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THE SOCIAL COMPLEXITY OF IMMIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

Social Complexity of Immigration and Diversity
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The Employment Model: Background, Approach, and Implementation

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DRAFT PAPER – NOT FOR CIRCULATION OR CITATION

Purpose:

When beginning to analyse the social complexity of immigration and diversity, the structures of the labour market (social, legal, geographic and economic) immediately appear to play a central role. What jobs people get – immigrants and ethnic minorities included – can be seen as a central driver of both immigration and diversity. That is, issues such as whom you work with, how much you earn, where you work and so forth, have a fundamental impact on other areas which affect social diversity, such as where you live and what your social networks are.

However, the processes by which this works are often hidden. Whilst excellent studies have illustrated the presence of ethnic segmentation in the labour market and its relationships with both international migration and social and economic diversity (Bauder, 2006, McDowell et al., 2007, , 2009, Waldinger and Lichter, 2003, Wills et al., 2010), how this occurs is unclear. We then rely on sociological theories to make assumptions which, while considered and internally coherent, are often difficult to test empirically.

For example, there is a large volume of substantive evidence regarding the persistence of ethnic segmentation in the labour market beyond first generation immigrants (Heath, 2007). However, studies inherently find it difficult to investigate the (hidden) mechanics of the interactions between discriminatory behaviour by employers (conscious or otherwise), legal rules and processes (such as employment law and immigration rules), and the dual interpellation of affect and ambition between employer and employed, society and individual.

Developing this model provides a chance to do this. In this paper, we present some thoughts on what the questions (big and small) we wish to investigate should be, how they could relate to/be measured by outputs, and finally, to provide some examples of how some simplified ‘causal stories’ might begin to be incorporated into the model.

Questions:

Understanding the social complexity of immigration and diversity with reference to employment is a potentially huge topic, with many fascinating questions to ask. However, in order to begin to build the model, it becomes necessary to ask both what 'big' question(s) we wish to focus on and, particularly, what can be gained from modelling them in this way. Below, we present two possible questions for your consideration – or, perhaps more accurately, two variants of a question – which reflect both recent academic debates in this area, and are difficult to definitively answer using current – quantitative or qualitative – evidence. These examples should not be seen as definitive and we will welcome suggestions at the meeting.

Q) Why are some people/groups disadvantaged in the labour market? Why is it persistent?

Empirical studies of labour market across the world have shown that some groups appear to experience substantially worse outcomes in terms of occupational attainment than others. Indeed, this disadvantage remains once other factors – age, experience, qualifications and so forth – have been accounted for (Li and Heath, 2008). Furthermore, there is evidence that labour market disadvantage persists across generational divides for certain minority groups (see, e.g. Heath, 2007). Heath and Cheung, 2007; Heath and McMahon 2005 That is, such disadvantage appears not only to be a function of being a new immigrant and lacking the necessary 'country-specific' skills (language, local knowledge and contacts, recognised qualifications and experience etc...) to actualise one's human capital (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003, Dustmann and van Soest, 2002, Duvander, 2001, Rooth and Ekberg, 2006), but also that other (unknown) processes are acting to produce cross-generational disadvantage.

Whilst it is possible to measure proxies for some forms of labour market disadvantage for certain groups – by reference to relative wages, occupational attainment and educational qualifications, for example – it is harder to explain which processes are producing these results (and how they interact), or why their effects are so patchy (i.e. why do these processes appear to impact on certain groups more than others, or why we see such differences between countries). In other words, the data we do have may tell us that labour market disadvantages exist for some groups, but not which processes create it and how, when or why they occur (and, indeed, interact).

A quick overview of the literature in this area provides a number of underlying (meta-) processes which could be said to impact on the differing rates of occupational attainment amongst minority groups. Whilst this is certainly not an exhaustive list, such processes may include:

a) Legal rules and regulations

Variations in the relevant legal rules regarding both immigration and labour market regulation are liable to have a substantial effect on the relative labour market (dis)advantages of different groups. At the simplest level, immigration regulations determine who can enter a country and what work they can do once they are there – changes in such rules have a huge impact on immigration flows as long as they can be effectively enforced.

