Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to examine the tactics and strategies utilised by Central Eastern European (CEE) migrant workers as they strive to develop their mobility power within the employment relationship and outside of the workplace.

Design/methodology/approach: Data is drawn from three qualitative organisational case studies. In total 70 interviews with migrant workers, managers and HR staff were undertaken. There were also nine focus groups with migrant workers across the case studies.

Findings: Developing mobility power is not straightforward, particularly in the context of hard HRM strategies. The majority of CEE workers across the case studies viewed the employment relationship as temporary, however people found it difficult to develop the mobility power necessary to leave and move to a better job. This can be attributed to a combination of people's individual subjective factors and employment in occupations with limited structural and associational power.

Originality This article engages with debates concerning the agency of migrant workers. Existing studies have focused upon the way in which migrant workers utilise mobility power to leave unfavourable employers. However, this article builds upon current debates by examining how migrant workers *develop* their mobility power. There is also consideration of the individual and collective dimensions of power.

Introduction

Following the European Union (EU) enlargement in 2004, the United Kingdom (UK) experienced large numbers of Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrant workers entering the labour market. These workers have been instrumental in meeting employers' demand for flexible labour at the bottom-end of the labour market (McCollum and Findlay, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted migrants' role as key workers in sectors as diverse as health and social care, hospitality, transport, and food production. However, the mobility of migrant labour across national borders continues to be a politically contentious issue throughout the world. In the UK's 'hostile environment', ending freedom of movement was a fundamental reason why the electorate voted to leave the EU. Freedom of movement enables EU workers to move around the EU labour market without restrictions or the need for an immigration visa. People who are employed as guest workers or through traditional migratory pathways do not have this right, therefore are often in more precarious employment situations (Fudge, 2012; Kononen, 2019). Withdrawal from the EU allowed the UK government to repeal freedom of movement through the Immigration and Social Security Coordination Act. The act enables the development of a points-based immigration system and minimum salary threshold. This will have exceptionally negative implications for low wage migration from Central and Eastern Europe. According to the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) framework, the UK's Liberal Market Economy (LME) means there is a demand for low wage migration (Devitt, 2011). CEE workers were attracted to the UK due to the ease at which they could find jobs, albeit in low skilled sectors of employment. CEE workers are a significant group of migrants to study as they are highly qualified and/or experienced workers who are persistently segmented into low skilled work in the UK, despite having free access to the

labour market at the time the research was conducted (Sirkeci et al, 2019). This article examines the complexities involved when CEE workers try to exit low skilled work. Such complexities are likely to be exacerbated by the economic turbulence due to COVID-19 and the immigration act.

Recently there have been rich insights into the agency of migrant workers, including the tactics and strategies utilised to cope with harsh employment conditions (Alberti, 2014; Berntsen, 2016; Datta et al, 2007; Hagan et al, 2011; Ram et al, 2013). While existing studies highlight the coping tactics and strategies employed by migrant workers in the labour market (Alberti, 2014; Berntsen, 2016; Datta et al, 2007), there has been limited focus on how migrant workers attempt to build their agency within the context of the employment relationship. This article examines CEE migrant workers' agency by analysing the ways in which migrants endeavour to develop skills and experience to leave unfavourable employment. The article begins by examining labour market segmentation theory and the VoC literature to explain the demand for low skilled migration in the UK. Following this, migrant workers' agency is discussed, and attention is drawn to the concept of mobility power. The next section outlines the research methods and approach and introduces the case study organisations. Then there is a discussion of the findings which highlight that rather than being mobile workers, some CEE migrants experience challenges when trying to develop their mobility power.

Migrant labour, labour market segmentation and the varieties of capitalism

In advanced capitalist economies migrant workers tend to be segmented into the peripheral labour market, which is described as a 'labour whirlpool that attracts and ejects large quantities of workers on a regular basis' (Rodriguez, 2004: 466). Segmentation

theories offer demand-side explanations based upon the duality between capital-intensive and labour-intensive jobs, which creates a division of labour. Labour-intensive jobs in the peripheral labour market are low skilled, have low wages, and poor working conditions. As work is a social phenomenon, some workers are reluctant to undertake low status, low wage jobs. However migrant workers are willing to accept these jobs due to their dual frame of reference (Piore, 1979). Migrant workers tend to rely upon social networks to find employment (Waldinger and Licher, 2003), therefore are often overqualified for the jobs they undertake (Leschke and Weiss 2020). This reliance on social networks can also segment and fix migrants into the peripheral labour market and can further segment migrant workers along the lines of gender and ethnicity (Gavanas, 2013). Piore (1979) argues that employers prefer to hire migrant workers when faced with labour shortages in the peripheral labour market because it is the easiest and cheapest option. Selection decisions are often based upon stereotypical views regarding national origin (McDowell, et al, 2007). There is evidence of employers ranking ethnic groups based on these subjective stereotypes, which creates ethnic hiring queues in certain jobs (Waldinger and Licher, 2003).

