

In or out? Understanding how social and symbolic boundaries influence the economic integration of transnational migrants in non-metropolitan economies.

McAreavey, R and Krivokapic-Skoko, B.

Abstract

This article uses data from Australia and Northern Ireland to examine migrants' inclusion in non-metropolitan economies that have limited experience of migration. These places came to our attention in recent decades when the accelerated arrival of migrants presented challenges and opportunities within these so called New Immigration Destinations. We scrutinise migrants' entry into, their participation in, and eventual mobility within, the labour market in these places. Contributing to the literature that challenges a linear concept of integration, social and symbolic boundaries are used to explore how migrants are included or excluded from rural and regional labour markets. We show how the state frames legal boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and how those boundaries are influenced and manipulated by a range of social actors, including private sector agents working within agri-food businesses. We find a misalignment between different scales of social boundaries. At a macro level, migrants may be included in the labour market while in reality they can be excluded through everyday interactions.

Key words: boundaries; migration; economic mobility; inclusion and exclusion.

Introduction

'I came in with a visiting visa and I overstayed my visa. I was working I was paying national insurance and tax. I was caught up with immigration because I was using a false visa to work and I know lots of people have experienced different things, but what I passed through it was terrible...I was locked up in [local prison] for 4 months and 2 weeks...I am trying to get back to work and everything is very hard, I didn't do any crime and now I can't find any work. I tried to register with [a local recruitment agency] and they assessed me and they told me because of the conviction the Trust [health agency] wouldn't take me' (Northern Ireland (NI), Focus Group (FG), Nigerian Association).

The nation state's enforcement of immigration policies is intended to lead to exclusion for some individuals. Those policies deliberately select individuals on the basis of personal traits and characteristics, often connected to wider economic growth and development objectives, but also related to colonial histories. Historically we know that some migrants operate outside of the legal system, due to a lack of understanding of that system or in some cases as part of a measured attempt to create a new life in a new country. In the above example, despite the claims made by the respondent, according to the legal system a crime was committed. As might be expected, hard legal boundaries were upheld by the judicial system and the young man was jailed. Having a criminal record symbolised unworthiness to work and this limited his access to the labour market.

This article considers the way in which state and non-state actors exert agency and negotiate different social structures including legal boundaries to gain access to the labour market in so-called New Immigration Destinations (NIDs). These are non-metropolitan¹ areas that can be defined as having relatively limited experience of immigration until the recent past when accelerated immigration occurred (McAreevey and Argent 2018). Labour migrants' experiences of the labour market are far less explored than of those in the metropolitan areas (Dufty-Jones 2014). They have been shown to be anything but an homogenous group and, as McAreevey and Argent (2018) describe, they have been drawn to multi-functional rural areas for a variety of different reasons. Correspondingly there are many different 'categories' of migrants arriving in NIDs, each of which exert very different levels of agency to navigate social and symbolic boundaries.

In contrast to migration in an urban setting rural migration involves small numbers overall. The literature has shown that the rapidity and intensity of migration to non-metropolitan areas gives rise to manifold challenges that are particular to rural society. Integration within a rural setting is distinct from its urban counterpart in terms of social, systemic and environmental dimensions (Hugo and Moren-Alegret 2008; Morén-Alegret, 2008). The impact of the relative shift in the ethnic composition of rural populations and the subsequent profound changes have been increasingly documented in the literature (see for instance Winders 2014, McAreevey 2017b; Rye and Scott 2018; Special Issue of Journal of Rural Studies

2018) and includes the lack of institutional infrastructure that results in insufficient resources to cater for diverse linguistic demands or low levels of cultural competence to effectively deliver services. In a non-metro setting, other difficulties include persistent long term structural challenges and short term responses to integration; invisibility; relative isolation; and being tied to employers for various issues such as housing and visas. New Immigration Destinations offer a natural setting to scrutinise the complexity of migration and its impact on inter-group relationships (Lichter 2012, p.3).

In the context of NIDs the uneven treatment of migrants' in the labour market has been the subject of growing debate (see for instance Findlay et al. 2013; Corrado et al. 2016; McAreavey 2017b; Rye 2017). Research has shown that migrants are able to exert different amounts of agency (Rogaly 2008; Gertel and Sippel 2014), but this is set within a context of migrants doing the work that the locals do not wish to do. Questions continue to be asked about ensuring respect for rural migrant workers (Rye and Scott 2018) and their capacity to achieve equity within social spaces that are defined by policymakers but inhabited by migrants (and others) through everyday encounters (McAreavey and Argent 2018). We seek to add to this scholarship on economic mobility in the context of non-metropolitan migration.

By using boundary work to better understand migrants' inclusion and exclusion in and from non-metropolitan areas (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008), this article extends our knowledge of migrant pathways in NIDs. Existing literature shows that migrant integration is not linear and we believe that boundaries offer an effective means of exploring the messy nature of integration. Boundaries involve complex interconnections and relational processes across time between individuals, social structures and institutions. Our research questions are: *how do different actors and institutions frame, sharpen, shift or blur social and symbolic boundaries and what are the implications for migrants' economic mobility? How are boundaries deployed by individuals and institutions to reinforce social hierarchies and divisions within the labour market in NIDs?* Broadly we find that individual agency and economic buoyancy (within the host society) are important influences in the ebb and flow of boundaries. Our analysis challenges the linearity of social and symbolic boundaries, showing instead that they are intertwined, both demanding attention as they each represent powerful forces for migrants' inclusion within the labour market.

