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Mulholland, Jon and Ryan, Louise (2014) Doing the business: variegation, opportunity and intercultural experience among intra-EU highly-skilled migrants. *International Migration*, 52 (3) . pp. 55-68. ISSN 0020-7985 [Article] (doi:10.1111/imig.12120)

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DOING THE BUSINESS: VARIATION, MIGRATION, AND THE CULTURAL
DIMENSIONS OF BUSINESS PRACTICE – THE EXPERIENCES OF THE FRENCH
HIGHLY-SKILLED IN LONDON

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DOING BUSINESS WITH THE ‘ANGLO-SAXONS’: FRENCH HIGHLY-SKILLED MIGRATION AND INTER-CULTURAL BUSINESS EXPERIENCE IN LONDON

Abstract

French highly-skilled migration to London arguably constitutes the largest and most significant manifestation of such mobility within Europe. As such, they represent something of a test case for understanding the dynamics shaping intra-EU highly skilled migration, and beyond this, ‘elite mobility’ more generally. Focussing on the working experiences of French highly-skilled professionals in London’s financial and business sectors, this paper explores the meanings attributed to business praxis, in the capital, by a migrant group motivated in large part by career escalation and accumulation. The paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the nature and effects of ongoing variegation in the national expressions of capitalism (in particular, its manifestation in the cultural dimensions of business practices), and its salience for grasping the motivations and experiences of particular instances of highly-skilled migration. The variegation thesis argues that national expressions of capitalism will endure, despite the forces of globalisation, as the latter will continue to be mediated by nationally-framed ecological, institutional, processual, cultural and behavioural divergences. The ongoing variegated nature of European political economies remains a fundamental explanatory backdrop to understanding both the motivations for, and obstacles to, intra-EU migration for the highly-skilled.

In line with such a thesis, the data (derived from one-off, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and a focus group), are indicative of the ongoing influence of nationally-framed, and culturally grounded, business practices, and of the equally nationally-framed manner in which these practices are signified by highly-skilled migrants. The data are also suggestive of the manner in which such variegation may challenge any seamless transferability of business-related social and cultural capital in contexts of inter-national migration. The paper explores the nature and signification of such variegation through an exploration of the cultural dimensions of business-related methodologies, language use, and communication praxis. Calling for a greater understanding of the particularities of specific instances of highly-skilled migration, this paper seeks to contribute to a fuller delineation of the specificities of French migratory motivations, experiences and meanings, as these pertain to their emplacement in London.

Key Words: Variegation, Highly Skilled Migrants, French, London, National and Business Culture

Introduction

...from a number of perspectives: technical knowledge of stuff which I have learnt in London, which are very specific to the London environment; the financial centre; big banks; most of the developments, financial developments; financial engineering...from a professional perspective, it was something I was happy to learn. In addition to which, the work environment, starting with the language, the English language, but also the management style, which was very much, I would say, Anglo-Saxon driven was also from this standpoint, something that I was very happy with (Bernadette)

Bernadette, a banker in her early 50s enjoying her second spell in London, gives voice to the substantive and particular attributes of London as a global financial centre in which one can escalate career opportunities and enhance professional experience. Her emphasis on the specificities of London alerts us to the ongoing importance of place in the lives of highly skilled migrants, and in turn, the ongoing divergences associated with different and particular places (Jessop et al 2008).

There is an emerging critique of assumptions about the 'friction-free' mobility available to a highly skilled trans-national elite assumed to be possessed of a seamlessly transferable cosmopolitan capital (Weenik, 2008). This critique is in turn underpinned by a challenge to other foundational assumptions regarding the progressive integration of European economies and labour markets; and more generally the broader convergence of national capitalist economies into an increasingly homogenous globalised *modus operandi* (Clift 2007). Against such assumptions lies a recognition of the ongoing importance of divergence in the national expressions of capitalism (Hay 2000, Clift 2007), and of the similarly variegated nature of the cultural underpinnings of economic and business praxis across national borders (Leung et al 2005, Wood 2003). These differences exist *despite* the forces of convergence associated with institutionally-drive processes of regional integration (as in the case of the EU) (Braun and Glöckner-Rist 2011) and globalisation (Clift 2007, Scholte 2005, Wood 2003, Hay 2000).

