

Migrant Workers and the north of Ireland: between neo-liberalism and sectarianism

Authors: Brian Garvey and Paul Stewart

Corresponding author: Paul. Stewart

paul.stewart.100@strath.ac.uk

Abstract

In 1998, the north of Ireland emerged from a protracted civil insurgency sustained by a socio-political infrastructure comprising an expanded Keynesian welfare state and a developing neo-liberal economy. This provided the context for significant migration to the North after 2004. While research highlights migrant experiences not dissimilar to those in other parts of the UK and Ireland after 2004 it also suggests that a number of reported experiences result from the reproduction of one aspect of a new sectarianism dispensation. Traditional sectarianism, while typically sustaining differential access to labour markets and other resources according to socio-economic advantage, was remade in the 1998 ‘peace-settlement’: a *new* sectarianism was institutionalised. While not impacting on all migrants, neo-sectarianism now encounters neo-liberalism, the out-workings of which do impact on many. Moreover, experiences of some reveal important and so far unreported features of an accommodation between agent-beneficiaries of the ‘peace-settlement’ and neo-liberalism.

Key words: Migrant workers north of Ireland, neo-liberalism, resistances, traditional sectarianism-neo-sectarianism, solidarities

Introduction

This study considers migration to the north of Ireland¹, subject to post conflict restructuring that depended upon both EU and UK Keynesian support for new political structures, and a flush of devolved powers within a British administration, more typical of the neoliberal project undertaken by successive UK governments since 1979. Macro level policy change at the European level in 2004 extending the EU (A8 accession states) coincided with a vibrant north of Ireland economy, buoyed by significant public expenditure, that was in contrast to a rise in neo-liberal work and employment regimes contributing to the flight of labour from CEE countries (Ciupijus, 2011). This resulted in the region exhibiting one of the UK’s

highest concentrations of ‘new’ migrant workers from EU countries, although the overall share of migrant workers remains relatively low (DEL, 2009).

Uncovering what was common and particular in the experiences of ‘first generation’ migrants arriving to a society characterised as comprising labour markets, living spaces and political-spatial relationships premised around two central, determinate confessional identities (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006; McVeigh, 2007) was the aim of this study. The article will seek an explanation for the link between the ‘typical’ (common migrant labour market and other experiences) and the ‘particular’ (a new sectarianism, a feature of the settlement known as the 1998 Good Friday Agreement-GFA). The exemplary case of Northern-Recycling illustrates one strand in the reproduction of the new sectarianism. These themes will be explored through the prism of the experiences of migrant workers involved as active subjects in this study. The article explores their perceptions of; coming to the north of Ireland and low paid or precarious work; community and social life; and finally, their individual or collective strategies of resilience or resistance.

Conducted over eight months in 2010, the research methodology facilitated an important depth of investigation into relations in work and life as experienced by these precarious workers encountering a society emerging from civil conflict. Moreover, they settled into a society with already existing sets of social exclusions in which ‘the community’ is a pervasive discourse over-spilling into the workplace. Return interviews were conducted in 2012 as the north faced public spending cuts and record job losses amid a European-wide recession.

The article begins with a discussion of relevant studies of migration and particularly those that have linked migration to low paid work in the UK under neoliberal labour market deregulation. This is followed by a brief summary of the political economy of the north of Ireland, necessary for understanding subsequent migrant views of their community, social and working lives. A methodology section is followed by the presentation of the research results. The final discussion considers the way in which migrants’ experiences of the north of Ireland also reveal the extent and character of the new sectarian society

Migration, neoliberalism and divisions of labour

In their recent overview of the academic literature on migration, Audebert and Dorai (2010) highlight the concepts of cosmopolitanism, hybridity and deterritorialisation that became prominent in studies describing the effects of border crossing during the neoliberal period. In the era of the current phase of globalisation, borders have become more porous to commercial and financial transactions but also and significantly, to people. The latter was particularly marked after the 1990s and studies of migration proliferated in which the world's cities were presented as the apex of consequent economic and cultural transformation. New cosmopolitan identities are being forged across lines of class and ethnicity (Sassen, 2001; Vertovec, 2006; Datta, 2009) and new belongings are engendered in response to new social constructions (Ma Mung, 1992; Bruneau, 1994; Ong, 1999; Glick Schiller et al., 1992). These approaches emphasise a fluidity of social processes, in common with financial transactions and communication technologies, across spatial and political boundaries (Papastergiadis, 2000). It has been argued, however, that these appear to be more consistent with ideological constructions of globalisation than the actual outworking of migration linked to neoliberalism in specific locations (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2004). While acknowledging that homogeneity was not the outcome of new encounters across borders (Audebert and Dorai, 2010), the enthusiastic focus on the cultural representations in much of their account arguably clouded a more sober reflection on stratified state regulation of mobility (McDowell et al., 2009), local resistance to integration (Chalcraft 2007), or the material and hierarchical divisions within class formations that have accompanied border-crossing in the neoliberal world (Swyngedouw, 2004). Furthermore, despite the plethora of studies many continue to focus on the challenges of migration from the perspective of receiving societies (Sayad, 1999).

