From Porto to Portadown: Portuguese workers in Northern Ireland's labour market

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Abstract

While North-Western Europe remains the principal destination for Portuguese emigrants, post-millennium flow has seen the United Kingdom (UK) and Northern Ireland (NI), in particular, emerging as a focal point. As part of a changing labour market demand and supply process, several thousand migrants have now been recruited by agencies to work in the region's rurally based food processing industries. This article quantifies the resurgence of Portuguese emigration trails, explores their recent distribution patterns, and evaluates the role of employment intermediaries in facilitating the flow. Using qualitative discursive techniques the experiences of these players are examined before determining their impacts on the local labour market. Results show that benefits have been brought to a number of localised economies suffering from shortages and working patterns based on substitution and segmentation have been fundamentally altered. At the same time, some small towns have struggled to adapt to this influx and concerns have been raised in relation to work-based problems and the pace of developmental change associated with the growing numbers of Portuguese emigrants in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

In summer 2006 as the Portuguese soccer team enjoyed success at the World Cup, residents of the small provincial town of Portadown in Northern Ireland gathered to cheer them on. In a display of inter-community support, both locals and immigrant workers came together in their support for a team that carried the hopes of two, small, semi-peripheral, part industrialised countries located on the fringes of the European Union (EU). It was a union, in part, inspired by their mutual rivalry with the England football team and demonstrated some of the progress that has been made in integrating Portuguese workers into Northern Irish society.

The Portuguese in this part of Ulster represent a small proportion of an emigrant community numbering at least 4.5 million worldwide (Lawless 2005). This mobilisation was based upon exploration, colonisation, and more recently, economic emigration to seek a better life. Migrant flows have curtailed since the peak period of the 1970s when hundreds of

thousands fled from authoritarian Portugal. Nevertheless, there has been a post-millennium, domestic recession-induced resurgence in emigration and it continues to be a fundamental factor shaping Portugal's socio-demographic evolution (Arroteia 2001). In turn, the United Kingdom has emerged as an important destination with immigrants now estimated to number between 110,000 and 250,000 (Anon 2005; Almeida 2006). While their nuclei focused upon London and the Channel Islands, there have been significant influxes of emigrants into Britain's peripheral, semi-rural regions. These secondary flows included East Anglia, north-west England, Wales, the Scottish Borders and Northern Ireland.

With this background in mind, this article presents an overview of the Portuguese emigrant flows in north-western Europe and more specifically towards the United Kingdom. It attempts to quantify recent influx, determines their location patterns and the reasons for recent re-distributions of *emigrantes* towards peripheral parts of Britain. The study reviews secondary literature and statistical data before utilising empirical research to focus upon the working experiences of Portuguese migrants and the views of interested third parties, related local employers and emergent support organisations. Our spatial emphasis is the Northern Ireland labour market where many migrants have been recruited by employment agencies to work in the region's agricultural harvesting, meat processing and food packing sectors. These industries, in turn, are located in small rural towns often distant from the region's main population centres. While the numbers of foreign minorities in Northern Ireland are relatively small, many Portuguese (along with recent influxes of eastern European workers) have congregated together in expressions of human gregariousness and shared economic interests. These concentrations have brought benefits to local economies but have also lead to problems at the micro-scale. As a result, issues relating to the workers' motivations, and including the phenomena of 'trade-off', competition and discrimination are discussed, together with a determination of what the future might hold for these itinerant workers.

Migrant workers, labour markets and population mobility

The majority of contemporary Portuguese migrants have been labelled as neo-classical labourers perpetually moving in order to find jobs, secure salaries and remit their savings back to their families (Castles 2000). This pattern has, however, become more complicated since the emigrants have been further motivated to travel and find a better level of remuneration and more secure conditions of employment in their chosen destination countries. In relative terms, therefore, workers availed of more advantageous labour market conditions to the ones they may have been used to in their country of origin or previous destination society and this is now a key factor influencing their decision-making, and in turn, their exodus.

Although this mobility was normally an individual decision-making process, in more recent years, Portuguese emigrants have become part of

a collective labour market process. Employment agencies have been set up that were designed to engage workers for the benefit of specific sectors of industry and these have proliferated with recruitment branches being established in both host and destination countries. The agents have actively sought out candidates and then moved migrants from either lower cost/lower wage areas (such as Portugal) or from employment in similar sectors of industry (in north-west Europe) to semi-peripheral areas of the European Union (such as Northern Ireland). In so doing, they have induced more complex local labour market issues (Mulholland 2005), which are, in part, based upon the perception of migrant labourers replacing the indigenous workers. This idea that the immigrants 'are taking (our) jobs (which should be) for local workers' (the 'TOJ' syndrome), is a prejudiced but very real concern (Hayes and Dowds 2006) in many advanced industrialised countries where immigration is often near the top of the political agenda (Borjas 1999; Spencer 2003). As a result, the notion of strain on social and economic integration into local job markets has emerged as a contentious issue for state governance, public organisations and private agencies. In an Irish context this issue was further complicated by a recent history of conflict within its divided communities and spatial boundaries, making the process of Portuguese immigration unique, and integration into the local labour market, an outwardly difficult prospect fraught with hazard (Borooah and Mangan 2007).

