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Migrants with insecure legal status and access to work: the role of ethnic solidarity networks

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Abstract

This article explores the complexities of ethnic solidarity and ethnic capital in enabling participation on labour markets for migrants with insecure legal status in the UK. By drawing together research insights and data from a questionnaire survey of 178 Iraqi-Kurdish migrants with insecure legal status, four focus groups and ten expert interviews, this paper examines how ‘unauthorised’ migrants get access to the segmented labour market at a time of increased in-border controls in the UK. It argues that conflict-generated diasporas such as the Kurds display a distinct solidarity with their community members with insecure legal status and provide access to the labour markets against the tangible threat of in-border migration enforcement. We term this form of solidarity as stretched solidarity which emerges during risky, difficult and destitute times and it is a reluctant act of empathy and socio-political position. This paper identifies the social phenomenon of stretched solidarity and sets out a model for understanding its embeddedness within conflict-generated diasporic networks.

Keywords: ethnic solidarity, stretched solidarity, networks, conflict and migration, labour market participation, migrants with insecure legal status

Introduction

This article explores the complexities of ethnic solidarity and ethnic capital in enabling participation on labour markets for migrants with insecure legal status in the UK. Drawing on research with Iraqi-Kurdish migrants in precarious situations, this paper aims to contribute a nuanced concept of stretched solidarities to the theoretical debate on labour-market segmentation, migration and ethnic solidarity networks.

It focuses on two main aspects of work in relation to ‘unauthorised’ migrants. Firstly, the paper concentrates on ‘unauthorised’ migrants’ working lives in terms of sectors of employment, jobs, working conditions and pay. Secondly, it examines the coping strategies that they develop and adopt for accessing work and managing work and life against the tangible uncertainties of being detected, arrested and deported, which brings to the fore the importance of ethnic

solidarity, the associated social and ethnic capital, and the 'push' factors for migration that render return unfeasible.

Building upon previous studies on the factors shaping undocumented migrants' experiences on the host labour markets (Bloch 2013; Ryan et al. 2008; Ahmad 2008), we expand the theoretical understanding of labour market participation and ethnic solidarity networks, accounting for the sending context of war and political persecution, and the trajectory to irregularity. While there is substantial academic and policy interest in migrant employment in the UK (Wills et al. 2009; Holgate et al. 2010; Markova et al. 2016), the working lives of migrants with insecure legal status and the role of 'ethnic solidarity' (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes 1995; Ahmad 2008; Bloch 2013) have received less attention.

This article contributes to the migrant employment literature by examining the intersections between ethnic solidarity as a form of ethnic and social capital among conflict generated diaspora communities settled in the UK and the increased in-border controls in relation to access to work for migrants with insecure legal status.

This paper is organised as follows. First, the literature on irregular migrant workers is reviewed, especially the conceptualisation of the role of altruism and ethnic solidarity as outcomes of ethnic and social capital. Second, the methodology and data collection methods are outlined. Third, the empirical findings are discussed to explain the strategies adopted by irregular migrants to access work, the experiences and challenges they face, and the role of ethnic solidarity networks in the process.

The theoretical contribution of the paper

Social networks, ethnic capital and the acts of solidarity

There has been a growing body of literature on undocumented migrants and their vulnerable position in the labour market (Jones et al. 2006; Koser 2008; Ahmad 2008; McKay et al. 2010; Bloch et al. 2011; Palenga-Möllnbeck 2013; Bloch et al. 2014). The reasons and motives for migration, the 'push' factors (Bloch 2013), often impact on migrants' degree of reliance on ethnic networks and their experiences of acts of solidarity by fellow community members. In certain geopolitical contexts, particularly the Middle East, the moving costs accrued are equalised with the costs to smugglers (Ahmad 2008). More recent clandestine journeys from

the Kurdish part of Iraq to the UK may range from \$6,000 to \$9,000, a price that accounts for the complexities of the trips and the associated risks of detection. The existing studies indicate that migrants smuggled in the country are more likely to rely on co-ethnic networks to find jobs in ethnic niches in the 'old' migrant economy because of the impossibility to access employment agencies or other legal recruitment institutions (Edwards et al. 2016).

Social networks are key in the conceptual framework of social capital of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), and Granovetter (1974), defined as sets of social relationships embedded in networks which consist of resources, the group's shared values, "impersonal connections and positional relations" (Bottero and Crossley 2002:8). The concept of social networks has been used in migration studies to understand the various stages of the migration process including the pre-migration, settlement, integration, community relationships and access to the labour market as well as trans-migrants' relationships with their homeland (Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Ryan et al. 2008; Bloch and McKay 2015; D'Angelo 2015, Molina et al 2015, Keles 2016). However, as Ryan et al. (2008:673) point out, "[s]ocial networks are,...often conceptualised rather loosely, with little attention to the varieties of networks and the different forms of support they may provide".