Although segmentation theories help us to understand why migrant workers tend to work in the peripheral labour market, they neglect the significance of the national context in explaining the differing demand for low wage migration between countries (Krings, 2020). The VoC literature demonstrates the way in which the configuration of interrelated socio-economic regimes, namely economic, industrial relations, employment, welfare, education and training regimes, influences the demand for different types of migrant labour (Menz, 2009; Devitt, 2011). LME's such as the UK, tend to compete based on cost reduction, have significant numbers of low wage and low skills sectors, and weak levels

of collective bargaining and employment-standards compliance control (Devitt, 2011). Coordinated Market Economies (CME), on the other hand, are based on a high quality and high skills production regime, strong firm-based Vocational Education and Training (VET), with higher trade union density than LMEs (Devitt, 2011). CME employers are interested solely in high-skilled migration and actively discourage low-skilled migration. The Nordic regime is similar to the CME regime, however trade union density is considerably higher and employment standards are more rigorously and efficiently monitored and implemented (Devitt, 2011). Migrant workers can obtain employment more easily in LMEs due to the abundance of low skilled jobs in the peripheral labour market, where there are often problems attracting and retaining labour (Menz, 2009).

Recently countries like Germany and Sweden, which are viewed as traditional CMEs and Nordic economics respectively, have undergone changes to their institutional frameworks, such as the weakening of collective bargaining mechanisms. The abovementioned changes, which are traditionally associated with LMEs, have resulted in greater numbers of migrant workers being attracted and segmented into the expanding low skilled sectors of employment (Woolfson et al, 2014; Krings, 2020). Therefore, as CMEs and Nordic economies have become more 'liberal', they have experienced greater numbers of low-wage migration. The VoC literature helps to explain why CEE migrant workers tend to be segmented into low skilled sectors in the UK context and increasingly in traditional CME and Nordic regimes. Yet, theories which explore structural accounts for the segmentation of migrant workers are in danger of presenting pessimistic accounts of migrant labour as weak, vulnerable and susceptible to wider structural forces (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Piore, 1979). This article shall analyse migrant workers' agency within the context of capital's demand for labour.

Migrant workers' agency and mobility power

Increasing attention has been drawn to the agency of migrant workers and their transnational and occupational mobility (Alberti, 2014; Berntsen, 2016; Datta, et al, 2007; Hagan et al, 2011; Ram et al, 2013). While working in the unequal London labour market, Datta et al (2007: 425) argue that migrants develop tactics, which 'are predicated variously on survival, balancing responsibilities and accumulation', and are 'reactive, fragmented and fragile', rather than strategic. Some studies argue that migrants do more than just 'get by' or cope (Alberti, 2014; Berntsen, 2016; Ram et al, 2013). Migrants can employ strategies to develop their labour power in order to obtain a better job. Short-term tactics can facilitate long-term goals (Datta et al 2007; Ram et al 2013). Ram et al (2013) show that despite having limited power in the labour market, migrants' tactics constituted a combination of immediate methods, such as drawing on networks, with longer term strategic approaches to developing career and entrepreneurial plans (Ram et al, 2013). Migrant workers can also make use of informal learning and knowledge sharing with people who share similar social ties, such as race or ethnicity (Waldinger and Licher, 2003). This knowledge sharing can help to facilitate future job moves. Hagan et al (2011) and demonstrate how Latino migrants utilise informal learning in their places of origin to become economically mobile in the US labour market.

Smith's (2006, 2010) conception of mobility power has been instrumental when considering the agency of migrant workers (see Alberti, 2014 and Berntsen, 2016). Smith (2006) argues that the indeterminacy of labour evident in the effort bargaining process, where the employer only purchases the capacity to work rather than a definitive amount

of labour power, can also be applied to where workers choose to sell their labour. Mobility power for employers is comprised of strategies 'over labour movement and retention, selection, reward and career development' (Smith, 2006: 391). While for employees it is evident in 'the time involved with network building, the resources used at work for the planning of job moves, and the use of mobility threats to create strategic rewards' (Smith, 2006: 391). Ultimately, this is about the power workers have to leave their employer, how they use this power, and the time spent developing the potential to leave. However, Smith's (2006) initial influential article gave the impression that mobility power was something that workers possessed or did not possess. Limited consideration was placed upon the way in which workers develop their mobility power. A later book chapter resolved this issue by focusing on 'labour power as a *flow'* which 'evokes action and movement' (Smith, 2010: 270, emphasis in original). Labour power contains some key characteristics which means it can transform, move or become fixed (Smith, 2010).