These theoretical conditions meant that Northern Ireland represented a microcosm of what was happening in other, similar, rural, labour migration-dependent and peripheral parts of the United Kingdom. Given that little research has been carried out into these job markets so this contribution becomes an important if tentative starting point. It is an issue deserving of attention from politicians, economists, demographers, geographers and social commentators interested in determining the impacts of relatively large numbers of often averagely educated, transient, single young people seeking work and financial remuneration at a level that would be impossible to achieve in an equivalent type of job in Portugal. As such, the theoretical and practical implications for both host and destination societies should not be underestimated.

The diáspora associated with Portugal's population has been an enduring feature of the country's social, cultural and demographic evolutions. Since the age of the discoveries, and for much of the 20th century, *emigrantes* have travelled in a worldwide search for heightened economic opportunity (Moreira 2005). As a result, sizeable Portuguese communities are now established in South and North America, South Africa, Australia and much of the rest of the European Union (Baganha 2003). The largest groups can be found in Brazil and the United States with approximately 1.2 million, in each case (Lopes 1997). Traditionally, Brazil was a favoured destination (Volpi Scott 1999) but towards the latter part of Portugal's authoritarian era (during the 1960s and 70s), young Portuguese men were emigrating in unprecedented numbers towards north-western

The longevity associated with Portuguese immigrants and their relative integration into British society is reflected in the second highest level of British citizenship being granted. In 2004, for example, 545 Portuguese nationals were confirmed with this status (Home Office 2005).

Europe: driven out by a repressive political regime. At its height in 1970, 173,000 individuals (Serrão 1977) left this part of the Iberian Peninsula; most heading for jobs, and potentially more rewarding and safer destinations in France, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland (Branco 2001). In addition, untold numbers emigrated illegally, anxious to avoid conscription and embroilment in the ultimately ill-fated attempt to control Portugal's African colonies (Corkill 1999: 25). After the revolution in 1974, more relaxed societal controls led to large numbers of emigrants returning home. Some were forced back (as *retornados*) from the former colonies whilst others travelled home voluntarily (as *regressos*) from northern Europe (Rato 2001). These returnees, along with increasing numbers of immigrants from the Cape Verde islands, Brazil, Angola, China, and parts of north-western, central and eastern Europe, contributed to a turnaround in the country's migration balance. Researcher's attentions shifted to evaluate this net-inward migration of flows (Fonseca 2001; Eaton 2002) while generally ignoring the continued outflow of the domestic population. This was unfortunate because as a renewal of economic recessionary conditions impacted in the first half of the current decade, emigration from Portugal re-emerged at rates of between 21,000 and 27,000 each year. Indeed, since the start of 2000, over 96,000 Portuguese (almost 1 per cent of the total domestic population) have left their country of birth (INE 2000–2003). Many have been forced to leave as a result of home labour market difficulties including growing unemployment, limited job opportunities, higher interest rates, the rising cost of living, wage freezes and other austerity measures imposed by successive governments (Economist Intelligence Unit 2004) (Table 1).

As a result, Table One shows that, in the new millennium, almost 83,000 (86 per cent) Portuguese emigrants continued to follow the modern route by migrating to central North-Western Europe. Switzerland and France remained the principal destinations (Malaurie 1998; Marques 2001) but the United Kingdom had come to account for one in ten of all emigrants. Indeed, the United Kingdom outstripped Germany (Bauer et al. 2002), Spain and Luxembourg as a main receiver of Portuguese migrants. Seventy-three per cent of emigrants were classified as temporary (less than one year), short term or seasonal migrants, but in the British case, the ratio was significantly different with 43 per cent being labelled as long-term, permanently settling (more than one year) emigrants. Almost 10,000 migrants were recorded as having travelled to the United Kingdom between 2000 and 2003, and the rate of outward movement was accelerating. When coupled with voluntary Portuguese consular registrations it was clear that Britain had gained significantly in its attraction.[1] Nevertheless, it is impossible to derive an accurate total not least because Portuguese citizens are allowed to circulate freely around the EU. Almeida (2006: 6) recognised the usefulness of the British labour force survey, which suggested that there were 85,000 Portuguese citizens living in the United Kingdom in 2005. However, some commentators believed there to be nearly 110,000

Table 1: Portuguese emigration to North Western Europe, 2000–2003.

