migrants are unrepresented or underrepresented in the available migration statistics because they are not obliged to register if they work and live for short periods of time in the destination country. This situation is a consequence of the current migration regimes involving open borders for new EU citizens due to the EU enlargements in 2004 and
2007. The same is true for illegal migration. Irregular migrants are often absent from the official statistics. However, their absence is not a consequence of open borders, but of closed borders (Engbersen & Broeders 2009; Düvell 2006; CLANDESTINO 2009).

It seems crucial to take the migration regime contexts into consideration. The earlier migrant workers, the so-called guest workers, arrived in a period when national borders were still very real and significant. This is no longer the case for the labour migrants from CEE countries after the EU

**Figures 4.3** Inflows of nationals from CEE countries in Spain and Italy, 2000-2008

*Source: Eurostat (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/population/data/database)*
enlargements of 2004 and 2007. This disappearance of EU borders contributes strongly to contemporary forms of liquid migration. It is much easier to travel back and forth for labour migrants from CEE countries to Western European countries than in the past. The enlargement of the EU has led to a blurring of the boundaries between international and internal labour migration (King & Skeldon 2010: 1621).

4.4 Liquid migration

The concept of liquid migration is inspired by Zygmunt Bauman’s work (1999, 2005) on liquid modernity (Engbersen, Snel & De Boom 2009). Central to the notion of liquidity is the idea that ‘thick’ and stable social institutions (class, family, labour, community, neighbourhood and nation-state) are transforming into more flexible, ‘thin’ institutions (see also Zijderveld 2000). Migration has always been strongly embedded in patterns of family, community, local labour markets and the nation-state (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes 1995; Torpey 1998). These institutions are still crucial to understand the strategies and opportunities of groups of migrants. However, current labour migrants from Poland, for example, have more freedom and liberty to develop their own migration trajectories than in the pre-EU enlargement period with its restrictive West European migration regimes. The borderless zone created by the EU has weakened the monopoly of nation-states to regulate and prescribe movements of people. Another changing institution is the family. There is a well-documented literature on the importance of family networks and loyalties that explains the centrality of the family in the field of migration. However, today we also witness migrants from CEE who are able to develop rather individualised migration patterns. Their stay abroad is not aimed at supporting family members at home. They are strongly focused on their own careers. The first findings of a Dutch study show that more than 50 per cent of the 650 respondents from Poland, Bulgaria and Romania did not send any money to their relatives in their home country (Snel, Burgers, Engbersen, Ilies, Van der Meij & Rusinovic 2010; Burgers, Van de Pol, Snel, Engbersen, Ilies, Van der Meij & Rusinovic 2011). Individualisation processes have made the family less dominant as an ‘engine of immigration’ (Massey & Philips 1999). In other words, the transformation of institutions like the nation-state and the family, together with more advanced communication technologies, has changed migration patterns in contemporary European societies and has made labour migration trends less predictable. Liquid migration has six ideal typical characteristics (Table 4.1).

The first characteristic is the temporary nature of a stay abroad. Substantial numbers of migrants do not settle permanently, but move back and forth from their source country to receiving countries (circular and
pendulum migration) or move to other destination countries. Many stay very briefly, while others opt for a medium-term or longer-term stay. However, the temporary nature of residence – which often goes hand in hand with non-registration – contributes to the invisibility of liquid migration. The circularity of liquid migration resembles, to some extent, the circular forms of migration as described in the work by Douglas Massey on Mexican-United States migratory flows in the 1980s (Massey, Alarcon, Durand & Gonzalez 1986). However, there are also other migrant groups such as students and highly skilled migrants who develop forms of career migration. Their ambition is to capitalise on their foreign education, language proficiency and work experience in their home country to achieve upward social mobility. The temporary nature of migration means that many labour migrants reside in temporary accommodation settings (hostels, pensions, barracks, holiday camps) and that they occupy a marginal position in the receiving country.