Despite the extensive political, economic and social restructuring that has been key to the roll out of neoliberalism (Huws, 2007; Harvey, 2010), the study of how migrant experiences are affected by pre-existing social constructions in the specific places to which they move remains underdeveloped. This is a significant area for research given that, i) the neoliberal project creates new forms of insecurity and precarity and, ii) that these may encourage a (re)formation of non-class forms of identity and the clinging to national or ethno-identity distinctions in order to reaffirm a sense of belonging or maintain relative advantage (Chalcraft, 2007; Munck, 2010) .

Research in the service sector of the London economy has developed greater understanding of the first of these phenomena by linking migration to a growth in low paid, precarious work in a deregulated UK labour market. May et al. (2007), McDonnell et al. (2009) and Wills et al. (2009) focus on how low paid work is an entrance to the labour market for many new workers, particularly after the 2004 expansion of EU borders. Europeans were shown to be favoured over migrant workers from other nationalities, who were disadvantaged by racialised state immigration policy and employer prejudice, forming distinct migrant divisions of labour. However, there are particular limitations to these studies that emphasise the diversity of the workforce, the competition for poorly paid jobs between ethnicities and restricted mobility of workers in these occupations. For example, while a survey of cleaners at Canary Wharf included British born workers (Wills et al. 2009) and some reference is made to racial discrimination being a factor in limiting the future prospects of key interviewees (McDowell et al., 2009; Wills et al., 2009), there is less focus upon the broader social structures in which workers are embedded and how these impact on their non-work life and work experiences. In the research reported here, the curiosity is that of the impact of, inter alia, sectarian forms of exclusions. Second, while these studies provide valuable insights, both acknowledge limitations in the methodological approach that relied firmly on employer engagement: issues of trust arise between interviewers and participants with a less than positive experience of interviews, employees declined to engage, perhaps out of fear for their job. It is also difficult not to consider that respondents' favourable opinions of their work and employer, often in stark contrast to their complaints about work colleagues, are not influenced by interviews held in the workplace. The third, rather obvious point is that in studies of low paid and precarious work, employers overseeing particularly exploitative and precarious employment are unlikely to co-operate.

Similar drawbacks are evident in studies that have examined work and migration in the north of Ireland. Published work deriving from interviews has tended to rely on links with individuals tied into existing networks established by NGOs and trade unions (Jarman, 2004; 2006; McVeigh op cit). These studies arguably feature a disproportionately high number of 'supported', English speaking, work secure and trade union protected migrant workers (inter alia, Bell et al., 2004). Furthermore, workplace studies in which migrant workers feature prominently are often conducted in isolation from the reproduction of sectarian social and employment relations. (See inter alia, Potter and Hamilton, 2014 who consider the plight of

migrant workers without any engagement with the political economy of sectarianism such that the situation facing migrants in the north of Ireland can be discussed as if the North were like any other part of the UK). Hence these commonly reveal features of lived experience not dissimilar to that of migrants elsewhere in the UK and the Republic of Ireland (Lentin, 2009) and underplay the link between migrants' experiences and the reproduction of sectarianism in social, economic, cultural and political spheres. The next section provides an overview of the political-economic context of the North to which migrants arrived in notable numbers after 2004.

Neo-liberalism and the state of Northern Ireland

The post-Second World War economic and political development of the Northern Ireland state, borne in conflict in 1921, can be summarised in two distinct phases: the first beginning after 1945 was marked by the adaptation of British Keynesian state strategies that sat, antagonistically, alongside the state's repressive apparatuses founded upon social and economic exclusion of northern Irish Catholics from the state's dominant institutions (O'Dowd *et al.*, 1980; Coulter and Murray, 2008). The discrimination was most keenly felt in housing allocation and employment and gave rise to the civil rights movement, the repression of which fed a conflict that was to last 35 years, would intensify housing and work segregation, and was remarkably concentrated geographically.