Conflict-generated diasporas such as the Kurds - those social groups (ethnic and religious) who have been displaced from their homeland to another country where they have established internal and transnational networks to mobilise resources for an eventual home return - constitute a marked type of ethnic networks. Their shared history (feelings of loss and displacement from their homeland, and trauma) (Alexander 2004, Keles 2019), ethnicity, and subordination, language, cultural and social ties, and practices may play a pivotal role in the creation of ethnic solidarity among the diasporas in terms of supporting their co-ethnic members in need. This form of ethnic solidarity is not based on altruism, rather, but it is related to collective trauma, memory and experience and political mobilisation of group members directly which are manifested through empathy, sympathy and solidarity with those who are in need, underpinned by a sense of duty. In this context, this form of solidarity is different from altruism which has been described as the "unselfish concern" for the wellbeing of others (Tchouassi and Sikod, 2010: 2).

Immigration is a 'network-driven process' where relationships based on kinship, friendship and shared community of origin are instrumental in linking new arrivals with established ethnic

communities (Massey et al. 1993; Portes 1995; Bakewell et al. 2011; Ryan et al. 2008; Bloch 2013). Portes (1995) points out the 'newcomers' will usually have access to the "ethnic enclaves" in such structured networks. Ethnic networks play a crucial role in providing information and knowledge about the labour market, connecting employees and employers, but also providing emotional and well-being support (Ryan et al.,= 2008). The literature has well-recorded the political dimension of the conflict-generated diasporic networks, arguing that they use their political, economic and cultural capacity to mobilise support and influence locally, nationally and internationally for their political demand (Burgess 2014; Cohen 2017). The role of ethnic entrepreneurs in this process has widely been documented. They support the cultural and political activities in the community; most of them are also part of the politicised diasporic structures (Dusenbery and Darshan 2010; Fair 2005). However, what remains unexamined in this process is the role of collective solidarity of conflict-generated diasporic networks in facilitating access to the labour markets to co-ethnic workers without residence and/or work permits. Moreover, the literature on ethnic niches overlooks the risks that co-ethnic employers take when providing employment to migrants with insecure legal status, at times of very tangible threats of immigration raids into (ethnic) businesses. In so doing, they may face potential fines and even closure of their businesses. We argue that their key driving motivations are deeply rooted in the shared history, migration experiences and identity politics of the diasporic community.

Borjas (2014) argues that with the improvement of the 'overall quality of the ethnic environment' (status, knowledge and material resources), the size and scope of ethnic capital will improve, affecting their economic and social mobility in the host country. Migration studies tend to illuminate the benefits of ethnic networks, overlooking inherent hierarchical structures. However, "the same networks that can enhance employment prospects also have the ability to destroy them" (Antcliff et al. 2007, 388). Hence, the usefulness of (ethnic) networks reflects the power structures of class, status, gender, and ethnicity (Ryan et al. 2008), which could trigger acts of 'exploitative' solidarity (Erdemir and Vasta 2007; Waldinger and Lichter 2003) where acts of community solidarity are interwoven with employers' expectations of recruiting labour for personal benefits or profits, without the provision of adequate protection and compensation. Insecure migrants, with differing trajectories of irregularity, utilise networks to different ends, dependent on their particular vulnerabilities.

Defining Stretched Solidarity

While we agree with the critics regarding the exploitative structures of the ethnic solidarity, we also draw on Keles's research (2015), which shows that conflict-generated diasporas such as the Kurds display a distinct solidarity among the community members through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained bonded ties due to their personal and collective history. In this paper, we focus on the 'stretched' solidarity of the conflict-generated diasporas in regards to providing access to the labour markets to 'unauthorised' migrants.

