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**Rye, Johan Fredrik and Scott, Sam ORCID logoORCID:
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International labour migration and food production in rural Europe: a review of the evidence

Abstract

Since Hoggart and Mendoza's paper on 'African immigrant workers in Spanish agriculture' in *Sociologia Ruralis* in 1999 there has been a proliferation of interest in labour migration to/ in rural Europe. It is now clear that the rural realm has been, and is being, transformed by immigration, and that low-wage migrant workers in the food production industry are playing a particularly prominent role in this transformation. This paper takes stock of the literature and identifies seven key issues associated with low-wage labour migration, contemporary food production, and rural change. Most notably, since the 1990s, there has been growing demand for migrants in the segmented, and sometimes exploitative, labour markets of the European food production industries. This demand has been met across a variety of contexts, with states and labour market intermediaries playing a largely supportive role. However, migrants' integration into rural communities has often been problematic, with the emphasis being on the need for, rather than needs of, low-wage migrant workers.

Keywords: Agriculture, Europe, Food, Labour, Low-Wage, Migrant, Migration, Rural.

Introduction

New patterns of international mobility are underpinning a European^(Endnote 1) "global countryside" (Woods 2007). According to Hugo and Morén-Alegret (2008, p. 473), migration is among the main process reshaping contemporary rural Europe and is likely to "play an increasingly important role" in the future. In effect, rural regions are turning increasingly diverse as migrants from all parts of the world arrive and shape rural communities in ways "which can be distinguished from international migration to urban areas" (Hedberg and Haandrikman 2014, p. 137). Woods (2012, p. 2) thus lists the "challenges arising from the intensification and reconfiguration of global mobility patterns from, to and across rural spaces" among the five key issues that needs to be explored by the rural studies discipline.

A host of scholars now recognise that the rural is an integral element of the mobilities paradigm (Bell and Osti 2010; Milbourne and Kitchen 2014). Each type of international migration – from asylum seekers and refugees, through lifestyle migrants to migrant workers, and indeed each nationality – has added new layers of complexity to the now highly variegated rural realm. This paper, though, focuses on one type of international migration to rural society: low-wage labour migration into the food production industry (i.e. agriculture and food processing). This type of migration represents, arguably, currently the main population inflow into rural areas of Europe. Indeed, one of the few constants across the food production industries of the developed world has been the perennial need for, and renewal of, migrant labour from the economic periphery. In this journal, a growing body of work has emerged to document this phenomenon (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil-Alonso 2013; Hoggart and Mendoza 1999; Kasimis *et al.* 2003; Kasimis *et al.* 2010; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; McAreavey 2012; Oliva 2010). However, to-date there have been no pan-European reviews of this growing literature (though for wider reviews see: Ortiz 2002; Svensson *et al.* 2013). It is now time, we argue, to take stock of the literature and to identify key themes and findings, gaps in knowledge, and suggestions for future research.

The seminal paper of Hoggart and Mendoza (1999) is used as the baseline for this review.

We searched this journal 'Sociologia Ruralis' and the 'Journal of Rural Studies', the two flagship journals in European rural sociology, from the year of Hoggart and Mendoza's paper (1999) to the present day for papers focused on contemporary labour migration into the rural European food production industries. Once papers were found, we then snowballed from these to identify other relevant publications. Our focus was on peer-reviewed academic literature (books, journals, theses) with the aim being to identify the core issues and topics covered by this literature.

In terms of gaps and omissions, the approach taken to the review was one in which emphasis was placed on unifying themes and questions rather than on seeking to specifically highlight spatial and temporal variation and nuance. Furthermore, the review predominantly draws on research contributions from the Western, Northern and Southern European regions, where the use of migrant labour in rural areas appears most developed. Thus, while some rural regions in Central and Eastern Europe host significant numbers of labour migrants, such as the Ukrainians working in Poland's agricultural industries (Górny and Kaczmarczyk, 2018), these areas are still primarily viewed in the literature as *sending* countries. It is also the case that much of the work we reviewed adopts a qualitative case-study methodology, that tends towards unique examples characterised by use of varied theories but with limited statistical input. Moreover, these examples usually come from seasonal horticulture with other areas of agriculture, and also food processing, relatively neglected in the European literature. Further, whilst migrant/ minority presence in rural areas is not an entirely new phenomenon (Bressey, 2009; McConnell and Miraftab, 2009; Woods, 2017) the review is largely focused on contemporary cases.

The review is structured around seven questions: 1) What explains the growth in demand for migrant labour in rural areas? 2) How do states regulate low-wage migrant labour supply into rural areas? 3) How are migrant labour markets sub-divided and segmented? 4) Is there evidence of mistreatment of migrant workers in rural labour markets? 5) How are rural migrants' experiences channelled by intermediaries? 6) How do highly marginalised migrant workers wrest back control? 7) What are the distinctly rural dimensions of migrant integration? The seven questions emerged from the extant literature but they also carry weight beyond rural migration studies, highlighting: change in the food industry at large; change in the rural realm; change in workplace relations; and, comparative differences between nation-states and their migration, work and welfare regimes.

Rising demand for low-wage migrant labour

Demand for low-wage workers in the rural food production industries has shifted from domestic/local to global/migrant labour. The agricultural industry in Europe traditionally relied upon flexible local labour to supplement family labour during the harvest period. Un- and underemployed local people would respond to employers' changing, unpredictable need for labour at short notice, with low-wages, poor working conditions and low job security as the norm. In neo-Marxist terms, they constituted a 'reserve army of labour', that capital had an interest in preserving and reproducing. However, recent changes both in rural areas and in the wider economy and society, have eroded this reserve army. Rural women, for instance, have been integrated into regular labour markets (Kasimis *et al.* 2010; Rye 2007) and rural youth now out-migrates to educational centres and/or "better-paid, higher status professions elsewhere" (Fonseca 2008, p. 527). Demographic shifts of depopulation and ageing have further reduced the pool of rural labour available (Kasimis *et al.* 2010). In addition, the growth of other rural industries (e.g. service employment) has rendered food industry employment uncompetitive, with an associated change in norms and expectations of indigenous workers as they aspire to

more “secure and decent” jobs (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005, p. 100). Even in times of domestic unemployment, employer preference for international labour now endures (Hoggart & Mendoza 1999; Kasimis 2008, p. 512; Scott 2013a). Kasimis (2009, p. 94) concludes that migrant farm workers “have not replaced native wage labourers; rather, they have complemented family labour”.