The ceasefire of 1994 paved the way for the 1998 GFA which marked the beginning of the second phase of the development of the North in which the UK government extended Keynesianism to maintain employment and quell unrest amidst political and economic instability while attempting to attract foreign investment through new bodies such as Invest NI. The accommodation of key social actors replaced repression and sectarian political structures became institutionalised in the state.

Far from depending upon Catholic exclusion and subordination these structures rely, ironically, upon the subordination-by-inclusion of both Protestant and Catholic communities under the aegis of 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' political identities. This is codified in the d'Hondt method for the distribution of political power and patronage in the Stormont Assembly. The functioning of the Assembly, inscribed in the socio-political settlement, has depended upon the creation and co-operation of a new political class (Shirlow and Murtagh,

2007) with leverage over the targeted disbursement of state (EU, UK and Republic of Ireland) funding providing stability for the peace settlement. The European Union Special Peace Programme for Northern Ireland has allocated some €1995 million (EU component €1335 million) in order to, “reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society [...] by assisting operations and projects which help to reconcile communities” (SEUPB, 2012). By 2003 a total of 61 political ex-prisoner groups and a further 29 affiliated projects received €9.2 million from the EU peace funds (Shirlow *et al.*, 2005) reflecting both the high percentage of the population who are politically motivated ex-prisoners (14-31% of the male population; Jamieson *et al.*, 2010) and, by offering a stake in the new dispensation, political interest in the survival of the ‘peace process’ (McKeever and O’Rawe 2007).

By 2008, 25,000 public sector jobs had been created since the GFA and the region was enjoying the greatest increase in employment in the UK, with 10,000 new jobs per year created (DEL, 2009). However, despite public expenditure that was until recently well in excess of the rest of the UK, inequality and spatial disadvantage have been reproduced rather than addressed and economic inactivity levels in certain working class neighborhoods remain higher than any other UK region. Recent retrenchment in welfare including community sector cuts has led to record job losses. Unemployment figures more than doubled during 2008-2010 (from 25,000 to 56,000) while youth unemployment is the highest in UK at 22.3% (DETI, 2013; when the GFA was signed in 1998 it was 9.6%). Racially motivated attacks also increased from 2004 to 2009 although the subsequent trend has been downward (NICEM, 2013). In May-August 2012 many of the interviewed migrant workers were revisited and their accounts provide telling stories of dynamic relations over time in work and the ‘community’.

The availability of low cost housing, particularly in Protestant working class areas where people, whenever possible, have tended to leave (NIACRO, 2008), and proximity to labour intensive, low wage workplaces (and hospitals) meant these neighbourhoods also received many of the new migrants and their families. Before considering the research results the article discusses the participative methodology chosen as the basis of the research.

Methodology

The active research nature of this project placed participants at the centre of a common effort to “understand the reality which we seek to transform” (Freire, 2005). Rather than being the ‘object’ of research, (Datta, 2009; De Tona and Lentin, 2011) participants are subjects in extending knowledge of her or his own experience and through the project, sharing this with other participants to overcome potentially individualised anxieties or insecurities, imagine new ways of finding community, and build networks of solidarity and resilience. With the support of a trade union with links to several employment sectors and residential communities with strong migrant worker representation, a group of 13 people from eight nationalities attended a workshop in Armagh City in 1 2010.

The research focus, methodology and outcomes of what became the Migrant Workers’ Research Network (MWRN) were agreed while individuals’ contributions to the study design, their participation in the research and its delivery were invited. Significant time was spent discussing the nature of research and the most effective way to engage migrant workers in precarious employment. Under the themes of migration, work, family and community life participants worked in groups of four devising questions they felt to be relevant to migrant workers and their families. These were summarised in a set of final questions, circulated to all for approval and formed the basis for semi structured interviews. People agreed to work in pairs to set up two to four focus groups engaging five to six participants each with an experience of migration and precarious employment in the North. Small focus groups of peers were chosen as the group felt that these could provide a level of comfort among participants discussing sensitive issues of work and life and with the hope that more vocal participants might encourage conversation with others on issues that might otherwise be ignored. One of two lead researchers was available for support for each meeting. The workshop group decided that individuals whose stories were particularly representative or poignant would be invited for a more detailed interview and would be, with agreement, filmed². Film was chosen as a way to present given situations and pose problems to an audience with the intent of prompting discussion with people in similar circumstances, neighbourhoods or workplaces with a view to a collective search for solutions (Solorzano, 1989). In doing so the supposition was that participants’ experiences and ideas might reflect a reclamation of notions of citizenship, identity and rights (Standing, 2009) including the challenges to contemporary labourist models of social reproduction (Wills et al., 2009; Harvey, 2010)

Following the preferred non-mainstream approach to conventional labour and voluntary sector institutions, participants in MWRN, by contrast, used the snowball technique to reach precarious workers outside well-established, visible networks. An example of the success of the approach was the extended involvement of the initial focus group participants. They subsequently joined the advisory group while setting up focus groups themselves, leading the questions in these and later presenting the research outcomes (Garvey, et al., 2010) while establishing a network of active participants. Moreover, the project offered space for voices of life experiences, including in instances where there were significant levels of violence, aside from the dominant ('Protestant-Catholic') post-conflict discourse prevalent in the North.

