

## **The perforated borders of labour migration and mob-regulation**

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### Introduction

Studies of industrial regulation have routinely focused on the ever-contested state of relations between capital and labour mediated within the territorial and legal frameworks for negotiation and dispute resolution of specific states (e.g. Dunford and Perrons, 1992; Goodwin *et al.*, 1993; Jessop, 1994; Majone, 1994). As globalised economic and political restructuring has disrupted patterns of work and employment, however, and shifted how and where control is exerted and experienced (MacKenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2005; see also Sennett, 2011), recent research has highlighted the variety of *spaces* and actors involved in establishing and contesting the restrictions, principles, rules and methods of control and governance, or ‘modes of social regulation’ (after Jessop, 1992; Peck and Tickell, 1995; Tickell and Peck, 1997). While some studies focus on conceptualising state regulation in contested, heterogeneous contexts, a range of other, more dynamic studies have addressed the *transfer* of regulatory roles, *re-regulation*, following MacKenzie and Martinez Lucio (2005). They underscore the myriad ways in which non-state actors are involved in social control within and across state boundaries with both positive and negative consequences for the organisation and experience of work. Moreover, broader socio-economic structures within which these processes are embedded are kept firmly in sight. (For a critique of traditional regulation literature, see, *inter alia*, Tickell and Peck, 1998; Baldwin *et al.*, 1998).

Hence these theoretical developments have a resonance with geographical studies of labour and the regulation of space that have refined our understanding of territorial formation as a

fluid construct of social relations imbued with power disparities taking account of the fact that states may have difficulty monopolizing legitimacy (Lefebvre, 1991; Mbembe, 2000). Indeed a modest cross-fertilisation of research in the fields of criminology, industrial relations and political economy have suggested how informal and indeed criminal networks are arguably becoming less exceptional in the constitution of new forms of regulation (Anderson, 1996; Bears, 1997; Scott McIllwain, 1999; Hobbs, 2001) with their own distinct norms, principles, laws and ‘territorial’ signatures (MacKenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2005, p. 508; Paoli, 2002).

The analysis here focuses on how migrant workers ‘experience control’ at the confluence of new social, political and economic relations in two regions of particular territorial contestation linked to the complex power struggles of non-state actors. Based on the testimonies of workers moving to the North of Ireland (NoI)<sup>1</sup>, subject to political and economic restructuring following a Keynesian management of the conflict, and to Mexico, a *cause celebre* of market liberalisation in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the study asks the following questions. In particular, how do recently arrived migrants experience work in poorly regulated sectors of the respective workplaces? How do localised socio-territorial formations affect the agency of new arrivals? How do these relate to the broader socio-economic (neoliberal) structures and processes of accumulation within which they are embedded?

In doing so the paper draws attention to perforated boundaries not just between work and social living spaces, but between formal industry/labour market re-regulation and contemporary informal/illegal employment and control across these working and living

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<sup>1</sup> In the text North of Ireland is the preferred term to Northern Ireland to emphasise the continued contested nature of the statelet.

spaces. In so doing, the research seeks to shed light on the import of informal networks beyond state regulation that may be either *meta-state* controlled or *para-state* controlled. Meta-state regulation refers to forms of informal regulation utilising legal and illegal practices conditional upon worker spatial, including domiciliary and territorial, insecurity. This typically blends legal and illegal employer controls ranging from a mixture of salary under-payment, non-declaration of employer surtax, passport impoundment and peonage in what is often described as a relationship of indulgence. However, it is a relationship of indulgence in which the employer has the upper hand throughout and in which any disavowal by the migrant worker of the terms of the relationship risks exposure to the state. Noncompliance is not a reasonable option since labour is not, in any straightforward sense, free. Para-state regulation refers to the activities of criminal gangs practicing control of migrant labour beyond enforcement of both labour and civil codes. Noncompliance can result in death or serious injury, that is, avoidance as against evasion. While we distinguish these two forms – one is in and against the state, the other against the state – in certain contexts they may meld together but more often it is the former, meta-state agencies, whose practices, when expedient, shift from the quasi legal to illegal. Para-state agencies, while often making use of mainstream actors, notably with respect to the judiciary, *ipso facto*, operate outside the state. Both forms of agency are involved in informal labour regulation in the research reported here. The first form is exemplified by reference to the north of Ireland, the second in the case of Mexico.