Such variegation remains both motive for, and potential obstacle to, the successful outcomes of migration for career escalation. A variegation framework also alerts us to the importance of understanding what remains qualitatively particular about specific migratory motivations, experiences and outcomes, and the places implicated in these (authors forthcoming). It also alerts us to the prospect that highly-skilled mobility, for the purpose of career escalation, may be impeded by the non-transferability of business-related social and cultural capital across national borders. We argue that French highly skilled migration to London, whilst complex in its nature (authors forthcoming), can broadly be conceived as a mobility driven by ongoing salient economic, social and political differences that are seen (by those who migrate) to exist between France and the UK (in particular Paris and London). Drawing on data from a qualitative study of French highly skilled migrants in London's financial and business sectors, the paper explores French significations of the nature of working praxis in London, and the 'new grammars' of business it offers (Conradson and Latham 2007).

The pertinence of ongoing variegation in the respective natures of French and British economic, business and career structures and practices is reflected in the scale and character of French migration to London and the UK. While there is no single mechanism for the systematic registration of migrants from the old EU nations, census data suggest a significant growth in French migration to the UK. For example, while there were officially 38,000 French people living in the UK in 2001, by 2010 this figure had risen to 111,000 (Office of National Statistics). This corresponds closely to the Eurostat (2009) estimate of 114,000

French nationals resident in the UK. Data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on new national insurance numbers issued to adult overseas nationals in the UK indicates that between 2006/7 and 2009/10, over 80,000 newly-arrived French nationals were allocated national insurance numbers. During 2008-9, only the Poles, Indians and Slovaks were arriving in the UK in larger numbers. Reflecting a broader pattern, London is the primary destination for the French (DWP, 2012). However, these figures are dramatically short of other recent, though unverifiable, estimates. The number of French nationals in London alone has been suggested to be as high as 300,000 (*Mail Online* Jan 24th 2010), and based on the French Consulate's estimates, 400,000 (*The Economist* Feb. 24th 2011). Evidence also points to the fact that the French are the most highly qualified European migrants in the UK (72% having a University education compared to 46.2% of Spanish and 21.3% of Germans) (see Braun and Glöckner-Rist 2011).

Variegation, Capital Transferability and the French Highly-Skilled in London

Recent research has sought to bring into question prevailing assumptions about the nature of highly-skilled migration. There have been particular criticisms of the assumption that highly-skilled migrants are global nomads, able to move seamlessly around the world at will, and without substantive impediment (see Raghuram and Kofman, 2002; Beaverstock, 2005; Butcher, 2009). Accounts of the highly-skilled migrant as super-proficient itinerants have been criticised for their failure to engage with certain prevailing realities associated with even the most elite forms of migration. Two particularly important limitations can be discerned. Firstly, that contrary to images of the highly-skilled as fortified by a cosmopolitan capital that guarantees, through its universal currency, employability and escalation, in any chosen destination (Weenik 2008, Scott 2006), social and cultural capital is not seamlessly transferable. For instance, Csedő (2008) points to the fact that skills, defined for the purpose of this paper as, general and specific competencies deemed to be appropriate to the fulfilment of specified tasks, are essentially socially constructed (in a manner that is commonly gendered Kofman and Raghuram 2006), and that the nature and sufficiency of skills must be negotiated in any national context. Even more fundamentally, the cultural and social capital acquired in, and pertinent to, one national context, cannot be assumed to be transferable to another (Erel 2010). In terms of social capital, access to, and effective utilisation of, career-pertinent social networks has been shown to be both necessary for the realisation of career escalation for the highly skilled, and also highly contingent (authors forthcoming).

