

‘London is a Much More Interesting Place than Paris’: Place-Comparison and the Moral Geographies of Highly Skilled Migrants

Jon Mulholland and Louise Ryan

Introduction

Drawing on data from a study of the French highly skilled in London, this paper explores the nature and dynamics of a migrant population’s ‘sense of place’ in a global city. Specifically, it examines some of the ways in which highly skilled migrants construct their own moral geographies through the recursive relationship that forms between the affective qualities of their cities of dwelling, their own status-related perceptions, and their day-to-day space-making practices. We assert that the moral geographies associated with the formulation of highly skilled migrants’ ‘sense of place’ must be understood as an outcome of this complex dynamic, but also produced through the deployment of what we would refer to as a ‘grounded comparative epistemology of place’, in this case through the juxtapositioning of the qualities of London and Paris. By a ‘grounded comparative epistemology of place’ we suggest a process whereby ‘senses of place’ are actively constructed through a complex play of lived experiences, imaginings, and the affective qualities of a place, but importantly via evaluative comparative practices where particular, ‘significant other places’, are selected to furnish evaluations of current places of dwelling.

Firstly, drawing on the work of Braudel (1977), and specifically the idea of the ‘soft tissue of urbanism’, along with the notion of ‘affective urbanism’ (Thrift 2004, Conradson and Latham

2007), we show how London is granted a particular affective and atmospheric quality deriving from the open and civil nature of its public sociality, and in contrast to Paris.

Secondly, we show how our participants draw on a rendering of London as a definitively libertarian space, largely as an expression of its attributed ('Anglo-Saxon') neo-liberal and cosmopolitan character, and value the capital as more 'livable' than Paris on this basis. We also explore the gendered dimensions of such moral geographies.

Thirdly, we examine our participants' attributions of the quality of 'buzz' to London, a quality central to the civic planning and branding aspirations of many global cities (Peck 2005), and a quality seen to be a necessary condition for attracting and retaining place-sensitive highly skilled migrants. We show that despite assertions as to the character of London as both buzzing and stressful, it was nevertheless considered both more buzzing, yet less stressful than Paris, suggesting that other qualities of place in London may serve to offset the intensity of life in the capital.

Fourthly, we explore our participants' accounts of London as a place of largely unprecedented cultural encounter, both in terms of the high-cultural amenities of museums, galleries, theatres and so on, but also in terms of the popular-cultural characteristics of its 'playscapes' (Chatterton and Hollands 2002). In particular, we show how the spatial composition of the pub, and its 'traditional' mode of occupation and usage is signified by our participants as a key ingredient in framing London's affective qualities, and its capacity to enable both buzz and a democratically inclusive public sociality.

Finally, we examine the importance to our participants of London's green spaces as 'high quality sanctuaries' (Kjølsrød 2013), offsetting the buzz and stress of urban life. We show how historically-bequeathed social goods, in all their material configurations, may inadvertently render specific global cities as particularly attractive to highly skilled migrants, and suited to the expectations of the most contemporaneous desires of affluent city dwellers.

We conclude by arguing that we need to pay fuller attention to the place-centric dimensions of the mobility, dwelling and settlement practices of highly skilled migrants, and in particular to the dynamics that shape the moral geographies associated with such migrants' senses of place, and the role played by 'significant other' places in framing a sense of place through practices of comparison.

Literature Review

Flows of international migration have become increasingly complex and diverse, witnessing an ever larger middling mass of highly skilled migrants (PIONEUR 2013). The study of such highly-skilled migration has moved importantly away from a reductionist neo-classical model that diminishes the migrant to a mere rational economic actor (Wang 2013). In this move, the migrant becomes understandable in all their actually-existing complexity, where motivations, experiences, relations, processes and practices come into view as the outcome of critically important interplays between the economic and non-economic dimensions of the migrant subject and their mobility contexts (Ryan and Mulholland 2013, Wang 2013). In this way, the *human* dimension of highly skilled migration has become an emergent area of enquiry (Van Riemsdijk 2014, Favell et al 2006). Within this frame, important developments have been made in understanding the internal heterogeneities that characterise this migrant

constituency and the accordant multi-dimensional nature of their motivations and desires (Ryan and Mulholland 2013, Wang 2013, PIONEUR 2013), the influential contextual-relational forces that act on their choices, practices and experiences (Ryan and Mulholland 2013), and of the imperfections, compromises and frictions associated with such flows and settlements (Van , Tseng 2011, Butcher 2009, Favell et al 2006).