The influx of migrant labour further responds to changing industrial structures. In many rural areas, especially those focused on horticulture, there has been a shift away from family towards industrialised farming, with larger but fewer farm units, an intensification in production regimes, and product specialisation. What Garrapa (2017) labels a “just-in-time” migrant workforce responds to industrialised agriculture’s demand for inexpensive, standardised and flexible labour. Underpinning these trends has been the enhanced vertical integration of the food chain, driven by supermarkets rather than by producers (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Lang and Heasman 2004). The supermarket supply chains are now fundamentally transnational and this can result in agricultural regions competing against each other as supermarkets may change main suppliers of products (Sippel 2017). Contemporary food production is also associated with other large-scale forms of global capital, beyond the supermarket: from seed and fertiliser suppliers, to supermarket’s favoured ‘category managers’, through to large-scale shareholders and associated financial institutions (Kilkey and Urzi 2017). This matrix of global capital actors adds to the productivity and efficiency demands, and pressures food producers to change their labour strategies.

Migrants are more productive by virtue of at least three aspects. First, migrants are attractive as they represent a flexible labour force. Second, their structural disempowerment – due to informalized work arrangements, a lack of language competence, limited union activity, etc. – renders them less able to negotiate wages and working conditions, and less able to resist a downward spiral in both. Second, migrants’ ‘dual frame of reference’ makes poor wages and working conditions in the host country relatively acceptable, and sometimes even appealing (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010; Scott 2013a; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Employers see the results of this through the presence of migrant workers who appear motivated, reliable and attractive to employ, especially relative to would-be domestic workers.

Scott (2013b), elaborating on Harvey’s (1981) work, sees this as an *in situ* ‘spatial fix’. The farming industry cannot relocate to where labour is cheaper or more pliable, so they must import cheaper and/or more productive labour. Thus, employers’ ‘need’ for migrant labour is about maximising labour power in downgraded jobs as much as about absolute labour shortages. It is about the right ‘quality’ of worker – skills and deference – as much as it is about securing the appropriate quantity of labour.

Notwithstanding broad structural-economic changes, the recruitment of migrant workers in rural Europe is far from uniform. The Mediterranean countries were among the first to establish practices of large-scale migrant worker employment, and they still appear to lead the way (Corrado *et al.* 2017a; Gertel and Sippel 2014a). Corrado *et al.*’s (2017b, p. 10-11) review, for instance, reports that 24% of Spain’s, 37% of Italy’s and as much as 90% of Greece’s, agricultural wage labourers are international migrants (though we note data issues).^(Endnote 2) Similarly, branches of French agriculture have become very heavily dependent on migrant labour (Gertel and Sippel 2014b).

Away from the Mediterranean, Germany has a long tradition of importing labour from Poland, and hosted circa 300,000 seasonal farm workers by the 2004 A8 accession

(Fialkowska and Piechowska 2016), with numbers continuing to remain high. In Northern Europe, large scale inflows of migrant workers represent a newer but rapidly expanding phenomenon. For instance, Rye (2007) details how the Norwegian production of vegetables in just a matter of few years (2000-2005) became dependent upon migrant labour, predominantly from Poland and the Baltic States. Central and Eastern European countries (the former Communist 2004/2007 EU 'accession' states) are primarily discussed in the literature as countries that export labour; though in some areas this also appears to be changing, as demonstrated by Górny and Kaczmarczyk's (2018) paper on Ukrainian farm workers in Poland.

The influence of migrant labour further varies within Europe's nation-states. Gerbeau and Avallone (2017, p. 138) argue, for instance, that: "We cannot speak of a Spanish agriculture, but rather of the global enclaves of agricultural production of Huelva, Lleida, Murcia, Almeria, and others". Distinct regional nuances are also identified. Perrotta (2017), for instance, shows how Italy's two regions that dominate its industrial tomato production, Emilia-Romagna in the North and Campania in the South, have developed differently; the former towards mechanisation, the latter towards enhanced reliance on migrant labour. Moreover, Kasimis (2008) demonstrates how different regions of Greece are alike in recruiting large number of migrant workers, however, high quality land in the plains attracts a different scale and type of migration compared to the lower quality land in the Greek mountains. Such local and regional particularities point towards the highly variegated character of the demand for and use of migrant labour across Europe's food industries. There exists not one European model of the migrant labour but several, each with specific historic roots and present-day particularities.

Regulating the supply of migrant labour

In the 'Age of Migration' (Castles *et al.* 2014; Dufty-Jones 2014) the contemporary abundance of migrant labour relates to global political, economic, legal and socio-cultural processes that have eased barriers to mobility. For instance, the collapse of the Communist order in Eastern and Central Europe from 1989 set in motion large-scale immigration of Albanians to rural Greece (Kasimis *et al.* 2003). The 2004 and 2007 'A8' and 'A2' EU accession rounds that then followed generated even larger forms of East to West post-Communist migration. Similarly, political turmoil and poor living conditions in North Africa and the Middle East have generated migration flows across the Mediterranean. At the same time, we have seen improved and cheaper transnational transport and communications links that have made long distance migration, even when it is temporary in nature, possible. There has also been the emergence of various actors to lubricate the migration process, part of a broader 'migration industry' that facilitate international migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013; McCollum and Findlay, 2017). Given the above, the key question concerning supply is not the availability of migrant workers at the global level but the ability of certain migrants to present themselves for work in certain European labour market. This section of the review is, therefore, interested in how states use policy mechanisms to regulate low-wage migrant labour supply into rural areas?