This relates to a second limitation, namely the assumption of convergence. Convergence theories suggest a relentless pressure for national variations in the social formation of capitalism to be reduced, and ultimately eliminated (Hay 2000). Ongoing national variation becomes incidental and temporary. Convergence theories may at first sight appear to have a particular pertinence to understanding the development of EU national economies, both because economic integration has functioned as one of the primary drivers of the European project, and to the extent that assumptions may prevail about a common pan-European (economic) cultural 'character'. But as Hay (2000) points out, though there may be some commonality of pressures on national economies, the manner in which these impinge, are mediated by national 'models', and are interpreted and responded to, will vary dramatically. Wood (2003) has also pointed to the manner in which economic and business culture are informed by national culture, such that business praxis may continue to vary from one national context to another (Leung et al 2005). In understanding the cultural dimensions of business, Leung et al (2005) have called for a new research agenda concerned with

elaborating a more complex notion of culture, its effects, and its interactions with socio-economic variables via a multi-method approach. They suggest, “sweeping statements about cultures are useful to the extent that they provide an abstract framework for organizing more situated description of the effects of cultures. A major challenge for the field is to develop mid-range, dynamic frameworks of culture that are sensitive to their nuances in different contexts” (2005: p. 374). Through the exploration of the experiences and significations of French highly skilled migrants in London we hope to make a contribution to such a framework.

Despite the multi-dimensional nature of European integration, levels of intra-EU highly-skilled migration remain lower than anticipated by Europe’s founding fathers (Verwiebe, et al, 2010). Though professional and managerial migration to the UK from EU citizens grew significantly from 2004, it remains significantly less than similar migration from the Commonwealth and other particular foreign countries (Beaverstock and Hall 2012). The ongoing variegated nature of European political economies remains a fundamental explanatory backdrop to understanding both the motivations for, and obstacles to, intra-EU migration for the highly-skilled (authors forthcoming). Such variegation, and certainly the perception of this variegation, provides a key driver for migration motivated by the desire for career escalation in a context where the country of origin and country of destination/insertion are deemed to offer quite divergent opportunities.

But, at the same time, such variegation brings into question the transferability of social and cultural capital, and the business competencies to which these relate (Leung et al 2005, Wood 2003). It also raises the potential for a host of other socio-cultural and familial obstacles to the successful exploitation of the opportunities available in the country of settlement, obstacles not limited to the poor and the powerless (authors forthcoming). Elsewhere we have explored the complex and uncertain nature of highly skilled mobility, across the spectrum of motivation, experience, trajectory and evaluation (authors forthcoming). We have argued that beyond simple typologies and generalised assumptions, lie thick biographies of experience and meaning which interact with broader structural conditions and forces to produce intricacies as yet only initially conceived.

It remains important to understand the formative role of place and territory in shaping highly skilled mobility (Ho 2011). Proposing a city-sensitive thesis, Tseng (2011) asserts the need for a fuller appreciation of the destination drivers of migration. Häussermann and Haila (2005) point to the dramatically divergent character of, even global, cities. Such divergence is reflected in the particular symbolic status that specific cities enjoy, which may draw heavily on a city-specific, or national, historical legacy. Such symbolic capital may well be exploited by cities to brand themselves in manners attractive to the highly-skilled (Tseng 2011). Although we may be witnessing trends of convergence associated with globalization, it remains the case that the manner in which such trends impact on particular places, even global cities, may be divergent (Kazepov 2005). Cities can be conceptualised as open systems, but nevertheless ‘nested’ in broader social, economic, cultural and institutional contexts, where the nation-state remains central to this ‘nesting’ (Kazepov 2005). Whether originating at the local, regional or national level, cities display a degree of path dependency (Kazepov 2005), and as a result, develop as agglomerated centres of gravity for particular forms of capital, economic and human. In reference to London, Beaverstock and Hall (2011) have pointed out that, ‘the City’s competitiveness is founded on its ability to attract and retain elite foreign workers, in order to nourish its global talent pool, expand business opportunities, drive innovation and create wealth’ (p. 1).