The concept of mobility power has been applied to migrant workers by Alberti (2014) and Berntsen (2016) who both focus upon temporary migrant workers employed in flexible labour markets. In her study of London's temporary hospitality industry, Alberti (2014), examines the way in which migrant workers use their quitting potential to escape poor quality occupations. While some migrant workers may remain trapped in low skill, low wage employment, others developed skills and experience to 'reproduce their mobility *occupationally and transnationally'* (Alberti, 2014: 866, emphasis in original). Furthermore, for migrant workers: 'mobility struggles become significant in social domains that exceed the workplace, including family, friendship, local and transnational communities' (Alberti, 2014: 877). Berntsen (2016) applies Katz's (2004) resilience, reworking and resistance framework to migrant workers in Europe's flexible construction

labour market. She highlights the way in which migrant workers use their mobility power to change their working conditions in non-unionised spheres of the labour market. However, this article builds on the work of Alberti (2014) and Berntsen (2016) by examining the way in which migrant workers *develop* their mobility power as opposed to how they utilise it to move around the labour market. There is also consideration of the way in which the collective dimension of power contributes to the development of individual mobility power.

Migrant workers' mobility power and the employment relationship

Social domains outside the workplace are essential spaces and contain resources for migrant workers to develop and utilise their mobility power (Alberti, 2014). However, it is also important to consider the impact that employers' strategies have on migrant workers' ability to develop mobility power. Labour power is owned by the worker; however, it can only be realised in the labour process (Smith, 2010). As with the effort bargain, employees and employers engage in an exchange relationship, however employers have a larger share of power. Recognition must be given to the individual and collective dimensions of power identified by Wright (2000) and developed by Silver (2003), namely structural power and associational power. Structural power derives from workers' position in the economic structure: 'the power of workers as individuals that results directly from tight labor markets' (Wright, 2000: 962). Silver (2003) terms this marketplace bargaining power. The other aspect of structural power is what Silver (2003) terms workplace bargaining power: 'from the strategic location of a particular group of workers within a key industrial sector' (Wright, 2000: 962). This highlights the importance of the value of workers on the labour market and within the labour process. Therefore, it is important to analyse how each of these dimensions interact. Workers who

have a high degree of structural power will have more opportunities to utilise their mobility power to bargain over strategic rewards and are able to leave jobs. Associational power, on the other hand, results from the collective organisation of workers and is manifest in organisations and structures such as trade unions, works councils and political parties. Mobility power is more applicable to the individual worker however the collective dimension of power can contribute to the context in which workers can develop their mobility power. Organisations where workers have a large degree of associational power tend to have more say in how work is organised and have the opportunity to bargain over pay, working conditions and access to training and development. For example, Green et al (1999) argue that the probability of workers receiving training is higher in unionised workplaces than non-unionised workplaces. Training and development enable workers to gain new knowledge, skills and experience, which increases the value of their labour power.

Some employers value the fixity of labour, as the continual flow of workers in and out of an organisation can be problematic when the skill set of employees is scarce, the skills demanded on the job are not readily available on the labour market, and/or if there have been significant investments in training and development (Smith, 2006). On the other hand, a continual flow of low skilled labour can be advantageous for some employers. Many of the sectors of the economy where there is a demand for migrant labour pursue hard HRM strategies, where disposable labour is desirable (Baxter-Reid, 2016). The competitive climate can be hostile and cutting labour costs is an important means of improving profit margins. Numerous studies emphasise the way in which employers target marginalised workers in the labour market as part of a hard HRM strategy, which allows them to gain control over the labour market and labour process (Baxter-Reid,

2016; Collinson, 1987; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to analyse different organisational contexts to examine the influence that employers' strategies exert upon migrant workers' ability to develop mobility power. This article seeks to address the research question: what tactics and strategies do CEE migrant workers employ when trying to develop mobility power within and external to the employment relationship?

Method

This article is drawn from research undertaken between April 2009 and April 2010, which analysed the employment relationship of CEE migrant workers in Scotland. Qualitative research data was collected in three case study organisations, Laundry Co, Hotel Co and Bus Co. The first case study Laundry Co is part of a large linen and laundry hire company, which supplies linen and workwear to clients in the hotel and restaurant sector. Most employees performed manual work and were process operators, and approximately 80% of process operators were CEE workers. Hotel Co, the second case study, was part of a large hotel and leisure group and findings are reported from the housekeeping and food and beverage department. 90% of workers in the housekeeping department and 30% of employees in the food and beverage department were CEE. The third organisation, Bus Co, was the subsidiary of a large bus company and transport group. Only 10% of bus drivers in Bus Co were from CEE, however this is a comparative number of CEE employees to the other two cases. Each organisation was chosen due to the large number of CEE workers employed there.