A second dimension is that liquid migration is predominantly labour migration. Particular groups of ‘economic’ asylum seekers, refugees and students can also be regarded as labour migrants. All these groups aim to earn money or to invest in their education in order to better their economic

### Table 4.1  Ideal typical dimensions of liquid migration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Settlement: Temporality of migration and stay</th>
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<td>Temporary migration</td>
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<td>Temporary settlement; semi-integration in destination country</td>
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<th>2 Type of migration: Labour migration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Labour migrants</td>
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<td>Categories of asylum seekers, refugees, student migrants</td>
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<th>3 Status: legal immigration status</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regular migration</td>
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<td>Work permit holders (Romania and Bulgaria)</td>
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<th>4 Destination: Multiplicity and multidirectionality of movements</th>
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<td>Multiple receiving countries</td>
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<td>New receiving countries</td>
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<th>5 Family: Individualised life strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individualised forms of migration</td>
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<td>First-generation pattern</td>
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<th>6 Migratory habitus: Intentional unpredictability</th>
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<td>No definite migration aspirations</td>
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<td>Open options</td>
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*Source: Own design*
position. Liquid migration is a typical first-generation phenomenon. However, some migrants will settle and may bring spouses over.

A third dimension is that migrants have a *legal immigration status*. Liquid migration is *regular* migration. However, some migrants that have legal residential status still need work permits in order to obtain access to the labour market. If they do not have a work permit, they become irregular workers. However, once the current ‘transition period’ ends – in which restrictions are currently imposed on workers from Bulgaria and Romania – these migrants will have free access to European labour markets.

Another relevant category consists of students. Many of them are not allowed to stay in the country after completing their studies. If they do stay, they become illegal migrants. Thus, some categories of migrants have temporary legal residence status (students), while others may face the problem of irregular work. These categories show that legal status itself is a fluid classification that may change over time (Ruhs 2007).

A fourth dimension of liquid migration is that international migration flows have become more *unpredictable*. Some categories of labour migrants work and reside in well-established destination countries, while others have moved on to new destination countries. Liquid migration partly ignores the political and economic factors that shaped migration flows in the past. The Polish migration flows to Ireland and the United Kingdom – and then to the Netherlands – are a clear example of this. Labour migrants react and adapt to evolving opportunities in the labour markets of different European countries.

A fifth dimension of liquid migration concerns the role of *family*. International migration has always been encouraged and facilitated by family networks (Tilly 1990; Massey et al. 1986). Households develop strategies to maximise the household income. These classic forms of migration rely on the solidarity between generations and on extended family patterns. Grandparents take care of the children when one or both parents go abroad to earn money for the family. In addition to this classic pattern, however, new patterns emerge that are much more individualised. These more individualised patterns are the logical consequences of the changing nature of family ties (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). These ties are becoming looser, not only in Western but also in CEE societies (Ornacka & Szczepaniak-Wiecha 2005). Furthermore, people are postponing marriage and childbearing to a later age. Many contemporary labour migrants are unmarried and have few or no family obligations (Snel et al. 2011). They go abroad to try their luck and do not have specific obligations to support relatives in their home country (Eade, Drinkwater & Garapich 2006).

The relatively autonomous position of labour migrants is facilitated by the demand for their labour skills, especially in secondary labour markets and – in the case of CEE migrants – because of the disappearance of internal EU borders (free movement). Their social position and the migration field in
which they strategically operate generate a specific migratory habitus of ‘intentional unpredictability’ (Eade et al. 2006). Some migrants have no clear ambitions or ideas concerning the future. Their options are wide open. They go to new destination countries without clear-cut aspirations of investing money in their home country or of settling in the receiving country. This migratory habitus reflects the more individualistic ethos of non-married labour migrants who are less bound by family obligations and also less restricted by borders and local labour markets than previous generations of migrants.

The fluid nature of East-West migration emphasises the contrasts between the so-called guest worker migration of the 1960s and 1970s and contemporary migrant workers from the CEE countries, who do not settle permanently in the receiving countries where they work but – at least until now – tend to return to their home countries. Workers go home when the job is finished and they return when necessary or are available on demand when certain work is to be done (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009).