An example of the rapidity of changes in this area would be the sudden upsurge in ‘Accession’ state migrants moving to the UK after entry to the EU in 2004 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2009). Alternatively, the decline in the numbers of new migrants from the Caribbean and South Asia to the UK after the introduction of increasingly draconian visa rules from the 1980s onwards illustrates that changes in legal rules more usually restrict, rather than encourage, further immigration (see, e.g. Shah, 2002).

Equally, employment regulations – particularly those concerned with ending labour market discrimination – can be seen as playing an important role in changing the labour market performance of certain groups, but cannot be viewed as stopping discrimination *per se* (Dickens, 1997, Lewis and Gunn, 2007).

However, in both these cases, it is difficult to ascertain *exactly* what impacts changing regulations have on their own (as their effects will be counteracted or boosted by other simultaneous changes in conditions) – this is one possible scenario to run in the model.

b) Discriminatory behaviour (including racism and employer behaviour);

Whilst there is evidence that strongly suggests employers act in ways which can be characterised as discriminatory against certain groups (see, e.g. Broyles and Fenner, 2010, Daniel, 1968, Pager and Karafin, 2009, Pinkston, 2006), the mechanics of this is unclear. What we are measuring when we talk about discrimination is often a residual category – that is, the difference in occupational attainment when the effects of other differences are removed. Alternatively, we can qualitatively note discrimination (or behaviour that is functionally discriminatory in its impacts), but it is, again, difficult to empirically test levels of discrimination in different areas and towards different groups.

Relatedly, some theorists have proposed the thesis that discrimination in the labour market (or, at least, the unavailability of desired positions) blocks the mobility of ethnic minority groups in the mainstream labour market, encouraging or channelling alternative strategies, such as entrepreneurship and the growth of niche business sectors (Li, 2001, Williams, 2007). However, the extent and transnational quality of such ethnic entrepreneurship varies

widely both within and between groups, suggesting other processes are at work, even if immigrants and ethnic minorities are faced with blocks to their mobility (Light and Bonacich, 1988, Portes et al., 2001).

Equally, it is apparent that the nature of discrimination – or, at least, distinction – changes over time. Historical studies have suggested the ascription of difference to certain groups (and thus discrimination against them) has changed substantially over the years (Roediger, 2005). Is this simply a process of acculturation and assimilation, or are there more nuanced processes at work?

c) Education, poverty traps and class reproduction

Education is often put forward as an important explanatory factor in the different labour market performances of ethnic minority groups (see, e.g. Becker, 1971). Equally, education can be a key purpose of international migration (Baláž and Williams, 2004) and an important factor in post-migration trajectories. However, in the latter case, pre-existing human capital (in form of educational and experience) are under-utilised for a duration after migration, as the lack of country-specific skills make it hard to activate that capital (Duvander, 2001, Rooth and Ekberg, 2006). Of equal importance is the validation and recognition of ‘foreign’ qualifications in the destination labour market – holding a high-status qualification in one’s ‘home’ country only remains valuable post-migration if it is recognised as relevant in the new labour market (Ackers, 2005, Raghuram and Kofman, 2002).

However, if we follow the logic that poor levels of qualifications (or a lack of recognition of current qualifications and poor access to new ones of similar stature) lead to ‘low-skill’ and poorly paid jobs, then we can also assume this places such groups into an environment of poor housing, low-levels of access to (and, perhaps, expectations of) other opportunities, poorer

health outcomes, and the wide variety of disadvantages we associate with economic deprivation (Mason, 2003). Additionally, such disadvantage appears to be passed on to future generations (though not always, and to different levels amongst different groups) – producing what is sometimes described as class reproduction, ‘trapping’ certain groups at the bottom of the labour market due to their initial trajectories of migration (Castles and Kosack, 1973, Heath, 2007).

d) Social networks and group processes;

There is a broad acceptance amongst migration researchers that social networks play an important role in the development of both migration flows and labour market positions obtained post-migration (see, e.g. Massey et al., 1993, Portes, 1998, Waldinger, 2005). Through relationships of trust, reciprocity and information sharing (generally incorporating kith and kin) they act to tie together sending and receiving society and ensure new migrants an easier route into their new surroundings. Once a migration route is established therefore, social networks ensure its social reproduction. However, there is considerably less evidence as to how and why such self-reproducing networks form (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003) – if we accept there is rarely any ‘rational’ reason why we should see the clustering of co-ethnics into certain labour market niches, we must ask why it happens so regularly (particularly at the lower end of the labour market) and how such processes actually work. Is there a tipping point after a certain concentration of a single social network in one post? What role do the preferences of employers play? Indeed, in contemporary migrations, what role do quasi-networks, like employment agencies, religious groups or civil societies, play (Garapich, 2008)? Finally, does the (re)production of social networks and their association with niche labour market segmentation – highly useful in the early years of a migration flow – actually tend to produce path-dependency?