Over a period of eight months, 92 people, from Liberia, Nigeria, Spain, Ghana, Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Brazil, Portugal, Czech Republic, Cameroon and Slovakia participated in focus group sessions held in cafes, community centres, fast food car parks, kitchens and living rooms. Eight people provided in depth interviews for a film that has been shown in four communities thus opening dialogue between the participants and the academy, the community, labour organisers and policy makers. Between May and July 2012, 20 of the original 92 participants were re-interviewed regarding notable changes to their work and community experiences and thoughts about the future, particularly in relation to the changed economic environment. This permitted a temporal analysis of the changing dynamics of many migrants' workplace and living-spatial relations uncovering important challenges both for governance in the North and for the academy and social organisations contending with migration in the current phase of neo-liberalism.

Results

Coming to the north of Ireland and low paid and precarious work

For more than eighty years labour market migration was predominantly that of emigration from the north of Ireland to elsewhere in the UK and Britain's other former colonies. The period of conflict lasting 35 years entrenched a remarkable lack of ethnic diversity; an economy comprised labour markets and political-spatial relationships premised upon socio-political divisions around two central, determinate confessional identities and habitation

boundaries (Maguire, 1988; Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006; McVeigh, 2007). This is crucial to understanding migrant worker experiences at work, home and in the community.

After 2004 European enlargement the local labour market expanded with the arrival of 21-25,000 migrants from the new EU countries, many of whom found employment in low wage, unregulated sectors. The concentration of migrant workers in low-skill-low wage jobs outside the public sector, despite their relatively high levels of education, is consistent with findings across the UK (ONS/ DETI, 2009). They have been seeking employment in a society where since 2008 significant public sector retrenchment has seen cuts to a range of local community, post conflict-resolution programmes accounting for the employment of up to 10,000 workers. Set against this background, it is not always obvious what is specific about the experience of migration to the North. As Wilhelmas' (Lithuania) suggests,

I remember I was working 120 hours in one week, and 44 hours non-stop, non-stop! It was like, work home, sleep, work, home sleep.

And Inga's (Lithuania) experience testifies to the 'exploitation' and 'unconditional' offer of employment facing new migrants in many cases in the North and elsewhere in the British Isles; 'We were told we had to sign a form if we wanted to work here'.

As in many other places, agencies, whether recruiting in the workers' country of origin or locally in the North, are a major factor in the migrant's experience,

My first job was through an agency, in Armagh and Dungannon, anywhere. [...] But [...]my agency boss told me I can't go because there was some small writing in my contract with the agency that when I finish the work then the company must pay the agency some money for me, because of something I had signed...I didn't have translator when I signed this [...]. Now I'm Bank staff but we don't have contract hours [...]. I get holiday pay based on the hours of work, but I don't know if I get maternity pay. (Paulena, Poland)

This febrile situation was a common experience for many new migrant workers revealing a context of insecurity: labour contract precarity and bullying and racist labour conditions,

I hear people complaining Black people are taking "our jobs" [...] when I came here there were jobs that local people did not want to do like cleaning, care assistants. [...]I

used to work in “I” cleaning company but I left because the girl I worked with was very abusive, she used to say “you come to work here and you think this is your country, this is not your country”. (Sherley, Liberia)

While these accounts provide us with insight into initial experiences of ‘coming here’ to work in low paid occupations, employment, though an encounter involving broader aspects of acceptance, struggle and mutual support, can also involve isolation. Marta:

At work no one talks to us. It’s hard to get information. When I came [...] I didn’t know how to do better, today I still don’t know, nobody wants to tell you.

