

Chapter One

Leaving Home: Migration and Working Lives

Introduction: Geographical Journeys

One of the key rites of passage for growing numbers of young women is leaving home. Once associated for the majority with marriage and the move from a parental to a conjugal home, many young women now live independently for varying periods of time. In the industrial West, this has been related to the rising numbers of women in universities and with the growth in women's labour market participation, enabling women increasingly to become financially independent and establish their own home. While once women's lives were associated with the private spaces of the home and the local scale of the domestic, women in Britain are now part of the public sphere of waged work, where they participate in almost equal numbers to men. About 11 million men and women are now in waged work at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and the social construction of femininity is no longer as closely linked with domesticity as it once was.

These changes have in the main been a post-Second World War phenomenon. While something like a third of all women worked for wages for some part of their lives in the century before that war, the numbers began to rise after it, accelerating from the 1970s. Between the end of the Second World War and the new millennium, then, there has been a transformation of employment, class, culture and relationships between gender and employment that have radically changed many people's lives. Men, as well

as women, found that the older certainties about their place in the labour market were challenged by the rise of new forms of work, new patterns of labour market participation and growing diversity in the social characteristics of employees. Perhaps the most significant change in the last three decades or so in the UK, however, has been the extended participation of women, especially mothers, in the workforce.

For many women, however, leaving home to take part in the labour market has not been a growing privilege, associated with educational participation, but an economic necessity. In different ways, sometimes on a casual basis or for cash in hand, working-class women have always contributed to their households and single women, without the support of a wider household, have also of necessity had to look for employment. For all but the few who work at 'home', in their own domestic arena, earning a living, going out to work, necessarily involves a journey, as Alice Kessler-Harris (1982) signalled in the title of her now classic history of US women's working lives: *Out to Work*. Long before the establishment of capitalist social relations and the type of regulation that now characterises the formal labour markets of many societies, providing the daily essentials for everyday life often involved both long journeys and absences from the home. Travelling considerable distances was common among nomadic hunters and gatherers before the establishment of agriculture. From herders engaged in transhumance, moving between pastures on a seasonal or annual basis, to the peripatetic tramps, hobos and casual workers of national depressions, leaving home has been a correlate of making a living. For some, the migrations associated with employment have been more permanent or larger scale, across significant distances. In the transition to industrial capitalism and urbanisation in the West, hundreds of thousands of people moved from the countryside to the city; others moved across national boundaries to start a new life far from their country of birth. It is this group of people for whom leaving home also entails leaving their homeland that is the subject here.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, millions of migrants from Ireland, Germany, Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe moved across the Atlantic to the USA and Canada, escaping from hunger, hardship, oppression and political unrest in search of a better standard of living, leaving behind increasingly impoverished compatriots as the more able, the more skilled and the more adventurous swelled the ranks of the leavers. These movements were predominantly voluntary, albeit often motivated by necessity, encouraged by a variety of economic, political and social circumstances, to 'new' lands where the settlers re-established societies in the image of the 'old' country, with different degrees of success, but often disenfranchising the original inhabitants. Earlier migrations, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, were different. The wholesale transportation of slaves between Africa, Europe and the Americas was a tragic example of involuntary movement to provide labourers for the plantations

and homes of the slave owners in the Americas, transforming both the sending and the receiving economies, and leaving a legacy of inequality and injustice that is still not settled. And more recently, in the immediate post-war period, white Britons left the UK to establish new lives in Australia and New Zealand as well as in North America, and several millions of displaced people after the end of the Second World War were transformed from refugees into economic migrants as western countries recruited workers to rebuild their shattered economies.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the rate of movement has increased as millions of people move in search of work or as displaced peoples and refugees. Currently in East and South-East Asia millions of people are moving within and across national boundaries as economic development, the mobility of capital and the growing integration of the global economy draw increasing numbers of people into different forms of employment relations. These more recent movements might be regarded as a sort of reverse colonisation (Bennett 1964), as millions of workers move from the economically exploited margins of the global economy to the centres of production, in the main as 'volunteers' or as casual cheap labourers, but sometimes under duress, as manufacturing workers, maids and nannies, gardeners and cleaners, construction workers and sex workers, bartenders and into numerous other forms of work, servicing the demands of more affluent populations.