Agriculture has a long history of relying on state migration policy to ensure a suitable quantity and also quality of low-wage workers is available to employers. For instance, there have been international migration programmes operating in British agriculture (Scott 2015), French (Crenn 2017; Décosse 2017) and German (Fialkowska and Pieschowska 2016) agriculture since the 1940s. This long history is indicative of the special place that agriculture has enjoyed at the migrant policy table; a place that relates to the distinct seasonal characteristic of agricultural employment and also to the

‘revolving door’ nature of this largely undesired form of employment. In other words, states have played, and continue to play, a vital role in facilitating low-wage labour migration into agricultural and, to a lesser but still significant extent, food processing sectors of the economy.

In some countries (such as Norway and the UK) the inflow of labour from elsewhere in Europe, following EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, was significant enough to mean that specialist agricultural guest-worker schemes could be abandoned. Many other countries, however, have retained guest-worker schemes. For instance, despite significant European migration, Sweden and Finland have continued to import farm labour from Asia (Valkonen and Rantanen 2017; Woolfson *et al.* 2012). Similarly, France and Spain has bi-lateral agreements with non-European countries to supply harvest labour via the *Office français de l’immigration et de l’integration* (OFII) (Crenn 2017; Décosse 2017; Morice 2006) and *Contratación en origen* (Hellio 2017; Lindner and Kathmann 2014) programmes. Nevertheless, and despite EU enlargement migration and the various farm labour guest-worker schemes, there have also been significant irregular migration flows into the food industry, most notably in Southern Europe.

Arguably, the state’s role in regulating the supply of global workers to supplement the EU workforce is greatest, or at least most obvious, when guest-worker schemes are utilised. These schemes have been both widely praised and also heavily criticised. Those welcoming guest-worker programmes argue to represent a ‘triple-win’ with the low-wage migrant workers, the sending economy, and the receiving economy all benefitting. Nevertheless, many are critical of the state’s use of guest-worker programmes and specifically how policy is used as a “mould” (Anderson 2010, p. 300) to create ‘good’ and ‘better’ workers. Castles (2006, p. 760) argues the “EU and its Member States seem still to be trying to import labour but not people”. In other words, guest-worker policies are being used to generate economic profits, but at the expense of migrants’ familial, social and communal worlds. This has implications in terms of integration, as we will see later in the review. The precarious, or at best partial, legal status that guest-worker schemes confer on low-wage agricultural migrants lies at the heart of this. The French guest-worker scheme, for instance, has been said to give employers access to “a precarious, bridled and cheap labour force” (Décosse 2017, p. 193). In Spain, the *Contratación en origen* “actually grants less mobility and freedom to workers than informal migration” (Hellio 2017, p. 203). Papadopoulos and Fratsea (2017, p. 131), describing the Greek strawberry industry, note how workers are “compelled to work hard under the threat of being replaced by other migrant labourers the following year”. In Italy, there are similar criticisms of the state migration policy: “There are no alternatives to the power wielded by farmers and *caporali* [gangmasters]. In fact, the national law seems to contribute to this power imbalance” (Avallone 2017, p. 224). In short, it appears that, as the demand for low-wage migrant workers has intensified, so states have helped to ensure not only that this demand has been met, but that a particular type of submissive and deferential workforce has been supplied to food producers across rural Europe. Migration policy in this respect has become an important element of labour market and associated economic policy.

Migrant workers and the segmentation of labour markets

Migrant workers generally occupy the least attractive and most disempowered positions in the food production industry (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010). They are represented – and in effect treated – as a different kind of labourer, distinguishable from domestic workers. Reflective of this, the literature on migrant labour in rural regions (Hoggart and Mendoza 1999; Rye 2007) has often employed “dual” or “segmented” labour market

theory (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Piore 1979) to describe how migrant work/ workers occupy subordinate (“secondary”) positions relative to more favourable “primary” segments of the labour market with low wages and poor working conditions the norm. Importantly, segmentation theory assumes few promotional ladders and it is difficult for workers to move up into the primary from the secondary labour market (Hoggart and Mendoza 1999). The sorting mechanisms are not necessarily based on individuals’ human capital, but on their origins and socio-cultural identity. Fissures like age, gender, ethnicity, race, foreigner status, or a combination, are all important. Moreover, secondary jobs often also connote inferior social status (Piore 1979).

The channelling of migrant workers into secondary segments of the labour market apply in most parts of Europe's food production industry. However, the literature identifies important sub-hierarchies in migrant secondary labour markets. Important factors are:

- a) *Duration* of employment (seasonality): Migrant workers on longer contracts, including some on permanent contracts, seem better off than workers on short-term temporary contracts. Significantly, in some countries and for some crops, the season appears to have been growing longer: as has been the case in the strawberry industry (Gadea *et al.* 2017).
- b) Degree of *informalisation*: Migrants within secondary labour markets experience different degrees of informalisation. Sometimes workers may, for instance, be denied the contracts that they are legally entitled to, but this will not be true of all workers.
- c) *Direct vs. indirect* employment: Workers who are directly employed generally seem less vulnerable than those employed through labour market intermediaries or on a self-employed basis. This said, the picture is complicated by the fact that there are various forms of intermediary employment (cf. Kilkey and Ursi 2017; Mésini 2014; Perrotta 2017).
- d) Form of *remuneration*: Workers receiving time-based remuneration (daily, weekly or monthly) seem better off than the piece-rate worker, as the latter seems to be associated with the intensification of work (Rogaly 2008).

Thus, the secondary labour markets are not homogenous. There are important variations between businesses, over time and across space, with gradation between more and less desirable forms of secondary employment.