At this point it is worth noting that Bus Co differs quite significantly from Hotel Co and Laundry Co with regards to the nature of work performed and the mobility strategies employed by employers. As a bus drivers' job is semi-skilled, it was expensive to recruit

and train new drivers. The organisation therefore adopted a systematic selection process and encouraged the retention of labour. Significant mobility was problematic for the organisation. In Hotel Co and Laundry Co work was predominantly low skilled, and each organisation was subject to seasonal fluctuations in demand. The movement of workers in and out of each organisation was not viewed as problematic and was regarded as a solution to fluctuations in demand. It is also worth noting that research was undertaken during a recessionary climate. This has important implications for the mobility strategies of employers and migrant workers, with the balance of power sitting firmly with employers due to the abundant supply of labour in the labour market.

In total 70 interviews were undertaken (48 CEE workers, 18 line-managers and supervisors and 4 HR managers). Interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes and all were recorded and transcribed. Additional data came from nine focus groups with migrant workers across the three case study organisations, which lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The data was analysed using NVivo. Key themes include: employers' recruitment, selection and retention strategies, migrant workers' decision to move to the UK, initial tactics and mobility strategies, acquiring fixity in organisations, the development of skills and experience to enable future mobility.

Findings

Employers' mobility power, hard HRM and the recession

This section begins by examining the mobility power of the employers in the case study organisations and how they responded to the changing external environment. This provides important contextual information, which demonstrates how employers' strategies and the external environment influence migrant workers' ability to develop

mobility power. Due to the competition, seasonal fluctuations in demand and requirements for temporal flexibility, Hotel Co and Laundry Co adopted a hard HRM approach to managing their workers. Workers were viewed as disposable and a cost that should be minimised. This was further exacerbated by the recessionary climate in which the research took place:

> Three years ago they respected us. We were very surprised about that. If you were late or you couldn't get to work, you called and they said "no problem, I will see you tomorrow". Now with the recession, they say "oh you have a warning". They are trying to cut our wages (Polish bus driver)

All non-managerial employees in Hotel Co were employed on zero-hour contracts, which meant variable demand for the service could be managed. Zero-hour contracts enabled management in the Hotel Co to cope with falling levels of customer demand: 'Because of the recession we have lost a lot of business during the week. I don't have enough work to keep people in work five days a week (Executive Housekeeping Manager). As Laundry Co supplied hotels with clean linen and laundry, the company was also subject to the same seasonal fluctuations in demand as Hotel Co. Additionally, the loss of business in the hotel and restaurant sector resulted in a loss of business in Laundry Co. During peak times the company relied upon overtime, and also employed student workers from CEE to work during the summer holidays. When demand fell, there would be a programme of redundancies.

Many room attendants stated that their manager mentioned unemployment if they complained about work: 'I was complaining on Monday to my supervisor. And my

manager she said to me "Why you complaining? You are lucky you have a job!"' (Polish room attendant). Due to the recession and lack of employment opportunities, the mention of unemployment was an important threat. In Laundry Co, redundancies were always looming: 'I have poor people crying because we are making people redundant again… they are like "Please, please, no, not again?" because they were made redundant the last time'. The continual threat of job loss resulted in people being too afraid to complain about their work: 'It is better to be silent'(Polish process operator).

In contrast, fluctuations in demand did not impact employment requirements in Bus Co to the same extent as the other two organisations: the same services ran regardless of changes in demand, which meant staffing requirements were more stable. Employment was much more secure than the other two organisations, however staff numbers fluctuated according to the economic cycle. During times of labour shortage, the company utilised overtime as a means of matching service demand. When the company had an abundance of labour supply, overtime was reduced or no longer available. The HR Business Partner explained that there was job security in Bus Co despite the recession: 'As long as you are prepared to behave and work away then you have got as close to a job for life as you will ever get. (HR Business Partner). This can be attributed to the fact that Bus Co was highly unionised thus there was greater protection for workers than in Laundry Co and Hotel Co.

Segmentation of CEE workers

This section examines the segmentation of CEE workers and begins to demonstrate why some people become fixed to jobs that they do not want to work in. The majority of CEE workers in Hotel Co and Laundry Co, and half of the bus drivers interviewed in Bus Co, viewed work in the case studies as a steppingstone to better work. However, CEE

employees were segmented into the lowest paid and lowest skilled occupations in Hotel Co and Laundry Co, as their qualifications, and experience obtained in Central and Eastern Europe were not recognised in the Scottish labour market. This prevented the majority of people from working in their chosen occupation: 'I want to do the job that I am qualified for so I need to gain more qualifications because my degree from Poland isn't enough' (Polish food and beverage assistant). A lack of fluency in English, however, was far more instrumental in segmenting workers. Every room attendant and process operator stated that poor language skills were the reason they worked where they did: 'This is the one factory where Polish people don't speak English. Other factories it is a problem' (Polish process operator). The use of migrant networks to fill job vacancies also contributed to the segmentation of CEE workers. This would appear to be the case for room attendants and process operators, where 90% and 80% respectively were from Central and Eastern Europe. Management in Hotel Co and Laundry Co both relied on this method: 'I say to the HR Manager I need six people and she has got piles of applications. It is all word of mouth. They are all brothers, sisters, cousins… (Plant Manager, Laundry Co).