These different migrations involve and affect men and women in different ways at different times. It seems that the forced migrations that characterised the early modern period included women as well as men, and white women among them (Colley 2002, 2007), whereas the enslavement of Africans in the Americas in the seventeenth century was predominantly, although not solely, a movement of men, as was the later transport of indentured servants and convicts from, for example, India to East Africa, China to the USA and Canada, and Britain to Australia. An analysis of migration reveals the assumptions about the suitability of men or women for different markets, as well as the racialised ideologies that permitted the exploitation of people constructed as inferior Others. In previous eras, when the earlier movers were men, the vanguard of the migratory movement, they sent for other family members once some labour market security had been found and savings accumulated. In the last century or so, however, women have made up an increasing proportion of transnational migrants, moving not only as part of a wide household group but also as independent individuals, sometimes in advance of other family members, at other times as single, unattached women, and in growing numbers leaving their families behind them as they become the primary breadwinners from a distance.

In the modern world, where restless global capital searches for locations where labour is cheap and exploitable, rural to urban migrations as well as transnational movements are increasingly dominated by women. These

migrants move into export processing industries – garments, electronics, food processing – in Thailand, Taiwan, coastal China, the Mexican border, into sweated industries in the cities of the advanced industrial West (Sassen 2001) and into the caring work of nannies, nurses and domestic servants, to replace the domestic labour of middle-class women or to provide care for ageing populations (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). These migrations have a huge effect on gender and familial relations in both ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ societies, affecting the demographic structure of different populations, the opportunities (or not) to create independent households and cultural assumptions about appropriate forms of work and behaviour for men and women, in some cases permitting greater freedom for women, in others deepening women’s exploitation as they find themselves trapped in unequal forms of relationships, both in the workplace and in the society at large.

Transnational migration has now become a global phenomenon. It has been estimated that at the start of the twenty-first century, about 200 million people in the world were migrants, the largest absolute number in history (Smith et al. 2006: 9) and about 3 per cent of the world’s population. Facilitated by developments in transport and communication technologies, people are now able to cross vast distances relatively easily and inexpensively, although the nature, pace and scale of migration are also connected to changes in national economies, to patterns of transnational capital flows, to wars, famine and pestilence, to revolutions and regime change, which may force the previously immobile to think about migration. The direction of travel is in the main from the South to the North, from less economically developed countries to the richer countries of the world, as it has been across the last two centuries. China, India and the Philippines have been the three main sending countries in the last half-century or so: an estimated 35 million Chinese, 20 million Indians and 7 million Filipinos lived elsewhere in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Europe and North America are the key destination regions, as they have been for centuries: 70 million migrants (9.5 per cent of the population) live in different parts of Europe and 50 million in the USA (14 per cent of the total population; IOM 2008, 2010).

Many of these 200 million migrants have become a key part of the labour force in both developed and developing countries, both vulnerable as newcomers and valuable as an essential part of the workforce in service and manufacturing industries. Although the scale of international migration is now larger than ever, paradoxically its regulation is easier than in earlier centuries. The controls on trans-border movements are now both greater and more easily enforceable. In the age of bioinformatics, when physical and even genetic information is encoded in travel documents, and new technologies of electronic surveillance, transnational movements are easier to track and to control, at least in the most technologically sophisticated

nations. Significantly, these same technologies permit migrants themselves to retain contacts with their 'homeland' as well as to build connections between diasporic communities in different places elsewhere. The internet, cheap phone rates, calling cards, low-budget flights, all mean that what was once – for migrants from, say, Russia to New York, from Poland to Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – a permanent movement, involving the severance of ties to friends and family left behind, has now become less permanent.

Although historical continuities are clear, it seems that a new stage in migration has begun, what theorists have termed transnationalism (Castles and Miller 2009; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Vertovec 2001) involving living between two (or more) places. Migration may in earlier eras have been more permanent, although it was never entirely so. Some migrants have always returned 'home' and maintained connections through marriage, for example, as well as occasional visits. However, it seems that geographical movement is now both more common and more complex as, over the life cycle, growing numbers of people may move between several countries rather than from one to another in a single movement.