The paper is structured in five parts. It begins by drawing on and modifying the key theoretical developments from two sets of literature; first, those of territory and of migrant labour regulation, with a particular focus on NoI and Mexico. Secondly it links these theoretical developments to the particular contest of social relations and strategies in these

two regions. In Ireland's recent history socio-territorial division has been sequentially deepened by the military reoccupation of the 1960s, and the Belfast Peace Agreement of 1998, from which labour market liberalisation has been accompanied by the ceding of statutory responsibility for community development to local, neighbourhood, power brokers. In the case of Mexico, NAFTA and other regional polices criminalising unauthorised migration have motivated the emergence of informal chains of labour migration and autocratic patterns of accumulation that fall heavily on the shoulders of Central American workers. These new geographies and economies of migration, labour subordination and trade re-regulation have been reinforced through new alliances between state officials, gangs and drug cartels, many of whom, in turn, have found in migrant's vulnerability new forms of profit. Thirdly, a discussion of the methodologies used in the research process is outlined before we develop the testimonies of migrant workers to consider the links between deregulation and migration, low paid labour and the spatialized restrictions of agency across work and life boundaries in the fourth section of the paper. The discussion of the findings conclude the study.

#### Low paid labour, migration and regulation

Processes of globalised trade and labour market liberalisation means that,

how we experience control and how we exist at the intersection of different relations has become more pressing with the greater disturbances taking place in individual workplace relations and worker existence [...] there is a shift away from a more organised and settled pattern of employment and work' (Martinez Lucio, 2015, p. 160).

Recent studies on the differentiated experiences of these ‘shifting’ patterns of work and employment linked to labour market re-regulation reflect, amongst other phenomena, the accelerated recruitment of labour from across national borders (Antunes, 2011; Huws, 2013). Previous research has demonstrated how new patterns of migration, state re-regulation of immigration and of labour markets have dovetailed to produce new characteristics of low paid and precarious work (May *et al.*, 2007; Wills *et al.*, 2009). In this situation, stratified, migrant divisions of labour are characterised as having differential impact across divisions based upon gender, class and race. These in turn are associated with differentiated border restrictions and visa entitlements (McDonnell *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, these new forms of racial and class segregation and discrimination characterise the contemporary migrant housing experience (Damm, 2009; Dill and Jirjahn, 2014).

Although these studies emphasise how borders are both a key dimension of institutionalised legal mobility and formal aspects of exclusion and inclusion (De Genova, 2002) that reproduce hierarchical relations between nations and individuals (De Giorgi, 2006), there is limited understanding of how new informal capital-labour relations that perforate state boundaries are being created through the emergence of new authorities across distinct regions (Mezzadra and Nelson, 2013; Weber and Pickering, 2011).

Furthermore, despite repeated underscoring of how the reproduction of unequal (and spatial) relations in capitalism is reflected across ‘processes of production, social practices and cultural identities’ (e.g. Bauder, 2008, p. 316), empirical research in industrial relations seldom departs from treating spaces of work and social life in isolation, or from a focus on more traditional antagonisms between employee and manager (*inter alia* Burawoy, 1985). (See, McDonnell *et al.*, 2009; Antunes, 2011; Munck, 2008; Chalcraft, 2007). In studies that

are more attentive to space, new avenues of research have focused in on micro-level or indeed individual zones of confrontation and regulation that respond to capitalism's transgression into previously private spheres of social reproduction such as the body (see Fassin, 2011). Others, by contrast, have zoomed out beyond the factory floor to pay closer attention to 'territorial' bases for challenging control and power relations (Evans and Tilly, 2015). The aspiration that the 'community' may offer a greater level of autonomy beyond the risky and fragmented workplace and can thus offer new sites of collective organisation from which to challenge and discipline capital (McBride and Greenwood, 2009; Coe, 2013; Pike, 2007), have partly been borne out my impressive expressions of mobilisation by often informally and precariously employed workers (e.g. Agarwala, 2014; Tilly *et al.*, 2013). However, the opportunities for and constraints on the agency of workers and their families across work/life boundaries remains work in progress (Coe, 2013) and more optimistic analyses are tempered by the impact that informal networks linked to unscrupulous employers, state officials and criminal groupings have across work and living spaces of the workers in question.

McKenzie and Martinez Lucio (2005) are among the few to incorporate these actors into contemporary analyses of industrial regulation providing examples of how informal networks, whether tied to progressive social movements or to criminal entrepreneurs, can influence social and economic regulation. The exploration of these relationships benefits from a consideration of territory in the following section.

### Territory, labour and regulation of space and behaviour

The significant theoretical work on territory undertaken by Sack (1986) presented it as,

a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area...It simplifies issues of political control, provides symbolic markers, and gives relationships of power a greater tangibility and appearance of permanence" (1986, p. 21-34).