Central to this shift towards understanding the human dimension of highly skilled migration has been a necessary concern to appreciate the importance of the non-economic dimensions of migrant motivations and practices, and in specific relation to the non-occupational dimensions of the places where they dwell (Meier 2015). A space, and place-centric understanding of highly skilled migrants' mobility motivations, experiences, contexts and practices, and the nature and dynamics of the particularities of their dwelling in those spaces/places becomes central to our understanding. (Van Riemsdijk 2014)

But the nature of space and place, and of their relations to the social goods and people who occupy them, has become an increasingly complex matter in the context of re-spatializations associated with process of globalization and transnationalism (Scholte 2005). But against the excesses of globalisation and transnationalist doctrines, that invited us to relinquish traditional spatial ontologies in the interests of understanding a new world of placelessness, flows, nodes and networks, we are witnessing a revival of interest in exploring that manner in which space continues to be 'placed', and in ways of critical import for understanding the heterogeneous nature of highly skilled migration and settlement experiences, practices and effects (Tseng 2011, Butcher 2009).

Even in a context where the new economic forces of globalization carry powerful drivers of homogenisation (Sennet 2005), important differences of place prevail, and where globalization can be said to have had its greatest impact (Meier 2015). Such differences are in part an outcome of the scalar dimensions of cities (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2011, Scott 2006). They also speak to the fact that cities embody still-defining historical trajectories and meanings, and related forms of path dependency (Kazepov 2005). As ‘open systems’, cities nevertheless remain ‘nested’ in broader social, economic and institutional contexts that also bear witness to the ongoing influence of the national contexts in which those cities are located (Kazepov 2005), despite the relative autonomy that global cities have increasingly come to enjoy vis-à-vis their national homes (Bagnasco and LeGalès 2000). Places continue to offer dissimilar experiences and opportunity structures (Smith 2005), and in ways that even those with the most abundant human capital cannot fail to experience. London and Paris here serve as pertinent cases in point. Ranked by the Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network as ‘Alpha Cities’, recent data from the A. T. Kearney’s Global Cities Index (GCI) and Global Cities Outlook (GCO), locate London and Paris in 2015 in 2nd and 3rd places respectively on the GCI, and 2nd and 19th on the GCO. As a result, incorporating criteria including business activity, innovation, political engagement, cultural experience and personal well-being, both cities are ranked amongst just 16 ‘global elite’ cities in the world. But beyond such apparent like-situatedness lie important points of difference, ‘objectively’ illuminated in the metrics of the GCI and GCO, but also ‘subjectively’ in the individual and collective experiences and imaginings of those who have a reason to compare the cities.

Migrant motivations, desires, experiences, relations and practices remain resolutely informed by place, and by the actual and imagined qualities of particular places. Migrants’ place-centric evaluative practices are informed by a multitude of: biographical variables, intimate-

relational circumstances; life-course positions; and more collectively formulated ‘senses of place’, as these emerge from the attributional practices of places themselves (through city branding for instance) and of collective others (for instance other nations or cities) (Van Riemsdijk 2014, Vanolo 2008). Both in terms of branding and civic planning, cities have become increasingly active as agents seeking to attract highly skilled migrants, or the ‘creative classes’ as Florida has defined them, by putting into place the right ‘people climate’ (Florida 2002). Though deeply contested, Florida’s (2002) contribution has had the effect of focussing policy, planning and academic attention on the place-centric orientations of highly skilled migrants, and the qualities of place deemed by such migrants as meeting the necessary and sufficient conditions of a ‘livable’ place (McCann 2008).

We argue that spaces and places provide far more than a mere context for the lives lived within them (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2011), but rather frame place-related practices, and are in turn themselves actively produced by the space-making practices of diverse subjects (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2011). We can think of such practices as *spacing* (Löw 2008), as processes involving important mechanisms of ‘synthesising’, where otherwise discrete social goods and people are brought together variably into a coherent singular entity in and through the spatial imaginaries and practices of social subjects (Löw 2008). In turn, such imaginaries (of spaces as they are and ‘should’ be) are formed, not in splendid isolation, but typically within a context of interpretive communities of like situated subjects (Van Riemsdijk 2014, McCann 2008).