Community and social life

In the north of Ireland, already existing sectarianism gives the experience of migration an added piquancy. This sectarianism underpins, at the same time as it refracts, experiences in determinate ways, but it is most obviously witnessed in the polarisation of living areas and social spaces that are a well documented consequence of recent conflict (inter alia Shirlow and Murtagh op cit) while of course predating the long insurgency. In the ‘post conflict’ period (post-1998-GFA) this social rigidity has been sustained through reinforcing sectarian parochialism and territoriality;

I heard yesterday a man got shot in Belfast but I think the situation is getting *better* between Catholics and Protestants ...but I was going to _____ bar, all Catholics at work were saying “oh don’t go there, its so dangerous”. (Jovita, Poland)

Jovita’s testimony points to the noise of political and community discourses that have focused on the war between two dominant communities drowning out a diversity of experience that includes hostility to migrant workers, domestic and sexual violence. (See especially, Women’s Aid NI, 2010; Jarman, 2006). Raul from Brazil was frustrated by the limiting nature of debate in the North,

You see when people here talk about ‘community’[...] it doesn’t matter if they’re loyalists, or people calling themselves Republican socialists, when they talk about my community it’s Catholic, Irish, Nationalist, or British and Protestant. It leaves no room for me.

As if to reinforce this, Andrius recounted how a group of young people when challenged by the local community leaders (who are paramilitaries) about their assault on Lithuanians claimed, “we thought we were doing our community a favour”.³ At work, this exclusion was perceived in typically racist terms and was experienced by a high percentage of focus group members.

As Kin (Nigeria) reflected,

There are work places if you are black they don't want to talk to you, they don't want to share things with you, they want you to get mad [...] to provoke you the way they look at you, [...] but if you are not strong enough they can push you to the wall.

While again, this highlights the particular form of the porosity of work-life boundaries in the North, perhaps Gedi (Lithuania) and Rosa (Spain), provide exemplary testimony,

This thing with Catholics and Protestants here is ridiculous. ..[...]. (Gedi)

Yeah, politics here are around the same topic. [...]. They've made them to be too interested in the Catholic and Protestant thing, they don't think about socialism, workers or the green movement, they are too concentrated in the Irish-British thing. When I first moved here I thought that people were very conscious of politics, because they are all day talking about it, but in the end after a while I just realized that people [...] just see what there was back in the past, they're still isolated: if you were born in a certain area you stay in a certain circle of people, they don't see any further. [...]. (Rosa).

The 'isolation', parochialism and a polarisation of social life that is observed by participants makes it difficult to initiate or sustain friendships within or outside of work:

The Irish, they are forcing us into our own corners, which is really bad (Kin)

And,

You see if you didn't go to school with them, grow up with them, it's hard to get to know them (Sherley)

This, as will be seen, has obvious consequences for attempts by migrant workers to reform their workplaces.

Individual or collective strategies of resilience or resistance.

The research suggests that migrant workers are far from passive since in a number of sectors they are actively engaged in protecting labour rights and fighting iniquitous employment conditions. For example:

I was a member of trade union in Poland - Solidarnosc. But I wasn't active. Here, life taught me to be active. We had enough of our manager. We knew what was going on and that somewhere wages were better or conditions were better. I am shop steward here. (Joanna, Poland)

And for Gosia (Poland)

There was no union at work. Nobody had contracts but we joined the union. The manager heard some people had joined and shouted and said he would find out who had joined. But after some time we told him we wanted contracts and now everything is much better [...]. We didn't lose our jobs. People shouldn't be afraid. We got contracts for [...] even the Irish, everyone, for almost 200 people.

These positive accounts are tempered by the frustrations of other workers. Finding themselves isolated at work or undermined by workplace segregation migrant workers offer a telling critique of society in the North: revealing one aspect of limits to practical workplace resistance in a sectarian society. This is important because despite the nature of the North's otherwise highly politicised 'equalities rights' culture there remain gaps more usually served by sectarian politics. One significant case from the fieldwork exemplifies the relationship between 'typical' managerial paternalism, worker competition and the new form of sectarianism whose character was described above. This complexity presents further problems for migrant workers fighting for better conditions and what makes it especially notable is that for many participants, it is local workers who have eroded workplace protection leaving many migrants exposed to unfair treatment.

Northern-Recycling (Belfast), and at Tatties-Now illustrate key features of this complexity. At Northern-Recycling, Lithuanian workers in dispute found that unionisation and improved

conditions were being undermined by local workers (who maintained separate indigenous-migrant respite rooms). In highlighting victimisation as a result of a fight for improved conditions one of the migrants argued that, ‘Only Lithuanian guys at work will support me...the others [indigenous] - no chance’ (Vaidas)

This subordination - divide-and-rule - was highlighted when a Lithuanian worker attempting to ask an Irish colleague where he kept his mobile phone (after Lithuanian workers had been told they must keep theirs in their car), was instructed “forcefully” by the manager that he was not to ask any questions of other staff. The effect of this oppressive managerial approach combined with an absence of any workplace solidarity from co-native workers soon became evident. After workers were informed that working hours were to be reduced when the company allegedly lost a contract, the union advised one Lithuanian worker to ask the employer about the status of the contract, as it appeared there had been no reduction in waste coming through the company. He laughed, “no chance, if we can’t ask a co worker where he keeps his phone, how are we going to question management?” Nevertheless, they continued with an internal grievance, protesting at two unfair dismissals. Threats made beyond the workplace were followed by attacks on two workers’ property. In the end the workers deemed it safer to withdraw from work than continue to challenge the unjust treatment.