While his emphasis on controlling resources and behaviour indicated that territory presents a distinct spatial formation, analysis has been hampered by the stubborn conception of space as a fixed container of social relations (e.g. Giddens, 1985; for a critique see Agnew, 1996; Brenner and Elden, 2009). As a result, typically we see the synonymising of territory with the state organisation of space through, for example, its military and judicial powers, border controls and its representations of space through cartography and census gathering (inter alia, Jessop, 2007). These domains are of course critical to understanding the key themes of regulation, migration and labour presented in this study. However, by contrasting stable territorial configurations of space or place at a point in time (inter alia de Certeau, 1980 and Sacks 1997) with a broader conception of territory as an ongoing, contest of social relations, Mbembe (2000) highlights the internal dynamics of territory, the ability of non-state actors to exercise territoriality and the multiplicity of social, cultural, economic and political forces inherent in its formation and reproduction (see also Bellve, 2013; Gramsci, 1971; Lefebvre, 1991; Neumann, 1999; Brenner and Elden, 2009; Santos 1998). So while Brenner and Elden (2009) emphasise that,

Territorial practices would be the physical, material spaces of *state* territory, from the borders, fences, walls and barriers erected to mark its external limits, to the spatial creation and maintenance of large-scale infrastructure enabling flows of people, goods, energy and information (p. 365; italics added).

for Mbembe, territory is, “defined essentially by the set of movements that take place within it [...] It is a set of possibilities that historically situated actors constantly resist or realize” (2000, p. 261). His observations, based on land contestations on the African continent that test the legitimacy of colonial-set borders, are sensitive to social insecurity and uncertainty that some observers of residential polarisation in Ireland claim have been heightened by “the disruptive effects of global integration, and the failure of markets to self-regulate in a way that protects the interests of the people” (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 8, quoted in Nagle, 2010). They also resonate with literature from Latin America and in particular Central America and Mexico where affiliation to non-state groupings with particular territorial control reflects a struggle against structural exclusion *and/or* subaltern forms of integration in capitalism (Hernandez, 2011). Where insecurity and uncertainty prevail close socio-spatial networks can provide resilience, reinforce a sense of attachment and belonging, and the ‘autogestion’ of Lefebvre’s work may be witnessed in self-organisation of reclaimed spaces by, for example, landless and indigenous groups (Fernandes, 2013). In other places, drug cartels and gangs have filled the vacuum provided by state neglect of social spheres and the denial of individual citizenship to migrant workers (Hernandez, 2014; Morales Pena, 2012). Their operations exemplify how a sense of identity and ownership can often lead to a defence of self-interest (Pickering *et al.*, 2012; Pitts, 2008; Ralphs *et al.*, 2009; Cerbino, 2011) and spiralling, often violent backlashes against a loss of economic sovereignty in which national, communal and gang identities have proven resilient (Smith, 2002). As is observed below, how criminal networking has grown to take advantage of weakened formal economic regulation, and its interaction with formal political and economic sectors has severe implications for labour on the move.

### Contested spaces of Ireland and Mexico

These multiple dimensions of territory, labour experience and regulation have resonance in the NoI where citizens' barricades and defence committees, youths with stones (and later guns), graffiti and painted pavements were as much markers of territorial formations as the military checkpoints and helipads. There, a remarkable persistence and deepening of 'post-conflict' sectarian division has been demonstrated (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). Yet, with notable exceptions (Anderson and Shuttleworth, 1998; McVeigh and Rolston, 2007; Garvey and Stewart, 2015), previous studies of migration and work also have tended to separate out worker experiences from broader societal relations and structures (e.g. Bell *et al.*, 2004; Jarman, 2004) and underplay the ways in which social context and location are linked to labour market insecurity in shaping precarious employment and living experience (see Vosko, 2006). This is significant as residential segregation has and continues to be related to segregated workplaces, a result of discriminatory employment practices that were effectively outlawed only in 1989, but whose legacy remains in a territorialisation of spatial mobility affecting where, and for whom, people would be willing to live, shop and work (McGuire, 1988, Mitchell, 2006; O'Hara, 2004). According to Nolan and Law (2013), for example, small firms that form 90% of the private sector, 'tend to recruit from their immediate surroundings', increasing the possibility of single identity environments and the reproduction of domination in neighbouring territories that are peripheral to regulation through, for example, trade union organising (Manwaring, 1981). The experience of these phenomena across the work and life boundaries of recently arrived workers remains largely underdeveloped and their subsequent testimonies shed light on troubling means of regulation at these intersections.

