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PRECARIOUS
MIGRANT LABOUR
ACROSS EUROPE

EDITED BY MOJCA PAJNIK
AND GIOVANNA CAMPANI

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INTRODUCTION

MOJCA PAJNIK, GIOVANNA CAMPANI

The collection of papers *Precarious Migrant Labour across Europe* explores current trends of labour market stratification in relation to migration and integration policies in European societies. It offers an overview of the position of so-called third country migrants in Europe, and looks at the differences and similarities in national labour markets and national policies in a common framework. This framework is characterized by global trends in the productive system (changed from fordist to post-fordist) and by national policies, and was influenced in a more or less significant way by the European Union. Contributions emanate from the research project PRIMTS, *Prospects for Integration of Migrants from “Third Countries” and their Labour Market Situations: Towards Policies and Action* funded by the European Commission (European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals “Community Actions” 2007), which was conducted in the period 2008–2010. The project explored the positions of male and female migrants, specifically third country migrants, who fill the labour demand of different economic sectors such as construction, farming, or care sector in the post-2000 period. It was the assumption of the project that work conditions, which are often precarious, determine migrants’ lives as economically and socially insecure.

Migration policies in most EU states exhibit a trend in designing entry requirements for migrants according to specific national labour market needs. Migrants classified as entering with an attempt to work are steered into professions that are considered as a deficit by the national labour market demands, or as too dirty, difficult, and dangerous to be performed by the “domestic” workforce. The approach used in the project combined the analysis of economic structures and the study of policies with a qualitative research approach attentive to the agency of migrants. Since policies are most often detached from migrants’ realities, the research considered migrants as “partners in communication”; by employing lightly structured, depth biographical narrative interviews, and in-person focus groups as methods of analysis the primary focus of the research was to gather and analyze migrants’ work-related biogra-

phies, and to show what they tell us about the contemporary framing of migration across Europe.

Labour migration is not a new research topic. However, the changing productive structures and economic contexts that have been defined as post-fordist influence migrants' incorporation in the labour market and in general migrants' lives very differently. Decades ago Michael Piore's (1980) *Birds of Passage* showed how migrant workers in the 1970s (similar to today) were appointed to more than 10% of active labourers and they performed the 3D jobs. Morokvasic's (1984) meaningful title *Birds of Passage are also Women* importantly pointed to the lack of theory and research on the topic of female migration. In the period that has followed some authors have shown how labour market-related statuses essentially determine migrants lives (Brubaker 1989), and how they function to sustain growth in global capitalist economies (Sassen 1998). The present collection explores migration and labour in contemporary European societies. It aims to bridge the gap in contemporary research where a void is observed in endeavours that would elaborate on a labour dimension of contemporary migration and integration.

Even though third country migrants' labour market positions were the focus of our research, we acknowledged the problematic character of categorizing migrants (as third country, family reunion, or asylum-seeking migrants, etc.) the consequences of which are unfavourable to migrant populations. Normatively, categorizations, although of legal value, sustain divisions in societies, and group people according to national affiliation or motive of migration. These categorizations determine their access to residence permits, work permits, family reunion requirements, citizenship, etc. Inventing categories of migrants not only has as a consequence the sustainment of migrants in rightless positions at the edge of societies (cf. Arendt 1948/1976; Benhabib 2004), but it also does little justice to migrants whose realities, related to the prescribed statuses, are in constant flux. PRIMTS fieldwork shows how a legal migrant today becomes illegal tomorrow, or, how a migrant engaged in legal work also works illegally in the black market. The project explored meanings of the "double labour market" dividing guaranteed and insecure jobs, or regular and irregular ones that sustain the precarious positions of migrant workers. It was an intention of the project to reshape current status-oriented policies to include migrants' transnational activities. This was the reason the project focused on opening up space for migrant narrations, and as well to provide analyses of current migration and integration management from a bottom-up perspective.