Scholars have emphasised the enabling factors of community solidarity discussing the role of the political articulation and mobilisation of the Kurdish diasporas for their homeland that have led to the establishment of strong community organisations, networks, obligations and responsibilities for their co-ethnic groups (Ramanathapillai 2006; Koinova 2011; Keles 2015). These articulated experiences have created a diasporic consciousness, responsive politics and mobilized ethnic capital, in which ethnic origin, shared experiences of expulsion and the sense of belonging are constitutive of trust, strong empathy and solidarity (Holgate et al. 2012) with the newly arrived asylum seekers, particularly undocumented migrants. Research has found that geographically displaced diasporas have a powerful sense of obligations and responsibilities toward their co-ethnic group (Koinova 2011). For this reason, conflict-generated diasporas take risks in providing financial resources to political parties and organisations. This stretched solidarity is also activated for the undocumented migrants in the country of residence (Bloch et al. 2014). Although migration studies have focused on the notion of risk (Massey et al. 1993), no theoretical framework explains the risks that ethnic entrepreneurs take to help their 'unauthorised' co-ethnic workers. This paper explores the interrelationship between the sustained bonded ties among members of conflict-generated diasporas and their risk-taking to help members in need, termed as stretched solidarity. The UK government uses a discourse of criminalisation of migrants with insecure legal status considering them a 'risky group' in the public sphere. As Zinn and Taylor Gooby (2006,37) state "...the individual's perception and response to risk can only be understood against the background of their embeddedness in a socio-cultural background and identity as a member of a social group, rather than through individual cognition".

Acts of ethnic solidarity, closely linked to members' socio-political background, collective identity and embeddedness in diasporic structures and stretch to facilitate access to work for migrants with insecure legal status within the conflict-generated diasporas. Stretched solidarity is the support and resource-sharing among members of certain conflict-generated diasporic

groups, embedded within a shared history of displacement, collective memory, culture, and obligations. The 'stretched' solidarity emerges during risky, difficult and destitute times and it is a reluctant act of empathy and socio-political position among conflict-generated refugee communities. The political articulation and mobilisation of conflict-generated diaspora create bonded ties and structures which manage risk for their co-ethnic workers in need, reducing the threat of detection, arrests and deportation.

Yet, we are aware that ethnic solidarity behaviour is not an insular construct but embedded in political, institutional and legal contexts. Restrictive immigration regimes and increased fines and business defamation pose significant limitations on how far ethnic solidarity can stretch. While co-ethnics provide reliable, trustworthy and cheap labour, employers provide their irregular co-ethnics with jobs and relative security subject to risks. Some scholars contend that employers' recruitment of co-ethnic workers is a profound example of 'the perpetuation of durable inequalities' (Paraskevopoulou et al 2012,410) stemming almost exclusively from categorical differences rather than 'individual differences in attributes, propensities, or performances' (Tilly 1999,7). There is plenty of empirical evidence in support of this thesis, which overlooks the risks that co-ethnic employers undertake when they provide employment to irregular co-ethnics. Increased employer sanctions, more often targeted at ethnic businesses, add an additional facet to the discourse on ethnic solidarity networks and their pivotal role in ethnic recruitment. Research indicates that employers may take advantage of migrants' vulnerable situation to "circumvent statutory employment rights such as the minimum wage, health and safety provisions and holiday and sick pay" (Bloch 2013, 274). Other recruitment motives stem from obligations and commitments to family and friends. They transform into 'stretched' solidarity to provide work for vulnerable co-ethnic group members, against the tangible threat of in-border migration enforcement. Employers themselves are family and ethnic community members, with a strong sense of ethnic solidarity. These personal and political positions often "outweigh the risks or fears of sanctions among some employers who [...] simply 'take the risk'" (Bloch et al. 2014,147).

It is relevant to mention here that the quality of the ethnic environment (Borjas 2014) and social networks pre-determine migrants' sectors of employment, types of jobs, their pay and working conditions (Piore 1979,8). Building on the theoretical perspective of Doeringer and Piore (1971), the labour market where migrants with insecure legal status are employed is defined by its dual structure, comprising a primary sector of formal employment in 'good' jobs

and a secondary sector of predominantly informal employment in 'bad' jobs. Based on research in the USA, it has been argued that the ethnic enclaves constitute an additional (Portes 1981; Duran, Massey and Pren 2016), third sector of labour market integration along with 'grey' zones in between these sectors (McKay et al. 2011). However, Bailey and Waldinger (1991, 432) pointed out that ethnic solidarity, which is 'the presumed source of the distinctive enclave effect', is not part of the theory of labour market segmentation. For migrant businesses have been identified in the 'secondary sector' while Wilson and Martin (1989, 138) showed that enclave economies 'reproduce critical features of the centre (primary) economy'. Ethnic solidarity, therefore, permeates the dual labour market structure, with the migrant economy spanning both sectors, subject to institutional regulations. The latter encompasses all the employment niches and jobs where insecure migrants find work based on their ethnic capital and solidarity of employers and co-workers (Holgate et al. 2012), delineating the cultural dimensions of informality. Work conditions and pay in the migrant businesses may differ depending on the business position in the segmented labour market. Increased in-border controls have limited jobs to businesses and sectors where primary relationships exist between the migrants with insecure legal status and the business owner/manager or when solidarity is stretched to include the tangible possibility of fines and even business closure/business defamation/bad publicity/ long-lasting damage on the business if detected employing undocumented migrants. 'Stretched solidarity' is in place when solidarity acts under high risks of detection for the business providing work to their co-ethnic members in need of it for their survival.

