A Complex Work of Migration:

Knowing, working and migrating in the Southwest of England.

Submitted by David Huw Vasey to the University of Exeter

as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

August 2010

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certified that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University

Signed................................................................. (David Huw Vasey)
Acknowledgements

As with any project of this length, there are a vast number of people who played a role in what I eventually produced. For some that came in the form of a direct intellectual engagement with what is written here, or a practical one in helping with the research itself. For others, the help and support came in other ways, prior to, during and beyond the duration of this PhD. In many ways, they played at least as big a part in what I wrote as anyone who was more intimately involved in the research itself. Therefore, the first acknowledgement must be to my family and friends for their love and support irrespective of this thesis. Thank you all.

I also feel I must acknowledge those who played such a vital role in my intellectual development, but were not immediately involved in the research, for I have been lucky enough to be mentored by some wonderful teachers during my University education. Especially notable have been John Hutson and Felicia Hughes-Freeland at what was then the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Wales, Swansea, who sparked my interest in people and societies and always gave their time to me, even as a humble undergraduate, to talk about the wonderful subjects they taught. Thanks are also due to Katy Gardner at the University of Sussex, who taught me that good research is as much about writing as it is about doing, and that the researcher should always retain an empathy with their subjects.

I also wish to note my appreciation for everyone at the Exeter Geography department who provided both intellectual stimulation throughout my PhD and many new friends. Particularly important were my supervisors there, Stewart Barr and Mark Goodwin, who always gave me the required advice, support and encouragement despite their busy schedules. Thanks also to my ‘third’ supervisor, Allan Williams, now at the Working Lives Institute at London Metropolitan University, who provided the intellectual foundations for the research and continued to give me timely advice, guidance and support throughout the project. A debt is obviously also due to the South West Regional Development Agency for its assistance and backing during the research. Particular thanks are due to Liz Georgeson, my supervisor at the Agency during the formative years of the project, who always showed an interest in, and intellectual engagement with, the research, but was never directive or imposing in her feedback.
I also owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who took part in the research, either as interviewees or in giving their time to talk to me more generally. Special mention, however, should be made of Agnieszka Romaszka and Caroline Nicholson who helped so much with the 'low-skill' work side of the research, setting up, conducting and translating a number of the interviews I would also certainly not have been able to obtain without their assistance. Dziękuję.
Abstract

This is a thesis about knowing, working and migrating in a complex and fluid world. Through an analysis of biographic-narrative interviews with migrants working in ‘knowledge intensive’ roles, as well as with those employed in jobs normally considered ‘low-skilled’, arguments about knowing, working and migrating in the ‘new knowledge economy’ are developed.

Foregrounding an active and embodied understanding of knowing as a socially embedded and fluid phenomenon allows for a reconceptualisation of the relationships between knowing, migrating and working, raising questions about our normative understandings of both the ‘knowledge’ economy and divisions of migrant labour. This thesis seeks to illustrate how everyday practice and the interaction of complex (and often competing) ‘forces’ have acted to produce powerful ideas about what kind of jobs are suitable for which types of migrants, and how these ideas become accepted as normal – as ‘common sense’ assumptions. Furthermore, such productions of knowledge about migrants, also impacts on how, what and where we know. That is, the processes and performances of knowing are both constitutive of, and constituted by, the structures of power which shape our lives. Thus the ‘power to know’ is contextual, fluid and yet fundamental to the constitution of our everyday lives.
## Contents:

- **Acknowledgements** 3
- **Abstract** 5
- **Contents** 6
- **List of Figures** 8
- **List of Tables** 9
- **Table of Abbreviations** 10

### 1 Setting the Scene: Structure, Style and Background 11
- Partial aims and emergent objectives 12
- Outline of the thesis 16

### 2 Conceptualising Knowledge, Work and Migration 18
- International migration 21
- Labour migration and work: theorising migrant labour markets 38
- The great unknown: knowledge and international migration 43
- Afterword: knowing-in-the world, writing of the world 62