A crucial difference between both episodes of international migration is the institutional context. The earlier migrant workers, the so-called guest workers, arrived in a period when national borders were still very real and significant. When asked why the guest workers from this period stayed in the destination countries despite their often firm intention to return, migration researchers point out the significance of national borders. According to Saskia Sassen, there was a significant increase in the permanent foreign-resident population in Western Europe when borders were closed in 1973-1974. Sassen writes (1999: 143):

 [...] this growth might not have occurred if the option of circular migration had existed. Much migration has to do with supplementing household income in countries of origin; given enormous earnings differentials, a limited stay in a high-wage country is sufficient.\(^5\)

Because it was impossible to move repeatedly between sending and receiving countries, many migrants decided not to return but instead to have their families come over. This was the beginning of the permanent settlement of the former guest workers who were consequently not ‘guests’ anymore.\(^6\) The current labour migration from Eastern to Western Europe takes place in a different institutional constellation, that is, in a context in which national borders – at least within the EU – have lost their significance. East-West migration is strongly labour-motivated – like the guest worker migration trends in the 1960s and 1970s – but nowadays workers have more opportunities to come and go as they choose. However, the other factors continue to be of relevance.
4.5 An elective affinity between demographic-economic factors and migration control

The central point in our argument is that ‘old’ immigration countries in Europe are confronted with ‘new’ fluid forms of labour migration. There are indications that current migration patterns differ from the dominant migration patterns of the twentieth century. Several studies – quantitative as well as ethnographic and anthropological – indicate more fluid forms of migration that bear resemblance to the circular migration of the nineteenth century, but cover longer distances and go to more diverse destination countries (Moch 1992; Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009). To understand these forms of labour migration, the four main drivers of labour migration as discussed by Fassman and Reeger have to be taken into account: 1) demographic factors; 2) economic growth; 3) segmentation of developed labour markets into a primary and a secondary sector; and 4) modes of regulation concerning international migration. It is especially the specific interaction between these drivers that explains the rise of liquid migration. One could also speak of a Wahlverwandtschaft (an elective affinity) between demographic-economic factors and the fading of borders within the enlarged EU (Weber 2002). Unintentionally, this has contributed to the large flows of labour migration from the East to the West.

New research designs are needed to document these flows, because the current administrative data are inadequate. These flows may also require adoption of new policy by the state. The temporary stay of many new labour groups requires a new flexible structure (in terms of housing, healthcare, education and integration) that can deal effectively with new patterns of ‘lasting temporality’ (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2005). At present, in many European countries improvised solutions are being devised to accommodate labour migrants from CEE.

Notes

1 These figures are based on a count of Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovenian, Bulgarian and Romanian nationals listed in the GBA. The number of CEE workers registered in the GBA greatly depends on the definition applied. Based on nationality, nearly 65,000 CEE nationals were living in the Netherlands on 1 January 2009. On the same reference date, the GBA contained 90,000 persons who had been born in one of the CEE countries. This means that the number of CEE workers when measured by country of birth is 25,000 higher than when measured by nationality. In particular, these are CEE workers who have lived in the Netherlands for some time and have acquired Dutch nationality.

2 Not all employees worked throughout the month of December, which means that the number of employees on a specific reference date is lower. Based on the not entirely reliable start and end dates, the number of CEE workers not registered in the
GBA for whom wage tax was paid as of 15 December 2008 has been calculated at 81,400.

Furthermore, there are CEE workers who are not listed in the GBA and do not appear on other registers, for instance, because they are working through mala fide agents. No reliable estimate can be given of the size of the latter group.

The WRS data give no indication of the duration of employment or if and when a return home might have occurred (Bauere et al. 2007: 8).

The same argument has been put forward by Alejandro Portes with respect to Mexico-US migration flows: ‘Today, the U.S. Border Patrol is the second largest arms-bearing agency of the federal government, next to the armed forces themselves. The huge expenditure of dollars in this policy has not succeeded in topping the unauthorized flow, but has succeeded in keeping it bottled up on the American side of the border. Contrary to the prior pattern of cyclical migration, where Mexican workers commuted back and forth across the border, those who, at present, manage to cross into the United States do not return to their countries, given the difficulties of repeating the journey. Instead, they bring their families along. As a consequence of its supposedly rational policy, the United States now has in its midst an underground poor and vulnerable population numbering about twelve million’ (Portes 2010: 46-47).

There were also other reasons, such as: i) changing plans of migrants as a consequence of the life cycle; ii) economic recessions in the home country; iii) the integration of migrant workers into welfare systems; iv) legal protection securing residence status and the right to live with families (Castles 2006).

References