Area/Country of Destination	2000			2001			2002			2003			Total (2000–2003)		
	Tem.	Per.	Tot.	Tem.	Per.	Tot.	Tem.	Per.	Tot.	Tem.	Per.	Tot.	Tem.	Per.	Tot.
North Western Europe	13,561	3855	17,416	13,473	4359	17,832	15,308	6922	22,230	19,347	5909	25,256	61,689	21,045	82,734
Switzerland	4718	1113	5831	3558	247	3805	6038	2240	8278	3879	907	4785	18,193	4507	22,699
France	2431	609	3040	3444	2229	5673	4124	1838	5962	6550	849	7399	16,549	5525	22,074
United Kingdom	1416	675	2091	1441	501	1943	984	881	1865	1705	2187	3893	5546	4245	9792
Germany	1495	1064	2559	X	X	1970	X	X	986	1443	955	2398	2938	2019	7913
Spain	X	X	1177	X	X	1175	2524	404	2928	X	X	2247	2524	404	7527
Luxembourg	X	X	X	X	X	1415	X	X	704	1266	770	2036	1266	770	4155
Other N. West European countries	3501	394	2718	5030	1382	1851	1638	1559	1507	4504	241	2498	14,673	5380	8574
Other countries worldwide	3080	837	3917	1354	1403	2757	3237	1891	5128	974	778	1752	8645	4909	13,554
Total for all emigrant destinations	16,641	4692	21,333	14,827	5762	20,589	18,545	8813	27,358	20,321	6687	27,008	70,334	25,954	96,288

Year

Tem., temporary emigration for a period of less than one year; Per., permanent emigration for a period of more than one year; Tot., total of temporary and permanent emigration;
X, information not available.
Source: Instituto Nacional de Estatística (2000–2003).

Portuguese resident (Anon 2005) although, in turn, the real figure (according to the Portuguese Consulate General in London[2]) could be more than twice as high at around 250,000 nationals (Almeida 2006: 12).

Whatever the true figure, it is clear that the Portuguese have been spatially drawn to two main locations. The first of these is the Channel Islands. Most emigrants found jobs in the horticultural and tourism industries of Jersey and Guernsey, where employment of Madeiran emigrants in the hotel trade remains important (Anon 2004; Beswick 2005). Today, Jersey has a population of around 6000 Portuguese, which grows to 10,000 annually as a result of seasonal employment fluctuations. There has also been a pattern of emigrants locating in central London, and more especially the boroughs of Kennington, Lambeth and Stockwell, where employment in cleaning and domestic service remains a significant feature (Campos and Botelho 2001: 3). This capital based community is well established and can be considered a socially coherent entity numbering up to 27,000 (Benedictus 2005). Indeed, it mimics traditional Portuguese enclaves found in parts of France (Volovitch-Tavares 1999) even to the extent that they have produced their own version of the *Yellow Pages* commercial telephone directory – as *Páginas Portuguesas* – detailing a myriad of Portuguese owned but British based services (Ramalho 2006). These included café-bars, restaurants, delicatessens, lawyers, doctors and hairdressers, as well as fostering community centres, social clubs and an expatriate football league. Many luso-families have produced first and second generation offspring who attend British schools (Abreu et al. 2003) and are culturally and dialectically assimilated into the host community. More recently still, there has been spatial distribution of the Portuguese emigrant population towards peripheral regions of Britain. Trails have developed, for example, towards East Anglia to help in agriculture (John 2003), and towards north-west England (around Manchester) where the Portuguese work mainly in food production factories. In a post millennium shift, workers have also begun gravitating towards Wales, the Scottish Borders and Northern Ireland (Corkill and Almeida 2007).

Portuguese migrants in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's foreign population is dominated by Chinese (estimated at 7–8000 individuals), Indian (1500), and African (1600) communities (Multi-cultural Resource Centre 2002). More recently, east European immigrants have proliferated with significant numbers travelling from Lithuania, Russia and, in particular, from Poland (STEP 2006). Nevertheless, as part of a provincial population of almost 1.7 million, foreigners remain a small minority. Given the paucity of information on the region's foreign population and the failure of the NI Census 2001 to delve beyond generic ethnic groupings, once again, accurate migration data on national groupings was difficult to attain. Conservative estimates placed the region's Portuguese population somewhere between 700 (MCRC 2002) and

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1000 individuals (Holder 2003: 74). In turn, most were Portuguese nationals with a small minority (of 10 per cent) being Portuguese speaking-individuals from third countries such as Angola, Brazil, Mozambique and East Timor. Data relating to the allocation of national insurance numbers showed that between 2002 and 2005 a total of 1630 Portuguese were registered with the Social Security Agency (DSDNI 2006: 22). Given that the mobilisation was a recent phenomenon and the situation constantly changing, as well as there being no requirement to register (or de-register) with the Portuguese Consulate (in Manchester), then the true figure for Portuguese immigration was perhaps higher still (at approximately 2500 nationals). The question marks surrounding these figures reflected the weak statistical hold of government agencies and the unrecorded flux associated with the migratory flows, both into and out of the province. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the Portuguese represented a minor grouping within a small foreign minority population in Northern Ireland.