The quality and quantity of the total stock of human capital in particular places remains important to an individual's ability to progress their own competencies, capacities and career (Beaverstock and Hall 2012, Sassen 2005).

Co-presence has been classically defined by Goffman (1963) as referring in its fullest sense to situations where "persons must sense that they are close enough to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived" (p.17), and as such where people are "accessible, available, and subject to one another" (p. 22). The nature and meaning of co-presence has been rendered infinitely more complex by the emergence of information communication technologies, and intricate debates have evolved around the conceptualisation of co-presence in such a context. We suggest here that 'real co-presence', in the sense of corporeal or physical proximity, or at least a spatial proximity that makes face to face interaction a frequent occurrence, remain significant to the realisation of human capital. Highly-skilled migration expresses the ongoing variegation in what global cities, as places, are able to offer.

This paper draws upon data derived from an 18-month, ESRC-funded project, qualitative study focussing on the life and work experiences of the French highly skilled in London's financial and business sectors, and their families. The project was based on semi-structured, one-off interviews and one focus group. A total of 37 people participated in the study; 16 men and 21 women, with the bulk aged between 35 and 44. The majority had arrived in the UK in the 2000s, though some had been here for considerably longer. 23 were married, 5 co-habiting and 9 single. 25 were parents¹.

The term 'highly skilled' covers a diverse group but the OECD and European Commission/Eurostat framework defines them as those who have *either* successfully completed a tertiary education and/or are employed in occupational roles normally requiring tertiary qualifications (such as undergraduate and postgraduate degrees). The majority of our participants satisfy this definition on both counts; 29 were qualified to degree level or above, and 16 had pursued subsequent education and training in the UK. Twenty were currently employed in senior positions in, or allied to, the financial sector; 3 worked in the field of finance law; 4 were employed in business-related higher education, whilst the remainder of those in work were occupied in a range of highly skilled professional positions. **Only 4 of the participants who were employed in the business and finance fields at the point of interview had substantive third country working experience prior to migrating to London. All spoke English on arrival in London, though to highly variable standards. Those with the most limited command of English were those whose educational and**

¹ A snowballing technique was used to recruit participants, with purposive sampling to ensure a sufficient range of key demographic categories: gender, age (capturing a life-course spectrum), family status and length of residence in London. The data was subjected to a broadly inductive coding exercise, using NVivo, to facilitate a thematic analysis. Although the project was formulated in pursuit of specified research questions, the coding process was in the first instance entirely data driven, such that 'good codes' were those that captured the richness of the data in themselves (Boyatzis 1998). However, as themes emerged inductively, these were verified through deductive re-examinations of the data, to produce rigorous and analytically-informed findings

occupational experience had given them little necessity to learn the language. Those with the greatest fluency had either studied a course, or worked in a context, in France, where English was required, or alternatively had enjoyed third country experiences in an Anglophone country (especially the US).

Negotiating London's Business Praxis

Most participants made some reference to nationally determined differences in the manner in which British and French professionals approached the praxis of business. Consequently, the 'softer skills', associated with inter-cultural competence in different national business contexts, remain important (Beaverstock and Hall 2012). Migration, even for a highly-skilled constituency armed with as much cosmopolitan cultural capital as any, brings with it the need to engage with difference, and in a manner marked by a degree of inter-cultural competence (Butcher 2009). There can be no guarantees of the transferability of one's business-cultural capital, or of the sufficiency of one's inter-cultural skills in acquiring such capital. In line with Butcher (2009), our data suggest that the world of work was a space in which French highly skilled migrants found the experience of difference particularly notable.