Despite this recent shift in the nature of migration, until the twenty-first century, economic migrants typically moved on a permanent basis, to settle in a new country. Indeed, countries such as Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand are 'settler societies', their lands colonised and their economies developed by large numbers of in-migrants, who less positively have often mistreated and restricted the land and opportunities available to the indigenous populations (Pateman and Mills 2007). The United Kingdom's more recent history has been a different one. Despite a long history of movement and in-migration associated in the main with colonialism, until the second half of the twentieth century, the population was largely ethnically homogeneous, mainly white-skinned and born in the country. At the end of the Second World War, less than 5 per cent of the population of the UK had been born abroad. In the decades since then, however, economic migration has begun to transform the population. Schemes to recruit foreign labour after the war and to permit demobbed soldiers and airmen from Poland to stay, as well as responses to the Hungarian repression in 1956 and to independence movements in the South Asian subcontinent and in Africa between the late 1940s and the 1970s, have altered the composition of the UK population. More recently, recruitment of skilled workers to meet the growing demands in new service industries, the need for less skilled workers to care for an ageing population, and the growing permeability of borders within Europe, as membership of the European Union (EU) was extended in 2004 and 2007,¹ have transformed many British towns and cities. The number of foreign-born people in the UK has more than doubled but was still only about 8 per cent of the total UK population in 2001. This compares with 11 per cent of the US population in 2000. The percentage may

seem small, given the significance of debates about migration in the national consciousness. In part this is explained by the confusion between the foreign-born population and British-born children of migrants whose presence increases the diversity of the population. The growing movement of people from elsewhere into the UK over the last sixty years, many of whom have stayed in the country for the rest of their lives, and their descendants has produced a new diversity in national origins, cultures and customs, skin colour and languages which simultaneously has enriched and challenged the indigenous population.

In the UK, as elsewhere, in more recent decades, as new patterns of economic migration seem to be emerging, migrants have become more transitory and more diverse not only in terms of their origins, but also in their motives, intentions and statuses within destination countries (Vertovec 2007). In the immediate post-war era in Britain, the majority of economic migrants came to stay. They left their home villages, towns and cities – in the Caribbean, the Punjab, or East Africa – to move to the UK on a permanent basis. Despite journeys home for holidays, for key family events such as births, marriages or deaths, most of the migrants in the earlier post-war decades lived for their entire post-migration lives in the UK, with the exception of small numbers who returned to their country of origin on retirement. In the last three decades, however, the numbers of people leaving the UK have risen from less than 70,000 each year to almost 200,000 by 2006, although not all these leavers were previous in-migrants and some are British-born people moving for work or on retirement. Nevertheless, more people arrived in the UK over these years than left, as in-migration accelerated especially from the early 1990s onwards.

It seems clear, however, that in-migrants are less likely to stay permanently than in previous decades. Only a quarter of the migrants who entered the UK in 1998 were still here ten years later (Finch et al. 2009). In part this is explained by the rising numbers of young, single migrants from within the European Union who came to the UK after EU expansion in 2004 permitted them to work in the expanded Union. Initially Britain was one of only three old member states that opened their borders to labour migrants, although other countries have now done so, and as a consequence larger than expected numbers of young migrants moved to the UK in the early years after accession. However, wider access to labour markets and the effects of economic recession in Western Europe after 2007 (Rogers 2009) have had an impact on recent numbers of both entrants and leavers, increasing the movement between countries within, and beyond, the EU.

Moving across geographical space to seek work elsewhere is, then, one of the key defining characteristics of the twenty-first century, so far. Globally it was estimated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that in 2005/6, one in ten workers was employed outside the country of their birth – an estimated million people. These figures are, of course, merely best

estimates as both migration and employment records are notoriously unreliable, especially the former. Many movements across national boundaries simply are not recorded as borders are porous or as migrants take evasive action to avoid being captured in official statistics. Many countries, where in-migration records are reasonably reliable, may not collect the figures of leavers with much enthusiasm. Some of the in-migrants may overstay their welcome and others may not have entered legally, and so both groups may be engaged in waged work outside the formal mechanisms of the labour market.