The majority of the bus drivers' qualifications and experience obtained in Central and Eastern Europe were recognised and relevant to the work they performed in Scotland. As Bus Co recruited people with a Passenger Carrying Vehicle (PCV) licence and bus driving experience through their Eastern European Recruitment Programme (EERP), this job was more likely to have been part of their career. However, a few people admitted that they had obtained a PCV licence and experience in Central and Eastern Europe to move to the UK. While a bus driver's job was higher paid and higher skilled than jobs in Hotel Co and Laundry Co, CEE workers in Bus Co maintained that they were segmented

into the worst roles in the company. Bus routes in the depot were allocated based upon seniority and CEE workers, as new workers, were given routes through the most deprived areas at the most anti-social times.

Developing mobility power within the organisation

Many people had plans to move to jobs that matched their education and/or experience. However, some people were concerned about 'getting stuck': 'it is a good place to start but if you don't go really early you will stay here forever (Polish process operator). It is imperative to analyse the way in which CEE workers strived to develop their mobility power in order to leave the case study organisations. Many people had ideas and plans, however very few people were able to realise their plans. This discussion identifies some of the complexities when trying to develop mobility power within an organisational context.

Opportunities for skill development

Smith (2010) draws attention to the unique characteristic of labour power as a commodity in that it has plasticity, therefore can change and develop over time. Yet in order to transform and develop, workers must have opportunities. The physically demanding, routine and repetitive nature of work in Laundry Co and the housekeeping department prevented CEE workers from gaining skills and experience to enable mobility in the organisation and wider labour market: 'It is very difficult after six months to expect something more because we are doing the same thing every day. It is a very simple job' (Polish process operator). Work was performed individually, and workers had limited interactions with customers or colleagues. Many people had poor English language skills and limited opportunities to learn this due to the low-skilled nature of work:

> They are here sometimes for two or three years and their English remains very poor because they work far too much. And they have no time. It is possible to work here for a couple of years and not need to say anything in English (Polish team leader).

Management in Hotel Co and Laundry Co also discussed a reluctance to invest in skill development for low skilled roles due to the mobility of staff: 'I could have a chef who is Polish and will stay in that role and develop their career. Whereas somebody who is in a lesser skilled job is going to move on to a different place' (Human Resource Manager, Hotel Co). Staff who were employed as supervisors had more opportunities to access formal training opportunities. However, in Hotel Co the two Polish housekeeping floor supervisors and one food and beverage supervisor who had worked in their roles for over a year, had not yet received their supervisor training. As a bus driver's role was semi-skilled, and was subject to extensive regulations over driving standards, Bus Co made significant investments into training and development. Therefore, flows of workers in and out of the organisation would be detrimental to operations. It cost three thousand pounds to train a driver to obtain their PCV licence, which meant employee retention was an important aim. Despite differing skill requirements, training and development provided by all three organisations focused on occupationally and organisationally specific skills. There were limited opportunities to transform labour power through company-provided training and development.

However, as Bus Co was highly unionised, employees benefitted from the establishment of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) and subsequent introduction of the Union Learning

Centre (ULC) and Union Learning Representative (ULR) role. Established in 1998, the ULFs aim was to encourage participation in learning activities in the workplace. Bus Co worked in partnership with Unite: Bus Co provided the room for the ULC, internet access and paid the ULRs wages, while Unite helped with funding for different courses. It was the ULR's role to engage people in learning and identify training needs. This was available to all workers in the organisation, whether they were domestic or migrant workers, members or non-members of the union. A significant benefit of the ULC and ULR for CEE drivers was the provision of English language classes. As English language skills were fundamental to a bus driver's role the company tried to hire people who could converse in English. Bus Co also offered in-house opportunities to develop language skills and consulted with the Glasgow English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) forum to provide courses for drivers and their families, which were organised around shift patterns.