Beyond the primary-secondary divide, the literature documents further, often related, forms of segmentation. First, employers are known to distinguish between ‘locals’ and migrants. Employers are still conscious of the potential for employing locals in secondary labour markets, but explain their reluctance through the notion of the ‘good’ migrant worker versus the ‘work-shy’ and ‘lazy’ local (Hoggart and Mendoza 1999; Scott 2013a; Tannock 2015). Waldinger and Lichter’s (2003) concept of the ‘hiring queue’ is useful to understand this type of employer-driven segmentation. The concept refers to the ways in which employers order different but competing groups of prospective workers according to their perceived employability; in other words, how and why employer preference and prejudice systematically coalesce around different groups of workers and how this rhetorical identity construction translates into the practice and practices of recruitment.

Second, hiring queues also exist within the migrant population where ethnic, national, religious, and racial markers have all been used by employers to determine exactly where “better” (however defined) workers are to be found. For instance, Moroccans and Poles have dominated separate agricultural niches in the South of France (Sippel and Gertel 2014, p. 45), whilst Thai workers have been considered superior wild berry pickers in

Sweden (Eriksson and Tollefsen 2013) and Finland (Valkonen and Rantanen 2007). In Spain, Moroccans once constituted the main labour source but were then marginalised by Eastern Europeans, only to then re-emerge as a valued labour source (Lindner and Kathman 2014). Azzerouli (2017, p. 32) demonstrates the arbitrariness of farmers' stereotypes: Italian farmers justify their preferences for Indian milk hands with the sacredness of cows in Hindu religion; however the milk hands mostly belonged to the Sikh or Ravidassia religions, where cows are not holy.

Third, there are gender divisions within the secondary labour markets of the food production industry. For instance, Spanish farmers have developed a preference for Moroccan women, or more precisely, mothers. Hellio (2014) explains this by these women's reproductive responsibilities in their homeland, which makes them reliable workers: not only do they work hard in Spain during their employment, but they are also likely to return home after their employment ends for family reasons, and crucially, to come back the next year for economic reasons. Women are also essentialised as natural born pickers with more "'delicate' hands for harvesting" (Mannon *et al.*, 2012, p. 95), and they are more docile ('submissive') labour (Reigada (2017, p. 102). In other cases men are preferred. At times gender preferences intersect with ethnicity and legal status, resulting in a triple segmentation of the workforce and to competition between different groups of workers as well as among workers of the same group (Hellio 2017, p. 204). For instance, Boeckler and Berndt (2014, p. 31) detail how, in Almeria in Spain, ("illegal") Moroccan males first were first preferred, but were then replaced by ("legal") Romanians of both sexes, with employers thereafter specifically targeting Moroccan females (on seasonal work permits).

Fourth, and finally, there are also other hierarchical nuances within secondary labour markets. For example, migrants are occasionally involved in the recruitment and management of the workforce. Established migrant workers may be tapped by employers for their extended family and friendship networks, and in some cases paid for the workers supplied through these. Others, especially those with language competencies, are given supervisory tasks. Nevertheless, despite these occasional elevations, the overall impression is that the migrant workforce is rooted firmly within the secondary sector of the segmented food industry labour market, and that this segment is further sub-divided by local hierarchies according to migrant's group belonging.

The (hidden) exploitation of migrant workers in rural areas

The segmentation of labour is at the same time both a general trend and something replete with local specificity and nuance. However, in the food industries segmentation has been commonly associated with exploitation.^(Endnote 3) Both extreme criminal abuse (such as forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking) and more general labour exploitation occur throughout the economy but they appear particularly pronounced in certain sectors, like food production, largely due to a relentless pressure towards cost saving measures and the associated turn to migrant farm and factory labour.

All in all, we know that employment in the food production industry is now very tightly controlled (Ortiz 2002, p. 406-409) and that exploitation does occur (Scott 2017a). Whilst there is ample evidence of maltreatment in southern Europe where labour markets are more informal and less regulated (Corrado *et al.* 2017a; Gertel and Sippel 2014a) the story does not end there. In more ostensibly formalised labour markets like the UK (Potter and Hamilton 2014; Scott *et al.* 2012) and, at times, even in the heavily regulated social democratic labour markets of Scandinavia (Mešić and Woolfson 2015; Refslund 2016; Woolfson *et al.* 2012) the safety-nets appear to be loosening or lowering. However,

important variations exist, both across space and between sectors of food productions, with examples of improving conditions for migrant labour evident in some areas (see: Rye and Andrzejewska 2010; Rye 2017a).

Nonetheless, the evidence points to an overall relationship between food industry restructuring, low-wage migrant labour use, and a ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of pay and working conditions. Many workers, as a result of this relationship, suffer physical and psychological harm (Hansen and Donohoe 2003; Holmes 2013; Lloyd and James 2008; Svensson *et al.* 2013), harm that is particularly veiled in rural areas and in stark contrast, often, to a pervasive rural idyll. In fact, the European literature, in contrast to that in North America, has relatively little to say with respect to the health (physical and psychological) implications of low-wage work in the food production industry. More generally, and this is true in Europe and the US, the academic literature also has relatively little to say about specific rural manifestations of social problems like modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking (Brisman *et al.* 2014, 2016).

Channelling migrants into rural food production

The bulk of migrants still ends up working in urban areas, and so it is important to understand the mechanisms by which many – and increasingly larger numbers of migrants – end up working and living, in rural areas. A key concept in this respect is ‘channelling’ (Findlay and Garrick 1990) and the role played by formal and informal intermediaries in the migration and settlement process, as “[m]ost international migrants depend on some form of intermediary to help them migrate to and find employment in another country (Findlay and McCollum, 2013, p. 11).

Of particular interest to scholars of low-wage labour migration in the food production industry are recruitment agencies. This is partly because of the long-established tradition of the use of ‘gangmasters’ in agriculture in countries like the UK (Brass 2004) and Italy (Avallone 2017). However, it is also because, in many European countries, there has been the increasing presence of agency-labour after 2000 (Corrado *et al.*, 2017b, p. 12). This shift relates to broad neoliberal trends in the labour market which have seen a decline in ‘standard’ stable and permanent employment alongside the above noted rise in the size of secondary forms of insecure and precarious work. It also relates, more specifically, to the move, in some countries, away from migration where the worker has a direct relationship with, and is dependent upon, the employer, to forms of migration that do not require a direct worker-employer relationship.