But spacing is more than ‘merely’ an outcome of the attributional practices of the perceiving subject, and the status-dependent pre-structured significations that such practices might express, it is also informed by the character and qualities of places themselves. In this regard,

we are also interested in understanding the affective qualities, and related atmospheres, associated with particular urban metropolises. Affect has been defined by Thrift (2004) as “the property of the active outcome of an encounter” (p. 62). Conradson and Latham (2007) define affect in terms of an “embodied appraisal of external stimuli. It is about the involuntary delivery of a somatic verdict on present circumstances” (p.236). To speak of the affective dimensions of a city is to talk of its ‘atmosphere’. Atmosphere can be defined as “the external effect, instantiated in perception, of social goods and human beings in their situated spatial ordering” (Löw 2008: p. 44). Of course, there can be no singular, or even necessarily a dominant, affective register to any city, as the affective order/s of a place necessarily expresses the particularities of its multiple ecologies (Anderson and Holden 2008).

As such, we would assert that places, in all their affective and atmospheric character are never experienced as a singularity. In fact, diverse subject positions (gender, class, ethnicity, age, relationship status) serve to frame how a place’s affective and atmospheric qualities are perceived through the pre-structuring effects that the life experiences and ‘cultural vocabularies’ associated with such diversities have (Löw 2008, Conradson and Latham 2007). Amin and Thrift’s (2008) work points to the ways in which ‘sense of place’ may inherently carry normative dimensions, where practices of judgement come to construct moral geographies that serve to normatively position, rank and rate cities in terms of their ‘worth’. This may manifest itself in terms of binaries of slow city/fast city, dull city/happening city etc. We would propose also that such evaluative practices draw on repertoires of evaluation that may have a national origin (Lamont and Thevenet 2000). Whilst challenging any tendency towards nationally-framed cultural essentialisms, Lamont and Thevenet (2000) have nevertheless pointed to the differential availabilities and usages of

particular culturally-infused ‘repertoires of evaluation’, from one nation to another, where such repertoires serve as resources for collective appraisals of the nature and worth of things, including places. We would also assert that such evaluative practices express formative biographical dimensions (Van Riemsdijk 2014 Wang 2013).

The French in London

Census data suggest a significant growth in French migration to the UK. For example, while there were officially 38,000 French people living in the UK in 2001, by 2011 this figure had risen to 129,804 (Office of National Statistics, accessed on 01.03.13). This suggests further growth since the Eurostat (2009, accessed on 01.05.12) estimated a figure of 114,000 French nationals resident in the UK. Data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP 2012) on new national insurance numbers issued to adult overseas nationals in the UK indicates that between 2006/7 and 2009/10, over 80,000 newly-arrived French nationals were allocated national insurance numbers. During 2008-9, only the Poles, Indians and Slovaks were arriving in the UK in larger numbers. Reflecting a broader pattern, London is the primary destination for the French (DWP 2012). However, these figures are dramatically short of other recent, though unverifiable, estimates. The number of French nationals in the UK has been suggested to be as high as 400,000, based on the French Consulate’s estimate (*The Economist* Feb. 24th 2011ⁱ). Evidence also points to the fact that the French are the most highly qualified European migrants in the UK (72% having a University education compared to 46.2% of Spanish and 21.3% of Germans) (see Braun and Glöckner-Rist 2012).

This paper draws upon data derived from an 18-month, Economic and Social Research Council-funded, qualitative study focusing on the life and work experiences of the French

highly skilled in London's financial and business sectors, and their families (with interviews taking place between 2011 and 2013). The project adopted a qualitative methodology concerned with illuminating the thick biography of migrant's lived experiences, and the meaningful nature of such mobility experiences for those concerned. The study was based on semi-structured, one-off interviews and one focus group. A total of 37 people participated in the study; 16 men and 21 women, with the bulk aged between 35 and 44. The majority had arrived in the UK in the 2000s, though some had been here for considerably longer. 23 were married, 5 co-habiting and 9 single. 25 were parents. Participants were contacted via a snowballing technique, with purposive sampling used, where appropriate, to secure data from a range of key demographic variables (gender, age, relationship status).

The term 'highly skilled' covers a diverse group but the OECD and European Commission/Eurostat framework defines them as those who have *either* successfully completed a tertiary education and/or are employed in occupational roles normally requiring tertiary qualifications (such as undergraduate and postgraduate degrees). The majority of our participants satisfy this definition on both counts; 29 were qualified to degree level or above, and 16 had pursued subsequent education and training in the UK. Though a range of French higher educational institutions were represented amongst the educational backgrounds of our participants, over 50% had attended highly selective, 'elite' academic institutions (*les Grandes Ecoles*). Twenty were currently employed in senior positions in, or allied to, the financial sector; 3 worked in the field of finance law; 4 were employed in business-related higher education, whilst the remainder of those in work were occupied in a range of highly skilled professional positions. Only a small minority of participants who were employed in the business and finance fields at the point of interview had substantive third country working experience prior to migrating to London.