Data collection and field research

The analysis utilises primarily qualitative data from a questionnaire survey of 178, adult, Iraqi-Kurdish migrants with insecure legal status - undocumented migrants, who, in their majority, had fled conflict in Iraq, had entered the country clandestinely and never applied for asylum; failed asylum seekers with no right to appeal; and asylum applicants with long-term pending decisions on their multiple appeals. The survey data was collected in the period December 2012-April 2013 by the authors of this article. Participants were recruited through UK Kurdish social media and different Kurdish communities, political, religious and gender-based organisations, networks and individuals. The survey questionnaire comprised a combination of multiple-choice, closed questions and open-ended questions. The paper draws on three sections of the questionnaire namely demographic data, migration history and current work and living

conditions in the UK, with specific questions on the role of ethnic community friends and relatives. The final sample was gender-skewed, with only eight female respondents, partly reflecting a mode of predominantly young, male migration from the region.

In addition to the survey, we conducted four focus groups with 14 young adults – 20-30 years old - with insecure migration status, living in London, Brighton, Birmingham and Derbyshire. These interviews were broadly structured around questions linked to pre-migration and the journey to the UK, life and work in the UK and future plans. The participants were from Halabja and Kirkuk in Kurdistan Region of Iraq and disputed territories of Kurdistan in Iraq and were working for Kurdish employers in off-licence shops, bakeries, cafés, carwash and restaurants.

Furthermore, ten community key informants were interviewed face-to-face to gain a better understanding of the role and function of the existing ethnic networks used by the ‘unauthorised’ migrants. They were representatives of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in the UK, the Refugee Council in London, the Kurdish Housing Association in London, the Gilgamesh Centre in Manchester, the Kurdish Association in London, the Iraqi Association in London, the Iraqi Welfare Association in London, the Kurdish Cultural Centre in London, one of the main Interpretation and Translation Companies in London and a community worker in Brighton. The three data sets provided complementary perspectives on the research topic.

Access to participants has been widely discussed in the social sciences, emphasising the fact that conducting sensitive research with vulnerable populations poses potential methodological challenges over ethical issues. Researchers have highlighted the difficulty of physical access to spaces used by the groups under study (Düvell et al. 2010). Contacts in community organisations were instrumental in accessing survey and focus-group respondents. Other respondents were recruited through UK Kurdish social media. Information was sent out about this research to community centres, political, religious and student networks, women's organisations, in addition to contacting people known to the research team.

Interviews were conducted in the Kurdish language, which facilitated credible, trustworthy sharing of information. However, some survey participants have also completed the survey in English. The identity of all respondents was protected and full anonymity was ensured. The majority of them arrived in the UK in 2007 and 2008, the rest were more recent arrivals, coming

to the UK in the period 2009-2012. Most of the survey respondents were young (92% of the sample were between 18 and 34 years of age), single (82%, n=146), male (96%, n=170), with slightly over half with no formal education (21%, n=36) or primary school education only (30%, n=53). Some 82% (n=145) were failed asylum seekers; 14% (n=25) were awaiting decisions on their asylum appeals, and 4% (n=8) were undocumented migrants who entered the country clandestinely and never applied for asylum (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the survey sample

	Numbers	Percent
<u>Legal status</u>		
a) undocumented	8	4.5
b) refused asylum applications	145	81.5
c) pending asylum applications	25	14.0
<u>Age group</u>		
18-24	55	30.9
25-29	68	38.2
30-34	40	22.5
35-39	8	4.5
40-49	6	3.4
50+	1	0.6
<u>Education</u>		
No formal education	36	20.2
Primary	53	30.3
Secondary education/professional	72	41.1
University and above	14	8.0
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	170	96.0
Female	8	4.0

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2012-2013

Empirical findings

Life in the UK: Sector of Employment, Wage and Payment

An understanding of the 'push' factors for migration, the aspirations for a new life in the host country (Bloch, 2013) and the smuggling trajectory of irregularity are instrumental in the contextualisation of irregular work and the role of ethnic 'stretched' solidarity in accessing it in the case of the Iraqi-Kurdish insecure migrant workers. The majority of respondents in the sample had fled conflict in Iraq. They stated 'war/violence' and 'political persecution' as the

primary 'push factors' for emigration, followed by economic and political instability. Other reasons were articulated as 'lack of freedom of opinion', and 'terrorist threats'.