The paper is structured as follows. We present a rationale for using Northern Ireland and Australia to provide an illustrative account, we then give an overview of New Immigration Destinations before unravelling the concept of integration. We move on to explain social and symbolic boundaries showing why they offer a useful analytic lens for examining migrant incorporation in NIDs. We then present empirical data from the two sites. Finally we scrutinise the way in which boundaries are deployed to influence migrants' economic mobility in the labour market.

Northern Ireland and Australia

Following Mayes and McAreavey (2017) and McAreavey and Argent (2018), we use case study material from two quite distinct contexts, Australia and Northern Ireland, to provide an *illustrative* account of how social and symbolic boundaries influence migrant pathways within New Immigration Destinations. Our study sites are distinct not least by the way in which migration has shaped the national psyche, Australia being a country of immigration, Northern Ireland until recently, the opposite. But it would be unjustified to avoid engagement across two national boundaries due to such differences, as rural space at the national level is variegated and heterogenous (Rye and Scott 2018). It may be argued that we followed a most different comparative design type (Bloemraad 2013), as we identified key similarities shared by both cases. However, we have not purposely engaged in an explicit comparative research design.

Historic migration to Australia has been to major metropolitan gateways. Evidence of a reversal to this pattern was visible from the early 21st century with increasing numbers of newly arriving migrants in non-metropolitan areas (Hugo and Moren-Alegrét 2008). The status of Northern Ireland as a country of immigration was also reversed around the turn of the century. Both places are governed by economically instrumental migration regimes, a shift evidenced recently in Australia as it moved away from family reunion migration policies towards economic growth and development (Breen 2016). In the UK migration policies beyond the EU level are specifically geared towards economic growth. Both places have witnessed the arrival of international migrants leading to the establishment of areas that can be described as NIDs as migrants undertake, so called '3D' work (dirty, dangerous, difficult)

(Hugo, 2008) that the domestic labour force is increasingly less willing to do (see for instance McAreavey 2017a; Corrado et al. 2016).

Migration policies in Northern Ireland at the EU level at least, would suggest that EU migrants have equal entitlement to the labour market as they are all part of a common market. We might therefore expect that EU migrants within Northern Ireland would be less subject to labour market exclusion and marginalisation. These different migration legacies, coupled with differentiated macro migration regimes (McAreavey and Argent 2018) provide a rich contextual backdrop for further exploration of how social and symbolic boundaries determine migrants' economic integration in two different contexts.

Migrants in non-metropolitan labour markets

Many migrants to non-metropolitan areas are employed in positions with low pay, minimal rights including little security or employee protection (McAreavey 2017b; Standing 2011), limited progression routes and few training opportunities (Philpott 2014; Devlin et al. 2014). Correspondingly, precarious roles have been created in agriculture, horticulture, food processing, construction, small industries and social care (see for instance Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Jensen and Yang 2009; Lichter 2012; Findlay et al. 2013; Corrado et al. 2016; Rye and Scott 2018). This creates a clustering effect and results in an over-representation of migrants in particular occupations. They may face employment inadequacy such as working fewer hours than they wish or working in jobs well below their qualifications; and they may be paid lower wages than others for doing the same work (Irwin et al. 2014; Geddes and Scott 2010; Rye and Andrzejewska 2010; Maher and Crawley 2014).

'Employment adequacy', i.e. conditions of the workplace, the extent to which employees may work the hours that they desire and educational attainment (Slack and Jensen 2002, p. 212), are important in understanding how social and symbolic boundaries are deployed. Social boundaries are determined by institutional frameworks established by the state to support the movement of people across national borders and to regulate them within those national borders (Castles 2010; Preibisch and Otero 2014). However, those actions can be influenced by third parties, such as firms who actively lobby for larger immigration flows (Hanson 2009:

Findlay et al. 2010; Geddes and Scott 2010). Other forces influence the strength and reach of institutional boundaries such as the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications (European Commission 2009) or legal systems that institutionalise exclusion and racialisation (Calavita 2005). In some circumstances, migrants have been shown to circumvent barriers making their skills and qualifications a better 'fit' to local contexts (Nowicka 2014). Where this is not possible the expected benefits for the host economy and for migrants are negated (Girard and Bauder 2007).

Understanding migrant integration

Just as the causes of migration are multiple and compound, so too the outcomes are complex (Vertovec 2017). Migrants' integration into the mainstream is a major concern for twenty-first century society, attracting the attention of politicians, policymakers and the electorate. Many problems have been associated with the concept of integration, including the fact that it is a fuzzy concept, but often dominated by a practical, one-dimensional approach and so fails to properly attend to complex consequences of transnational connections (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). This leads to another major problem with integration discourse which is that it assumes there is a fixed and cohesive society into which 'newcomers' may integrate and that some differences are good while others are bad (Anthias 2013). A Brazilian migrant to Northern Ireland succinctly sums up this problem:

'You cannot integrate into the countryside because they want you to pick a side, which I am not going to do' (NI, Group Interview).