‘Sense of Place’ as Moral Geography: Comparing London and Paris

London as a place to live and work

We have referred elsewhere to the multidimensional nature of French highly skilled migrants’ significations, evaluations and experiences of London as a place to live and work, across a range of dimensions. Specifically, we have accounted for the ways in which our participants understand London in multi-scalar terms: as a mosaic of localities; as a national capital; and as a global city, bearing the hallmarks of a nationally-framed (‘Anglo-Saxon’) neo-liberal character that equips it well for its global role (Mulholland and Ryan 2015). We have also explored some of the frictions associated with work and life in London, especially in respect of the challenges of establishing deeper and more meaningful relations with (especially native) others in the city (Ryan and Mulholland 2014), and the dissonances that may come from inter-cultural experiences in the workplace (Mulholland and Ryan 2014). We have discussed the ways in which the topological proximity of London to France, even in an age of globalised transportation opportunities and ICT, has enabled important processes of embedding in the capital, precisely because of the manner in which proximity allows for a maintaining of substantive ties with family and ‘home’ (Ryan and Mulholland 2014, Ryan, Klekowski and Mulholland 2015). Here we focus on some key dimensions of our participants’ evaluation of the livability of London, specifically on the moral geographies they construct through the practice of comparing London to Paris.

The ‘Soft Tissue of Urbanism’: The Openness and Civility of London’s Public Sociability

Rae (2003), drawing on the ideas of Braudel (1977), emphasises the somewhat intangible yet important ‘soft tissue’ of urbanism; an ‘accumulated legacy of habits and expectations for conduct in daily life’ (p. 29). For Braudel, urbanism may be marked by the routinised expression of thousands of acts that ‘...flower and reach fruition without anyone’s having made a decision, acts of which we are not even fully aware’ (cited in Rae 2003). We would suggest that the ‘soft tissue of urbanism’ can be understood as one component of the affective qualities of a place (Conradson and Latham 2007). We propose that, however difficult to operationalise, public sociality is one important dimension of such ‘soft tissue’, and informs the affective and atmospheric (Stewart 2011) character of the place. Whilst complex and at times contradictory, our data offered illuminating, though perhaps unexpected, accounts of London as a place valued for particular qualities of public sociality, and in direct juxtaposition to Paris.

Paris was without exception portrayed as unfriendly and ‘tough’. Paris was, for some, juxtaposed to the rest of France as particularly unfriendly, reflecting an influential tradition of bifurcated Paris-provincial relations. However, there was also clear evidence that such Parisian unfriendliness, as a feature of public sociality, was seen as a manifestation of a broader French trait. According to Agnès, “I think in France relationships between individuals are much tougher...brutal, more direct...In Paris...people...can’t smile. It’s bad to be seen actually to be someone who looks happy and cheerful. You have to...be strong”

Adèle, a proud French provincialist, in response to a request for clarification on whether she saw London as friendlier than Paris, insisted, “yes, absolutely. It’s changing in London but

definitely, 100%. And oh boy, I hate Paris'. Luc points to the relative (to London) lack of openness to public communication in Paris, "I personally find that you make a lot easier contacts in London than in Paris I would say, and I'm always amazed because people are more open in terms of conversation" [in London]. In direct contrast, London was valued for everything that Paris was not, namely its openness and friendliness. Martine reflects, "People are more helpful...they take time to explain...at the beginning they were really friendly... and I think people are more friendly in the street, they smile more and everything is a bit more serious in Paris". In addition to the importance attached to London's 'playscapes' as venues for making friendly contact in London (discussed below), we have discussed elsewhere the relationship-facilitating 'openness' (relative to Paris) attributed by our participants to London's work and residential spaces. Perceived national qualities of meritocracy, flexibility, and cosmopolitanism' were commonly presented as also facilitating the making of contacts (Mulholland and Ryan 2014, Ryan and Mulholland 2014).

