A 70TH BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE
TO
RUSSELL KING

Compiled and edited
by
Michael Collyer, Jade Cemre Erciyes, Julie Vullnetari and Jenny Money
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Understanding European Onward Migration

Jill Ahrens

Since coming to Sussex I have immensely appreciated collaborating with Russell as both a student and a colleague. As for other generations of students on the MA in Migration Studies, Russell’s Theories and Typologies core course was my foundation to this interdisciplinary research field. During his seminars, Russell encouraged lively discussions through which we became familiar with key migration scholars and the breadth of his own research. Later I started working together with Russell, Allan Findlay and others on two research projects on international student mobility. Conducting fieldwork with Russell in Dublin and Leicester, I was fascinated to see how his interest in migration went beyond the realm of our research, guiding his conversations with the people we encountered and the observations he made about the changes in these cities. These experiences greatly contributed to me eventually pursuing doctoral research.

Many of Russell’s publications have been relevant for my PhD topic, but when pushed to name one publication, I would select his article ‘Towards a new map of European migration’ in the International Journal of Population Geography. In this widely cited paper, Russell argues that the simplistic dichotomies, which came to dominate research on previous European migrations, fail to capture the more complicated and nuanced lived experiences of more-recent migrant types. This overarching argument has influenced how I approached my own research with Nigerian onward migrants in Germany, the UK and Spain. On the whole, previous research conducted on the topic of onward migration within Europe tended to be situated at binary extremes, focusing either on the ‘illegal’ moves of transit migrants or secondary movers, the ‘legal’ onward migration of naturalised refugees or the mobility of native Europeans. However, this appeared to contrast with the various types of semi-legal mobility and status I encountered amongst Nigerian migrants (Ahrens 2013). Considering onward migration along the life course, as Russell advocates in this paper, also enabled me to see how migration trajectories evolved over time and space. Some onward migrants went through extended periods of temporary relocation involving various degrees of transnational mobility and livelihood. Meanwhile, other onward migrants who appeared permanently settled often visited or even decided to ‘return’ to their previous European country of residence (Ahrens et al. 2014). As my supervisor, Russell encouraged me to question existing categorisations and make sense of these complex lived realities.

In his role as the co-founder of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, Russell has made a lasting impact on Migration Studies more widely. He was instrumental in bringing together this large interdisciplinary group of migration researchers, who all contribute to the SCMR being such an exciting place to work and study in. Yet another reason why many migrationists fondly regard Sussex as our alma mater is the many potluck dinners we shared together in Russell’s house and garden over the years. Here’s to many more celebrations of migration in Lewes!

References


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