In spite of this limited status, recent media attention highlighted the Portuguese community but delivered mixed messages as to their impact. On one hand, they were viewed as a positive player in the regional economy, helping to support agriculturally based industries that have suffered from acute labour shortages in recent years. At the same time, some media sources have painted them as a disruptive group (Tyrone Today 2006) citing problems such as anti-social behaviour, abuse, harassment, intimidation and violence (issues reported in *Público* 2002) in the workplace. In autumn 2002, a locally produced TV documentary exposed some of the difficult conditions and experiences of Portuguese emigrants working in Dungannon's meat processing factories (Collins 2002). The programme alleged that wages paid to the Portuguese workers were generally lower than the salaries paid to local Northern Irish employees working in the same factory. Survey of the Portuguese community in Northern Ireland by Soares (2002) found that the recruitment process was demographic and gender specific with almost nine out of ten workers being young, single males, between 22 and 31 years of age. Most returned to Portugal at the end of their six-month temporary work contracts. Educational attainment amongst these immigrants was of an average standard, with over three-quarters having completed their secondary level school education. These were a replication of the neo-classical migration chains established by temporary labour migrants in other semi-industrialised areas, and particularly those previously moving from, into, and via Portugal (Castles 2002). Indeed, almost seven out of ten migrant labourers interviewed had worked in other north European countries, namely France, Germany, and Switzerland (Soares 2002: 78). Many workers, therefore, had experienced similar work posts and labour schemes operating in these countries. Consequently, Northern Ireland could be seen as another cog in the wheel of migratory circulation that now typifies this sort of semi-rural labour market arrangement that is pan-West European

in scope, with workers moving as a reaction to where the job demands were emanating from.

In spatial terms, the Portuguese were found located in small but highly concentrated numbers in the new/market towns of mid-Ulster. These included the localities of Portadown and Craigavon (each conservatively estimated to contain around 200 Portuguese nationals), and in the initial focus of location – Dungannon (estimated at 300) (McGreevy and Bayne 2001). More recently, Portuguese workers were drawn into the smaller outlying market towns of Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Banbridge, Coalisland, Coleraine, Cookstown, Kilkeel, Limavady, Magherafelt, Omagh, Newtownards and Rathfriland (NISRA 2006). What was unusual about this distribution was that, the main population centres of Belfast, Lisburn and Londonderry/Derry were largely ignored by Portuguese emigrants. This was because migrant workers were responding to change and short-fall in the rural economy and filling an: 'unmet demand for low paid labour' (TUC 2004: 2): effectively substituting themselves into the local, agriculturally based labour markets of Ulster where activities including mushroom picking, sandwich-making and potato-packing factories remained important. Indeed, Northern Ireland's food processing industry was the third largest manufacturing sector in the region, employing 19,000 workers and producing £2.5 billion sales in 2005 (Anon 2007). Moreover, much of the produce was exported and this value-added trade accounted for: 'almost two-thirds of the food processing sector's output' (OFMDFM 2004), thus helping to maintain its position as a staple indus-try, alongside tourism, financial services, and electronics manufacturing sectors. Northern Ireland remains a relatively buoyant regional economy with low unemployment (4.2 per cent – April 2007), increasing levels of employment activity (an EAP of 786,000), and falling numbers of persons claiming unemployment related/incapacity benefits (around 24,000) in spring 2007 (DETI 2007).

Portuguese workers' impacts

Because of the sensitivity associated with this topic area, language con-straints and the levels of suspicion now surrounding the role of agencies, as well as alleged interference on the part of supervisors, it proved impossible to conduct a quantitative inquiry aimed at the workers. However, to coun-teract these difficulties and begin examining the experiences of these labour migrants a series of in depth, semi-structured exploratory discussions were held with representatives closely associated with the Portuguese working in Northern Ireland. These respondents included a female migrant worker from Lisbon (Interviewee A), a local supermarket line manager (B), two food processing factory production managers (C and D), a local commu-nity/church worker (E), the managing director (F) and manager (G) of a sandwich making factory, a Brazilian born, male immigrant worker (H), a Portuguese family support worker (I), a local newspaper editor (J) and a former recruitment agent (K). Our informants were carefully selected as

possessing knowledge of the labour market issues specifically surrounding the migrants in two of the main destination towns: Portadown and Dungannon. This important and detailed qualitative information was collected in the spring of 2006 and focused upon the segmentation of the local labour market, the problems and benefits emerging, and the integrative process undertaken by migrant workers and local communities alike. We should, of course, be aware that the empirical base was narrow and opinions put forward were value laden. Nevertheless, quality and integrity of responses was high and allowed for tentative comment to be made.

Our discussions showed, for example, that at the micro scale the influx of Portuguese workers into Northern Ireland has been rapid and a very recent phenomenon.

> Interviewee E gave an indication of the timeline whereby: The first group of people to come were the Portuguese appearing here in 2000. At the start it was all males arriving most of which were aged between 20 and 30. In the last few years (however) there have been many families and middle-aged people coming to live and work here.