The majority of people across the cases were highly skilled and/or experienced but could not transfer their labour power to the Scottish labour market. English language skills were an important means of 'releasing' this latent labour power. Food and beverage assistants and supervisors across each organisation generally had good language skills and had the most opportunity to improve this on-the-job: '... all the time I am improving my language. I like it because I can speak with guests and I can speak with other people in this building' (Polish housekeeping floor supervisor). However, as English language skills were not crucial to perform the job of a room attendant or process operator, this was not a training priority. English language skills were a fundamental influence on CEE workers' fixity. However, learning English in Laundry Co and the housekeeping department was incredibly difficult due to the large numbers of Polish people who worked there and

naturally conversed in their native language: ‘Most of the staff here is Polish, so we speak in Polish. I don’t have to use English very well. This is not good because I can’t improve my English’ (Polish room attendant).

Internal upward mobility: promotion

Only a small number of CEE workers had been able to progress in Bus Co, Hotel Co and Laundry Co. For these people, internal progression was an incredibly important aim, despite the fact that pay was only marginally higher. This was regarded as a short-term tactic, which would help facilitate long-term goals. English language skills differentiated those who gained promotion from those who could not progress. One housekeeping floor supervisor taught herself English in order to obtain a managerial role. Progressing in the organisation allowed people to develop their external mobility power. People reflected on the managerial skills that they were developing: ‘I am a supervisor. I am managing six maids. I have learnt management skills. Communication’ (Polish housekeeping floor supervisor). Everybody who had had a supervisory position highlighted the mismatch between their qualifications and the work performed in Scotland. The majority of supervisors were educated to Masters Level, while a team leader in Laundry Co had also begun a PhD. Internal progression was a way of ‘making the best’ of employment in jobs that did not match qualifications and experience, and enabled people to develop English language, managerial and interpersonal skills. Such skills would enable CEE migrants to build and develop their potential to exit the organisation and move to a better job.

However, all three organisations had weak internal labour markets and limited opportunities to progress. Due to the flat organisation structure, the number of supervisory or managerial positions were extremely limited. In Hotel Co progression routes had been further reduced due to the recession: ‘There often aren’t any opportunities for people to

progress. If there is no need to replace an assistant management position, then that's an opportunity lost for somebody' (Human Resource Manager, Hotel Co). Numerous bus drivers recognised that it was impossible to progress beyond being a driver in Bus Co: 'If somebody works in the office, they stay in the office. If somebody is a driver, they stay driving' (Polish bus driver). Some people recognised this was due to a lack of available positions and training courses, whereas others attributed this to their status as migrant workers: 'People who are born and live here it is easy [to get a promotion], but for people from different country it is not easy (Polish process operator)'. Migrant workers in all three organisations had experienced racism and bullying from domestic colleagues and managerial staff, therefore the lack of promotion opportunities based on nationality was a credible concern. In Hotel Co, the Executive Housekeeping Manager highlighted her objections to migration and discussed the strain that migrants exert on public services such as the NHS, housing and schools. She expressed racist views, which impacted how she managed her, largely, CEE workforce. CEE workers also experienced racism from their supervisors in Bus Co who bullied them, withheld overtime from them and pretended they could not understand their accents.

Developing mobility power outside of the organisation

It is clear that the majority of CEE workers in Hotel Co and Laundry Co, and half of the bus drivers, viewed employment as temporary and wanted to move to occupations that better matched their qualifications and/or experience. However, organisational strategies impacted the extent to which CEE workers could develop their skills and experience within the case study. Some people therefore looked external to the organisation to try to develop their mobility power.

Approximately one third of people were utilising their time to develop tactics and strategies to develop future mobility opportunities. This group of CEE workers had clear and focused plans of what they wanted to achieve and knew how they were going to achieve their goals. People employed creative strategies external to the organisation. A common approach was to undertake education, as new migrant workers' educational attainment was generally not recognised in the UK: 'As soon as I found this job I was thinking about education. I am trained in Sage accounts. Three months training last year. I was thinking about university here next year' (Polish housekeeping floor supervisor). One bus driver was working full-time and studying for a business management degree at university. Education was deemed an important method of improving and realising career expectations and aspirations. Some people invested time and effort into developing strategies to enable them to meet their career goals. One Polish food and beverage assistant, who worked as a nanny in the past, was beginning a Master's degree in hospitality management and spoke about her career plans:

> I always wanted to work with children doing hospitality management. I have applied for the children's panel starting next year. I want to be a children's entertainment coordinator, organising parties and charity work… There's a gap.

Some CEE workers found novel ways of working in their chosen occupation as a side-line, in addition to working in the case study: 'My wife and I are historians. We were translators for guidance for Polish visitors for History Scotland guide books to Edinburgh Castle and Stirling Castle and the guidebook to the Scottish Fisheries Museum' (Polish supervisor). There were many examples like this. A housekeeping floor supervisor, who

had a Master's degree in Russian taught Russian at a community centre in Edinburgh. One bus driver spent time building networks that would help him in his future career. The ULR was instrumental in this and had introduced him to many people who could help him to become an electrical mechanical engineer. Another bus driver had started his own business selling motorcycles and cars in Poland:

> I want to save some money… I will open my own business in Poland… trading. I will be buying motorcycles and selling... I am doing this now and I will do this in the future on a bigger scale.