At the start of the twenty-first century, there were almost equal numbers of men and women among the official figures for transnational migrants (IOM 2008), although according to United Nations statistics, there were more women than men among the recent migrants in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Oceania and the former USSR (Koser 2007: 6–7). This transformation in the gender composition of transnational migrants is the subject here, associated with a parallel transformation in the structure of the labour market and the division of labour in the more affluent countries of the world that attract growing numbers of women migrants. Migration often challenges and recuts older divisions based on gender, as well as on class and ethnicity (Andall 2003; Palmamy et al. 2010). For many migrants, moving in search of work involves downward social mobility as qualifications and skills may not be recognised. Migrants from middle-class backgrounds may find their insertion into the class structure in the UK problematic as they are able to find only low(er)-status work. They may experience anxiety as previous ideas of status and authority are challenged by the hierarchical structure of the labour market and by racialised discrimination. Gendered notions of authority may also be challenged as women assert their growing independence based on new expectations about women's and men's rights and obligations in host societies, leading to new cleavages and divisions within migrant populations as well as between different migrant groups and between migrants and 'local' populations.

Transforming Lives

These questions about the transformation of identities as women move across national borders and enter the labour market are the focus of this book. At its heart are the lives of women migrants, born outside the UK but who moved there in the decades after the Second World War from a variety of countries to create a better life for themselves and their families. Some women came alone, others as single women but as part of a family or household that moved together, and others came either to marry or as already married women. All of them worked for wages for large parts of their lives, in a range of different types of jobs in different parts of the UK, becoming

a crucial part of the workforce in female-dominated sectors of the British economy. The main focus of the succeeding chapters is the waged work undertaken by these women migrants – the types of jobs they undertook as the British economy changed from one dominated by manufacturing industries employing mainly men to a service-dominated economy in which almost equal numbers of men and women are in waged employment. In Part One I explore ways of theorising the connections between employment, migration and identity, and in Part Two the focus is on the daily working lives of migrant women across six post-war decades.

Over these decades, not only the types of jobs changed but also the ways in which people were attached to the labour market became more varied. New forms of contracts, shift work, casual employment, short hours or long hours and overtime all became more common and, at the same time, the workforce itself became more diverse, as more women, more people born outside the UK, older workers, students and schoolchildren all worked for wages (McDowell 2009). Part of this growing diversity is reflected in the origins of the women migrants who became part of the British labour market in growing numbers after the end of the Second World War. In the second part of the book, I explore the nature of the UK labour market through the eyes of migrant women. I investigate the jobs that women undertake, and the reasons why class, colour, gender and ethnicity intersect in particular ways at different times in the UK, to produce a gender division of labour in which migrant women often, but by no means always, find themselves restricted to some of the lowest-status and poorest-paid jobs in the UK economy. The voices of women migrants across sixty post-war years echo through the pages, as they reflect on their lives in the UK in their own words. It is interesting to hear the similarities and continuities of their labour market experiences, despite the differences among women migrants and in the jobs they undertook over the years. Some of these women are now elderly – the oldest were over 75 when I talked to them. Others were much younger, still in their teens and twenties. What unites them is their history of migration and employment.

The focus on women reveals the ways in which gender operates as both a normative and regulatory device in the sphere of production and the world of waged labour. Notions of appropriate work for men and women affect both the nature and distribution of jobs and opportunities between the sexes, as well as men's and women's aspirations. Accepted versions of masculinity and manliness, ideas about appropriate femininity, and about respectability at different times and in particular places influence definitions of what sorts of work tasks are appropriate to expect or allow women and men to do in the labour market. Laws to regulate different types of waged work and the hours during which it is undertaken also act to reinforce gendered assumptions, to restrict women to particular tasks and sometimes to reinforce their responsibilities for family life and caring for others.