At the time of the questionnaire survey, 107 reported working, and 71 said they were not working. Those not working were young men who feared losing their asylum appeals or applications if detected working. They either had claimed asylum and were waiting for a decision or had their initial decision rejected and were in the process of appealing. *"I am not allowed to work. If they catch me working, I will lose all the support I am getting. I am an outstanding chef and had a great offer to work in an Italian restaurant for £2,000 a month, but I was scared to take it."* (20 years, male). In focus group discussions, some of them admitted to occasional work earning £140-£260 per week. *"But it can be a life without much dignity having to beg people for a day's work"* argued one survey respondent.

"There are little human rights here. There is no work, and I am not allowed to do anything The UK is worst, instead of helping you, they make you turn to crime". (27 years, male).

These words were echoed by the Director of the Kurdish Association in London who spoke of peoples' desperation with life in hiding and insecure jobs that lead them to break out in violent acts. *"This links to lack of English language skills and learning the culture here."*

Seven respondents spoke of acts of solidarity by ethnic networks, with bridging relations, that secured them work in the primary economy, thus, achieving a degree of 'structural' embeddedness (Portes 1981; Ahmad 2008). They were working as a migration legal advisor, IT specialist, translator, educator, factory worker, market trader, working side by side with local workers, without ethnic co-workers. Over a third of the survey respondents were employed in service jobs (cafes, bars, restaurants, takeaways, car wash and garage work, hairdressers and bakeries) in the central economy, with cultural aspects of informality, mediated by solidarity acts (Table 2 and Table 3).

Confirming Piore's (1979) labour market segmentation theory, the focus group interviews show that 'unauthorised' migrants are usually clustered in the secondary segment or the 'periphery' of the market as a result of their conditions of insecurity compounded by their weak ties to ethnic solidarity networks as well as individual differences in human capital such as education, host labour market experience, transferability of skills and the capacity of speaking

English, among others. Our data show that many migrants with insecure legal status engage in undesirable forms of employment, which increases their labour market vulnerability in Kurdish ethnic niches, mainly in the ‘grey’ zones of the labour market. This can be partly explained by the Kurdish experiences of institutional discrimination in the homeland preventing them from accessing adequate education to allow operation in the primary labour segment of the host economy. Those who arrived in the UK as refugees in the late 1980s and early 1990s had experienced a less favourable economic climate compared to the time other migrant groups first arrived. This quality of the ethnic environment is likely to influence migrant employment conditions.

Table 2. Sector of employment by jobs performed in the UK

		Sector of employment				Total
		Formal sector	Borderline formal and informal sector	"Scared to work/to admit working."	Ethnic enclaves in the informal sector	
Job in the UK	Cafe/bar, restaurant, Take-away	0	38	0	0	38
	Car wash/ work in the garage	0	28	0	0	28
	Hairdresser, bakery, Shopkeeper	0	9	0	2	11
	Construction	0	2	0	11	13
	Other (legal advisor, IT, educator, translator, market stall, factory)	7	5	0	3	15
	"Scared to work/to admit working."	0	1	71	1	73
Total		7	83	71	17	178

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2012-2013

Table 3. Sector of employment and current immigration status

		Current immigration status			Total
		Undocumented	Refused asylum application	Pending asylum application	
Sector of employment	Formal sector	5	1	1	7
	Borderline formal/informal sector	3	72	8	83
	"Scared to work/admit working."	0	57	14	71

Ethnic enclave in the informal sector	0	15	2	17
Total	8	145	25	178

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2012-2013

‘Unauthorised’ employment is heterogeneous and ranges from 'organised' employment undertaken by employees for a business that conducts some or all of its activities informally or more 'individual' forms of informality (Williams and Windebank 1998, 30-32). It can be highly paid, and autonomous work or low paid and exploitative work (Vasta, 2004:4). Three respondents spoke of being self-employed and owning their business but not on paper, not in their names. Gazioglou (2002, 3) argues that self-employment might offer an alternative to discrimination and exploitative employment practices.

“I own my business, but because I have no legal papers or status, it is not in my name. This is not my first job...Like many young men dream to do, I wanted to work for myself, to be self-employed. I tried harder, and eventually, I achieved it...It is not in my name, but I can say I have no problems”. (male, focus group, Birmingham)

To open an ethnic restaurant/shop was the dream of young men in Brighton who stated that “when we have our papers, we will have our own business”. Informal employment for an 'organised' business was identified in the kitchens of restaurants and takeaways, a solicitor's office, bakeries and cafes. Self-employment in conditions of insecure legal status is seen as an experience of vertical mobility on the labour market (Bloch 2013).