### 3 The ‘Local Context’: Situating the Research 63
- The South West: labour market characteristics 64
- International migration and the South West 68
- Skills, knowledge and the local context 83
- The proximal and the distal: on scale, locality and relationality 87
- Afterword: the dynamics of context 94

### 4 Methods: On the Complex Work of Researching Migration 97
- The story of the research 98
- Making sense of it all: reflections on method 116

- 5 - Table of Contents
Afterword: creating a thesis and presenting narratives 124

5 Journeys: Trajectories of Migration 127
The migration of academics: mobile success in international scholarship 128
Migration trajectories beyond the academy: ‘low skilled’ mobility? 142
Powerful trajectories: routes revisited 158

6 Work: Migrant Labour Markets 161
Introduction: work and migration 163
Beyond the global city, beyond labour segmentation theory? 186
Afterword: considering the complex work of migration 197

7 Knowing: Skills, Knowledge and Migration 199
Knowing in the academy: ‘high-skill’ work, migration and knowledge 201
Wasted knowledge? International migrants in low-skill roles 219
Afterword: mobile knowledge, sited knowing 231

8 Discussion: The Complex Work of Migrating and Knowing 238
Conceptualising the complex work of migrating: a recap 239
Further reflections – context, difference and complexity 251
Messy methods revisited – theory, method and context 255
Emerging research themes 261
Afterword: partial pictures and never-ending stories 266

References 268
Appendices 283
List of Figures:

**Figure 3.1:**
Economic activity rates by Local Authority, July 2009 to June 2010  

**Figure 3.2:**
Unemployment rates by Local Authority, July 2009 to June 2010  

**Figure 3.3:**
Gross weekly earnings, full-time workers (workplace based), 2010  

**Figure 3.4:**
NINo registrations of non-UK citizens in South West GOR by financial year  

**Figure 3.5:**
NINo registrations by nationals of EU ‘accession’ states in the SW GOR by financial year  

**Figure 3.6:**
Proportion of SW GOR NINo registrations made in ‘Urban 4’ by area of origin, 2007/8  

**Figure 3.7:**
Employment rate (working age) by nationality and ethnicity, SW GOR  

**Figure 3.8:**
WRS registrations, SW Postal Address Book region  

**Figure 5.1:**
Concentration of Polish interviewees by most recent Voivodeship of residence  

**Figure 7.1:**
Stylised relationship between labour market position, language proficiency and international migration (after Rooth & Ekberg, 2006)
List of Tables:

Table 3.1:
Employment and deprivation indicators, Swindon and Penwith Local Authority areas 65

Table 3.2:
NINo registrations by adult overseas nationals entering the UK (SW GOR). Top 5 countries by financial year 72

Table 3.3:
Proportion of workforce employed in ‘Agriculture, hunting and forestry’ industry sector in the 5 local authorities with the highest proportion of A12 registrations in the SW GOR. 74

Table 3.4:
Population by ethnicity and nationality, SW GOR, by financial year 77

Table 3.5:
Proportion of cumulative total of WRS registrants employed in certain industry sectors, May 2004 – September 2008 80

Table 3.6:
Top 5 occupations in which WRS registrants were employed, England & Wales, 2007 80
**Table of Abbreviations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>‘Accession 2’ – refers to the two states, Bulgaria and Romania, which acceded to the EU on 1st January 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>‘Accession 8’ – refers to the eight states – Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – that acceded to the EU on 1st May 2004 and whose citizens were required to register with the WRS if they wished to work in the UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS</td>
<td>Annual Population Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAQDAS</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE</td>
<td>Collaborative Award in Science &amp; Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>Confederation of British Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOR</td>
<td>Government Office Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESS</td>
<td>National Employers Skills Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NINo</td>
<td>National Insurance Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRDA/ South West RDA</td>
<td>South West Regional Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNC</td>
<td>Trans-National Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRS</td>
<td>Workers’ Registration Scheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>