Turning to México, new forms of territorial organisation shaped by neoliberal insecurity are a feature of empowered criminals' influence on the pathways and destination of migrating labour. On the one hand, their practices are transnational as they territorialise their activity without respect for the state's spatial and legal limits. On the other hand, these activities not uncommonly intertwine with national criminal justice practices, codes and personnel within the state of their formation (Cerbino, 2011; Hernandez, 2011; 2014). Where gangs and drug cartels emerge as new local authorities, one particular and understudied feature has been the production new scales of labour subordination (Bustamente, 2011). While narco-trafficking continues to make the headlines, the mobility of Central American workers seeking to reach USA via Mexico - and denied legal entry and citizenship to both countries -has become integral to the territorial organisation and rationale of these groups (Gamboa, 2007). In this regard, the *regulation* of their subordination is not limited to the legal aspect of their mobility as emphasised in the literature. More than this, the potential profitability arising from their informality presents significant possibilities to others on the margins of legality. Due to official territorial regulations, it is estimated that less than five percent of Central Americans manage to reach the US borders (Ortis, 2013), however many of these remain in Mexico. Many migrants have had their journey regulated by the formal state practices through criminalisation and detention, but what is their experience of the informal practices of non-state actors willing to benefit from this chain of exploitation?

New informal authorities are shaping regional and local labour-capital relations and informal networks, industrial clustering and new patterns of marginalisation are a feature of contemporary negotiations between labour and capital (Castilla, 2008; Covarrubies *et al.*, Valencia, 2003). The mobs require and capitalise upon migrants' flight as a further source of commodification while the migrants' aspirations increasingly depend on these informal actors

who pledge to facilitate mobility (Garcia and Decosse, 2014). Extreme forms of risk are at play in the negotiation and the testimonies below demonstrate that these invariably shape these migrants' work experience and particular insertion into the labour market and society (Ruiz, 2001).

### Methodology

This paper presents data collected in three discrete periods by the authors in 2010, 2012 and 2013. In Ireland an action research group comprising 13 migrant workers from eight nationalities worked alongside three experienced researchers, one trade union and one supporting community organisation representative to devise questions that were of common interest in relation to migration, work and family life. A more detailed description of the methods that were inspired by Paulo Freire (1973) can be found in Garvey and Stewart (2015). The term 'migrant workers' was agreed as appropriate as it incorporated regularly and irregularly employed people from the range of nationalities represented in the workshop. Over a period of eight months in 2010 the people in the research group used their knowledge of where low paid and precariously employed migrant workers lived, worked and socialised to engage 92 people, from Liberia, Nigeria, Spain, Ghana, Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Philippines, Brazil, Portugal, Czech Republic, Cameroon and Slovakia in focus group interviews. The majority of the interviewees worked in agriculture, recycling, food processing, hospitality, care, nursing and warehouse work that coincided with official data for where most migrant workers were recruited in this period (DEL, 2009). In 2012 twenty participants were revisited for one to one and focus group interviews

In Mexico, the data collection occurred between August and December 2013 in Mexico City. The data gathered in this ethnographic research included focus groups and individual

interviews with legally detained migrants. The questions and discussions focused on their migration motivations, work and employment, their journey and interaction with other actors in the social arena. The data encompasses a myriad of migrant groups with varying personal experiences and forms of state categorization (asylum seekers, economic migrant and refugees) and the ethnographic method aimed to privilege the unveiling of, and meanings attached to, these diverse experiences (Veena Das and Poole, 2004).

Approximately 450 migrants from 20 different nationalities were interviewed of which over 90% were from Central America's northern triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). Twelve semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted to gain greater depth of individual experiences. The interviews were undertaken in migrants' shelters and the detention centre in Iztapalapa, Mexico City.

In the next section we present the testimonies of migrant workers, beginning with Ireland and moving to Mexico, that bring us to the new frontiers of formal/informal work and regulation in contested spaces.

#### Post-conflict north of Ireland

The Belfast Peace Agreement of 1998 indicated a shift from the containment of the 36 year conflict involving the British Army, armed groups of Irish Republicans (drawn mostly from Catholic working class populations) and pro-British Loyalists (drawn mostly from Protestant neighbourhoods) to the normalisation of strained relations. This has involved an initial Keynesian provision of the necessary economic stability to allow the establishment of a consociational power sharing executive - in which proportional representation was designed to redress previous Catholic Irish exclusion - and the use of a Special European Union funded

programme to promote civil society's role in local peace building through the growth of the community sector, identified as a positive place of engagement for those released from prison (Ruddock, 2006).