Many low-wage labour migrants end up working in rural areas of Europe due to the actions of employment agencies and their less formal gangmaster counterparts. These channels work in complex ways and various typologies have been developed and advanced (Barrientos 2013, p. 1060; Findlay and McCollum 2013, p.13; Scott 2017a, p. 105-106). Crucially, agencies/ gangmasters are not only involved in the migrant’s travel and employment, they also often provide workers with accommodation and thus affect migrants’ welfare well beyond the workplace (see for example, Avallone 2017, p. 224).

Despite the complexity of the agency/ gangmaster system, what is clear is that this system is popular with employers for at least three main reasons. First, it facilitates the intensification (Rogaly 2008) and informalisation (Scott, 2017b) of working conditions. In other words, agencies/ gangmasters have allowed employers to wrest more labour power from arms-length workers than would have been possible from directly recruited and employed labour. Secondly, and related to this, agencies/ gangmasters allow more of the risks of the just-in-time food production system to be passed onto workers. As

Barrientos (2013, p. 1066) notes: “risk displaced along the production chain is extended along the labour chain”. Thirdly, employers evade some of the responsibility for declining working conditions and the transfer of risk by engaging agencies/ gangmasters. In fact, many employers go to great lengths to make the recruitment of labour multi-layered and opaque and thus benefit from the associated diminution of responsibility.

Some scholars have taken a hostile stance towards agencies/ gangmasters equating their presence to the existence of ‘unfree’ labour (Barrientos 2013; Fudge and Strauss 2013; Strauss 2012). Irrespective of one’s view on this, it is clear that the agency/ gangmaster system has been in the ascendancy over the past few decades and that a large part of this is about the control it gives capital over labour, and thus the productivity and efficiency savings that result. However, important deviations from this general rule exist and the literature documents a variety of alternative recruitment systems. For instance, direct employment is the standard in Norwegian agriculture, even for short-term contracts (Rye 2017a). Garrapa (2017, p. 122), studying the Gioia Tain Plain in Italy, finds that some small and medium farmers often recruit day labourers directly. She emphasises that this direct employment relationship is highly nuanced:

“...this personal relationship between worker and employer is ambivalent: more humane compared to the labour relations mediated by a gangmaster, but at the same time paternalistic and masking the reality of precarious and badly paid work.”

Beyond recruitment agencies, it is clear from the broader migration literature that informal networks (social capital) also underpin migration. This is most clearly articulated via the concept of “cumulative causation” whereby the social networks (friends and family) of migrants continue to drive immigration to particular places, even when the factors that originally caused migration become less important (Massey *et al.* 1993: 448-450). So, whilst pioneer migrants may often rely upon recruitment firms to access work (and possibly also transport and accommodation) in rural areas, they often then act as intermediaries themselves for subsequent waves of immigrants. Channelling in this respect is a complex process, and in different places and at different times involves a different balance between formal and informal intermediaries.

Migrants' agency

The literature is clear that, even those in the most marginalised of positions in rural society, have been able to engage in small acts of empowerment (Rogaly 2009; Rogaly and Qureshi 2017; Scott 1985). Gertel and Sippel (2014c, p. 247), for instance, asserts that “seasonal workers are not simply victims; they should be understood as actors that command a certain scope of action”. It is important, therefore, not to equate the enduring vulnerability of low-wage migrant labour with an absence of agency and to recognise that most workers are able to create “incremental and sometimes highly significant changes in the microspaces of work and living, albeit it in a world dominated by capital” (Rogaly 2009, p. 1984).

A prime example of this relates to migrants’ ability to transfer income from the host to the home country and across a core-periphery economic gradient. This effectively allows low wages to go further and can elevate the status of otherwise ‘dead-end’ work. Alongside this remittance activity, many migrants also retain strong transnational ties and identities. They often spread their lives across countries both in terms of actually moving between nation-states, and in terms of creating translocal *milieus* within the rural areas in which they live (Hedberg and Carmo, 2012). At the same time, migrants carve out *in-situ*

forms of conviviality that demonstrate a commitment to local people and places even in the face of extreme precarity. These types of behaviours, that are evident at both an individual and communal level, have been observed amongst many highly marginal migrant groups: such as the Albanians in rural Greece (Labrianidis and Sykas 2009) and the Brazilians in rural Ireland (Maher and Cawley 2016). They may be everyday forms of behaviour, that in certain respects are unspectacular; but on closer inspection both migrants' transnationalism, and their commitment to the local, demonstrate a challenge to the dominant *homo economicus* concept of low-wage labour migration, that sees migrants simply as highly productive and highly efficient workers. This agency can also serve as a springboard for migrants to progress beyond their initial highly precarious work and towards a desired end goal (usually centred around work stability, financial security, and family life).

Beyond everyday forms of agency, there are cases of rural migrants coming together collectively to challenge the systems that underpin their marginality. Examples from the literature of temporary and/ or seasonal food industry labourers taking collective action include:

- The 'Codetras' network in France: the *Collectif de Défense des Travailleurs Etrangers Saisonniers dans l' Agriculture* (Collective for the Defence of Foreign Agricultural Workers) (Sippel and Gertel 2014, p. 45-47).
- The El Ejido protest in Spain: this is the Spanish town from where Moroccan workers went on strike in response to anti-immigrant riots and sentiment in 2000 (Veiga 2014)
- The SOC union in Spain: the establishment of the *Sindicato de Obreros del Campo* union made up of day labourers based in Andalusia, Spain (Caruso 2017 p. 288).
- The unofficial Nardò strike in Italy: this is a small agricultural town in the Apulia region of South-east Italy where, in 2011, there was a strike in response to exploitative conditions and the *caporale* (gangmaster) system (Perrotta 2015).
- The Swedish berry picker marches, and associated union action, of 2010 (Mešić 2016; Woolfson *et al.* 2012, p. 154-156).