Thierry suggested that the openness and friendliness of London was an outcome of the fact that "...there are no barriers between people...I think it's due to the way you live". Offering some substantiation of the 'way English people live' in the UK, Elizabeth proposes an explanation grounded in an account of the particular role played by family in England; "there's much less a centre of family in England, people do go out...they live more outside their house". It was not however that 'the English' were seen as placing less importance on family, as the privatised and bounded English family was presented by our participants as constituting an obstacle to forming close relationships with the 'English'. Rather it was that a cosmopolitan ethic of openness to the 'other' was seen as a pervasive social good oiling the

wheels of public sociality. Again suggesting a defining quality of Englishness as an explanation for the character of the urban sociality evident in London, Charles argues that the “The English love to be in groups... They live like on a campus... They never sit in a couple two by two, they all sit fifty by fifty”.

Not all of our participants were however, convinced that such contact-facilitating openness was attributable to a national trait as such. Whilst Renée appears to concur on London’s friendly openness, she does question the extent to which this can be attributed to the ‘English’; “it’s more friendly as well... I was really surprised because actually in London I haven’t met a lot of English people. I don’t know where you are”.

The sense of London as a place marked by a virtuous form of public sociality was reflected in our participants’ accounts of the capital as a place inheriting a tradition of rule-abiding public civility. For Bertrand, “the UK is seen as a place where the rule of law is respected”. Some of our participants drew a direct comparison with Paris; For Luc, “what I like about London is that you have rules and people keep these rules, whereas in Paris it’s more in between always”. For Luc this appears to be a manifestation of a broader national legacy, “It’s really different, with many rules in England... that you still have, which I think are good things, which probably we have lost in France”. For Charles, commenting on the governance of urban space, particularly in respect of traffic, “the English like to tell you the law in their country as if they were all a police officer”. In this sense our participants appear to be giving voice to the ways in which even global cities may be perceived as embodying path dependent historically informed qualities of place (Kazepov 2005), even in respect of their cultural character in a context of globalising change. It may also suggest something of the *desire* (Wang 2013) of highly skilled migrants to dwell in places that whilst defined by their neo-

liberal quality of energised competitiveness, are still able to embody particular qualities of public sociality.

Here we are offered, through accounts of London's apparently friction-free modalities of public sociality, a virtuous rendering of London's tolerant and inclusive 'openness'. In this sense, the particularities of London would appear to offer the kind of environment so foundational to the requirements of Florida's 'creative classes' (Florida 2002); an environment "rich in possibilities and opportunities for interaction" (Vanolo 2008: p. 372).

But we would suggest that such necessarily selective perceptions of London's atmospheric and affective qualities, express spacing practices inevitably framed by the status of our participants as affluent white western European subjects, relatively free of the pathologising attentions of xenophobic anti-immigrant sentiment. In our participants' juxtapositioning of London and Paris, we would also suggest that our data show how highly skilled migrants may actively draw on a grounded comparative epistemology of place through employing their own partially 'pre-scripted' and nationally-framed constructs of other places (here Paris) in spacing their city of dwelling. Such comparative epistemologies take on important evaluative-normative forms and functions, serving the purpose of mapping moral geographies. These data also appear suggestive of McCann's (2008) claim that spatial imaginaries typically emerge in the context of interpretive communities, facilitated in our empirical case by the striking patterns of co-national sociality exhibited by sections of the French population in London.

Civility with Liberty: Gendering Moral Geographies

The libertarian nature of London was an influential feature of our participants' sense of place, and seemed closely connected to their accounts of the capital's public civility. Explicitly linking rule-abiding civility with freedom, Omer reflects, 'every time I go through the tunnel, every time I arrive here, I feel free, just protected, just really free...you feel that it's really organized, you feel secure. You feel free but secure'.

For Irène, freedom is a ubiquitous feature of London, "the sense of freedom is everywhere, from how you look, from what you say, from how you live...". According to Bernadette, London is defined in terms of its freedom, where the freedom to present oneself entirely as one wishes without judgement from others appears to derive from a certain quality of tolerant disinterestedness, "the fact that you are free and people don't care about you...you can do whatever you want and you can have pink hair, just going out of your house with slippers - nobody cares". Reflecting a libertarian, neo-liberal, reading of London as a place marked by precisely the forms of openness and tolerance apparently demanded by the 'creative class' (Peck 2005) our participants drew substantial contrasts with Paris.