Aside from this political restructuring, a faith in improving the economic fortunes for residents of this new order has increasingly been placed within a market logic more in keeping with the neoliberal policies of key stakeholders from Washington, London and Dublin governments. Proponents of the peace building capacity of the free market equated the intensification of production and consumption across borders with the dissolution of the nation as the 'predominant community' (Purcel, 2003, p. 568). Following this argument, a greater global interconnectedness would positively reduce the significance of national sovereignty and affiliation (Taylor, 2008) while increasing access to an "entrepreneurial capitalism for all" would play a key role in resolving conflict (Strong, 2009). The state body *Invest NI* was set up to encourage inward investment, as the "twin moral goods of political progress and privatised, neo-liberal economic development" were "folded into one another" (Jewesbury and Porter, 2010, p. PAGE; ) and low wages, lack of labour unrest, and low taxation were among the characteristics subsequently promoted internationally (Kelly, 2012). Part of the outward looking turn was also reflected in the active recruitment of labour from beyond the region, with the proliferation of agencies reflecting changes elsewhere in the UK (Wills *et al.*, 2009). The initial political optimism and relative if short lived economic stability of the NoI were factors in local labour market expansion with the arrival of around 10,000 people from Central and Eastern Europe annually between 2004 and 2007. Migrants were more often allocated low cost housing close to low waged workplaces and often in areas that had also borne the brunt of conflict. This became a trend characterising one of the UK's highest concentrations of 'new' migrant workers from EU countries (DEL, 2009).

With recruitment agencies and subcontracting playing a major role in work and housing allocation, emerging new migrant divisions of labour in the workplace were also reflected in a reproduction of territorial and social divisions (qua reoccupation and segregation) that are negotiated by migrant workers and their families. Tiago from Brazil, whose illegal status relegated him ‘below’ European arrivals wryly recounted that often the employer and landlord was one and the same;

We’d like to get a proper job, where at the end of the week you would know how much I would get...the people working for the agency boss are Slovakian, Polish, guys that live in his houses, so they prefer these people when the agency needs people. We work Friday, Saturday, Sunday normally, the shifts the others don’t want. Then they call us. But he always makes sure those guys get at least two shifts a week, because that is enough to pay the rent, and he owns the house.

To the east of Belfast a family-owned food processing company engaged a Lithuanian agency to recruit workers to the fields and factory lines of the expanding business which availed of not inconsiderable capital resources from the state body, *Invest NI*, for recruitment and marketing. New recruits were housed in onsite accommodation, signed a form that they later discovered committed them to a 60-70 hour working week, before gradually moving out to the surrounding neighbourhoods of Newtownards and east of Belfast. After the initial recruitment the most loyal workers were invited to bring friends or family to work in the factory, saving on agency costs by also bypassing employment law (any new vacancy should be advertised locally for two weeks before international recruitment), and used as a further way to bring discipline to the workplace (interviews, 2010; 2011).

Soon after the arrival of Lithuanian, Latvian and Polish workers to this and two other local food harvesting and processing factories, a series of attacks occurred in the area, introducing workers not only to racial tension, but also to those with local influence. Mardas recalled a positive response by a local loyalist paramilitary group who used their influence to quell tensions. Furthermore, a strong sectarian sense of identity was illustrated in the words of a 17 years old among a group that attacked a car of Lithuanian friends; “UDA [loyalist paramilitary] community leaders actually helped resolve the situation and when they questioned one of the boys he said, “I thought I was doing the community a favour”.

The role of non-state actors in local control was mirrored in Ana’s (Philippines) recollection after her home had been damaged by youths in Catholic West Belfast where she was nursing. A more parochial solution was recommended;

After I went to the police, a woman, a nice woman, \_\_\_, called around. She explained that, “here, we don’t go to the police” and that if I had more problems then just to call her and the people in the community would deal with it.

In other accounts the territorial influence of community behaviour was more troubling and the following account from Ann (Liberia), is significant as it points to the way in which intimidation can supersede neighbourly support in demarcated sectarian districts:

In the first place I lived the neighbours helped me to set everything in the house when I just moved in. ...about 5 or 6 years ago, some guys got into my house in East Belfast. I said “get out of my house! How did you get in here, you don’t have the key to my

house, I'll call the police", and they said "oh, really, do you want to call the police and see what happens?"

One of my friends then came and told me in my ear that those were paramilitaries and could shoot me or slap me around, don't say anything, be careful. Then my friends (local girls) warned me and said "don't stay in the house, ask them to move you, because if they come back again you don't know what they are going to do.

A report in a leading newspaper addressed questions to the Loyalist leadership. It pointed out that while racist attacks were increasing in 'Catholic' areas also, 90% of racist attacks over a two year period had taken place in 'loyalist' areas (Belfast Telegraph, 2009). The allegation that such attacks could not take place without the knowledge, consent or involvement of paramilitaries seemed to be corroborated in a UDA paramilitary magazine praising the expulsion of Roma families from south Belfast, an event recalled by Andrew who, "got home and found my family with all their stuff on the street. It was terrible".

As Raul, from Brazil stated,

You see when people here talk about 'community', it doesn't matter if they are loyalists, or people calling themselves Republican socialists, when they talk about my community its Catholic, Irish, Nationalist, or British and Protestant. It leaves no room for me.