These ideas of appropriateness run through the education system too, separating women from men even before their search for waged work, and have a lasting impact on wages and living standards through the ideology of the male breadwinner, which assumes that a man supports a household whereas a woman works for 'extras'. These normative assumptions and gendered practices also influence class structures and political actions. For many years, for example, the trade union movement regarded women as in competition with men as cheap labour and failed to support their demands (Campbell 1984; Milkman 1987, 2006). Over time, however, the norms and values that structure gender divisions of labour in the UK have changed. Assumptions about women's place both in the labour market and in society more widely have altered radically over the sixty years at issue here. There has been a dramatic transformation in women's participation in paid work across the world, including in the UK, altering social relations between women, men and children and placing the individual rather than the family at the heart of employment policy.

When migrant women, many of them women of colour, become the particular focus, the ways in which gender and class are refracted through ethnicity, and racialised assumptions about the attributes and talents of particular women, also become clear. The ways in which labour markets work to produce a hierarchy of both desirability and legitimacy are revealed, as potential employees are allocated particular places in the division of labour through systems of regulation, assessments of skills and cultural assumptions about the appropriateness of particularly embodied individuals for different types of work. Migrant women often find themselves at the bottom of these hierarchies, confined by the dual operation of what Roediger (1991) termed the wages of whiteness and Kessler-Harris (2007) the wages of a normative masculinity. Their intersection excludes women of colour from more privileged and better-paid positions. Through the eyes of migrant women, the ways in which notions of respectability, of inclusion and exclusion, of home and homeland, of belonging, and Britishness, as well as the changing hopes and fears of newcomers, are made visible.

The focus on migrant women means that the significance of class, ethnicity and culture, as well as gender, is also revealed. The consciousness and identity of migrant workers are rooted not only in the traditions and practices of the UK but also in their location in other sets of relations and cultural practices. The major flows of people into the UK over the last half-century reflect its imperial history, as I shall show in later chapters, raising complex issues about belonging to Britain, about skin colour and language, about racism and inequality. Many of the post-imperial migrants came to the UK as citizens, but others came as what used to be termed in official discourse 'aliens', with little knowledge of the country and fewer rights. The family and community lives of all these migrants are often a significant part of the ways in which they respond to the challenges faced by finding work

and settling into new patterns of living. For some of the women in this book, community support became a crucial part of their participation in industrial action. For others, more personal networks of help within the family from mothers and mothers-in-law or from a wider circle of relatives or friends were the only way in which they were able to participate in the labour force on a continuous basis for many years.

As well as their long employment histories, many of these women became mothers. Over the sixty years there has been a remarkable transformation in ideologies of femininity, domesticity and, especially, maternity. In the early part of the period it was the expectation that women would leave the labour market when their children were young, or at the most work in a part-time capacity. Their domestic labour was supported by the notion of the male breadwinner wage, and married women were assumed, in the social security and tax systems, to be the dependents of men. Migrant women, however, flouted this assumption, largely on the basis of economic necessity. By the end of the century, however, expectations had changed. Not only had women's overall participation in the labour market grown through gradual and then more rapid rates of increase over the intervening fifty years, but that for married women with children had expanded most rapidly. Further, women's financial and emotional dependence on men had been challenged by, *inter alia*, rising rates of divorce, changes in household forms and legislation to improve the civic and labour market rights of women. In the 1990s, women's growing independence was taken for granted in changes in the welfare state that emphasised the rights and duties of the individual rather than mutual household obligations and joint provision. All women, whatever their familial obligations and marital status, were expected to enter employment, marking a hugely significant shift in the state recognition of and support for the duties of motherhood and transforming the working lives of migrant women into the norm rather than the exception.