Thus, since 2000, across rural Europe, there have been networks formed (France), protests (Spain), union action (Spain), unofficial strikes (Italy) and marches (Sweden) all underlining the fact that highly marginal migrants do have agency. In many of these cases, migrants' protests have been supported by locals.

The political-economy within which low-wage migrant workers are embedded, however, tends to guard against such action, or render it eventually insignificant. Indicative of capital's ability to prevent or circumvent conflict, Kasimis *et al.* (2010, p. 261) have noted how migrant labour has been 'refreshed' in order to prevent collective bonds from developing and to ensure workers remain individualised:

"There has been a replacement of traditional or old migrants with irregular newcomers over the past few years. This has often been linked with attempts to restrict the collective action and collective bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions sought by traditional and old migrants".

Nonetheless, the political-economy of Europe is variegated, and whilst there may be an overall desire by capital to control labour as far as is possible, there are isolated cases of this desire being kept in check in order to avoid harm. In Norway, for example, the state, the trade unions and the farmer's associations have come together to try to actually enhance working conditions and wages for migrant workers to avoid the threat of "social dumping", with partial success (Rye 2017a).

Labour migrants and rural integration

Integration is a notoriously difficult concept to pin-down and define. In a broad sense, it involves a combination of social, economic, civic-political and legal transitions, of both migrants and the receiving society, such that the distance between the two reduces.^{(Endnote}

⁴⁾ In any case, the literature demonstrates suggest that migrants' integration in rural society is challenging. At a more general level, Oliva's (2010) term "rural melting pot" is significant as it draws attention to how enhanced international migration in profound was challenges, and transforms, traditional rural values and ways of life. For example, Hedberg and Haandrikman, (2014) discuss how the influx of international labour migrants challenges, in racial terms, "white rurality" and, in class-based terms, the very "rural idyll". Relatedly, Erikson and Tollefsen (2013) claim that hegemonic representations of the rural render migrant workers invisible and may actually contribute to disguising racism and to obstructing improvements for precarious workers.

The fact that migration challenges the traditional is however not in itself a definite barrier to integration, it is simply to note that integration occurs in a distinctly rural context with the process apparently evolving differently between rural and urban areas (Hugo and Moren-Alegret 2008, p. 474). Nevertheless, insight into the integration of migrants in rural areas is still limited (Flynn and Kay, 2017; Jentsch *et al.* 2007; McAreavey 2012, 2017; Rye 2014, 2016). Dufty-Jones (2014, p. 370), for instance, notes that the conditions of labour migrants in rural communities are far less explored than of those in the metropolitan areas. Similarly, McAreavey (2012, p. 488) observes that: "little is known about the way in which migrants navigate their way through social structures as they settle into destinations with little experience of immigration". Whilst acknowledging the important work of local government institutions and rural civil society, she also finds that many rural communities: "are ill-equipped to manage the rate and pace of change that has been witnessed in recent years".

What we do know is that there is often a reluctance to see migrant workers integrate into rural areas, in some cases resulting in social exclusion and poor living and working conditions. Migrants in Southern Italy, for instance "inhabit abandoned houses or large 'ghettos' and slums in rural areas" (Perrotta 2017, p. 59; see also Perrotta 2015, p. 198-199). They form distinct communities, which are conceived of as distant, and even deviant from the viewpoint of the locals. Similarly secluded and impoverished immigrant enclaves have also been reported in other parts of rural Europe, leading some authors to suggest that migrants working in the food production industry have come to form a rural underclass, or class apart (Kasimis 2008, p. 513; Rye 2014), the "new international proletariat" (Avallone 2014, p. 137).

Limited integration in rural areas can be linked to citizenship status/ policy. On the one hand, intra-EU migrants have protection as EU citizens, including national social entitlements and rights for labour market mobility. On the other hand, many seasonal visa schemes limit non-EU migrants' status and rights. Beyond specific and largely rural seasonal guest-worker visas, tourist visas and an associated self-employed status have been used to limit the rights and entitlements of migrants in some countries: such as wild berry pickers in Finland (Valkonen and Rantanen 2007) and Sweden (Eriksson and Tollefsen 2014). Worst off of all migrants are those who are undocumented, and entirely fall outside the social welfare arrangements of host states (Repič 2010). This seems to be a particularly significant issue in southern Europe, which has a large informal economy dominated by migrant workers (Reyneri 2003).

A lack of social integration can also result from the very character of migrant work within the food industry. This work tends to become all-encompassing and all-consuming, often because it is so precarious yet so important for those dependent on it, and can effectively prevent workers from forming 'active communities' and from contributing to realms outside of their workplace (Mitchell 2011). In addition, for seasonal migrants, staying for short periods makes integration both difficult to achieve and not particularly coveted. Thus, for many, especially those in precarious or seasonal employment, the maximisation of working hours and pay takes priority over rural integration (Andrzejewska and Rye 2012; Fialskowska and Piechkowska 2016). This can lead to bonds coalescing around work and the workplace, that might involve fellow workers but might also encompass employer-employee relations.

In terms of the latter, Fialskowska and Piechkowska (2016) suggest that bonds vary between smaller and larger farms, with the latter providing less intimate relations between employers and employees than the former. Illustrative of this, Rye (2007) describes how Norwegian farmers (on relatively small farms) and their workers have developed dense social relations, including workers' participation in farmer family functions, and farmers visiting workers in their homeland. Jentsch *et al.* (2007, p. 47) have documented similar relations in the Scottish case. Nevertheless, Aznar-Sánchez *et al.*'s (2014, p. 19) study of the Almeria region of Spain demonstrates that small farms do not necessarily imply strong social relations and can actually be associated with detachment. This is because labour is constantly moved between farms, as demand is limited due to farm size. As a result, the itinerant migrants are rarely able to make social connections to specific farms or specific local communities. Also in Spain, Hellio (2017, p. 207) describes how, within the arrangements of the *contratacion en origen*, employers seek to hide (female) workers from the local community, literally creating an invisible migrant worker population. Thus, the relationship between a migrant and an employer in some contexts is associated with integration and conviviality, whilst in other contexts it is associated with separation and isolation.