Evocations of anti-migrant racism were important for Lisa (from Liberia) in so far as they were crucial in establishing or reconfirming notions of the outsider: ensured by 'policing'

migrant spatial locations. Intimidation was crucial in this process and the effect of ensuring separateness over time was inherent to the wider society's historical divisions;

It's like, I'm not intimidating you, why are you creating these barriers...cos of the problems here, people have become very like, 'stay in your place, and I'll stay in mine, and if something happens to you I'll pretend I don't see it'.

Violent intimidation was a feature in each of the focus groups but this final exemplar demonstrated most vividly the overlap between poorly regulated industries and territorial control of adjacent, or often contiguous, neighbourhoods. Seven Lithuanian workers challenged despotic employer practices in a recycling plant in Belfast. After introducing a trade union to the company through statutory grievance procedures and submitting a collective industrial tribunal claim for unfair dismissal three workers had their cars and homes attacked. Their fellow, native work colleagues remained passive. Suspicions of loyalist paramilitary commercial interests in the company were confirmed after an interlocutor advised the workers that the attacks would cease if they cut links with the trade union, left the workplace, withdrew the tribunal claim and did not involve the police. While modest support was vocalised from the broader labour movement, in the absence of local labour or community networks of support to contend with the paramilitary groupings, this could offer little reassurance or security to the workers who felt that they had little option but to comply with the imperative. Incidentally, this was delivered through a peace funded community organisation with links to former loyalists combatants.

#### Post-NAFTA Mexico

In the 1990s, Mexico restructured its national economy and invested in an international trade agreement with North American countries (NAFTA) with the aim of recovering its economic growth after a decade of economic crisis. Thus, the country took measures to facilitate the global competitiveness of US industry in Mexican territory. Industry would operate at the US-Mexico border, to facilitate ease of export to the US while benefiting from cheaper labour in Mexico. Mexico, on the other hand, would diversify its production, create industrial jobs and increase wages with the support of transnational capital. Thus, the production restructuring would not only attend to economic imperatives, but it would also improve Mexicans' living conditions.

To do so, the country partially realigned its economy with the US production sector (Dias-Bautista, 2003). While offering benefits such as tax exemption and subsidies to international companies, Mexico reduced investment and incentives in local traditional sectors such as agricultural, manufacturing and services. In addition, in deregulating working conditions the country consolidated neoliberal reforms in an attempt to attract foreign investment and reduce local poverty.

The increase in competition, the neoliberal forms regulation and intensification of work have overseen a decline of labour conditions over time. The rise of subcontracting also relates to the increase in precarious work and living conditions (Canales, 2008). Following NAFTA, Mexico's national workforce experienced a falling wage rate of more than 30% while unemployment also increased contributing to long term wage reduction (Covarrubies et al, Elias, 2013). Moreover, initial optimism was depressed by the increasing relocation of international companies to countries attracting investment with ever lower production costs (Gereffi, 2005).

These dynamics inevitably shaped new social relations, forms of governance and territorial constitution. While Mexicans moving north remains one of the most hotly debated political issues in the US (see Canales, 2008) Mexico has also experienced massive internal migration, whereby migrant workers follow jobs arising in specific niche markets prioritised in the national restructuring of production. Movement of goods and people across borders have been central to the rising power of non-state actors operating at the margins of state structures. Despite criminalisation, many have benefited from the transnational drugs trade, local poverty and informal networks of human movement to expand their influence. These forms of criminal organisation and struggle are not new, but they have increasingly been shaped by the growing levels of poverty and related structural violence (Hernandez, 2011).

Easily demonised, these criminal networks originate from dispossessed communities that have experienced - throughout the advance of neoliberal reforms - exclusion from their land, work or dignified living conditions. Dramatic economic reforms affect formerly productive sectors that now are unable to cope with transnational capital. In the wake of these structural changes the rise of these groups parallels the increased militarisation of regional states and the criminalisation of poverty. As is revealed by the testimonies below, unauthorised immigrants fleeing poverty, or persecution, have faced this increased militarization of borders and new forms of violence in Mexico as part of their journey towards the United States.

The irregular immigration status of migrants has placed them at the very bottom of the Mexican labour market, working in poorly regulated sectors that are less attractive to Mexicans (García and Décosse, 2014). The testimony of Julio, who was fleeing poverty and

violence in Guatemala, shows how migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and marginalisation in this new community.

The gangs wait for you in migrants' transit zones. There are also coyotes. There is danger. People stay traumatised. You must pay. They killed an old man beside me when we arrived. Then the Mexican dream was over. I was forced to work for them in a farm. I escaped. They have migrants. There is no authority. I was stolen, aggressed and detained by the police and gangs. The migrants starts to hate the Mexicans.