Not surprisingly, our investigation showed that Portugal's immigrant community is a small and largely hidden group whose relative 'invisibility' was based upon their inherent desire not to draw attention to themselves. While their numbers were the subjects of debate it was quite likely that current estimates of between 1000 and 2500 newcomers were conservative. Taking account of unrecorded immigration and family reconciliation the real figure was much higher at anything up to 6000 individuals (reflecting speculation on the part of ground worker E). In spite of this uncertainty, most Portuguese immigrants were now part of a distinctive labour market where the immigrant's importance was repeatedly stressed. Indeed, without the migrant labourers then, it was likely the meat processing factories (and the rural agricultural economy) in many parts of the region would struggle to survive.

> Interviewee C, for example, was unequivocal on this topic: Local people don't want to work in this (chicken processing plant) environment. Moreover: We can't get local people to do the work so if it weren't for foreign workers the company would not be able to operate. We have such high productivity and market demand that if we failed to meet it, the factory would close down and (all of us) would be out of jobs.

The inherent flexibility, ready compliance and low skill requirements afforded by the immigrant worker (in comparison to a local employee) also lay at the heart of the business decision to take on foreign nationals. This was particularly true in terms of the seasonally fluctuating, generally long, hard and unsocial hours that were associated with shift working patterns in these sectors. To this end, G attested that:

The food industry has unpredictable hours at best . . . (this factory) starts at seven and does not finish until production has stopped. For local workers with families to support, this is not seen as an acceptable condition. However, it is perfect for foreign nationals who (in his perception) . . . have no families to support in the immediate area.

D argued:

the migrants have been able to work overtime in the past when it was not wanted (by the local workers), for instance, at Christmas and New Year holidays.

This demand-led argument meant that the employers were generally happy with their supply relationships with the labour agencies (Cains 2004: 5) and were, therefore, reluctant to intervene to make agents change their ways or regulate their activities. Indeed, the factories had garnered the fruits of a well-motivated, highly productive and relatively docile immigrant labour force that was easily recruited and praised for its intrinsic work ethic. This positive image was one reiterated by:

F who said that his factory had been able: to use a large population of (Portuguese) workers keen to work at any time, any holiday to maximum effect, and as:
    B affirmed: we have (Portuguese) agency workers who come in to do shifts we have trouble filling at night.

The role of the labour agents and the agencies they represented was clearly very strong and often extended from pre-arrival through to their initial location in Northern Ireland:

A's narrative appeared typical of many and explained that: I had to give (name of employment agency) a cheque for £250 in order to secure my plane ticket . . . On arrival, (name of agency) had organized accommodation for us but it was rough with no heating, oil, electric and very little furnishing.

A synthesis of information supplied by the interviewees and K (in particular) showed that these employment agencies were both internationally and locally based, in Oporto (Portugal), and in the island of Ireland (in Belfast and Dublin). A typical agency attracted workers to factories across Northern Ireland (Bell et al. 2004: 54) through adverts placed in Portuguese daily newspapers (e.g. *Correio de Manha*). The agency interviewed potential workers and completed medical checks before signing them up and flying them to Belfast. Once in the region, they were accommodated in shared lodgings of variable quality with several other agency employees and then assigned to meat processing companies and food packing firms in one of the main foci/semi-rural towns mentioned previously.
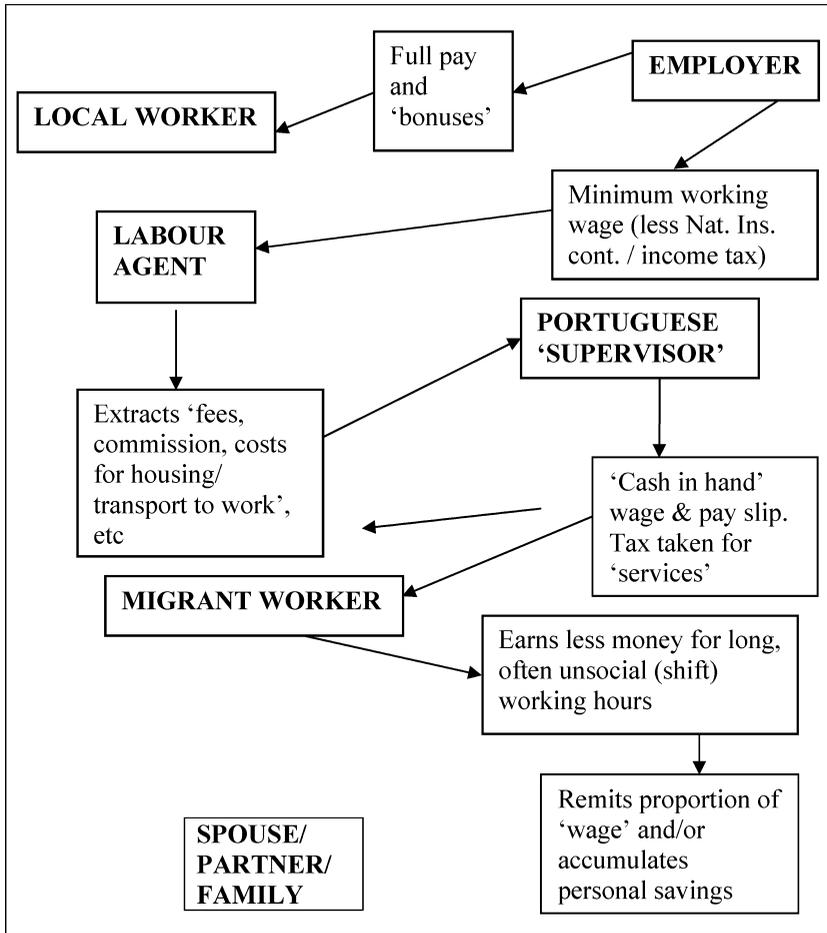
Source: Author's schematic interpretation (2007).