Whilst freedom was an important motif across our cohort's account of London as a place, and applied to multiple contexts, it appeared particularly significant, and valued, by our female participants. Here, liberty appeared linked specifically to women's freedom from the normative judgement of others. Unlike Paris, where a women's presence in the public sphere was seen to be governed by a set of evaluative criteria concerned with how women 'look', London was defined as a place where a woman could enjoy autonomy. Margaux contemplates, "I have a feeling it's anonymity almost in London, not being observed...not

being controlled, because women on the whole...within the European environment, there is much more control”. Valentine draws a stark contrast between the gender order of Paris and London, “I think here you can walk on the streets and be inexistent, whereas in Paris...they stare at you, they malign the way you dress, the way you behave”. Irène asserts, through a juxtapositioning with France, the relative absence of a gendered normative regime in London, “...in France there is a huge emphasis on how you look, how you dress and how slim or how big you are”. Interestingly, whilst extolling the virtue of such liberation from the gendered regimes of control associated with women’s public presentations of self in Paris, our female participants commonly took significant pride in, and attached importance to, what they deemed to be their own, nationally-characteristic, good taste in clothes.

We have asserted that the particular and variable subject positions occupied by highly skilled migrants may frame how a place is experienced and perceived (Löw 2011), and in turn informs the space-making practices of those subjects. Research suggests that women’s embodied experiences of patriarchal oppression may inform their mobility and settlement practices in the pursuit of self empowerment and liberation (Wang 2013). Our data suggest that even in the context of a relatively privileged migrant population moving between two like situated, and geographically proximate global cities, two city-places may facilitate quite divergent, gendered moral geographies.

The Affect of Buzz

Conradson and Latham’s (2007) seminal work on New Zealand Overseas Experience migrants in London pointed to the sheer intensity and energizing vitality of the lived

experience associated with life in London; to its ‘buzz’. We would argue, with Conradson and Latham (2007), that this sense of ‘buzz’ can be read as an affective outcome of the city’s material and immaterial characters. On one level, it is not surprising that a sense of London’s ‘buzz’ may become a feature of the perceptual and attributional practices of such diverse migrant constituencies, as instilling a sense of ‘buzz’ in a city has become a central point of reference for the ambitions of global cities’ civic planners and branders alike (Vanolo 2008).

Our data, despite being drawn from a more diverse demographic than that of Conradson and Latham (2007), pointed to a sense of place stamped by the quality of buzz, even if the subject positions of many of our participants made it difficult for them to substantively engage with this quality of the city. The prevalence of data pertaining to the character of London as a ‘buzzing place’ was particularly striking given that we did not ask a question relating directly to this. Valentine reflects, ‘up to the ...economic downturn...it was just an amazing place to be. You could feel a buzz, an energy in London that you don’t feel in Paris or...Milan’. Claudine describes London as ‘a very fast city...it has a very intensive rhythm...It’s a very vibrant city...getting your adrenalin working’.

Buzz may of course be experienced as a defining affective feature of a place, yet still be quite differentially valorised. As with Conradson and Latham’s and Favell’s (2006) studies, our participants did make reference to the stress-inducing character of a life lived in a buzzing place. Charles unsurprisingly juxtaposes London and ‘non-Paris France’ (from where a significant proportion of our participants came); ‘there are many people who come from non-Paris French places and they come to London and they find it very stressful, a lot of commuting and traffic jams and congestions, and car parking is very difficult...Obviously it’s very noisy and very polluted’. There was also a recognition that such intensity may be more

suited to some than others. Claudine points to the life-course dimensions of this; ‘I don’t think I could retire here because I couldn’t retire in a place where everything is going too fast, I think it drives me mad’. Exhibiting some reflexivity on the class-based determinants of effective inclusion in the capital, Chantal declares; ‘if you have the means, the financial means, it’s a lovely city. I wouldn’t venture if you don’t have the financial means’.

Chantal’s testimony epitomises the near universal consensus amongst our participants that London was a particularly expensive place to live (even compared to Paris), though a consideration of the implication of this for those without the economic means to participate was remarkably limited across the data. It is characteristic of contemporary ‘new economic’ urban developments that the ‘dark side of the dialectic’ (Gouldner, cited in Scott 2006), embodied in the human casualties of increasingly socially bifurcated cities and lives, becomes not only concealed but neglected (Peck 2005).

However, though London was characterised by our participants as a ‘buzzing place’, over and above Paris, London was never described as more stressful than Paris. In fact quite the reverse. According to Luc, ‘I’ve been living roughly in the same kind of areas in Paris and in London. I’ve found life better organized in a way because what I like about London is that you have rules [in London] and people keep these rules...I found living in Paris more stressful than it used to be’. As with all other participants who expressed a view on this, London was valued for its successful, and life-enhancing, balance of rule-abiding behaviour and freedom. Luc appears to be suggesting that some aspects of what Rae (2003) has referred to as the ‘soft tissue’ of urbanism, may serve to offset some the stress-inducing features of an ‘all-consuming’ place, offering in turn a preferable quotient of liveability.