The collection cuts across the EU by providing analyses of various experiences in migration history and labour market integration of countries with: a longer tradition of migration (Germany), a pronounced regional component (Finland, Cyprus), a Mediterranean one (Italy) and those with a socialist past (Slovenia, Hungary). Chapters are also clustered with reference to general divisions in patterns of migration that refer to North-South / East-West divides, and with references to “old” and “new” countries of migration. The collection considers the transnational character of debates in migration while specifically elaborating on connections between migration and labour. Although focused to debate country specificities, chapters explore various aspects of migrants’ realities that cut across national states.

Chapters point to transnational dimensions of migration and global consequences of migration policies, while at the same time recognizing that migration discourses and policies are embedded in historically, culturally, and socially-determined, national contexts. The collection devises country-specific case studies in which contributors debate the precarious positions of migrants based on: 1) analyses of data on (un)employment trends; and 2) the distribution of industry and sector branches employing migrant workers or engaging them via informal routes in the black market. It is a common feature of chapters to include the analyses of the migrants’ labour market from the perspective of a critical policy evaluation. Moreover, specific attention is given to capture gender bias in patterns of migrant employment and treatment of migrant women. It comes as a no surprise that all chapters detect the location of migrant women in service-oriented sectors that are largely black economies that reproduce the gender, class, and ethnic divides. It is also a common feature of chapters that they detect the specific rationale of current migration policies which channel migrants to the precarious “traditionally migrant” sectors of the economy, where they are additionally burdened by a high level of job insecurity, low payment, a low level of social benefits, and where they face de-skilling, language barriers, and discrimination in the workplace. These writings also confirm the thesis that current economies of European societies produce “conditioned lives” (Pajnik 2011) of migrants where legal statuses – be it temporary regular or irregular –, labour market realities of unstable jobs, and insecure work relations produce what appears to be the forced flexibilization of migrants that serves the needs of global capital (Campani 2007; Munck 2007).

An important topic of the book is integration, a complex notion that is debated by politicians and scholars. Independently from the definition,

integration cannot be thought without the agency of migrants themselves. Evaluation of existing data on (un)employment conditions for migrants, and of migration and integration policies coupled with migrant narratives devises a specific critique of integration as a policy that positively influences migrants. In the last decade numerous publications have emerged that accept integration as a *per se* desirable concept and analyse migrants' integration (Niessen et al., 2007; Niessen 2009) where a lack of critical reflection of the concept is observed. Replacing the undesirable and politically incorrect assimilationism, integration was praised as providing an alternative and as stimulating debates and policies towards processes of equalization of migrants in relation to the "nationals." Theoretical considerations of integration, however, soon began to examine integration as a way of "migrant's recolonization" (Balibar 2004) that serves to preserve "the national" which leaves the concept with limited potential for equalization.

Three types of migrant incorporation approaches are distinguished by the literature, these being assimilation, exclusion, and integration (Tambiah 2000). Also, several research projects funded by the EU in the last decade have pointed to the problematic character of integration. What is becoming a more and more contested concept in scientific debates (and is backed by empirical evidence), however, persists in the EU policy agenda on migration. The PRIMTS project detected the conditioning character of integration while exploring integration in relation to migrant labour. As a result, we question whether the concept potentially practices mutual cooperation, where citizens (as "beyond-nationals") deliberate as equals. On the contrary, because it is unable to provide the space for true, two-way communication, integration has become a concept that feeds the various processes of nationalization, such as those of protecting the national labour market from migrants (Trimikliniotis 2011). Moreover, potential positive aspects of integration are also reduced by the fact that integration is increasingly being promoted side-by-side with migration prevention (see Kontos in this collection). Here the argument is increasingly employed by EU countries that migrants' integration should be preferred to actual immigration. Instrumentalization of integration is also present in strategies at the national and EU levels that frame migrants' integration in those demographic discourses that promote economic utilitarianism, i.e. the argument that migrants' labour is necessary for sustaining the EU economy and labour market demands. Although such arguments may quiet racist attitudes towards migrants, their limits lie in the instrumentalization of migrants, the factual treat-

ments of migrants as “necessary labourers” that can, however, easily become unnecessary tomorrow.