Figure 1: Portuguese immigrant insertion in the Northern Ireland Labour Market.

Figure 1 interpreted the segmented nature of this labour arrangement and the way in which rental and transport costs were deducted from the employee's wages, which in turn were paid by the agency and not directly by the factory of employment. In turn again, the agency was paid by the host-company at minimum working wage (MWW) level for the production work that was provided by the migrant. The agency then paid the migrant labourer a wage (minus deductions) at a basic level that it determined. Often, the money was paid 'cash in hand' and via a second intermediary who was normally a native, Portuguese speaking, charge-hand. It was along this continuum that the labour market changed from formalised to informal and into a 'grey' area where regulatory controls were more difficult to enforce. Unsurprisingly, this sub-contracting arrangement became increasingly complicated in its operation and led to allegations that migrant workers were being exploited. Indeed, many were considered victims of a 'long hours/low pay' syndrome (TUC 2003) that has proliferated elsewhere in Britain.

Problems in the labour market

The major problem to emerge from the investigation, therefore, related to the employment situation, and more specifically, the issues of exploitation, discrimination, and physical/verbal abuse in the workplace. These hazards were often perpetuated by intimidation and fear on the part of intermediaries. Indeed, in many respects these workers were dependent upon the 'generosity' of their labour agents but vulnerable to (unfair) dismissal and ejection from tied accommodation at short notice.

> Interviewee A, for example, alleged that: Portuguese people and other foreigners . . . were complaining that (Mr X) was bullying and threatening them . . . I knew of them to put Portuguese out of their homes which they were renting off (Mr X), during the night if they were going to shift jobs that were not a part of the (named) agency.

Rivalry and competitiveness amongst the controlling agents was a factor, therefore, and echoed a similar system operating in Portugal but relating to some Portuguese agent's nefarious treatment of Lusophone African immigrants (Eaton 2003: 108) during the 1990s. Moreover, there were parallels with immigrants entering Portugal that were carrying similar life experience backgrounds, since the Portuguese emigrants possessed a strong work ethic and had family values at the root of their decision to emigrate (McGreevy and Bayne 2001). These drivers included a desire to earn money, remit savings, improve their lives and those of their family, educate their children and broaden their horizons. Many of these migrants, therefore, made independent choices in order to maximise their incomes and other opportunities within the constraints that they faced. This reflected a dual frame of reference that they carried with them (King 1998: 270) or a trade-off, whereby poor wages and working conditions abroad were tolerated because the wages earned in Northern Ireland were higher than any potential earnings in their home country. Portuguese workers appeared to accept their circumstances in deference to the remuneration that they received: sterling, which could be converted into a relative euro fortune when repatriated, thus helping to improve familial circumstances, in their source areas. However, in extreme cases and according to:

> C, for example: If foreign workers have trained to a higher level and are working through an agency they still only receive(d) the basic rate, so in some cases they were exploited through their agency.

This scenario was, however, complex and relative to the individual's circumstances since one person's 'self-exploitation' represented another person's 'trade-off'. Interviewee H, for instance, was previously a car mechanic in his native Brazil and:

made more money than most but this only allowed (him) to have a basic standard of living (at home). It is nothing compared to what (he made) now (in Northern Ireland). H explained that he currently had a specialist (food processing) job that meant he: received a higher salary.

A related feature was the integration process that these immigrant workers underwent in the face of wider societal issues such as racial tension, verbal abuse, and occasional physical violence that was often a reciprocal process. There was, for example, some evidence of intimidation and violence directed against fellow nationals. Indeed, Portuguese 'work supervisors' were alleged to be coercing the contracted immigrant workforce into rejecting trade union membership and encouraging the Portuguese to inform on each other with respect to misdemeanours, both trivial and serious. The consequences were sometimes extreme:

> A: I know a Portuguese guy who had a bottle smashed over his head. Also (name of NI labour agent deleted) and his crowd treat Portuguese like slaves and carry out wrongful beatings which I would class as racial.