The significance of migrant-led union organisation in spite of indigenous worker passivity, or indeed hostility, was reinforced by Lynne in Tatties-Now, a food processing plant,

At 11am the machines were stopped, all staff called to the central floor as the manager brandished a union form. He told staff he would find out who was behind this, threatened them that the company had its own solicitors and it was illegal to join a union⁴ if you had not worked for two years or more in the plant.

Nonetheless, the Lithuanian workers raised a collective grievance and gained written contracts for everyone, significantly reduced supervisor bullying while obtaining health and safety assurances. Despite the relatively large workforce (almost 90) that included a number of native workers, contact between foreign and locally born staff remains limited. Arguably this nativist depoliticisation is sustained by a wider culture of depoliticisation alluded to by Rosa (above).

Indeed, despite the optimism presented in many of these testimonies, the difficulty of forging workplace co-operation-cum-solidarities is a common theme and friendships at work, like those outside (section ii), are described more often as ‘superficial’ and difficult to sustain. This has the effect of leaving many workers in this research to reflect on the larger social structural peculiarities of the North and their impact on work, social and family life. Many realise that while they are confronting a range of subordinations at work (place) and in space (hierarchy) some of which are not uncommon to those experienced by migrants in other jurisdictions, in the North, the nature of the society riven by pre-existing forms of social subordination are sometimes made worse by the new political settlement: the political settlement (GFA) is of course also a social settlement. This settlement is allowing the main protagonists to the older conflict space to divide the spoils – the ‘price of peace’ – and as such often leaves new entrants exposed in myriad ways but especially in those SMEs controlled by ex-combatants whose reproduction of former *sectarian alliances* between management and workers is tolerated to the disadvantage of those outside the ‘hallowed ground’ of the north’s older socio-political divide. Northern-Recycling was owned, and its core (native born) workers came from, one section of the community. What is more, at the community level, where people live, the GFA has continued to reproduce relatively static spaces of habitation in which outsiders are often deemed a threat. As Shirlow and Murtagh (op cit) have demonstrated, Protestants and Catholics continue to live where they always lived (more or less) and incomers must accommodate to this (more or less). In addition, migrants will find that their often less desirable accommodation will dovetail with their lower status in job hierarchies lying outside already existing and often intergenerational and sectarian friendship networks.

So while it is important to identify the *places* where migrants work, it is nevertheless the case that where they are positioned *in* these ‘places’, matters, “migrants...are immediately identifiable. As a group they are at the bottom of every scale; wages, type of work; job security, housing, education, purchasing power” (Berger, 1975: 143). Thus one finds that where indigenous workers were present alongside migrant workers in low paid occupations often the division of labour extends to a hierarchy of roles within the workplace, as was expressed by Dan, from Romania,

I worked through an agency, in the big supermarkets. The Irish workers were full-time staff. The agency workers were Russian, Polish, Romanian, Brazilian and it was okay, but we did the heavy work and nights.

Kristina from Poland (care home agency worker) also perceived that local workers in the same occupational space seemed to be offered preferential working patterns,

This boy from Romania, he was given shifts that I don't think a local worker would be asked to do, and a Chinese girl, she was asked to work from 9pm to 11pm then 8am till late the next day.

Yet the fact of a workplace migrant division of labour in which migrants are put in their place (where they work) and space (hierarchy) tied to extra-work community associations needs to be continually highlighted. In other words, this is where work place subordination meets subordination beyond work. In the discussion and conclusion the article now assesses a number of potential socio-political reasons accounting for what could be interpreted as the paradox of migrant experience in the North. On the one hand experiences are often seen as unexceptional in comparison with migrant experiences elsewhere while on the other the distinctiveness of the North soon becomes apparent. The research suggests the latter results from the confrontation between the 1998 settlement and its outworking in the context of deregulated neo-liberal environments in which this taken-for-granted 'new' order is challenged (if not overtly) by workers otherwise marginal to the peace settlement.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research sought to address two perceived underdevelopments in recent migration literature. In the first place, by considering the role of sectarianism in the context of new patterns of globalisation (specifically neo-liberalism) the study addressed a number of aspects of the ways in which migrant experiences are affected by pre-existing social constructions. Second, and relatedly, the research explored a number of ways in which local resistance to integration recreated established patterns of paternalistic exclusion. In order to investigate these related processes, the article has considered the degree to which sectarian labour markets and spatial-living segregation in the North impact upon migrants in ways distinctive from those experienced by long term residents. The research found limited support for the thesis that exclusionary, including racist, responses to migrants in work vary significantly