The next chapter provides the theoretical and methodological framework for thinking through these questions about and connections between gender, migration and employment. In chapter 2, I outline the key bodies of theory that together provided the questions about migration explored in the interviews, and explain how the stories about migrant women's working lives were collected. I also explore arguments in feminist theory about the necessity of theoretical complexity in understanding the intersections of class, gender and ethnicity in the labour market. Finally, in the third chapter in Part One, I place the women who came to the UK over the sixty years since the Second World War in their historical and geographical context, outlining the main legislative changes that permitted the entry of women from some parts of the world while excluding others, and the ways in which the labour market operated to segregate women from different places with different social characteristics into particular jobs and occupations. The approach in this chapter is a broad-brush one – the details of particular jobs

and different localities are found in the chapters in Part Two of the book, which focus on specific periods of time and different types of waged work undertaken by women migrants across the second half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium.

Ordinary Lives

The six decades since the end of the Second World War have been ones of significant social and economic change, transforming the lives of ordinary women. Thirty years ago, Elizabeth Roberts (1984) published a book with somewhat similar aims to this one. Her focus was the lives of working-class women during the sixty years before the Second World War. The women she interviewed were, she argued, 'ordinary women in the sense that very few of them achieved even a small degree of public prominence, but they were truly remarkable in the extent of their real achievements' (p. 1). The women in this book are equally ordinary but also remarkable, perhaps even more so than the women Roberts interviewed as all of them have made a life in Britain after long-distance migrations. For the 'ordinary women' in Roberts' book, family life was at the heart of all that they did: they managed often small budgets, gave birth to and brought up often large families, supported friends and neighbours, and worked for wages, typically on a casual basis. Between the 1880s and the end of the 1930s, only a third of women of working age were in employment, and marriage and children often resulted in withdrawal from the labour market. And the women in Roberts' study spent most of their lives in a tightly defined geographical locality.

In the next sixty years, however, women, especially women with children, joined the labour force in growing numbers. For 'ordinary women', the negotiation of family responsibilities, at the same time as they struggled with the demands of waged work, became a more central part of their lives. In 1945, as this book opens where Roberts' book ended, many, although not all, British-born women withdrew from the labour force when they had children, but women who came to the UK after the war seldom had this option. Their wages were a crucial part of household budgets and for some migrants, including the women refugees from post-war Europe who came to Britain between 1946 and 1950, employment was a condition of their entry.

Over the next decades, non-British-born women typically had higher labour market participation rates than British-born women. Women from the Caribbean, for example, were, in the 1950s and 1960s, more likely to work for wages than 'white' British women, although women from the former Baltic Republics also had high rates of labour market participation and were more likely to be in full-time employment than the British women in the labour force. When the numbers of women migrants from elsewhere

in the post-colonial world came to the UK in growing numbers – women from South Asia and East Africa, for example – religious beliefs intersected with economic necessity and their labour force participation rates were more variable than those for women who came before them.

As the twentieth century moved towards its end, in-migration became both more common and more varied as women from a diverse range of origin countries moved to the UK and into different types of jobs. It is this story of growing diversity that is told here through the voices of women migrants.

A Recent History: The Post-war Era

Writing a history of women's changing lives – even the sort that ends in the contemporary period – is never straightforward. There is seldom a clear and uncontested reason for choosing a particular periodisation, although the rise and fall of governments or rulers often mark the beginnings and ends of a regime, and large-scale wars are also a convenient place to start or stop. The length of a century or a decade seems an obvious stretch of time to explore, although as Hobsbawm (1994) noted, the 100 years of a century too often is an arbitrary span of time. In his influential study of the twentieth century, *The Age of Extremes*, he chose to begin and end with a revolution. He assessed the key political changes in what he termed the short twentieth century, from the Russian Revolution in 1917 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. I too have defined a period through political events: the sixty years from the end of the Second World War to the significant extension of the European Union in 2004 and 2007. The year 1945 saw the end of a major war and the beginnings of post-war reconstruction, the origins of cooperation between Western European countries that resulted in the foundation of the European Union, and a Cold War that divided the East from the West for several decades. Almost sixty years later, large parts of former Eastern Europe moved into the heart of the Union.