This quote illustrates how integration is anything but straightforward. Contemporary scholarship challenges fixed notions of migrant incorporation, showing instead how migrants live in fluid, dynamic and transnational spaces with different degrees of attachment (see for instance Torres et al. 2006). We know that people do not settle in a linear manner and people are not equally committed to belonging to a particular cultural group (Modood 2007, Anthias 2013). Even if they were, societies are typically stratified and so integration can emphasise differences at the expense of commonalities, creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that are 'underpinned by binary and essentialised constructions of these very divisions'

(Anthias 2013, p. 324). Ryan (2018, p. 235) proposes that the “‘differentiated’ notion of embedding is useful in understanding the dynamic processes through which migrants negotiate attachments and belonging...in different social and structural settings” showing how it involves temporal, spatial and relational processes.

Many rural scholars have long recognised that the simple binary of integrating or not integrating does not accurately reflect how individuals act or feel, complex relations emerge between migrants and the host society (Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska 2008; Camerero et al. 2012; de Lima 2012). In their comprehensive review of rural migration processes, Rye and Scott (2018) show how knowledge about the integration of migrants in rural areas is still limited. As a means of further exploring integration we propose the use of boundaries.

Boundaries are important in facilitating integration (Bauböck 1994). Boundary work has been increasingly used within the fields of race and ethnicity and mainstream migration studies to unravel inequalities between different social groups, typically within an urban setting (see Barth 1969; Zolberg and Woon 1999; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008, 2014; and Symposium, Ethnic and Racial Studies 2014; Amelina 2017). While some of this work relates to migrants, to our knowledge, boundary work has been little used to illuminate migrant incorporation in a non-metropolitan context (for an exception to this, see de Lima 2012). We maintain that boundaries can inform wider debates on migrant integration and incorporation in NIDs; helping to advance our knowledge of the significance of everyday encounters in these rapidly evolving places while also highlighting the import of the rural context.

Getting to grips with social and symbolic boundaries

Social actors draw on cultural norms and traditions to make distinctions between social groups creating boundaries that can serve to include or exclude, depending on an individual's position. Boundaries are ‘sociologically complex’ (Alba, 2005 p. 27) with different types of social infrastructure creating social and symbolic boundaries. Unequal power relations can emerge as hosts and newcomers use social, cultural and economic capital to negotiate around social and symbolic boundaries (Zolberg and Woon 1999). Boundaries help understand how social differences (race, gender, class, etc.) are created, upheld or eroded. In their seminal work, Lamont and Molnár (2002) distinguish between social and symbolic boundaries, these

being analogous to Anthias's material and cultural boundaries (2001). Social boundaries relate to substantive social difference between social groups. They are manifest 'in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities' (ibid, p 168). Social boundaries are readily demonstrated by legality, and are accompanied by entitlements and rights to certain resources such as welfare benefits. Qualifications represent another social boundary affording the right to enter the labour market and enjoy the benefits that it brings.

As intersubjective 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space' (Lamont and Molnár, 2002 p.168), symbolic boundaries are more nebulous and less explicit than social boundaries. They can therefore be difficult to pinpoint. Individual evaluation of social interactions creates symbolic boundaries that discriminate between different groups, exclude lower order social groups and ultimately support the monopolisation of resources (Lamont et al. 2015). For instance, workplace cultures can demonstrate strong symbolic boundaries as long standing employees clearly state 'that's how we do things round here', resisting any form of change, and establishing a conceptual distinction between those who are loyal to the old way of operating and those employees seeking to introduce change. More insidious are symbolic boundaries that demarcate informal entitlements such as access to or mobility within, the labour market. For instance, the way in which an elite education grooms people for particular jobs. This is evident in the UK where twenty-nine per cent of Westminster politicians are privately educated (nearly four times the figure for the UK population), indicating that private education is an important asset for public life. Or in the context of NIDs, for some employers, the migrant identity can symbolise that they are 'exploitable' and worthy of employment only in certain jobs (McAreevey 2017a).

Although Durkheim showed how symbolic boundaries are important for creating a sense of community, Weber shows how they can lead to inequalities (Lamont et al. 2015). Taking this further, Wimmer (2008) argues that the discriminatory practices of those with access to more resources, i.e. the powerful in society, is of more consequence than the actions of subordinates. In contrast, Lamont (2014) shows how boundary movements do not necessarily lead to exclusion, exploitation or isolation, more positive consequences can arise as

individuals are sorted and categorised and opportunities are opened and closed. She urges us to shift our gaze from predominant actors to subordinates and to recognise that social divisions cannot be reduced to specific or single categories, nor can they be considered outside of subjectivities, perceptions and interaction (Lamont 2014). To scrutinise the way in which circumstances, incidents and social actors interact '[w]e need to look at the overall societal framing to understand patterns of group-making and their practices' (Anthias 2013, 325). In recognising this need to transcend the binaries of inclusion and exclusion, we use Bürkner's (2012) intersectional framework for understanding inequalities which suggests that we are attentive to micro (i.e. social practices); meso (representation) and macro (social structures) levels. This recognises the irreducibility and dialogical nature of social divisions. We are interested not only in firm or "bright" social boundaries (Alba 2005) such as policies about who has the right to work, but also in less clearly defined or "blurred" symbolic boundaries. We want to understand how people distinguish between different groups within the labour market through different symbolic mechanisms such as rituals, scripts, dignity and social standing and through more clearly defined social boundaries (Lamont 2017).