from those experienced by migrants settling in other parts of the British Isles. That said, racism in the north of Ireland is made more complex by the historical role of sectarianism. Itself a determinate form of racism, sectarianism was, in its original incarnation, a state and economic strategy of social and political subordination of one section of the community by the other. Sectarian subordination furthers inter-communal conflict and as a consequence inevitably links to work and employment in historically informed ways. These links are important in allowing us to better illustrate the extent to which what goes on *in* work, how people interpret their work, is also an effect of what goes on *beyond* workplace boundaries.

Under the auspices of the GFA sectarianism has, paradoxically, acquired an added dimension where it has been reborn as a form of legitimated state brokerage. It is a paradox because while society is committed to prosecuting sectarian attacks, state disbursement of the GFA largesse reinforces the structural pillars of the old sectarian society dominated by two key community identities: Unionism and Nationalism. The growing strength of sectarian ideology and culture is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the proliferation of so-called Peace Walls (four in 1998 to more than fifty in 2013). The original state strategy driving the 1998 settlement leaned towards social democratic socio-economic stability measures. Since the onset of the economic crisis and the ConDem government, Stormont's strategy has been more determinedly neo-liberal, with the assumption that expansion in newly state-privatised and other private sectors of the economy would not compromise the 1998 settlement. The research unearthed one possibly overlooked feature of the GFA: attempts to keep the older (sectarian) divide in aspic have, under the pressure of neo-liberal globalisation, exposed another dimension of dysfunctionality. The socio-political inflexibility of the older taken-for-granted 'peace-settlement-sectarianism' is now rubbing up against the newly deregulated neo-liberal economy. This social structural dysfunctionality is to be seen in certain SMEs where ex-combatants, given permissive tolerance as a result of the new dispensation, depend upon older sectarian cross-class paternalism to maintain order in the employment relationship, free from the restraint of trade unionism (let alone contemporary new management protocol). Illegal threats and occasional violent chastisement are on occasion used to resolve labour-management disputes as was seen at Northern-Recycling.

The case of Northern-Recycling is significant since it highlights a number of latent features of the impact of sectarian social relations upon employment norms in particular settings

including both existing and ‘new’ communities and wider political society. First, since the North has now politically institutionalised sectarianism it is argued that this impacts upon new entrants participation in political society both locally and in the Assembly: one can be Polish or Lithuanian, but one must also either be an Irish nationalist or an Ulster Unionist according to Assembly voting protocol. Second, migrants’ subordination in weakly regulated sectors is impacted by the fact that the state and trade unions while more comfortable with conventional contests in the public sector, by and large are tolerant, often standing aside, in disputes in sectors controlled by former combatants when conflicts should be seen as traditional labour disputes. In these and some other SMEs, migrant labour is particularly prevalent. While one might argue this is an egregious example, it is nevertheless significant in that it highlights the tensions and some of the reality behind the veil of the ‘north-as-normal’. Of course, not all migrant workers work in SMEs and not all SMEs operate in the shadow-land of unreconstructed sectarian paternalism. But making sense of SMEs’ impact upon migrant workers allows a degree of insight into another aspect of the growing tension between regulated Keynesianism to end the conflict and the advance of contemporary neo-liberal state strategies. This research, while demonstrating some commonality with migrant experiences elsewhere also brings out a variant of subordination distinctive to the north of Ireland.

Migrant workers coming to the north of Ireland typically find themselves in the midst of a polarised environment not of their choosing. Initial optimistic narratives were on occasion displaced by other feelings of unease and the sense that the North is indeed a difficult place for migrants (Sherley, Liberia and Kin, Nigeria). While that initial sense of the North-as-normal could sustain the conclusions of other research, the methodology establishing extended relationships with the project research participants, allowed the exploration of a range of other perspectives. Amongst these was the realisation that the North, though in many respects accepting of new workers, was also ham-stung by already existing exclusionary socio-cultural realities (Vaidas, Northern-Recycling). These realities encompass community associations (where one can feel comfortable) and perceptions of who ‘we’ are and they reach into workplace affiliations and identities. The signally important reality is that of sectarian socio-economic relationships embracing people whether at home, in communities or at work. These historical patterns have been sustained by the institutional development of a sanctioned political class constituted by the out-working of the 1998 GFA. This class has a

contradictory place in the communities out of which it emerged for while it is sustained by them, in line with the dominant discourse about the ‘North’, this political class interprets other social and ethnic tensions as secondary to the key binary divide of Protestant/Catholic-Irish Nationalist/Unionist (Rosa).