Payment levels for migrants with insecure legal status varied between sectors of employment, occupational status within the sector and the business, employers' ethnicity and the associated relationships with the workers, hours worked, and knowledge of English. The language was a particularly important determinant of jobs and wages in the formal sector and on the margins of it. Educational levels and training prior to migration were not significant determinants of migrant wages. Irregular employment in hospitality (cafes, bars, restaurants and takeaways) was paying on average £900 per month; the wages for those working in the car wash or garage work, hairdressing, work in a bakery and shop-keeping, were not exceeding £600 to £800 per month. The most significant variation in payment was observed in construction, where unskilled and semi-skilled jobs were performed sporadically, dependent on demand; they were

paid £800-£1000 per month while those with close ties to the managers/owners of the company, with higher levels of skills and English language, were earning between £1200 and £2000 a month. The irregularity of work is an emblematic outcome of insecure status. "Being undocumented stops you from finding regular work, which affects your entire life". (Male, 20 years).

Access to work: the ethnic solidarity networks

Limited access to networks may lead migrants to exclusion and marginalisation in the labour market (Hakak et al. 2010). A number of studies have indicated that ethnic networks enable access to the labour market for migrants, including those without legal permits for work (Bloch and McKay 2015). Because as below illustrated, friends and acquaintances embedded in the ethnic networks have inside knowledge of informal employment opportunities, access to information about current and upcoming vacancies. Strong personal ties and recommendations for jobs within the ethnic networks enable vulnerable migrants to enter the labour market.

Irregular migrants heavily depend on ethnic employers with a sense of solidarity, either 'flexible' or 'exploitative', to access the host labour market, at least initially. Eighty percent of those who admitted working at the time of the survey found their job through a Kurdish friend or a family member. Some 16 people approached the employer directly, but they often targeted Kurdish-run businesses and followed recommendations by friends.

In this context, our respondents and the key informants emphasised that employment relations within the ethnic Kurdish enclaves comprise a web of reciprocal obligations. Portes (1995:15) explains that the motivation of bounded solidarity may have an "altruistic" aspect in the form of "transferring resources to others because of identification with in-group needs and goals." It is not only the structural conditions of the UK faced by immigrants that might shape 'ethnic solidarity' among the Kurdish migrants, but also their shared history and pre-migration relationships and experiences, and shared norms that play a crucial role in facilitating the construction of the ethnic, social networks. This solidarity forms the main component of the social capital, which enables migrants with insecure legal status to be part of social relationships embedded in networks which consist of resources, the group's shared values and impersonal connections. These connections lead to access to the labour market within the ethnic enclave or beyond. Bakhtiar from London who became undocumented after numerous refusals on his asylum application, mentioned:

“I am fortunate because I work with Mr A and his brother, so they are able to help me, the Kurdish people are able to help more. Because I am Kurdish, they are able to help me work even without having any documents. The Kurdish community really takes care of each other”.

As Bakhtiar states that personal contacts within the ethnic network are an important resource for information on available job vacancies. For example, Rebeen, an undocumented young person in Birmingham, was a member of a Kurdish social network where people often helped him to find a job:

“I work for my friends. I met them in a Kurdish restaurant, and through them, I meet many other Kurds. The Kurdish community is very strong in Birmingham”.

Other young people have been ‘referred’ to Kurdish employers within the ethnic network. However, as Sangar pointed out, after getting access to the labour market, they would search for work themselves, without the help of others, diminishing their reliance on ethnic solidarity acts.

“At first, my friends would refer me and find me jobs, but after a while, I got used to living here and was able to go and search for work myself. In the beginning, I did jobs in factories, which I got through friends”.

The pre-migration ties may facilitate initial labour access, as Jaffer, an undocumented young person from London, describes:

“The people I work for, I knew their relatives back in Kurdistan, so they did it as a favour. Nobody else gives anyone a job if they are not legalised”.

Similarly, Arin, a failed asylum seeker from London, works for his brother and he is aware of the advantages of his employment situation:

“Well, my working situation is slightly different compared to most undocumented Kurds here, my brother lives here, and he owns a business. Therefore I work for him”.

Azad, an undocumented migrant from London, summarises the importance of the Kurdish social network. He points out that *“the main way for me to find work is through Kurdish people, which means that I always need to be surrounded by the Kurdish community in order to survive”*.

The motives of the Kurdish business owners who employed their co-ethnic people with insecure migration status have been interpreted by some of our respondents and key informants as derived from community commitments, creating acts of ‘ethnic solidarity’. However, this solidarity is not only an ‘altruistic’ engagement by the employers. Indeed, employers and irregular migrants are benefiting from ethnic solidarity, having faith in their reliability, reciprocal trust and an enforced unwritten social agreement among the Kurdish employers and the workers.