There is consensus in the literature that social and symbolic boundaries both can create inequalities. A significant point of departure emerges in relation to the relative strength of social and symbolic boundaries. For Anthias (2001), cultural boundaries are as important as social boundaries. She uses the powerful example of cultural boundaries denoting symbolic ideas of work relations including 'ideas that some jobs are clean and some are dirty' (Anthias 2001, p. 381), this delineation being a frequently used means with which to segment the labour market in NIDs (see for instance Corrado et al. 2016). Lamont and Molnár argue that constraining behaviour results when symbolic boundaries are widely accepted and become social practice. That is to say, symbolic boundaries translate to social divisions and are a necessary condition for social boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002). As we are interested in the 'episodic nodes of exclusion, [that] have a complex (i.e. intersectional) origin' (Bürkner 2012, p. 186), we focus less on the causal relations between social and symbolic boundaries. Instead we take further the debate regarding the relative strength of social and symbolic boundaries and the degree to which they result in inequalities. We follow the thesis that social stratification results equally from the application of social and symbolic boundaries both of which result in distinct behaviour, social categories and classification (Anthias 2001, Wimmer

2008, Amelina 2017). Before we present our empirical data, we provide context of the two study sites and the approach to each study.

Northern Ireland: context

The active recruitment of Filipino nurses to Northern Ireland in the 1990s, the expansion of Europe in 2004 and the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers all helped to reverse its long-term status as a country of emigration (NISRA 2010). Subsequently it has been described as a NID (Winders 2014). Reflecting these changes, country of birth figures for Northern Ireland (NI) show that the proportion of the population that was born outside the UK and Ireland rose from 1.5% to 4.5% between 2001 and 2011 (NISRA 2013). Settlement patterns are uneven and geographic pockets exist across the region (Doyle and McAreavey 2014). Overall it has no remote rural spaces (OECD 2011), instead many connections link small urban centres with surrounding rural areas. Thus while many areas are intrinsically rural in the region, the connections between urban centres and the rural areas are manifold. Many challenges have emerged including that small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), the main source of employment for migrant workers to NI, have been shown to be more discriminatory than larger employers towards ethnic and migrant groups (Green et al. 2005; Irwin et al. 2014). Evidence suggests that migrants are employed in jobs well below the level of their skills and experience across many sectors of the economy within NI (see for instance Irwin et al. 2014) and of migrants being exploited and deemed 'exploitable' (McAreavey 2017a).

Australia: context

In contrast to Northern Ireland, international migration has long been a major element in Australian population growth. The geography of Australia also differs sharply to that of Northern Ireland with extremely large areas of bushland and corresponding remote rural areas, small towns and large metropolitan centres. Historically, post-world war settlement of immigrants in Australia was largely focused on major capital cities, especially Sydney and Melbourne (Hugo, 2011). However, in the last twenty years new visa pathways have been opened up for permanent and temporary migrants to settle in rural and regional Australiaⁱⁱ (Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko, 2011). This has created 'new paradigms in international migration' (Hugo et al. 2006) because they oppose and challenge the predominantly

metropolitan settlement of immigrants. Consequently, the number of international migrants living and working in non-metropolitan Australia has increased. The numbers of overseas-born persons living outside the major capital cities increased from 771,574 in 2001 to 1,001,645 in 2011 – an increase of 30 per cent. At the same time the numbers living in the capitals increased by 29 percent. While the numbers involved are still relatively small—only 19 per cent of the overseas born are living outside major urban centres—the numbers are critical to regional and rural Australia and represent a turning point in Australian immigration history, with a potential to benefit rural and regional Australia. New migrants are expected to address sparse population issues, solve the skills shortage in regional areas across the occupational range from entrepreneurs and professionals to farm labourers, foster innovation and contribute (with a wide range of skills) to the growth of a region or industry.

The new migrants moving into non-metropolitan Australia are highly educated and they tend to have a substantially higher level of education than the Australia-born population (Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko 2011; Massey and Parr 2012). However, there is strong evidence of downward occupational mobility where new migrants tend to be employed at a skill level lower than the skill used in their job in their home country (Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko 2011). Similar to the case of Northern Ireland, there is evidence of the exploitation of migrant workers in Australian agriculture/horticulture (Underhill and Rimmer 2015).

Methodology: Northern Ireland and Australia

McAreevey uses data from research that she has been conducting with migrant communities in Northern Ireland since 2005. The objective was to identify links between poverty and ethnicity. A series of 13 focus groups (FGs) and 43 interviews were conducted with migrants and with support agencies between 2005 and 2013. With consent all interviews were taped, transcribed and anonymised. Access to respondents was initially gained through a gatekeeper working with an advocacy group for migrants. Research participants were paid an honorarium. Respondents ranged in age from late 20s to late 50s. Interpreters were always offered, and they were provided for a number of interviews and FGs. Moreover, a series of three FGs was convened in Polish involving the same group of Polish women. It was co-facilitated by the author and two qualified psychologists, both of whom were interpreters who provided simultaneous interpretation. The nature and format of all focus groups and

interviews were discussed at length with co-facilitators, interpreters, and project steering committees as appropriate. The research was conducted in three locations, Belfast and two rural areas within Northern Ireland. Both rural areas had experienced a significant increase in migrant communities following the expansion of Europe in 2004. Most participants were recent arrivals, although some had been living in Northern Ireland for at least twenty years. The research design did not focus on a specific nationality, age-group or define a particular socioeconomic profile. However, many of the focus groups and interviews were conducted with the Polish community, the largest Eastern European group in Northern Ireland (NISRA 2013). Overall participants were from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa and included professionals as well as individuals working in unskilled jobs, many of whom held multiple jobs. Educational attainment included those with few qualifications as well as graduates in diverse subjects including psychology, teaching, and architecture. Respondents varied also in terms of qualifications and motivation for moving; a few worked in professional posts, but the majority were employed in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs.