A notable feature of the data in this context related to the different ways in which French and British business professionals approached problem-solving in a working environment. The French were represented as characteristically analytical, with a tendency to employ tools of abstraction for both understanding and resolving business-related challenges. But in turn, this orientation was seen as merely one manifestation of a broader national orientation towards critical analytical methodologies that were equally evident in the field of politics and culture.

Emphasising the French tendency towards Cartesian dualism, Damien reflects, "I guess I brought a lot in terms of organization and efficiency in the team really, and I think this is the Cartesian way of thinking actually, the French way of thinking, which is very analytical...The English are much more EQ emotionally driven [whereas] the French are much more IQ intellectually [driven]... like processing ideas, concepts. It's much more abstract".

French intellectualism is juxtaposed here to English (rather than British) emotionality. This is interesting given the prevalence, within our data, for a representation of the French as emotional and expressive, and the English as stoic and reserved. Speaking about the 'reserved' national character of the British, Claudine claims that,

if you work in a French office you will hear a lot of screaming, you would know who got on with whom, it's quite clear, there's no hiding of feelings which you'd never get in the UK but it doesn't mean everybody loves each other, they're just much more reserved about the way they feel about things.

Damien goes on to offer a resolution to this apparent contradiction; "English people are cold...they are introverted emotional people. They don't show it outside, but they feel it inside". Bringing his account of the respective characteristics of the English and French in line with the bulk of the data, he goes on to say; "English people are much more pragmatic, French people are much more theoretical". Charles concurs. "The English businessman is very practical. At the end of the day, what he will make as a decision will make sense – 'it works, so it's good'. The French would say, 'it's logical, so it's good'". Pointing to a difference of national educational and cultural traditions, Charles goes on to assert that a

French professional, with a background in *les grandes écoles*ⁱ “is rational, loves rationalizing things, to apply a logical analytical sense of commenting. The English guy with the same level of studies would just get to the same point quicker. It doesn’t look very intelligent but it works”. Luc suggests that French analytic tendencies are a consequence of “a Latin influence”. Specifically, he claims that in the UK, “...it tends to be more pragmatic; black or white, but it’s never grey, whereas the French tend to be more always grey. That’s a Latin influence I would say”.

This rendition of the French professional as characteristically intellectual related closely to a positive re-claiming (Butcher 2009) of Frenchness. Though the education system was criticised for its role in supporting un-meritocratic social closure in France, it was nevertheless prized for its inculcation of rigour, abstraction, logic, and linguistic accomplishment. It was also valued for the breadth of knowledge it imparted. According to Samson, the French curricula is “...much broader than you would have if you came out of a university in the UK...And that has a fundamental relation to the way you react in a business...you can act quicker if you come from a French background because you have so much overall knowledge that...you will find a solution after a while”. Such renditions of French business praxis as being definitively intellectual, as grounded on a Cartesian logic, corresponds closely to broader renditions of French business praxis within the comparative business literature (Alston et al 2003).

Language is central to all forms of business praxis. Underpinning convergence perspectives tends to be a set of assumptions about the relentless hegemony of the English language, and with this the progressive disappearance of the dissonances associated with linguistic difference (Wood 2003). For Bertrand, “because of the colonial past of England, English has become the lingua franca everywhere, certainly the business language everywhere...” But this hegemony is in fact far from secured. For Florin, “English is so important...if you can speak English you can go everywhere...I would say that it could not be possible to be relocated in Spain or Italy if you don’t speak the language...because most of your clients don’t speak English”

At one moment English appears to be a ticket to universal mobility: “it’s a platform that you can use to propel you somewhere else” (Michel), and at the next, the limitations of its use restrict the English-fluent migrant’s access to particular labour markets. The participants offered a host of different mappings of the reach and influence of the English language in international and European business. In general, amongst our participants, France was located at the outer-reaches of this influence. Adèle, reflecting on her experience of working with French banks, claims that “...it’s amazing the amount of people who don’t speak English. Less in Spain, but in France, it’s appalling”. Although Nickerson (2005) has claimed that, “the dominance of English used as a *lingua franca* in international business contexts is now seemingly beyond dispute”, our data is suggestive of a nuanced picture, broadly supporting Wood’s (2005) challenge to the notion that English has become the globally hegemonic language of business.