Equally, there was some observational evidence of intimidation of the indigenous community (e.g. street begging, vagrancy and casual violence), and conversely instances of harassment of workers by locals, particularly, in social interaction arenas such as public houses and nightclubs. Experience amongst the respondent workers was mixed but the underlying theme was one of conflict.

> H, for example, stated that: (he) had one or two problems with local people . . . mainly occurring on nights out in (a nearby) town.
> A claimed that: one (Portuguese) guy was called a monkey because he was black and people call us smelly and think we are diseased. (Some) homes are targeted with petrol bombs.
> D spoke of: some resentment towards the migrant workforce.

It appears that the harassment was not exclusively, therefore, the domain of the local resident/worker against the immigrant but more a two-way process reflecting confrontational attitudes on the part of some of the immigrant population (agents/supervisors/workers) against each other. A complicated picture was clouded further by the alleged involvement of local paramilitary vigilantes (BBC 2004) looking to 'control' what they considered to be 'their' communities.

> Interviewee E stated: Most attacks are from . . . youth mobs that are linked to paramilitaries and it is the paramilitaries who control the attacks. Some of the houses, which are rented to Portuguese people, are paramilitary owned and these people . . . (then) demand £20 per week from the Portuguese who

live in them to ensure their windows stay in . . . and that they receive no attacks.

This, of course, had a multiple depressant effect since the Portuguese workers had monies deducted at source by the labour agent and allegedly by their supervisor, paid rent to the paramilitary 'landlord' and then had to pay protection money to the same 'landlord' to secure a safe living existence. From a spatial perspective, many immigrant workers lived in rundown, dilapidated interface areas between Unionist and Nationalist communities and were, therefore, often on the 'front-line' at times of heightened tension such as during the Orange Order parading season.

Community responses

A further complication emerged, since the process of adaptation by Portuguese immigrants to the local society, and indeed, by local communities to the Portuguese (and other immigrant communities) has been slow. Mobilisations by organisations such as the Northern Ireland district councils and agencies like the Citizens Advice Bureaux, to help local integration efforts were only a very recent development. Relative invisibility within the community meant it was difficult for the region's social services, for example, to help the workers. A simple lack of knowledge of an exact number of immigrants resulted in resource issues often being ill informed and poorly determined. It was initially difficult to overcome factors such as efficient provision of English language classes, the proper distribution of interpreting and translating services, or improved access to health services, education systems, welfare benefit offices, and so forth.

The situation has, however, changed with greater recognition and involvement through, for example, local councils providing translators and translations of documents. Several simple but far-reaching transitory arrangements emerged.

> Interviewee B (referring to a national supermarket retailer) stated that: In the Dungannon store they put up signs in Portuguese for taxis and (one) manager was sent to learn Portuguese. In this . . . store we have an outside firm (which) acts as a translator and is . . . used when the customer requires one.

Other retailers specifically employed Portuguese in their human resource departments to assist with their recruitment process and facilitate direct employment strategies, thus removing the agent from the employment equation.

> C noted that: Within personnel we have a Portuguese girl who assists in the (worker) interviews and also checks identity cards (against false representation and fraud).

In addition, the Police Service of Northern Ireland employed an interpreter for the mid-Ulster area and community funded initiatives such as the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) was utilised to support the immigrant community (STEP 2005). Migrant workers' forums were set up in Craigavon and a community/voluntary partnership called ANIMATE (Action Now to Integrate Minority Access to Equality) was working on migrant worker issues in the Dungannon, Craigavon and Cookstown areas (Craigavon Borough Council 2005). Bus-mounted advertising campaigns aimed at disseminating an anti-racism message in the workplace, were also instigated in Dungannon in the spring of 2006 (DSTBC 2006: 10). Moreover, a local newspaper, the *Tyrone Courier*, published a weekly column in Portuguese devoted to matters of local interest to the immigrants. This was tangible recognition of the contribution that the Portuguese workers have made: a point noted by J when he stated that:

> There are more than two communities in Dungannon: the Portuguese are now a sizeable group and an important part of life in Dungannon.

In some respect the Portuguese emigrant experience in the province mimicked that found in rural parts of mainland Britain such as Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The situation they found themselves in was fluid and the immigrant group was rapidly expanding. Most new entrants were trying to 'shuffle up the socio-economic pyramid' (Eaton 2003), which was based upon relative levels of aspiration, wages and living conditions found in different parts of North-Western Europe.

> When Interviewee A was asked: what factors made her decide to leave Portugal, her answer was emphatic and echoed the views of most: money.

In turn, even the minimum-working wage (minus agent's deductions)/basic wage earned locally was higher than what could be made in Portugal where:

> everything keeps going up in price . . . but the salary stays the same so it becomes unaffordable to live there (Interviewee A, again).

Northern Ireland was, ergo, an outwardly attractive location pulling workers into the province and providing jobs and rewards, with only the climate negating against even greater levels of satisfaction since according to Interviewee A: it is very cold here. Equally, the local education system (once the initial English language barrier has been overcome) offered first and second-generation immigrant worker children a much better prospect of schooling than similar opportunities found back home (Newnham 2003). Indeed, the Portuguese in Northern Ireland quickly moved beyond a pioneer stage and were now settling with spouses/partners and/or children. As E attested:

> There are 70 (Portuguese) kids now in school in Portadown, mostly in
> primary schools but there are a few attending secondary school.