The characteristics of rural society can hamper interaction with locals. For instance, the population structure of rural communities (few inhabitants, scattered settlements) often means a limited number of public meeting points, which also require a car to access. In addition, rural communities are in many instances old/ ageing and in some areas very firmly middle/ upper-middle class and almost always white. There are, then, social and cultural fissures between low-wage migrant workers and the indigenous population in rural areas.

Integration is at times also place-specific and reflects the variegated expressions of the migrant labour phenomenon across the European continent. Kasimis *et al.* (2010), for instance, claim that less developed rural regions are generally more willing to accept migrants into the local community. Similarly, where labour migration counters trends towards rural depopulation, representing a "demographic refill" (Hedman and Haandrikman 2014, p. 129), there is an assumption that incomers will be more acceptable and more accepted. However, studies point towards uneasy tolerance rather than outright acceptance.

An important factor shaping the overall process of integration is the identity frontier between the migrant and the host society. Just as at work some groups are more welcome than others, so this applies to the world outside of work. For instance, in Spain "local residents may protest against the arrival of single male migrants whereas they may welcome immigrant families" (Viruela 2008, quoted in Bock *et al.* 2016, p. 11). Also in

Spain, Pumares and Jolivet (2014) describe how locals are often more welcoming to Romanians than to Moroccans.

The above discussion underlines the point that there are limits to “rural cosmopolitanism” (Popke, 2011; Woods, 2017) and whilst tolerance and integration of sorts is often evident across rural Europe, this comes with expectations. Torres *et al.* (2006) talk, for instance, of a “silent bargain” that occurs whereby locals ‘accept’ increasing rural diversity as long as labour migrants are prepared to do (restructured) low-wage work (largely in food production industries). To be sure, this silent bargain may exist in urban and suburban areas, but it should be clear from the above that rural integration has its own unique set of dynamics. Specifically, labour migrants in rural area are often: living in places unused to accommodating diversity; invisible and hidden from view; relatively isolated; dependent upon a major industry/ employer; unable to cluster in conventional ethnic neighbourhoods; lacking ethnic infrastructure; reliant on tied accommodation; dependent upon precarious forms of employment (temporary or seasonal); linked to an intermediary for work, accommodation and event transport; tied to a specific specialist visa and thus employer; and, hoping that their low-wage work is a stepping-stone to more rewarding forms of employment. Thus, “silent bargains” have important place-based characteristics that make rural integration different in different contexts, and certainly often distinct from the integration that occurs in traditional immigrant gateway cities and established ethnic neighbourhoods.

Conclusions and Futures

Since Hoggart and Mendoza's (1999) study of Spanish agriculture, the employment of low-wage migrant workers across Europe's food production industries has increased tremendously and international migration to/ in rural areas of Europe has become a new norm. The academic literature has responded to this trend, and, notwithstanding important spatial and temporal nuances, appears to coalesce around the seven core themes as discussed above. We see, for example, that processes of social and economic change in rural areas have underpinned a ‘need’ for migrant labour that is as much about employers’ desire for certain types of workers as it is about absolute shortages. It is also clear that across Europe migration policy has played a pivotal role in regulating the supply of migrants and in moulding particular types of workers, mostly to meet the needs of the food production industry. In addition, the literature shows us that migrant workers take up largely secondary labour market vacancies and thus fill important niches within the, largely rural, food production system. It appears that the work they do is precarious and, in many cases, this may lead to exploitation and even cause physical and/ or psychological harm. Channelling, through both formal recruitment agencies and informal social networks, is a significant factor for migrants finding their way in rural areas and securing work, transport and accommodation. Notwithstanding the overall impression of disempowerment, labour migrants in rural areas have also shown considerable agency both at an everyday level (e.g. through transnational links and identities) and in more spectacular ways (e.g. through collective action). Finally, migrant integration does appear to be possible given the right antecedent conditions, though the picture is a variegated one, with particular rural barriers and challenges identified.

There is a difference between describing and reviewing the literature, on the one hand, and identifying core cross-sectional analytical themes on the other. With this in mind, and with a view to further research, it is now apposite to draw on the above review to identify key analytical issues and questions. The most obvious point of departure here is the changing balance between labour and capital and the implications of this relationship for rural society and space. Alongside this, there is the labour-capital-state triad and, in

particular, the role of different migration, integration, labour market, industrial, and rural policies over time and space. Furthermore, whilst capitalism may often appear consistent in the form it takes, there are also always inevitable temporal and spatial variations; and one might ask, for instance, adopting a comparative perspective, in what political-economic contexts is labour more or less free? Following on from this, there is the question of good versus undesirable work (however defined) and why low-wage food production has tended towards the latter for so long. Inequality, between different segments of labour, between migrant origin and destination countries, and between the urban and rural realms, also needs attending to. In addition, and running throughout the review, there is the constant need to render low-wage workers visible in rural settings and to uncover voices from the workplace and the wider community that would otherwise remain hidden. Finally, there are distinctive rural stories to tell with respect to migration and migrants, but what is distinct about the rural requires further articulation.

Studies of migration to/ in rural areas are, then, more than the sum of their parts. They connect to much wider debates within society – about the gap between labour and capital, about the level of inequality, about the role of state policies, etc. – that in some cases also have distinctly rural dimensions to them. However, whether focused on a description/ review of the literature or on wider analytical themes, or preferably both, there is always a danger of missing important differences and nuances. For example, rural spaces and places have different migratory histories, from both the distant and recent past. These histories, crucially, are not always separate from the present and may lead to particular cultures of migration in particular countries or regions. Capitalism is also variegated (Peck and Theodore, 2006), and this means that the food production industry may well work differently across space: key distinctions here being between family farms and industrial agri-business and between the use of intermediaries versus direct employment. Similarly, welfare regimes vary between nation-states and, thus, the policy realm becomes an important source of nuance. This is also true with respect to migration, labour market and industrial policy. The result of this historic, economic, and policy variation is that the 'global countryside' is spatially variegated and heterogeneous despite having shared characteristics across Europe. Most obviously, for instance, the more residual welfare states of southern Europe have been associated with greater levels of impoverishment amongst rural labour migrants than the social democratic welfare regimes of Scandinavia.