That is, does it petrify certain migration trajectories for certain groups by lowering the 'costs' of following that path compared to other routes?

e) *Capital and distinction*

A number of researchers have taken the idea of social capital as central to the development of ethnic labour markets. One strand of this approach argues that, once networks are established, the social capital of belonging to that group increases one's chance of getting a job in the same (or similar) area (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991, Portes, 1998). In essence, embeddedness leads to group concentration – because of an increase in shared information, contacts within the organisations, and the apparent preference of employers' to bring in those similar to existing staff (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003).

A second strand (explicitly or implicitly) approaches social capital in the sense outlined by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977, , 1984). In these approaches, social capital is seen as playing a much more complicated role in the labour market participation of ethnic minorities and immigrants (Bauder, 2006). The everyday enacting of roles and rules of *habitus* (or 'proper' behaviour) in a 'receiving' society produces a landscape to be negotiated by the new immigrant (who has their own deeply embodied sense of *habitus*). This effectively closes certain avenues down and encourages migrants towards certain roles for which they may be seen as suitable. However, this is not a one-way interaction, it is an iterative (though hierarchical) process of social reproduction (McDowell et al., 2007). It can lead to exploitation by co-nationals just as easily as acting as a support network (Bonacich, 1993). Equally, it can act to trap 'vulnerable' migrant groups in certain low-wage jobs by dint of their assumed corporeal suitability for that 'type' of work (Bauder, 2001).

However, it is important not to assume social capital is something imposed upon migrant groups in their new surroundings. It is a dynamic and transnational process; anthropologists have long noted how migrant groups – often in low-status position in their receiving society – use their position as a migrant to develop their social standing ‘at home’. This can be through marriage strategies (Ballard, 2001, Charsley, 2005), building projects (Gardner, 1995), donations to religious or civil society groups (Gardner, 1999, Werbner, 2002), or utilising contacts to develop business opportunities (Ballard, 2001, Osella and Osella, 2000). Social capital is both contextual and place-specific; it cannot be reduced to an epiphenomenon of social networks or labour market position.

An alternative approach to this area is to consider the role of *human* capital in the labour market performance of migrants and ethnic minority groups. Following this approach, migrants are penalised early in the migration cycle due to their lack of country-specific skills, most notably language (Dustmann and van Soest, 2002), but also covering the recognition of educational qualifications, a lack of local knowledge (Duvander, 2001) and an unfamiliarity with local norms of behaviour (Beaverstock, 2002, , 2005). In this analysis, migrants should experience a U-shaped curve of occupational attainment, with their labour market position improving once they have learnt the dominant language to a necessary level to realise their human capital (Rooth and Ekberg, 2006).

In terms of building an employment model, however, the idea of social capital becomes problematic – when it is measured it is largely done so through proxy terms and in a way which does not easily allow for differentiation between different types and contexts of social capital (at least in its Bourdieuan form, although the research tradition due to Granovetter, Burt and Lin might offer some help here). Therefore, if we accept that social capital plays an important role in such a model, how do we begin to a) formalise it, and b) make it have an

effect. In essence, we need to ask what social capital is, and how does it work? Secondly, the relationship between social and cultural capital with *habitus* as an internal, as well as an external, state may be an important issue – that is, people take on the embodied performance of cultural capital and combine it with their social connections in employment-seeking activities (the way we dress, how we talk, even what our ambitions and drives may be) (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006, McDowell et al., 2009, Seymour and Sandiford, 2005, Witz et al., 2003). With such, and with an adequate understanding of human and symbolic capital, we may begin to see the intricate interlacing of capitals or resources affecting minority ethnic groups in the labour market and try to build these in our models together with macro-level government laws and regulations.