A significant issue is that new workers introduce other narratives into and about communities and workplaces not readily constituted by the sectarian binary divide in and beyond work. Again, a challenge to the dominant story of the singular binary divide in the North was witnessed at Northern-Recycling. An otherwise conventional labour struggle initiated by migrant workers highlighted a new, unforeseen development: a latent tension between the Keynesian GFA’s division-of-spoils between the two dominant social groups and state sanctioned neo-liberalism. In some SME sectors neo-liberalism is blind to the continuation of older sectarian tropes of subordination supposedly prohibited by the GFA, concerned as the latter inevitably is, with the disbursement of resources to public and state selected actors. This has allowed the state and some union centres often to turn a blind eye to the activities of some former sectarians, less concerned in their SMEs, by forms of state regulation of the employment relationship. The manifest labour challenge to Northern-Recycling’s management interestingly revealed a structural accommodation between the Keynesian GFA and neo-liberal development wherein competition, so carefully managed within the state sector by management and unions, was determined by ex-combatants. While the home grown labour force had been prepared largely to accept their paternalistic employment conditions, temporary migrant workers, less conditioned (since they were excluded) by the older sectarian paternalism, saw their relationship to management in conventional employment terms. Northern-Recycling revealed that the experiences of some migrant workers result from the structural accommodation of the new sectarian dispensation to neo-liberalism. Finally, and relatedly, the notion of community too proved to be somewhat more problematical than the often emollient association with positive integration (for a critique see Holgate et al, 2012 and of course, Coates and Silburn’s 1973 classic community study of working-class Nottingham). In communities in the north of Ireland, competition for ‘place’ can be exclusivist and subordinating not least for new entrants. The latter also may be faced with long-term residents whose sense of place is being renewed in the face of perceived challenges from those beyond ‘their’ communities. In such instances, the sometimes violent exercise of territorial power must be constantly negotiated by newcomers.

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Authors

Dr Brian Garvey is a Research Associate with University of Strathclyde. He was a trade union organiser with the Independent Workers Union and has worked in various community education and organisation projects. He co-founded the Migrant Workers' Research Network (MWRN) in the north of Ireland. He is currently undertaking research on changes to work and migration linked to emerging commodity chains for agroenergy in Brazil and strategies by rural trade unions and social movements in the frontiers of production.

Professor Paul Stewart is Professor of the Sociology of Work and Employment at the University of Strathclyde and is coordinator of the international Marie Curie ITN "ChangingEmployment" programme. He is a member of CAIRDE Teo in Armagh City in the north of Ireland, a social economy organisation, and is participant in MWRN. He is member of the IWU and UNITE. With Brian Garvey he is currently researching changes to work, employment and migration in global commodity chains in Brazil. For over twenty years he worked with shop floor trade unionists in the Auto Workers' Research Network at Cowley and Ellesmere Port researching the impact of lean production on workers lives. Recently he co-authored of *We Sell our Time no More*, and with Tommy McKearney *The Provisional IRA: from Insurrection to Parliament*. In addition to his work with Brian Garvey and Tommy McKearney he is currently completing the book "*Where did you go to Lizzy?*" *Protestant women in the insurgency in the north of Ireland from 1969*.

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¹ Northern Ireland is contested socially and politically in ways not immediately obvious to new migrants so that for many of our research participants it seemed 'normal' during their early transition period. Because this contestation over identity, extending to the definition of the statelet, reaches beyond those born into those socio-political divisions commonly referred to as the Protestant-Catholic sectarian divide, we prefer the term the 'north of Ireland' or the 'North' rather than Northern Ireland, as a reminder of contestation.

²See film, *The New Workers*. Garvey, et al.

³ Often the community is seen as the secure space where inclusiveness allows that differences can be acknowledged and outside (state) subordination ameliorated yet we know that communities can also be exclusionary places; "The youth attacked a car full of Lithuanians in Newtownards. [...]. I went to the UVF and UDA and they actually sorted it out; [...] the kids said, "we thought we were doing the community a favour". (Andrius)

⁴ A spurious pretext to intimidate since industrial relations in the north follows UK legislation.