Pseudonyms were assigned to interviewees. The data was analysed and interpreted by reading and re-reading scripts, followed by a process of coding according to emerging themes which were discussed within the relevant research teams and corresponding advisory groups. Emerging issues and early ideas were elaborated or modified accordingly (Boeije 2010). The results presented in this article are representative across the sample.

The Australian data is based on the open ended responses as part of a national three year longitudinal study (2008-2010) of almost 1,000 new immigrants' working and settlement experiences in regional and rural Australia (Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko 2011). The response rate to this section of the national survey was 34.6 per cent, as 333 respondents decided to provide additional comments about their attitudes to the whole process of settling in rural Australia. Respondents in this survey were also able to freely express their views about any issue in relation to their settlement experience. They were asked to write this down in a space provided at the end of the questionnaire.

It has been argued that in comparison to the other form of qualitative data gathering, such as interviews or focus groups, open ended survey comments can offer 'greater anonymity to

respondents and often elicit more honest responses' (Jackson and Trochim, 2002). According to Niedomysl and Malmberg (2009) open-ended questions are particularly useful in researching immigrants' motives, because responses are given spontaneously and it is possible to avoid bias that may result from suggesting responses to the immigrants included in the survey. The gathered responses varied from a few phrases to a couple of paragraphs, or what Jackson and Trochim (2002, p. 308) refer to as 'a free list in the context' type of text. The analysis of the textual data collected in the open-ended survey was based on the words as units of analysis or key words in context (Jackson and Trochim 2002). Following Miles and Huberman (1994) we used a comment (a clause or section containing a single attitude/position/stance) as a starting point with themes considered as a compilation of comments.

Re-analysis of the responses to open-ended questions about issues in relation to the settlement and integration process was done through the lenses of social and symbolic boundaries. Issues tended to converge around employment, such as the central role of employer, problems of recognition of overseas qualification, limited labour market size, and community related issues and interactions in everyday relations within the co-ethnic group and towards the mainstream population.

Shifting legal boundaries: ambiguity or certainty?

The way in which international immigration law was perceived by employers in both research sites created a symbolic barrier that excluded some migrants from job opportunities. In the UK, social differences are underscored for migrants by the Home Office through immigration legislation that denotes individual legal status. The UK Immigration Bill 2016 (relevant for non-EU migration) used a point based system to categorise individuals according to one of five tiers: high value migrants; skilled workers; temporary workers; commonwealth citizens with ancestry; or 'other'. The status of migrants greatly affects their material and non-material ability to access opportunities: a national insurance number must be assigned to each individual seeking employment, this depending on the migrant status of that individual. Employers who hire someone who they have 'reasonable cause to believe' do not have the right to work can be sent to jail for up to five years and pay an unlimited fine (<https://www.gov.uk/penalties-for-employing-illegal-workers>). The increasing predilection of

the UK government to place the onus of policing the legal framework on intermediary bodies created an atmosphere of fear, as one migrant describes:

'That's appropriate for one year, but after that I need a different visa, the company needs to do this. They are afraid to do so; they don't have enough knowledge...' (NI, migrant from India).

Here the lack of familiarity with the legal system and the threat of being prosecuted for employing someone without the right to work, meant that some employers refused to hire migrants. This was especially the case for relatively small scale organisations with little experience of employing migrants, typical of non-metropolitan economies. Therefore, although many migrants were legally entitled to work, prospective employers chose to avoid any doubt by giving work to locals. The lack of institutional knowledge created a symbolic boundary, whereby certain categories of migrants became unemployable because of fear of acting outside the legal system. In other words individuals who were technically permitted to work were not employed, due to the creation of a symbolic boundary which was derived from a lack of understanding of meso-level structures made real at the micro-level.

The central role played by individual employers in interpreting employment law and the creation of power imbalances was also apparent in the Australian context. Here, we found evidence of local employers influencing happiness, satisfaction and the well-being of migrants and their families:

'Sponsoring employer made me feel like a 2nd class citizen who he had 'rescued' and brought to Aus. He made threats about me ever leaving his company as 'he would get me sent back' Not the way to encourage skilled immigrants to come' (AU, migrant from the Netherlands).

Circumstances change and with them, social boundaries. Family migration rules in the UK were amended in 2012 and a key change was a shift in income requirement from approximately £5,500 to £18,600 for individuals wishing to sponsor a partner to come to the UK (Migration Rights Network 2015). These new rules meant that some families were denied a family life as articulated by this Indian migrant:

'There are opportunities here to get a job, yes there are. But the problem is the restriction around immigration...so the person thinks: why should I be here alone without my family? The restrictions make it difficult to bring your family. For Europeans, there are no restrictions...' (NI, migrant from India).