From High Culture to Popular ‘Playscapes’

Virtually without exception, our participants made reference to London as a place of apparently unprecedented cultural opportunity; “I think there’s loads of culture, all the museums, all the shows, the theatres. It’s a very vibrant city” (Claudine). Claudine goes on, “In London there is much more availability of culture, there is more going on. In Paris it obviously has got a lot...but I would say there is more in London in terms of culture”. Our participants’ clear valorisation of London’s ‘high’ culture appeared to run in tandem with an appreciation of the capital’s cosmopolitan popular cultural diversity as a place-enriching feature of the capital. London was prized not just for the fact of its cultural effervescence, but for the accessibility and affordability of its cultural provision. Here the data corresponded closely to the central position granted to cultural amenity within the creative city discourses that have come to frame much contemporary urban development (Peck 2005). Given the status of our participants’ identities as migrants rich in cultural capital, it should come as no surprise that they may synthesise (Löw 2008) a sense of place out of their usages of London’s high cultural amenities. However, the fact that all of those participants who expressed a view on the relative merits of London and Paris as cultural spaces here articulated a moral geography that ranked London as at least matching or even exceeding Paris in these cultural terms came as something of a surprise. . It appeared to be not only the qualitative character of London’s high culture that accounted for this particular moral geography, but also the ethic of accessibility and inclusion framing London’s cultural policy and practice, .

Alongside the valorisation of London’s high-cultural attributes, our participants made

frequent reference to one key dimension of the capital's 'playscapes', explicitly granting 'the pub' a key role in facilitating the city's 'buzz' and open public sociality. Playscapes have become an important focus of scholarly interest, especially as features of the contemporary city (Chatterton and Hollands 2002). A playscape may be defined as, 'a post-modern space, related to recreation and leisure, involving a large number of cultural meanings and social symbolisms' (Crivello 2011: p. 709). Playscapes have emerged as key features of consumption-driven renewal and are typically located centrally in the iconography of the contemporary urban metropolis. Urban planners have reflexively understood the central role played by playscapes in communicating key valorised features of a city as a buzzing place, a space of affective encounter. As such, significant investments have been made in developing spaces for consumption-driven pleasure as part of a certain 'eventification of place' within the experience economy, where eventification can be understood as "the deliberate organization of a heightened emotional and aesthetic experience" (Jakob 2012: p. 448).

Our participants were clear that the institution of the pub contributed a particular 'atmosphere' to London's public sociality, drawing an important contrast with Paris. Luc attaches particular significance to the facilitative role played by the pub's spatial composition and practice of usage; "people are more open in terms of conversation... In many bars in Paris people are all sitting everywhere. You can see the difference, it's cultural... here, people are standing and talking to each other".

Here, something as apparently banal as the necessity of, and/or orientation toward, standing in the pub environment is seen to facilitate forms of sociality not possible in the French equivalent. Thierry concurs; "...people can drink and they are mixing together, whereas in Paris it's much more conventional. You have to stay on the terrace with your friends. You're

not really mixing with other sorts of people...here it's on every street corner". Sylvie claims that the pub also serves as a key location, and framing institution, for the sociality practices of existing friendship groups, in contrast to the more private sociality (for instance invitations to dinner) of the French; "I think of course we [the French] do a lot of dinner parties and maybe less of 'let's just have a pint in a pub". The institution of the pub was understood as both embodiment, and facilitator, of what might be described as a levelling, democratic public culture. Notwithstanding the fact that "the dominant audiences for nightlife spaces are mainstream, higher-spending, consumption groups such as young professionals, aspiring 'townies' and students" (Chatterton and Hollands (2002), and our own evidence that our participants often use pubs as extensions of work-related sociality with like-situated others, representations of the pub as an institution of inclusive 'mixture' were predominant within the data:

...if you go into a pub, you can be next to the CEO of Citibank...
here, everybody goes to the pub, right? In Paris, it is a bit different.
You have got posh cafes, and you have got like you know the lower
side cafes...In England, it is easier to mix up with different types of
people (Cedric).