In 1945, a population of East European refugees – from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine and the Baltic States – anxious to escape the dominance of the USSR, settled in the UK. They were joined sixty years later by economic migrants from the same parts of the world, whose migration was made possible by the freedom of movement resulting from both the fall of the USSR and EU expansion. Among these migrants were women from Latvia, with whom the story of post-war migration told here begins and ends, even though these Baltic migrants were little more than a footnote in the larger sweep of Britain's migration history. In the intervening period, Britain's imperial history was the key factor influencing migratory movements. Most of the migrants came to work, hoping for a higher standard of living than they expected if they remained in their countries of origin. They

settled in Britain's major towns and cities, especially those of the south-east and the Midlands, where visible concentrations of migrant workers became part of the labour force, in Greater London, Birmingham and Manchester, as well as in the industrial towns of the north of England (Dorling and Thomas 2004).

The second reason for focusing on the second half of the twentieth century is that these were the years when the UK labour market changed its shape and character in remarkable ways. The economy was transformed from a predominantly manufacturing-based employment structure in which men were the main workers into a service-dominated economy where almost equal numbers of men and women participated in waged work, albeit on different terms and conditions. In 1955, ten years into this narrative of post-war change, a larger proportion of the employed population than ever before or since (almost 55 per cent) was employed in manufacturing industries and about one-third of all women of working age (then 16–60) were in employment. By 2007, women's lives changed significantly as employment opportunities for women increased. More and more women, both 'locals' and migrants, were recruited for all sorts of jobs in a service-based economy. Almost 13 million women were in employment in 2007, almost the same number as men. The service economy to which they were recruited is a more polarised economy than in earlier decades as both the top end and bottom end of the labour market, in terms of status and rates of pay, have expanded. At the top end, new jobs involving informational or cognitive labour have grown, where products are often immaterial. At the bottom end the work is more physical and embodied, sometimes termed emotional labour (Hochschild 1983, 2003), typically involving caring for the bodies of others, both sick and well bodies, in health care, elder care, and leisure industries. In the earlier post-war decades, women migrants worked in manufacturing as well as in service industries, initially as part of the post-war reconstruction effort. They found jobs in, for example, the textile industry and transport as well as in the new National Health Service, and later in the assembly of white goods and other consumer durables, including cars.

A third and more personal reason for writing about these years is that they coincide almost exactly with my own lifetime. As Hobsbawm (1994) also noted, there is something particularly interesting about writing the history of a period in which the historian has been both a participant and observer. As he suggested, 'nobody can write the history of the twentieth century like that of any other era, if only because nobody can write about his or her lifetime as one can (and must) write about a period known only from the outside, at second- or third-hand, from the sources of the period or the works of later historians' (p. ix). Working in the present means that ordinary women are able to tell their own stories, which scholars are able to refract through and test against their own lives and family memories.

My own family history involved migration, my mother worked for wages most of her married life and my school life and academic career have coincided with all but fifteen of the years discussed here. My academic career has also coincided with the years in which feminist research began to have an impact on the social sciences in the UK, challenging the assumptions and theoretical perspectives of geographers and others interested in labour market change.

The research for this book grew from the desire to combine more recent interest in labour geographies with the longer-standing (but even so relatively recent) feminist work in geography and in the other social science disciplines. It is now reasonably widely accepted that employment relations are gendered: that the nature of work, who does it, the processes involved and the institutions that regulate the labour market are imbued with gendered assumptions, practices and cultures that affect whether men and women do particular types of jobs, as well as how well rewarded they are for their labours, both in terms of money and social status. Even economists (although not all of them) now accept the notion of 'identity economics' (Akerlof and Kranton 2010), accepting that social identities shape employment, wages and well-being. And yet, although labour geography and feminism ought to mutually inform each other, if not yet combine in a seamless whole, those of us who identify with this integrated enterprise habitually find ourselves subject to one label or the other, often dependent on the gender of the scholar. Here, I want to enthusiastically embrace both identifiers and demonstrate the rich possibilities of gendered labour geographies, following the example of Alice Kessler-Harris (2007) in her fine demonstration of how to do gendered labour history in an intellectually challenging way.