Several CEE workers stated that they wanted to attend language classes, go to university or college in order to be able to work in a job that better matched their qualifications and/or experience. However, this was not always possible as people worked extremely long hours. Long, unsociable working hours were an endemic feature of work in Bus Co and the food and beverage department of Hotel Co. In Laundry Co people undertook overtime to 'top up' low wages: 'You know there's more overtime, it is working the full week. My girlfriend is pregnant. I need money… is not a choice' (Polish process operator). The majority of room attendants had a second, or in some cases a third, job. It was therefore difficult to gain the experience necessary to be mobile in the labour market. These people were therefore gradually becoming stuck to the case study organisation or low skilled work in general.

It was mostly highly qualified people and/or experienced people who had defined career plans and who were actively putting their plans into action. Numerous people highlighted a mismatch between their skills, qualifications and experience in CEE and the jobs they

were performing in the case study organisations, which influenced a desire for upward mobility: ‘I expect more because I have studied five years in Poland and what for? This?’ (Polish housekeeping floor supervisor). Additionally, younger people who were child-free were able to invest their free time in education and their future plans. Many people had concrete ideas of what they hoped to achieve and were gradually working towards their plans, however others had much looser expectations, explaining they wanted to travel and were open to new opportunities and possibilities: ‘I am thinking Germany next then I would love to go to Australia. Who knows? I want to travel’

Mobility power is subject to changes in the life cycle, and workers at different ages, and life stages have different concerns (Smith, 2010). This was evident across the case studies, and family commitments were an important reason for the fixity of CEE workers in Bus Co and Laundry Co where a relatively high proportion of people had children. Family commitment exerted a substantial impact upon the desire to remain working in the case study organisation and upon migratory plans in general. For some people, the long hours and family responsibilities meant they could not devote time to developing their mobility power: ‘it is difficult because I have a three-year-old daughter. I must take care of her, so I don’t have time for education’ (Polish room attendant). One bus driver explained that he was supporting his wife through education, and when she finishes her degree, he will study, and she will support him. Therefore, he was stuck in Bus Co for a fixed period of time**.** The majority of people who had children stated that they had moved for a better life for their children, therefore this was a central motivation in their future plans:

> I am stuck in the middle…. My material life is better here in Scotland. But the money is not everything. I sacrifice for my family. My wife and boy say

> they want back [to Poland]. I don't think that after five years here they will be able to cope with some Polish reality (Polish bus driver)

The majority of CEE workers were in danger of being "stuck" in the case studies: the longer they spent working low to semi-skilled occupations in Scotland the less likely they were to be mobile in the labour market. Fixity was developing as a result of time.

Analysis

This article contributes to the literature on the agency of migrant workers by concentrating on the development, as opposed to utilisation, of mobility power. Previous studies have examined highly mobile migrant workers, employed in temporary jobs, and the creative strategies they use to move around the labour market (Alberti, 2014; Berntsen, 2016). However, this neglects what happens when migrant workers do not have the necessary mobility power to leave their jobs. It is crucial to widen the focus to include migrants who become fixed to jobs they want to leave. This is particularly pertinent when analysing CEE workers, as they are relatively highly skilled and/or experienced but are persistently segmented into the lowest skilled sectors of employment in the UK (Sirkeci et al, 2019). The development of mobility power is essential for CEE workers to exit poor jobs.

Similar to existing studies, this article demonstrates the significance of individual coping tactics and strategies (Alberti, 2014; Datta, et al, 2007; Ram et al, 2013). It is critical to focus on the individual dimension of mobility power because labour power resides within the individual and has the potential to transform and move, as well as becoming fixed (Smith, 2006). The findings highlight the creative ways that some migrant workers

developed their mobility power to facilitate future job moves. However, it is also imperative to recognise the way in which wider structural forces, namely a workers' position in the economy and labour market, influence mobility power (Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003). Migrant workers tend to be segmented into the peripheral labour market due to the availability of jobs (Piore, 1979; Rodriguez, 2004). However, easily attainable jobs have low structural power (Silver, 2003). CEE workers in Hotel Co and Laundry Co had low levels of structural power because work was low skilled, therefore workers could be replaced easily. In Bus Co structural power was slightly higher because bus drivers were semi-skilled and training costs were significantly higher than the other two case studies, therefore the retention of bus drivers was a key concern. The structural power of migrant workers in all three organisations had also diminished as a result of the recession and increased labour supply.