Nevertheless, a key advantage of London, for most of our participants, was the opportunity to develop a greater command of the English language, and the social and cultural capital associated with this. As Florin claims: “English is so important in every part of your life that you need to speak English, and the only way to learn English is to live in the country somewhere”. In the context of business, English language competence serves as an important social asset, in the Bourdieusian sense, facilitating access to business-related social networks, and underpinning forms of ‘fit’ and legitimacy central to career escalation. For Jean:

“...English is the main language for the financial sector and you cannot afford not to be absolutely fluent”.

Many participants made reference to the challenging process of learning English to a level that could secure the desired access to occupational progression and inter-cultural competence. Chiswick (1979) has pointed to the importance of host country language competence in securing employment, with Csedő (2008) referring to English language knowledge as the ‘invisible facilitator’. If, as Csedő (2008) asserts, skills and competencies are socially constructed through a process of negotiation, language must be at the heart of this process. Renée explained that her boyfriend had secured a job quickly on arrival in London: “...because his level of English was really good, and I was not really confident. So at the beginning I think ‘...I have a Masters degree but I can’t speak English. I’m so stupid’”. The non-negotiable nature of English language competence, at least for those migrants who work in an English-speaking context in London, is characterised by Charles: “we speak English because we have to...because of the business language, we need to speak English...it’s a decision based on needs”.

Language competence is also profoundly contextual. For Charles, “the English we understand is the business English of cash flow analysis, p&l analysis, customer service level agreement, management English. But when it’s about social English we’re as handicapped as you in France”. But language remains a barrier even for those who may appear to have sufficient competence to navigate successful career pathways. True fluency is measured by the capacity of language to facilitate the communication of complexity and affect, and in manner that enables a sense of control. Even in a business context: “you feel like a teenager speaking the language because you don’t have the same nuance...Most of the time we hate to be losing control. The French, like the English, have a very strong pride of themselves, right?” (Charles). This suggests the need to understand linguistic competence as a process, as having a ‘career’ with an aspirational endpoint of linguistic inclusion. Kennedy (2008) has pointed to the importance of a range of para-linguistic competencies (including accent, slang and social habits) required of the newly arrived migrant.

An interesting finding to emerge from our data was the way in which English language was inextricably connected not only to national – business and economic - culture but also to a notion of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ culture. Jean clusters the English language and an Anglo-Saxon management style together in discussing his appreciation of work in London. For Jean: “English language, but also management style, which was very much...Anglo-Saxon driven, was also...something that I was very happy with”. Bernadette places great import on the English language as the medium through which ‘Anglo-Saxon’ culture is communicated. Discussing the foundation of ‘Anglo-Saxonism’, she suggests:

it’s probably the language first which is, I think, a tool, which has always some consequences in the way you think, in your mentality, in the way you approach things...what I call Anglo-Saxon behaviour...Also I think what is very specific to the Anglo-Saxon culture is also the fact that we all meet with the same language in a very specific place and that’s the main point of London.

Butcher (2009) discusses what could be described as the performativity of identities, particularly the manner in which social identities are constituted through repetition and

recitation. Language and communicative behaviour generally become the necessary basis through which culturally competent business communication can take place in an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ context, for the French professional. Bernadette goes on to say: “I know how to deal in a negotiation, I know the kind of person I have in front of me. I know that I will not obtain anything with the same type of behaviour I could have in my country”.