According to Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH, 2011), approximately 20,000 migrants are kidnapped every year in Mexico. The following testimony of Jose illustrates how these structures have been developed, targeting **migrants**:

When I arrived here fleeing from gangs' extortion in my country, I was kidnapped. My family payed the ransom. I sought protection in Mexico. The Mexican government granted me a humanitarian visa, but I am not allowed to work with this. How I provide for my wife and children? In southern Mexico I cannot stay, the Maras (gang group) started the extortion. In northern Mexico there is the organised crime. They think we are a gold mine. The biggest challenge is to cross Mexico. You know you will be extorted. It is like toss a coin. The women know they will be violated.

The right to stay but not to work forces migrants into informal work and moreover leaves them prey to extortion as they 'plan' their journey to the USA. As Julio states, these informal networks (*human commodity chains*, in effect) often involves both smugglers and national police officers who in turn are often associated with other major criminal groups. The

Salvadoran Ana Elisabeth, who left her country to escape extortion revealed the precarious space between border transit zones and legal protection within the state, prohibiting her from employment. Despite fleeing human traffickers she was often forced to accept unpaid work:

I did not want to come to Mexico; most migrants never want to stay here. The majority wants to go to the United States. However, things happen on trips that require us to stay here. But to not be in danger on the borders we are forced to stay here. The coyote told me I could come for free because my friend was already paying. Latter on I realized he wanted to sell me. He told me someone would have to pay for me. I escaped.

Now I am here. I not allowed to work here. There is discrimination and abuse. They abuse you because you are a foreigner. There is time scheduling abuse. They often do not pay you.

The extent of marginalisation highlights the way in which these chains of exploitation regulate actors' attitudes, expectations including the extent of resistance. Although powerful non-state actors constitute themselves on the margin of the state, the extent of the informal economy, the contemporary forms of state regulation and the particular criminalisation of migration, have played a fundamental role in their existence and ability to exploit migrants. This brings new forms of subordination to older forms of gendered and racial oppression in Central American labour markets that make collective resistance particularly difficult (see Cruz and Martha, 2000; Gamboa, 2007) contributing to a remarkably cohesive structure provided by state and non-state actors for further exploitation of migrant labour.

## Discussion

In the north of Ireland migrant worker testimonies point to a social cost of sectarian division and territorial separateness that elsewhere has been measured in terms of its economic expense (Ruddock, 2006). Historical and cultural differences were exacerbated and cemented through military reoccupation leading to physical separation of neighbourhoods in the containment of conflict from the 1960s onwards. Following the 1998 Peace agreement these are now exploited to reinforce the political power of parties with a dispensation in the new sectarian division of government and a “stale and repetitive pattern of ethnically-divided competition over resources” (Nagle, 2010). As the economy was increasingly placed in the hands of the market, the role of localised conflict resolution was placed firmly with the voluntary sector but where community, as Raul articulated above, was tied up with distinct and separate confessional identities. Amidst the stuttering uncertainty of the political process, which saw the government in London take over Direct Rule of the governing institutions between 2002 and 2007, and a 40 year stagnation of deprivation indices in areas most afflicted by conflict (Hillyard *et al.*, 2003), short term funded community projects proved to be a poor substitute for the deindustrialisation of neighbourhoods. The latter process has arguably been most acutely felt by working class Protestant and loyalist populations whose symbolism and prestige had been tied to old industrial, mostly male blue collar, workplaces.

Two tendencies are observed across the residential and working spaces in this study in the NoI: firstly, the adoption of neoliberal economic policy has led to a growth of small, private enterprises, tapping into the global labour market to get work done more ‘cheaply, skilfully or efficiently’ (Huws, 2012, p. 1). Many of these lie beyond the current organising strategies of major unions and are located on city outskirts or in rural zones, are poorly regulated and risk

the reproduction of sectarian and other exploitative employment practices. The testimonies of migrant workers who were drawn to work in the NoI highlight the emerging migrant divisions of labour in low paid work, not unlike those documented elsewhere in the UK. However, testimonies also reveal how migrant workers' circumstances have been determined by the relationships between territory, labour market, and the reworking of these in the light of localised socio-economic power structures of regulation, the second tendency highlighted by the study.

Rather than the predicted social pluralism of free market-led progress it appears that political and economic insecurity was maintaining or even deepening a defence of parochial differences (see Nagle, 2010, p. 232). This was manifest in these former industrial heartlands where an absence of a direct stake in the new political dispensation, including vertical access to power structures, meant a fractured (Protestant) loyalism has sought some recompense in attempts to increase territorial control through dense horizontal networks of patronage to sustain localised economic advantage. Hence the role of ex-combatants in often unrewarded community work and resolution (as in the dealing with racist attacks on Lithuanian workers to the east of Belfast) co-exists with other criminal activity (such as attacking groups of Lithuanian workers in Belfast). Yet, since both cases indicate, "a movement away from political/military formations fighting in a conflict over unresolved issues of political structure, national identity and the role of the state" (Gormally, 2011, p. 36) it may be argued that the state has grown comfortable with both tendencies. This is especially so given the new ruling elite's inability to provide work in poor areas and that voting patterns sustain sectarian party divisions. As argued by Anderson and Shuttleworth, (1998, p. 197) a vested interest in division continually calls for "sectarianism to maintain and sharpen [...] overlapping group boundaries".