Legal boundaries are very real and clearly defined. While they may be seemingly hard, immovable and non-negotiable, they are temporal. In the UK, following pressure from the electorate, the government wished to prevent spouses and families from developing reliance on public funds. The subsequent amendment to UK migration law represents a hard boundary shift, extending exclusion zones for international migrants. At the same time this reinforced symbolic boundaries about perceptions of entitlement to the labour market by different social groups. The process of shifting legality produced uncertainty and created an atmosphere of ambiguity.

Representations of migrants and the enactment of symbolic boundaries.

Individuals act according to personal and family preferences, they listen to local stories. Despite the significant difference in geographic scale, remoteness, isolation and a restricted labour market, all of which characterise regional and rural economies, influenced the behaviour towards migrants in both studies. Ultimately migrants' inclusion in the labour market was limited. Respondents in the Australian study found rural communities to be very 'cliquey' and close knit:

'They have all grown up together and have lived here all their lives. They are very reluctant to allow strangers in', or as another account explains: *'People do not accept outsiders into the local community easily'* (AU, migrants from Zimbabwe).

Meaning making and talk all affect how symbolic boundaries emerge, local scripts create powerful symbolic boundaries (Lamont 2017). One support worker in a small town in Northern Ireland had a very clear view on this:

'...because in [this town] there are myths about everything, people are coming to me and saying 'oh in April we have to leave because the UK is leaving the European Union'. There are myths about lots of things and someone starts to talk and then everyone starts to believe. They don't understand English'. (NI, Volunteer migrant support worker).

NIDs have traditionally have been homogenous, inward looking, and hesitant to 'outsiders'. These features can easily turn into big challenges for migrant groups from different cultural and language backgrounds. As we have already explained, the historical legacy of migration differed between Australia and Northern Ireland, the former having a long history of immigration in contrast to the experience in Northern Ireland. Despite this, we found micro-levels of aggression were powerful tools in boundary making across both sites. In one case a graduate was frustrated because she was not being paid the same as her peers in the office. Mentally she was attempting to orientate herself towards professional colleagues, striving to create a 'buffer zone of indifference' (Zolberg 2004), that would result in her inclusion. Instead her cultural difference became a defining issue. She describes how someone in that office *'... treated me differently because I was Polish, her attitude was that you should be glad you are here, you should be grateful that you are not a cleaner...'* (NI, migrant from Poland).

The underlying assumption here was that the Polish woman was not entitled to equal treatment to the longstanding resident population. Her national identity symbolised a lower position in a social hierarchy that determined access to the labour market and was enacted by local actors. Her voice was very much muted as a consequence of her marginal position (Zolberg 2004) arising from her migration status. National identity also signified difference in the Australian context with Pacific Islanders being singled out as having different work ethics and values. They were found to do unskilled jobs that many others in the community would not consider doing and for wages substantially lower than what others doing the same work were receiving. Many members of the community described the Pacific Islanders' approach to life, family and work in a negative light. Some respondents pointed out that their physical size was intimidating and accordingly Islanders were automatically presumed by some people as being more violent than other groups.

The script of migrants as being culturally different and thus less deserving was heavily used in both research areas creating sites of division within everyday encounters. This reveals the magnitude of power among subordinates (Lamont 2014) as their beliefs about the entitlements of migrants translated to different and unequal treatment, typically manifest as less entitlement to economic capital.

It is worth noting that we found (a few) situations where employers actively negotiated state-level institutions by flexing boundaries that might otherwise exclude employment. For instance an advocacy organisation employed a lawyer who had practised in a jurisdiction outside of Northern Ireland which meant that technically that individual was not recognised by the legal profession in Northern Ireland.

Tactics for constricting boundaries

The literature has emphasised the need for context attentive perspectives to understand migration to non-metropolitan areas (Jensen 1994, Flynn and Kay 2017). When migrant workers first arrived in the UK (post 2004), the economy was booming and recruitment agencies travelled to international cities to recruit workers. The Great Recession of 2008 marked a rapid economic downturn, with ripples felt very widely. Local employers' recruitment practices became more restrictive as they retracted their zones of inclusion. When demand for labour was high, employers did not specify English language skills. With the first sign of an economic decline, the criteria necessary to work altered, denoting a clear case of boundary shifting (Wimmer 2008, p. 1038):

'But if you are applying for a full-time job in [meat factory] they now do an English test and they say that my English is not good enough to be a worker. I was very surprised because I know a lot of people there who don't speak English...it's not fair. I know a lot of people who got a job there, but they do this test now just for a job' (NI, migrant from Poland).

Migrants in both sites were re-categorised as not having equal entitlement to work to the local population even though this did not have a legal basis. As an EU citizen, the Polish worker above was entitled to the same access to the labour market as the local population. Boundaries were re-drawn to prioritise the local English-speaking population for tasks that in

the past required no English – meat processing. Respondents described how they were no longer viewed as doing jobs that locals did not want to do, but that they represented competition for local jobs. In the context of Northern Ireland, the symbolic boundary of ethnic difference was reified through the creation of a hard boundary in the form of employment criteria that had little to do with doing the job, and more to do with outright exclusion as it limited migrants' access to the labour market. Despite higher level migration policies in both sites being geared towards economic growth and development, those aspirations were stymied at the very local level. The lack of recognition of overseas qualifications reduced access to the labour market and was evident in both case study areas:

'Being in a country that has such a rigid and inflexible system of qualifications, and not being recognised as a qualified professional makes me feel worthless (emphasised in interview). The skills recognition process is a farce. Getting my electrical trade recognised was a nightmare. It took almost a year - very demoralising' (AU, migrant from South Africa).