Q) *Why do certain people get certain jobs?*

In this formulation the focus becomes not on the labour market disadvantage *per se*, but differentiation and segmentation in contemporary labour markets. In essence, it assumes processes of differentiation, but does not necessarily view them in terms of relative disadvantage. This potentially allows for an approach by which the focus is not solely on understanding occupational attainment in terms of an inflexible hierarchy of wages, jobs or sectors. For example, such a change in emphasis may be important when considering the formation and persistence of labour market niches, or the rates and focus of ethnic entrepreneurship (Basu and Altinay, 2002, Kloosterman and Rath, 2001, McCabe et al., 2005, Portes et al., 2001). Here, the question is not merely about disadvantage, but about differentiation (by employers and individuals). Social studies have illustrated that ethnic labour market segmentation is not simply a matter of hierarchies, but of complicated (and, possibly, complex) iterative processes that appear to ‘sort’ different groups (largely conceived of in terms

of nationality/ethnicity) into different types of jobs, based on imagined attributes which go beyond the impacts we may expect from relative levels of qualification or experience, or the role of social networks alone (May et al., 2007, McDowell et al., 2007, , 2008, , 2009, Roediger, 2005, Waldinger and Lichter, 2003, Wills et al., 2009, , 2010).

Again, however, though the results can be seen and, to some degree, measured, the processes of this differentiation are difficult to gauge. For example, whilst Sassen's (1999) (largely structural) approach to understanding global socio-economic change and its impacts on the labour markets of global cities may help to explain the overarching macro processes of labour segmentation, it doesn't explain why there is such differentiation within each layer of the hierarchy. Furthermore, both the processes of this differentiation and their impacts are somewhat obscured – why, for example, would we see different sorts of differentiation in the same system if we have a hyper-diverse population (as in contemporary London), as we would if we had a similar proportion of immigration/ethnic minorities, but far fewer 'types' of groups (as in 1970's London)?

Outcomes:

Deciding on a big question to ask leads us to how we might want to 'measure' it. As with any social research, we cannot directly quantify the outcomes of numerous processes such as labour market disadvantage or segmentation, instead we need to determine what our key outcomes will be. In terms of the two versions of the 'big questions' outlined above, two alternative outcomes would be:

- a) to measure employment rates for different groups (and how they change in various scenarios)
- b) to measure employment by job role, sector and wage for different groups (this would implicitly include outcome a)

The first of these may be commended for its relative simplicity. However, both a focus on the nuances of occupational attainment (as opposed to attaining an occupation), and on the dynamics of labour market segmentation, strongly suggest that the second output would be preferable. It would allow the analysis of both hierarchical differentiation, and concentration and differentiation between and within sectors (and job roles). However, the question then becomes one of the extent of definition within the model – that is, how many different levels and types of jobs/sectors are required to provide useful information for the wider academic community?

Additionally, what should the mechanics of job creation, recruitment and selection be? Equally important will be the question of how agents in the model search for jobs – how powerful should networks (and, perhaps, social capital) be? How discriminating should employers be? Do we need to differentiate between the recruitment behaviour of an SME, a multi-national and a public sector organisation; between low-skill roles and high-skill roles?

An initial discussion framework:

Considering the complexity of the task, it can often be difficult to begin to visualise how to build such a model. One approach would be to start by exploring two of the most taken for granted (but certainly fundamental) processes in the labour market; a) the factors and (sub-) processes in employer decisions about who to employ, and b) how potential employees approach getting a job. Overleaf is the beginning of a conceptualisation of how we might operationalise this in an agent-based model.

Agent (A)/Object (O)	"Employee" (A)	"Employer" (A)	Job (O)
Attributes * = Dynamic <i>Italics = Unclear operationalisation</i>	Age*		Required Qualifications - Generic - Specific
	Sex		Required Experience - Generic - Specific
	Nationality/Legal Status		Required "Soft" Skills
	Ethnicity		
	Qualifications*	Organisation Size	
	Experience*	Organisation Sector	
	"Soft" Skills*	Organisation Type? (e.g. Private, Public or 3 rd)	
Social Networks*	Yes		No
	Homophily effect - Weak? - Strong?		
	Can include employers - Increases likelihood of applying for job (info sharing)	Can include employees - Weak tendency to favour members of own social network?	
Processes	Search/selection strategies		N/A
Confounding factors	Distance from agent node	Legal regulations	N/A
	Wage level	Size of company - Smaller orgs search more locally - Smaller orgs more risk adverse? (stronger homophily effect?)	
	<i>Self-image</i> - <i>Low level of co-ethnics in sector/job role = slight decrease in probability of applying for post?</i>		

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