All of these favourable conditions, therefore, had the potential to allow further improvement of the familial situation. Once again, they helped to justify the trade-off associated with many of the immigrant's work experiences and their apparent willingness to tolerate the more negative aspects of their existence.

Discussion

In conclusion, we have tentatively examined the scale, experiences and impacts of Portuguese migrant workers in Northern Ireland's labour market. Our analysis argued that employment of Portuguese migrants, in Portadown, Dungannon and other regional market towns, was significantly driven by employment agencies. This process has provided factories with a stable workforce and counteracted many of the labour shortages associated with the rurally based food processing sectors. As a result, working patterns based upon substitution and segmentation, have been fundamentally altered. Equally, the role of agencies have brought adverse consequences for some migrants in terms of reduced pay and inferior working and living conditions compared to other (non-migrant) workers. However, it appeared that this was a conscious decision-making process on the part of the migrant worker to 'trade-off' personal inconveniences in deference to remunerative reward, remittances, and savings, which could all be used to improve familial circumstances, both in Portugal and in Northern Ireland. As such, many Portuguese appeared to tolerate the dualistic operating conditions that they faced as well as the slowness associated with the pace of developmental change and the process of adaptation to, and on the part of, many local communities.

Consequently, the future for these types of immigrant is difficult to surmise. It may be that with growing levels of migrant labourers and increasing evidence of family reconciliation then greater integration can be expected. Integration can take two forms, first, in terms of the community. As we have observed, first-generation immigrant children are now settling in Northern Ireland's primary schools and with time will move into the secondary (and tertiary) education sectors. It is likely that community groups/associations will be established, and continue to grow. Hypothetically, they may come to mirror (on a smaller scale) the established Portuguese social communities found in London. Fledgling examples already exist in Dungannon where the weekend use of a local community centre together with a Portuguese owned restaurant and a managed public house forms the hub for a local socialisation/integration process to take place. Portadown has a public house with a strong Portuguese clientele base, and a coffee house and shop selling Portuguese goods, which acts as an informal drop-in support-centre offering mutual advice and translation services. More importantly, these initiatives are contributing to a relatively positive information chain that constitutes a

key part of the strong worker migration trail that has now developed between Portugal and Northern Ireland.

Second, greater levels of integration can be anticipated in terms of the local labour market. Progress has been made with some migrant workers now being directly employed by the factory (rather than continuing to be linked to a labour agency), thus benefiting from bonus payments, training opportunities, language attainment, access to trade union membership, and closer immersion in the workforce and local economy. However, there is also a downside because if labour agencies are not carefully regulated (Concordia 2006: 12) then problems of discrimination/exploitation demonstrated in the article could render the Portuguese immigrants as a vulnerable group in a society not characterised by its tolerance of 'outsiders'. The omnipresent spectre of violence is unlikely to go away completely and it is a disturbing prospect; one orchestrated by criminal paramilitary elements (both Republican and Loyalist) exerting what they see is 'control' over 'their' communities.

Equally, as segmentation in the labour market continues and potential saturation point[3] is neared with migrant workers continuing to enter Northern Ireland and take up jobs that local workers are reluctant to take on, then it is possible that conflict will develop. There is already some observational evidence of friction developing between different groups of immigrant workers (Portuguese and eastern Europeans, for example) competing for the same job vacancies in mid-Ulster and this may be exacerbated in the longer term in a three way-internecine tension between the local, Portuguese and East European working groups.

On the other hand, with time, co-operation and a level of tolerance, the Portuguese workers and their families could be a welcome addition to the establishment of multiculturalism and a multi-ethnic society within the region. Such a community already typifies large urban centres in the rest of the United Kingdom (i.e. London and to a lesser extent, the Channel Islands and around Manchester) but is a process still in its infancy in Northern Ireland. Moreover, it is a largely unknown concept in many rural market towns, and more economically peripheral parts of the province. This lack of experience of immigrant labourers and their contributions will be a key factor in changing community relations and perceptions of the Portuguese workers. It is a feature that time will change but one which will require all parties to come together to discuss their similarities and differences. Given past experience, there is no guarantee that this will happen. As a result, Portuguese workers in Northern Ireland remain in a classical state of migratory flux. Many live in a hidden, partially understood, sometimes abused, but important, gradually evolving, and at the micro-employment scale, an increasingly influential community.

3   There is debate over whether there are a finite number of jobs available in the food-processing sector of Northern Ireland. It may be that saturation point is being reached. Equally there were inferences from the survey (interviewees B and E) that some local areas have been regenerated and the contributions of migrant workers have helped to improve trade and produce re-investment, increases in jobs and sustained growth of factories (DETI 2007).

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