However, beyond the façade, this ‘ethnic solidarity’ may turn into ‘exploitative’ solidarity for insecure migrants. Amanj, an undocumented migrant from London, explained:

“I work in the market. The owner is Kurdish. He is nice to me, but he pays me little because he says he is taking a risk in employing me”.

Others like Bakhtiar work six days a week and more than twelve hours a day, echoing Ahmad’s (2008:309) account of the ‘apparent economic dynamism, or added zeal [...]’ as the ‘unifying characteristic of smuggled migrants of all backgrounds’. These demands of the work prevent them from having a life outside of the ethnic enclave and register for a language class to learn English so that they may have better opportunities in case their asylum appeal is approved. In interviews with key informants, it was confirmed that some employers were taking advantage of the precarious situation of migrants without legal documents, conscious that these workers have no other choice in the labour market and would not complain about their low payment and even maltreatment. *“The risks are worse for women, who often experience sexual harassment because their employer knows their lack of rights”* (Expert interview, 11 February 2013).

There was a unanimous acceptance among the focus group interviewees that low pay and a limited range of employment opportunities go hand in hand with their being ‘unauthorised’ .

“Yes, payment is much less (compared to legal workers), but you have no choice, you have to work. It is not like I can go to Sainsbury's or Tesco's to work. It is not allowed”.

Yet, migrants felt that the unfavourable working conditions were the price they paid for avoiding being detected, arrested and possibly deported. The same respondent continued: *so I have no choice but to settle for little pay, work for 12 hours on the market, to save me from getting found out. However, of course, this is expected if you do not have legal status, and you do not have documents then, of course, whomever you work for is going to pay much less. If you have documents and citizenship, it is different, maybe you will get paid £10/hour, but if you are in my situation, you get paid maximum £4/hour, most of the time even less than that.*

A distinctive feature of undocumented employment is its vulnerability, in varying degrees, dependent on the factors discussed earlier, impacting payment, jobs and sector of employment as well as the contextual factors underpinning the migration decision.

Acts of solidarity are mitigated by the degrees of vulnerability experienced by migrants with insecure legal status. There is agreement among the surveyed respondents that acts of solidarity on the part of Kurdish employers offering jobs to them carry the premium of fines in the event of immigration officers raiding the business. Intensified enforcement against employers of ‘unauthorised’ workers in the past years has added a complex layer of uncertainty not only for the migrants with insecure legal status but also for their employers.

Being a migrant with insecure legal status with no rights to work, no government support and in need to make money to survive qualifies one as being 'in great trouble' (Eldemire and Vista, 2007). Times have changed, as one of the respondents contemplated. *“Back in the days, places like car washes would easily let you work, but now they are too fearful of the fine they have to pay if the migration police turn up”.* Structural factors associated with increased government controls and in-border enforcements have reconfigured the sectors and jobs accessible to migrants with insecure legal status and have had a real impact on their work experiences, increasing the sense of fear and helplessness.

“I am undocumented, and I work, but there have been many occasions when people have been disrespectful towards me... But because I am undocumented, and in need of a job, I have no choice but to accept this kind of treatment”. (male, London).

Ethnic solidarity in employment may provide not only protection but also decent work conditions. One respondent described himself as 'fortunate' to have been working for Kurdish employers only because some of his Kurdish friends in the past had worked night shifts for native British employers and had been paid half the wages they had been promised or not been paid at all. On some occasions, this solidarity extended by employers could include 'exploitative solidarity' (Erdemir and Vasta, 2007). The unfavourable work conditions are characterised by long, often unsocial, hours, low or withheld pay. Yet, these working conditions were perceived by some respondents as the 'right' price to be paid to an employer who risks being fined for recruiting irregular labour. These acts of solidarity were often perceived by respondents as providing for a 'dignified life' despite constant fear and hiding from immigration control. However, this view was not unanimously shared by other participants. For example, a 30-year old male in the focus group in London shared his appreciation for his Kurdish employer who treated him well but still paid him little for a 12-hour shift and did not agree that the low pay justified the risk premium on the irregular employment at a time of increased raids.