But language is merely one dimension of a broader business-related communication praxis that bears the marks of nationally-characteristic business cultures. The data were replete with references to characteristic French and British ways of communicating at work. There was a common allusion to the ‘forthright’ nature of French approaches to communication in the workplace, even in the UK. According to Adèle commenting on what she considered to be an essentially French trait; “If I’ve got something to say, I will say it, and that for me is typically French. If I don’t agree with something, wherever I am, I will say it. I will make a point of saying it and I will make a stand for it. Even though I might not get what I want”. Here Adèle appears to be claiming, as a French national trait, a practice of speaking; an insistence on a right to speak (to the point of duty); and a ‘need’ to be heard. Reflective of the data discussed below pertaining to the normative ‘politeness’ of British business environments, she seems to suggest that such forms of ‘speaking’ may be transgressive of the communication ethics informing business praxis in London. For Florin: “probably in France we are just more direct, probably in the UK you’re more reserved”.

Valentine accounts for her friend, who has recently moved to a ‘very British company’, saying:

He’s really French in behaviour. Quite arrogant, secure you know, the way he talks...and there’s a clash of culture...he hasn’t been able to adapt because probably he’s just used his French mental frame and he is behaving like a French person. French people are very outspoken where in an English environment you can’t be like that. I mean you can say things but there is a way of saying it and talking to him has really made me realize that I’m not French anymore because I would not have behaved like him in that environment...he understands that he has to change but he has to do the work on himself

This rich passage expresses a number of important themes. The French are constructed here as typically outspoken, to the point of arrogance. French outspokenness appears responsible for a ‘culture clash’ with the normative rules of English/British discursive praxis at work. It would seem that for the French to ‘fit’ in such a context, they must find the will *and* the capability to ‘work on themselves’ in ways that ‘close the gap’ with the character of British working praxis. It may be that for some highly skilled French migrants, reciting French approaches to business practice may facilitate a sense of control in a context of dissonance-inducing work-based difference (Butcher 2009). Kennedy (2005) has argued that whilst highly skilled migrants may at first lack social capital, they are subsequently able to utilise evolved levels of cultural capital to gain access to career enhancing social networks. Whilst not challenging this rendition of social capital, our data brings into question any assumption of the readily transferable nature of cultural capital to use for such purposes. Valentine’s account of her friend, above, indicates the dissonances that may come with inter-cultural contact in the business world. The manner in which such dissonances are navigated and mediated involves a host of variables, including: the quantitative and qualitative nature of those dissonances, the meanings attributed to these by the social actors involved, and the willingness and ability of those actors to find adaptive and effective resolutions in particular

contexts. But adaptations occur, and the career successes of our participants bear testimony to this. Pierre points to both the qualitative changes that work and life in London can bring to one's identity and orientations, and to an important determinant of a migrant's willingness and ability to successfully mediate associated differences and dissonance:

I must say, I don't really know where I sit right now in terms of being French or not. I am French, obviously. I speak with a French accent and so I can't hide it...I think I'm less French, I definitely think I'm less French but I should perhaps put a bit of a nuance in there because when I left France it's because I didn't feel I was belonging to that France so I was perhaps not really that French after all otherwise I would have stayed there. You see what I mean? I left because I was not happy with the way things were in that country but I've still, I've got a certain way of life, a way of looking at things which is probably very French.

Pierre suggests that one's general orientation to the country of origin, before and after migration, is significant in determining adaptation to the country of settlement. This seems confirmed by Damien, when he says, "I'm here because I'm not really a French patriot at all, so this is why I always wanted to live abroad...I'm very into English, American, Anglo-Saxon civilizations. I've always been interested since I was a child and a teenager and so I really wanted to come and live in London for a very long time" There were a number of references made to the 'politeness' of the working environment in London. Politeness, as a communicative 'ethic of care' for the feelings or well-being of the other, was positively regarded by all participants who made reference to it, though not without reservation. According to Charles, in UK business: "you don't want to be rude, so you always make up nice ways to say "no" and for the Frenchman he takes years to understand that". The ethics, or perhaps the 'politics' of politeness, are a code that takes time to adapt to. But this politeness was also acknowledged to be misleading; a device that flatters to deceive. Charles goes on to say; "the 'yes but' is an art-form in this country. They never say 'no'. When they say 'I'm interested, how interesting, yes interesting' it means bullshit". But politeness may mask something far more problematic. According to Michel, "it gets to the point where people are polite right in front of you and then shoot you in the back...It's just how English people are here in the work environment".