It has thus become apparent that integration derives from a strongly national state-centred social order, which prioritizes nationality status. Integration as a kind of moral social order of specific national states supports forms of associative membership only to the extent when these correlate with national interests. The primordial ethno-cultural nation whose implications have largely been criticized (Habermas 1998; Balibar 2004) is still a prerequisite of integration that doesn't really seem to bring communities closer, but on the contrary, can be viewed as drawing strong demarcation lines between “real nationals” and “migrants.” Integration produces migrants as an “object group” and as such doesn't overcome the frame “which prevents seeing the objects of integratory policies as anything except *immigrés*” (Favell 2001, 73). Such an attitude is exemplified in labour market policies that are oriented to protect national labourers from migrants' penetration, best seen in populist-racist rhetoric across the EU spreading slogans such as “migrants are eating our jobs,” to use only the mildest version of these xenophobic outbreaks. For example, to protect its labour market Hungary facilitates transnationalism of its co-ethnics living as minorities in the neighbouring countries through preferentialism in migration-related legislation. Research has shown that the protective measures are directed towards channelling low-sector labour migrants into the informal economy. This satisfies the Hungarian labour market's need for disposable workers – who appear when in need and disappear when unwanted (see Pető, Dezső and Kakucs in this collection).

Our approach to integration has been pragmatic: we have certainly looked at the academic debate, however, in the various case studies, we have taken into account public discourses that deal with integration, and have analysed policies and various measures of integration in dealing with migration. In Cyprus integration policies sustain the problematic assumption that labour immigration to the country is a temporary phenomenon and desirable only when it covers labour shortages in sectors which are unpopular with Cypriots. Consequently, the adopted policies are transient and short-term, which reproduces the precariousness of migrant workers. Similarly, integration bills in Slovenia leave migrant men and women on the outskirts of integration where they endure harsh living and working conditions. Consequently, much more than mere policy adjustments are needed to comprehensively grasp the current trends in migrant labour, because it seems that migration management – as

this is currently practiced – remains a problem and not a solution to the situation of migrants’ “recolonization” (see chapters by Trimikliniotis and Demetriou; Pajnik and Bajt). Such approaches clearly don’t help improve migrants’ labour market positions. Chapters show how rising informal economies are increasingly possible because of migrants’ cheap labour. The Italian economy (see Campani, Chiappelli and Salimbeni) is largely sustained by informal migrant labour that makes up as much as 30% of the GDP. This is a structural cause that produces irregular migration and creates an obstacle to the integration of regular migrants. The concept of “subordinated integration” becomes the key to understanding the acceptance of migrants into Italian society via their incorporation into a labour market that needs a labour force for manual and unqualified jobs in sectors where the informal economy is important (small and very small enterprises, traditional productive activities, tourism industry, Mediterranean agriculture, services to private persons, etc.). The reconceptualization of integration would thus require responses to such an anomaly in the labour market. Also, recognition of alternative ways of migrant participation would be needed, for example with recognition of migrant entrepreneurship, labour market niches exemplified by ethnic economies, the exchange of economic and cultural resources via interaction processes of diasporic communities, etc.

In contrast to more or less restrictive migration regimes across European societies, the Nordic residence-based welfare model brings a slightly better situation for migrants in Finland when compared with other countries. Specifically, Finland has seen looser labour market policies that don’t tie migrants to specific employers, and they grant work opportunities to family migrants unlike in many other European countries. High rates of unionization and social solidarity have also brought higher visibility of migrants in political life. Finland has also adopted effective integration measures at the local level. However (see Saarinen), fallacies of the Nordic model point to the fact that despite universalist claims, this model also sustains the exclusion of migrants, produces their irregularity, and fosters the illegal economy, which are all coupled with rising populist discourses also in the North.

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