One prevailing discourse was that overseas qualifications were of lower quality than those in the host society. Migrants were generally quite sceptical of this rationale considering that it created a system that was considered both strict and discriminatory. German nurses in Australia discussed how their extensive experience was not recognised. Similarly this respondent explains how:

'Many systems make it hard for immigrants to live/work effectively. Fear of lower standards of training overseas has resulted in systems that discriminate against all immigrants including those who are much better educated than their Australian colleagues' (AU, migrant from USA).

A clear re-ordering of the meaning of recognising overseas qualifications created a hierarchy of qualifications that symbolised exclusion. The failure to recognise qualifications from migrants' home countries created serious issues of personal esteem for the individuals involved, many of whom were highly qualified and competent. Peddling a script that qualifications from 'elsewhere' are not as valuable as those from the host society resulted in systems that automatically discriminated against newcomers in both sites, even though in the

case of Northern Ireland, many of the workers were from the EU and technically had equal entitlement to the labour market. This barrier was eventually recognised by government in Northern Ireland who established a free service to help migrants have their overseas qualifications recognised according to the local equivalences. That service was not monitored and many problems remained, as a pharmacist from Africa explained:

'I should have my certificate recognised and to do this I needed to study for a year and that costs £11-16,000 to do this. It's not running here, it's only in London, just in five Universities across the UK' (NI, migrant from Sudan).

She further elaborated that to be eligible, applicants need to work in a hospital and that some of her friends (who were not resident in the UK) had pretended that this was the case so that they could do the course. Those individuals had taken the initiative to cross firm social boundaries so that they could achieve economic integration. However, not all individuals possessed the cultural or social capital to exert this level of agency. Moreover, cultural narratives about the types of jobs that migrants are able to do threatened to undermine higher level policies by creating symbolic boundaries within the labour market and thereby determining the types of jobs migrants should do:

'The problem is that I need to have a qualification here in law, but the problem is that when you go to the job centre, they don't want you to stay in the benefits, they push you to jobs. But I studied law and I come here maybe to wash dishes or to clean – it's not making any sense to me...They give jobs to local people, but they will never give it to African people. When you go to organisations you never see African people working in these jobs...They tell you to change your way, the system gets you to change your way...when I go to the job centre to find a job, they told me you can find a job in [nursing home], but I didn't study this, I want to find something similar to what I did' (NI migrant from Congo).

Meanwhile, a pecking order of entitlements and of status among migrant groups was blatant in both Australia and Northern Ireland:

'...Islanders do unskilled work – Italians don't do that anymore – there is a hierarchy in this town' (AU, local resident).

'...if there are harder tasks people refuse to go. And there is no problem. They say they will go to a Pole and he'll go. Poles do the most difficult tasks. He'll never refuse and he's always happy. Other nationalities refuse and there are no consequences' (NI, migrant from Poland).

This suggests the existence of different levels of labour market incorporation that were closely connected to symbolic boundaries that emerged from ethnicity:

'There is this expectation, I think, that we would do more. There was this Czech who applied for a job at the company where my husband works. And he claimed to be a Pole on his application. There were 3 or 4 Czechs applying for this job and he was the only one who got it. The boss said: I know that Polish people work well; I know I can trust them' (Laughter) (NI, migrant from Poland).

In this scenario there seemed to be a belief that Polish migrants were more reliable than migrants from the Czech Republic. These actions reflect an attempt by prospective employers to change the contours of the labour market by denoting difference between different migrant groups. Not quite a full 'normative inversion' in the manner depicted by Wimmer (2008), this displays a hierarchy based on ethnicity creating stronger and weaker connections for different migrants, depending on their perceived position in the receiving society.

This hierarchy was reinforced in the Australian context with individuals engaging in inter-group competition and judgment. Some of the respondents *'object strongly to refugees being allowed into Australia, especially when we have had so many stringent criteria to fulfil'* (Au, migrant from Zimbabwe).

Other strong opinions were articulated as one individual claimed to be *'...sick of all the illegal immigration. They only cost taxpayer a lot of money. For those who go through the right channel to apply for immigration always have difficulty to get a visa e.g. skilled migration.'* (Au, migrant from Malaysia).

Final comments

We used this article to explore the role of social and symbolic boundaries in migrants' economic integration within New Immigration Destinations, considering how different actors and institutions affect social and symbolic boundaries and the implications for migrants' economic mobility. The literature shows how the arrival of migrants in non-metropolitan areas is quite distinct from urban migration, not least due to limited history of migration and small overall numbers resulting in insufficient institutional infrastructure that can emphasise difference which can also perpetuate lack of familiarity. This article extends this knowledge by showing how social actors and social institutions, implicitly or deliberately, manipulate boundaries which can serve to exclude or include migrants from the labour market. Contextual issues are imperative for understanding these processes. We focused on two distinct cases where at times the context was similar, but at others it was different.