In Mexico, the narratives of Central American migrants shed light on how the informality and denial of citizenship have become the key features of new local territorial regulations and migrant labour exploitation. Following NAFTA reforms in the 1990s, the restructuring of production has impacted on the geographies of production, regulation and socioeconomic vulnerability in the region. Economic informality has been paralleled by new social affiliations with territorial relations. These also intertwine with formal state regulation of migration and labour. Drugs cartels and local gangs have increased their power and consolidated themselves as local authorities, particularly in the ‘transit zones’ close to and across state borders where they have diversified their forms of profit maximisation at the expense of migrants. The latter encounter formal constraints on their mobility and access to employment, and in turn experience broader and violent forms of capital extraction from those non-state actors they encounter.

Central American migrants have been particularly exposed to this situation due to their location geographically and socio-economically. Unable to fulfil formal immigration requirements, they seek to cross Mexican borders irregularly towards the United States, but they are easily coerced or captured by the informal regulators of migration and their testimonies highlight how they were made particularly vulnerable by two main factors. Firstly, flexible and systematic operations by both state (police) and non-state (gang) actors in migrants’ transit zones directly extract value from migrants through extortion, smuggling, trafficking and kidnapping. Different and seemingly limitless forms of violence impose a regime of exploitation which migrants attempt to negotiate or escape. One option is to seek state protection in Mexican territory and avoid these violent zones or to find ways to accrue money for their onward journey, for which they must pay travel costs, smugglers and

extortion. Where the first of these is chosen the formal practices of state regulation, which may (not often) grant humanitarian grounds to stay, but forbid employment, leads to a second source of vulnerability. Particular low paid sectors of the economy have experienced the exodus of Mexican workers to other industrial clusters or to the US, and hence criminal Central American workers have met the demands for cheap, poorly regulated labour. As the testimony of Ana Elisabeth highlights, this “irregular work” does not obviously encourage employers to respect legal obligations.

Finally, the migrants’ narratives have shown how the social restrictions, principles, rules and methods of control by non-state actors benefit directly from corrupt state agencies and indirectly from formal regulation and criminalisation of migration. They benefit too from the territorial reach of their networks beyond state borders in facilitating migration and co-opting the migrant journey into their portfolio of economic enterprise while also exploiting migrants aspirations to move on (to the US) or secure income while in Mexico. A tripartite nexus of criminalisation (denial of legal citizenship in Mexican territory; forced into criminal activity by traffickers; forced into informal, illegal labour) produces a particularly vulnerable worker whose capacity to negotiate the process of value extraction at various stages along an arduous journey is especially limited.

### Conclusion

This study presents contrasting examples from the north of Ireland and Mexico of the ways in which social contestation impacts on precarious and endangered workers in particular social spheres and distinct deindustrialised spaces. In Mexico, abandoned by formal state regulation to the logic of liberal market orthodoxy, migrant workers are subordinated by a combination of market and extra-market control with limited recourse to protection. The relationship

between criminal gang networks and state tolerance (parasitism) leads to a pattern of *para state regulation* sustained by informal and illegal networks subordinating workers and their families within and across working and living spaces. A pattern of *meta state regulation* is exemplified by the case of the NoI where a combination, not so much of abandonment as indulgence, by the state of illegality (labour market sectarianism) and neoliberal orthodoxies, describes the principal form of migrant worker subordination: formally regular labour participation over-determined by state indulgence, or ignorance of, quasi and non-legal labour practices. The paper thus highlights a double porosity: on the one hand, of boundaries between work and living space, and on the other, formal labour market re-regulation and contemporary informal/illegal employment and control across working and living spaces.

In both cases these developments have grave implications for migrant labour compromised by an inability to negotiate, or resist, further exploitation and violence. Migrant workers are either hamstrung by direct employer participation or state officials involved in racketeering, or the indirect implications of state policy that reproduces class, racial and sectarian hierarchies while normalising exploitation of migrant labour in poorly regulated economic sectors of the economy. In the first instance, remedies are either non-existent or, dysfunctional, aiding and abetting, via symbiotic relationships, the criminalisation of specific state actors. In the second instance, in the NoI, potential collective remedies are compromised. This occurs through a combination of non-enforcement based on marginalisation of labour movement counter strategies and inertia by state actors, including the police, and the social marginalisation of migrant workers.

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