My initial interest in migrants and the sorts of work they do was, however, unmarked by feminism, as it was a study of male workers from Eastern Europe in the steel industry in Corby New Town undertaken in 1970. It was to be many years before I returned to this same group of post-war migrants, and this time to the women who came to the UK in the early post-war years. In the early 2000s I began a research project, focusing specifically on the women who came to the UK as 'European Volunteer Workers' (EVWs). These women were recruited in displaced persons camps in Germany by the British Government between 1946 and 1950 to meet the shortages in female-dominated sectors in Britain as British women returned to the home in significant numbers (McDowell 2005). I interviewed 25 by then elderly women whose lives had been utterly transformed by war and migration and became fascinated by the stories of displacement and adaptation that they shared with me. I began to wonder how their lives compared with those of other migrants from different societies who came to Britain in different circumstances, also looking for work but propelled by different reasons, economic hardship rather than war, ambition perhaps rather than necessity.

My interest in the connection between migration, work and gender relations was strengthened by a later study of migrant workers in the hospitality sector and the health service in the years immediately after the 2004 expansion of the European Union (McDowell et al. 2007). In that work, I talked to women, many of them from the same countries as the EVWs sixty years earlier, but whose lives, opportunities and plans were quite different. These younger women were not stateless like their grandmothers' generation and had come to Britain not intending to stay but usually for a temporary period to improve their English or save money for further travels or to return home. These two generations of migrants were white-skinned Europeans whose experiences of discrimination were different from those of migrants from what was euphemistically termed the New Commonwealth in official statistics, people from the Caribbean and South Asia, who dominated the migratory flows in the decades between the two European migrations, as well as from skilled migrants from the Old Commonwealth, from Australasia and Canada (and from the USA), whose numbers grew as the British economy expanded in the post-war decades. And so I decided to write a history of post-war migration into the UK through the lens of women's lives, beginning in 1945 and ending in 2007, which coincided with the second of two expansions of the European Union in the first decade of the 2000s and with the start of the financial crisis and economic austerity which is, once again, this time for the worse, altering opportunities for many women in Britain.

The symmetry of starting and ending with women whose lives were radically transformed by the remarkable transitions connected to the expanding and declining power of the USSR is satisfying but the economic logic is also sound. The end of 2007 saw the beginning of a period of recession and austerity unmatched since the 1930s, whereas the years in between, despite minor crises and periods of stalled growth and rising unemployment, were ones of rising living standards and new opportunities. The economy expanded, more people had waged work and some degree of financial security, and people's horizons expanded as travel became easier and new borders were crossed. New states emerged across the period as independence movements in South Asia and in Africa affected Britain's colonial subjects and later as the fall of the Communist empire led to new patterns of movement. Over the sixty years considered here, Britain moved from an austere post-war society and economy dominated by shortages and, for many, poor living conditions, through the 'golden' years of post-war expansion, into a consumer society in which desire rather than need stimulated economic expansion. Over the same decades the population grew, moved south, bought houses in growing numbers and became more ethnically diverse as growing numbers of people decided that their futures lay in the UK rather than in their country of birth.

The severe economic recession from 2007 onwards whose origins lay in a financial crisis originating in the housing market came as a considerable

shock to popular assumptions that economic growth and prosperity were the normal course of events. This tone of optimism about the period until 2007 is not to deny that for many life was difficult and that British society, especially in the earlier post-war decades, was one in which many newcomers found closed to alternative ways of living and to people who did not resemble the majority. The exciting growth of a post-colonial literary tradition, as well as official statistics and a wealth of research evidence – some of which I draw on in later chapters – are ample testimony to the sorts of inequalities that marked British society in these years. Having the start and the end of the book, with the valuable assistance of several talented young scholars, I then spent several years interviewing women from a wide range of different places who came to the UK between the Latvian women in the 1940s and the women from the same part of the world in the 2000s. Those readers anxious to hear the voices of migrant women might turn now to the five chapters in Part Two and return to the next two chapters after reading them. But chapters 2 and 3 are important as they lay out the theoretical bones of the study and illustrate why I decided to ask the sorts of questions that I did. The answers, however, were often surprising.

Note

- 1 Eight states in Eastern Europe (known as the Accession 8 or A8 states) acceded to the EU in 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, plus Cyprus and Malta. Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007.