We strongly believe researchers need to engage in debates about how to do research across national boundaries, including Mills' (1967) logic of comparative research, such as method of agreement. This is a major challenge, but if we are to fully unravel the intricacies of migration, we need to be properly equipped. Debate on how to conduct research across national boundaries needs to be opened up.

We found commonalities: boundaries in host societies are deployed in complex ways. Ostensibly fixed boundaries may be furtively flexed by wily and powerful actors. This is highly context specific, but closely aligned to the buoyancy of the economy and symbolic interpretations of migrants' status. We found misalignment between different scales of social boundaries: at a macro level, migrants are deemed to be included in the labour market. Zooming into granular everyday encounters, we see that interactions between migrants and the host society can be replete with microaggressions attempting to re-position migrants beyond apparently hard boundaries. Our research reinforces previous findings of insular social attitudes within a non-metropolitan context. We highlight four substantial issues arising from our research.

First of all, it is clear that the legal status of the individual involved is an important factor at a macro level, but other issues are also significant and need to be considered as we scrutinise migrant trajectories. The distinctiveness of different migration regimes was clear in the case studies, and yet actors were able to bypass those apparently firm boundaries demonstrating tension between local practices and national policies. For instance, even though EU migrants have equal entitlement to the labour market in Northern Ireland, meso-level structures and micropractices interfered with this entitlement. In both cases employers acted as agents of the state as they used different regimes – employment and migration - to achieve their preferred outcome. The overall small scale nature of migration to rural and regional communities appeared to mitigate against employers becoming truly *au fait* with migration regimes, instead lack of familiarity created uncertainty and fear of falling foul of the law. The research found that seemingly hard and impermeable boundaries, such as legality can actually create uncertainty if legal structures change, leading actors to engage in risk averse behaviour. This can result in re-positioning of migrants so that where they once lay within the zone of inclusion, they are relegated to the margins. Migrants are not necessarily passive in this process, they can exert agency to over-ride restrictions caused by social boundaries. Boundary flexing and constriction occur because boundaries are encountered in live social space that is influenced by an changing social, political and economic environment. A shifting economic landscape such as an economic downturn, was shown to create different conditions for migrants, affecting their status, what they symbolise (taking jobs from locals) and local scripts of what migrants are able to do. This process is heightened in a rural setting, because of the small overall numbers of migrants involved.

Secondly, and as previous research has indicated, social and symbolic boundaries are interconnected, with symbolic boundaries often leading to the creation of social boundaries. Our research suggests that the relationship is non-linear with constant interplay between the two that is made real through social interaction. Symbolic boundaries often inform the way in which social boundaries are interpreted by social actors, but equally social boundaries can influence symbolic boundaries, both of which reinforce zones of exclusion. Layering ethnicity with other forms of social difference, such as language as in one case illustrated above, means that boundary blurring (as used by Wimmer 2008) can obscure the issue of ethnicity. Migrant workers were excluded due to their lack of English language skills which

was perpetuated by their ethnicity. Thus while on the one hand macro-level boundaries suggest the inclusion of migrants in the labour market, the way in which symbolic boundaries are deployed suggests a mismatch between different layers of migration regimes. Further research could focus on the inherent contradictions within migration governance and the particular way it is interpreted in a rural context. This is important because of the small absolute numbers of migrants overall; the lack of familiarity with higher level migration policies; and fewer employment options in a non-metropolitan setting. This leads to our third point, which is that the role of individuals is crucial; agents' deploy tactics and strategies to re-interpret the meaning of boundaries, such as repeating popular scripts that can significantly influence the strength of social and symbolic boundaries. In a rural context, they can be socially conservative and resistant to change. Material resources and knowledge influence the way that individuals can implement boundaries.

Finally there was evidence of a migrant hierarchy with some migrants playing into the stratification of migrants, resulting in differential access to the labour market. In the Australian case, differences were assigned to so-called "boat people" compared to migrants who had entered via the points based system. In Northern Ireland, this seemed to be quite random and requires more investigation.

We have not fully explored how migrants' legal status leads to complex, diverse and often gendered experiences and outcomes, but this is surely an area ripe for future research. Additionally, for rural society increasing levels of superdiversity (Vertovec 2017) that result in diverse migrant groups need be effectively accommodated to ensure cosmopolitan openness (Krivokapic-Skoko et al. 2018) to overcome the prevalence of parochial practices that we highlight in this paper. The state and other bodies have important roles to play in enacting the boundaries of inclusion. Better understanding of how these relations are played out in rural society has the potential to contribute to a more equitable rural society.

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ⁱ We struggled with the labels 'rural' and 'non-metropolitan'. In general terms the former tends to be used in a UK context and the latter in an Australian context and also among international migration scholars from highly developed countries (Hugo and Moren-Alegrét 2008; Special Issues of Population, Space and Place on International migration to non-metropolitan areas of high income countries). We are mindful also of the linkages between rural and urban areas. For the purposes of this article we use rural and non-metropolitan interchangeably, while recognising the limitations of these terms.

ⁱⁱ We follow Regional Australia Institute's definition of regional Australia as including non-metropolitan areas across Australia, that is all of the towns, small cities and areas that lie beyond the major capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra) <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/what-is-regional-australia/>