While the literature focuses solely on individual coping strategies (Alberti, 2014; Datta, et al, 2007; Ram et al, 2013) this article also explores the way in which the collective dimension of power enables migrant workers to develop their individual mobility power. Berntsen's (2016) study of the European construction industry provides an example of unorganised collective mobility power, as workers moved between employers in groups to increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis employers. However, this article differs because it examines associational power, which results from the collective organisation of workers. Associational power is manifest in organisations and structures such as trade unions, works councils and political parties (Wright, 2000). As well as having low levels of structural power, migrant workers in Laundry Co and Hotel Co also had low associational power due to the low levels or lack of unionisation. The lack of associational power of workers in Laundry Co and Hotel Co meant that workers had limited voice or

say over workplace decision making. Whereas in Bus Co, the terms and conditions of the employment relationship were collectively agreed. One of the key benefits of this associational power for migrant workers' mobility power was the introduction of the ULR and the learning centre. Extant literature highlights the important role that ULRs play in encouraging employees to voice a demand for training (Bacon and Hoque, 2011). CEE bus drivers in particular benefitted from this because they were able to draw upon the formal training opportunities and utilise them for their particular developmental needs. Some drivers also worked with the ULR to build professional networks and begin future career and entrepreneurial plans. The union learning representative in Bus Co increased the associational power of workers and the union generally. This coupled with higher levels of structural power meant that bus drivers had more power than room attendants, food and beverage assistants and process operators. However, they were also more likely to be fixed to the organisation due to the time spent performing the occupation. Labour power can gain a degree of fixity through performing the same task over time, through associations to a place, and/or time spent with the same employer (Smith, 2010). Whereas lower skilled workers were more likely to be mobile because jobs are readily available in the peripheral labour market, however this means they have less power in the employment relationship and could be easily replaced.

Conclusion

Despite data collection taking place ten years ago, the research findings are relevant for policy makers and practitioners. This article highlights that labour market mobility is not always straightforward. CEE workers' position as new entrants to the UK labour market placed them in precarious situations and compelled them to take any job that was available, often in the peripheral labour market. People were forced to prioritise their

short-term needs of ‘survival, balancing responsibilities and accumulation’ (Datta et al 2007: 425). Rather than being ‘mobile’ workers who use the labour market to obtain better quality work, many CEE workers became fixed to the case study organisations. This can be attributed to the combination of people’s individual subjective factors such as caring and family responsibilities, and their lack of planning and long-term goals. Furthermore, the longer people stayed in the case studies, the more they became fixed to the company and community, which limited their transnational mobility power.

When this research was conducted, CEE workers were in a distinctive position in the UK: they were EU citizens with free access to the labour market. However, there have been significant changes to the immigration system following Brexit, which will have important consequences for low wage immigration. A key feature of the proposed points based system is the minimum salary threshold, which is designed to limit low wage migration. However, the MAC (2020) found that the majority of employers surveyed did not want a minimum salary threshold or wanted it to be significantly lower than the suggested amount. Many sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, hospitality, and social care, depend upon low wage migration to fill vacancies. Recruitment and retention problems in these sectors are endemic and enduring, and Brexit will aggravate them. There is also the additional concern of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on immigration and emigration. Recent reports predict that the number of migrants living in the UK has decreased by up to ten per cent, which suggest significant numbers of migrants have emigrated (Sumption, 2021). However, Sumption (2021) stresses that this is likely to be inaccurate because of a lack of data (the passenger survey has been suspended during COVID). It is clear that the new immigration act will prevent low wage migration. At the same time, COVID has resulted in decreased migration and increased emigration (perhaps

not as much as ten per cent). These factors together will have important consequences for employers who depend upon low wage migration.

Recruitment problems are likely to persist and could be exacerbated. One possible scenario is that employers may increase pay and improve working conditions in order to attract domestic workers. However, this is incredibly optimistic given the way in which employers have historically targeted groups of marginalised workers to fill vacancies in low wage sectors. Unemployment levels may increase as the furlough scheme ends and the economic impacts of the pandemic become evident. This would provide employers with a ready supply of labour. However, it is anticipated that there will still be hard-to-fill job vacancies, which will grow in the medium term. Therefore, it is likely that there will be a demand for low wage migrant workers, particularly in sectors of the economy where there are low levels of structural and associational power. A possible option could be temporary worker routes or sector-based schemes. There could also be increased irregular migration. Migrant workers who are employed through any of these channels have limited means in which to exercise their mobility power because their residential rights depend upon their continued employment (Fudge, 2012; Kononen, 2019). This may result in employment relationships based upon hyper-exploitation, tough work-effort bargaining and new levels of vulnerability for low wage migrants in the UK.

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