As a lot of energy is expended on trying to avoid detection, this interferes with work: *The brain is split into two, half is thinking about the work you are doing, the other half is worrying and fearing of things that could happen.* (Male, focus group, London)

"Because you always live in fear of being caught, even if you work and make money, the fear is constantly on your mind. For example, if a police officer stops you on the street and they find money on you, of course, they will question you where you got the money from since you are not allowed to work. I make sure I don't have much money on me... I know a friend of mine who gives his money to another friend". (Male, focus group, London)

'Unauthorised' migrants' feelings of fear also extend to their employer: *Every day at work I spend in fear. I always think about being arrested and causing my friends (who employed me) a big problem.* (Male, focus group, Birmingham)

When asked about any experiences of exploitation in the UK, some 68% of the respondents reported frequent incidences of exploitation at work. Some young people in the focus groups shared their appreciation for their Kurdish employers who treated them well but still paid them the national minimum or living wage. The young people were not very convinced that the low

pay was the risk premium on irregular employment at a time of increased raids. In this context, stretch solidarity is based on an asymmetry in an inequality power relationship between employers and irregular migrants. The lack of legal migration status put the irregular migrants on the lower end of a power relationship with their employers. Therefore stretch solidarity may lead to an exploitative enticement in every form of social relationship.

The data reveals a combination of limited or no choice among most respondents and complex evaluations of risks and opportunities in the labour market, producing varied coping strategies. The intensified in-border controls have contributed to reduced employment opportunities, which nevertheless have given rise to acts of stretched solidarity' by ethnic employers, who provide work with a risk premium of being detected employing irregular workers. This may translate into low pay and long, unsocial hours, but it emerges as the only dignified option for migrants with insecure legal status. The lack of secure legal status has a profound impact on access to the labour market and determines the sectors of employment, the jobs and the associated work conditions. It excludes access to education, wider social circles and the wider community. These multiple exclusions push 'unauthorised' migrants into reliance on their existing co-ethnic networks which can be a source of solidarity, but they can also lead to increased insecurity and vulnerability.

Conclusion

The analysis of our data provides strong support for the theoretical expectations outlined above, assuming that the conflict-generated diaspora communities display a very distinct solidarity among its members, embedded in a shared history of conflict, persecution and identity struggles. Ethnic solidarity is put to the ultimate test in times of intensified enforcement of employment and immigration law. It stretches to accommodate the risks that employers take to provide work to their insecure co-ethnics, facing the tangible threat of raids, business closure, defamation and colossal fines, to mention but a few. In this context, we have defined "stretched solidarity" as a form of support and resource-sharing among certain conflict-generated ethnic groups, embedded not only within a shared history of displacement, collective memory and trauma, and shared culture, language, loyalties, obligations and experiences but also in the 'reception context' (Portes, 1981), which may limit ethnic solidarity through restrictive immigration controls.

We recognise the limits of the paper, which are that analysis is mainly based on experiences of migrants with insecure migration legal status, rather than employers, the majority of respondents were young, male migrants without secure immigration status.

Our findings complement other studies on social networks and “ethnic enclaves” (Portes 1995; Ryan et al. 2008; Holgate et al. 2012; Bloch 2013; Bloch and McKay 2015). The analysis shows that the overall quality, size and scope of the ethnic environment shape the work outcomes for the migrants embedded in these ethnic-based social networks (Borjas 1992). The characteristics and political structures of the Kurdish social network not only enable access to the labour market for Kurdish migrants with insecure legal status but may generate bonding social capital, as well as emotional support for vulnerable migrants at a time of increased in-border controls. In this context, the conflict-generated Kurdish diasporic ethnic networks function as informational vehicles in facilitating and providing a livelihood to irregular Kurdish migrants. Their collective trauma and socio-political socialisation create strong ties as well as solidarity towards their co-ethnic individuals in need.

Similar to other research, our findings also provide evidence of the exploitative class relationship among employees and employers from the same co-ethnic group (Eade et al., 2007; Ryan et al. 2008). Moreover, the lack of the network diversity (different types of networks for different purposes) and network composition (quality of network environment, resources and structure of the networks) of these ethnic structures as well as legal migration status may hinder these migrants’ social mobility and their equality of access to opportunities in the majority society. These factors prevent them from achieving “structural” embeddedness (Ahmad, 2008) in the UK. However, for migrants with insecure legal status who cannot access formal employment, ethnic networks are channels for survival at a time of increased in-border controls.

This paper has identified the social phenomenon of stretched solidarity and has set out a model for understanding its embeddedness within conflict-generated diasporic networks. By drawing together research insights and data on Iraqi-Kurdish migrants with insecure legal status, it addressed the central research question how ‘unauthorised’ migrants get access to the segmented labour market at a time of increased in-border controls in the UK. The paper enhances our understanding of the complex phenomenon of stretched solidarity which provides

a platform for identifying a number of emerging areas for further empirical study and policy thinking.

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