Where does all of the above leave us in terms of research gaps and future research directions? First, it is clear that the literature reviewed is empirically very strong and that there are excellent in-depth qualitative case-studies to draw on. Dufty-Jones (2014, p. 377) argues though that “[f]uture research needs to be grounded in both robust and appropriate theoretical frameworks” and, quoting Woods and Goodwin (2003, p. 250), warns against future research falling into the trap of privileging “new empirical knowledge over and above conceptual and theoretical development[s]”. Against these warnings, it is heartening to see a range of theoretical perspectives being used to explore and understand international migration to rural areas, such as the use of the mobilities paradigm (Bell and Osti 2010; Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014; Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska, 2008); the combined use of agri-food systems and labour geography theory (Gertel and Sippel 2014a) and migration theory (Corrado *et al.* 2017b); the related use of political economy (Rogaly, 2008) and segmented labour market (Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999; Rye 2007) perspectives; Scott's (2013b) elaboration of Harvey's concept of the 'spatial fix'; the use of gender theory (e.g. Hellio 2014, 2017; Kilkey and Ursi 2017; Mannon *et al.* 2012); Goffman and social identity theory (McAreavey, 2017), transnationalism (e.g., Hedberg and Carmo 2012; Andrzejewska and Rye 2012); rural

cosmopolitanism (Popke, 2011; Schech 2014; Woods 2017); and, theories of rural transformation (Rye 2014).

Second, the majority of research is based on a qualitative case-study methodology i.e. interviews and to a lesser extent ethnographies. This is to be welcomed in one sense, for its testimony evidence and 'thick description', but in another it leaves an important gap. Milbourne (2007), for instance, warns that studies on rural areas have tended to focus on singular cases. As the rural migration research matures, we would advocate larger-scale studies alongside qualitative case-studies i.e. comparative research, statistical analysis, and quantitative surveys. A few studies (Pumares and Jolivet 2014; Rye and Holm 2013; Sippel and Gertel 2014), for example, have utilised large-scale survey material but more work is needed. It is also true that in many countries national data is poor (especially around seasonal migration flows). Similarly, there is some, albeit limited, comparative work (Basok and López-Sala 2016; Corrado *et al.* 2017a; Gertel and Sippel 2014a; Jentsch and Simard 2009). Despite that cross-national comparative research poses many methodological challenges, as detailed by Simard and Jentsch (2009), we believe such works will provide insights into the phenomenon of global labour migration that goes well beyond the specificities of individual case-studies. Most obviously, there is a need to consider the impact of different policy contexts at different times and in different places.

Third, the literature is rich in studies of migrant workers in horticulture but more limited with respect to other areas of food production. It is clear though that migrants are now spreading to areas of agriculture beyond traditional horticultural destinations. We have also known for some time that migrants work in considerable numbers in food packing and processing plants (James and Lloyd 2008; Lever and Milbourne 2017; Lloyd and James 2008; Perotta 2017; Tannock 2015), many located in rural and semi-rural locations. There are also a few studies into migrant labour use in rural fish processing (Aure 2008, Rye 2016, 2017b), which is an important sub-sector of the food production industry in some European countries.

Fourth, the literature on migrant workers in food production could better interact with broader literatures from, *inter alia*, rural studies, migration studies, and labour market studies. Some of the literature reviewed above does do this, but the integration is patchy and, we hope, will be helped by this review.

To sum up, and as is clear from the reference list that follows this concluding section, a great deal of recent work has been carried on the relationship between low-wage rural labour migration and the European food production industry. That this industry has become dependent upon migrant workers is now beyond doubt. In fact, it is now, arguably, *the* most migrant-dense industry of them all. It is not, therefore, enough to simply highlight migrants in rural areas of Europe and link this to the activities of food producers. There are far more nuanced, intricate and pressing research questions to be addressed. The aim of this paper has been to look back on past research and, in so doing, help us to understand the future form these research questions could take. Moreover, underpinning the multitude of questions yet to be posed, and answers yet to be gleaned, is a core dilemma. Namely, how do we go about balancing the economic 'necessity' of migrant labour with a respect for workers' as human beings and as an integral and integrated part of the fabric of rural communities? Where the correct balance lies, depends upon who is looking and where they are focused on. In our pan-European view, there are pockets of good practice out there, but there is also intense pressure to extract as much surplus value from labour as is humanly (if not always humanely) possible.

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Endnotes

Equal authorship, in alphabetic order

- 1: More specifically, the paper covers the EU member states, including the UK (set to exit the EU in March 2019) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members (Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Switzerland).
- 2: For a number of reasons migration populations, often employed in the informal economy, are difficult to survey. The authorities are generally more eager to survey their permanent populations, while the migrants have fewer reasons to report their presence, some even having strong reasons *not* to be registered (e.g., migrants without legal papers).
- 3: Depending upon one's political and philosophical position, for instance, it could be argued (e.g. by Marxists) that all secondary labour is exploited to some degree given the way in which it provides surplus value and supports primary employment. Nevertheless, and whilst closely aligned, segmentation and exploitation are not the same thing. The former is a strategy used by capital to maximise returns on investment in labour. The latter is the damage that tends to arise when this strategy is used too intensively.
- 4: We focus here on international migrants' integration into rural society through their position within the labour market. Integration processes in other spheres of rural society (neighborhoods, civil society, etc.) are acknowledged, though they are outside the remit of the paper.

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