Conclusion

Intra-European highly skilled migrants have been presented as the epitome of an emergent class of 'Euro-stars' (Favell 2008) or 'super-movers' (Santecru et 2009). Such accounts have been subjected to an emergent, empirically-grounded, critique suggesting that although highly-skilled migrants may be armed with substantive quantities and qualities of cosmopolitan cultural capital, their mobilities encounter significant 'frictions' (authors forthcoming). These frictions are associated with the ongoing variegation in national ways of 'doing business', and as a part of this, the cultural underpinnings of the manner in which business is done within different national contexts (Leung et al 2005, Wood 2003). Additionally, it is an outcome of the fact that social and cultural capital emerges within particular places and thus may not be seamlessly transferable to other locations. Whilst appreciating the capacity of highly-skilled migrants to recognise and adapt to the differences associated with the inter-cultural experiences that come with inter-national migration (Butcher 2009), our data contribute to a rich understanding of such experience, and some of its associated 'frictions'.

Focussing on French highly-skilled migrants in London, we contribute to understanding highly skilled migration in four particular ways. Firstly, we highlight the need to understand the particularities and context-dependant dynamics operating within particular instances of highly skilled migration. Secondly, whilst seeking to avoid essentialism, and methodological nationalism, we demonstrate the ongoing importance of national variegation in the expressions of capitalism, and the cultural underpinnings of the business praxes found therein. Thirdly, we illustrate the ‘frictions’ associated with the inter-cultural experience of working in a context of business-related cultural difference. Finally, we suggest ways in which highly-skilled migrants may navigate and mediate these differences in the interest of career progression and escalation.

The transferability of human capital across national borders has been supported by a host of developments, of both design and default. There currently exists an intense competition, between cities and nations, to attract and retain the world’s ‘brightest and best’, where success depends much on the breadth and depth of the talent pool amassed (Beaverstock 2005). This has in turn provided a key driver for the internationalisation of credentials, and their measurement and recognition, supported by a legislative framework (Salt 1992, Csedő 2008). As theoretical knowledge becomes increasingly important to economic activity, particularly within the ‘new economy’ (Sennett 2006), emergent transferabilities of knowledge become possible. But there is a significant literature attesting to the fact of ongoing obstacles to the transferability of human capital remain. Qualifications and skills may not be recognised outside their country of acquisition (Zulauf 2001). The work of Csedő (2008), Mournier (2001) and Meyer (2001) suggests that the meanings of skills are determined by a process of social construction and as such negotiated by asymmetrical parties in specific networked contexts that do much to determine what can or cannot be recognised. Our data point to the ongoing tensions between the drivers of convergence and the ongoing bulwark of variegation, such that highly skilled migrants face the challenge of inter-cultural adaptation in business contexts that offer both opportunity and obstacle, and in ways that confront the will and ability of both person and place to find productive and successful solutions of inter-cultural working praxis (Butcher 2009).

Policy recommendations:

At EU level

1. Paying due heed to the on-going salience of national business praxis, EU policy makers need to work with business leaders to ensure that different ways of ‘doing business’ do not operate as barriers to highly skilled mobilities

At national level

2. Language fluency continues to impede highly skilled migration. Policy makers at national level need to work with education providers to develop a framework for improving language fluency especially for business purposes

At regional level

3. Highly skilled migration is crucial to the London economy, regional leaders need to work with businesses and national policy makers to reduce the frictions which may hinder this particular migratory flow

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ⁱ *Les Grandes Écoles* is the collective name for a large number of higher educational institutions that operate largely out-with the University sector, are highly prestigious and selective, and are associated with progression on to senior positions in the French economy, civil service and politics