Despite the reality of London's playscapes as the objects of highly strategic, reflexive and contemporaneous planning, the 'pub' appeared to our participants primarily in the form of an inadvertent attribute bequeathed from the past. 'Traditional' features of a place (here the 'traditional English pub') may furnish it with a capacity to speak to the most contemporaneous needs of its residents. Adèle seems to be suggesting such; "when you

adapt to something, but you don't lose who you are, or what makes you such a great place...you can have your pint outside - it's still a pint, it's still ale".

Such perceptions of the democratic inclusivity of London's playscapes sit uneasily with emerging understandings of their de-facto exclusions. Crivello (2011) points to the growing divide between different urban locales produced by the particular quality of playscapes increasingly produced in the image of the buzzing creative global city. Zukin (1995) has illuminated the exclusions associated with participation in such playscapes that derive from extant and substantial socio-economic inequalities. Though there was little explicit recognition of such in our data, our participants' accounts of apparently unfettered sociality, did occasionally appear to know some limit, specifically in respect of its gendering.

According to Charles, the French "mix boys and girls quicker in our life than maybe here. You've got fifty girls [in a group] in a pub and fifty boys [in a group] in a pub". Martine appears to agree, "it's different in France and England... the separation of women and men. It seems that here lots of women are going out together". Furthermore, for those who don't drink, the centrality of the pub to public sociality may also serve to effectively exclude, especially where the pub becomes a space in which business-related interaction takes place. Odile, whose role as a single parent made attending pubs additionally difficult, declares, "I'm a very light drinker...It's very difficult for me...Alcohol is everywhere and not lightly. So socializing, yes, with people in my business environment, I do socialize, but I try to figure out ways of doing so without drinking".

Our data are strongly supportive of the role attributed to playscapes in contemporary urban development as places where those with the necessary social and economic position may enjoy 'open' social environments that enable encounter with interaction and belonging

(Vanolo 2008, Peck 2005). Pubs appeared an important feature of London's atmosphere. If atmospheres are the outcome of affective qualities emanating "from the assembling of...human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situation" (Anderson and Holden 2008: p. 3), then the spatial composition of the pub, and its 'traditional' mode of occupation and usage, appeared to contribute something important in this respect. Van Riemsdijk (2014) has argued that highly skilled migrants' adoption of established national pastimes in their place of settlement may constitute place making practices that in turn create a sense of belonging and attachment. We would suggest that for our participants, partaking of the physical geography and practices of usage of the 'English pub', contributed significantly to their sense of belonging in London.

Offsetting Stress in the Alpha City: London's Parks as 'High Quality Sanctuaries'

Our data were replete with references to the virtues of London as a green space, in direct contradistinction to Paris; as a place offering readily-available opportunities for Londoners to escape the buzz of the city to the 'high quality sanctuaries' (Kjölsröd 2013) of the parks. The value of the parks to our participants' sense of place in London is again suggestive of the importance of a city's heritage in rendering specific global cities as particularly attractive to place-sensitive migrantsⁱⁱ. This points to the importance of the material configuration of social goods within a city as important in framing its affective qualities.

Our participants articulated a sense of Paris as a planned city, as a city built to be looked at, and appreciated, for its aesthetic beauty. But it was also presented as a 'claustrophobic' city, where its current population density only confounds a legacy of urban planning insufficiently orientated to the needs of its ordinary citizens. Pierre asserts, "you shouldn't

underestimate the power of London as a green place. Paris actually is suffocating, absolutely suffocating...because there is no green, you can't do any damn thing about it". Claudine concurs; ...open a map of London and Paris...Paris feels very built up compared to London...London is definitely very green compared to Paris".

Linking the number and size of parks to the demand placed upon their usage by the density of the resident population, Agnès reflects, 'in Paris you don't have that many parks, just a few, and very small in comparison with the population, so you don't have the impression of space. In London you have this impression of space'. London's space was also seen to be more accessible; '...you can't walk on the grass in France, it's very restricted' (Valentine). The number, size, accessibility and usage of London's parks added significantly to the capital's sense of spaciousness. For Thierry, '...the parks are an important part of London, and it's very good to have those kind of parks where you work, whereas in Paris you don't have that kind of thing'.

The parks served a key function in offering a certain offsetting of the 'buzz' of the urban experience, enabling people access to some relationship to nature and seasonality without leaving the city. Charles makes reference to the parks as one among many amenities that make London a more complete place, a place able to offer such an array of affective experiences as to make its escape at the weekend simply unnecessary, unlike Paris; "we can have a super nice weekend in town which was not conceivable...in Paris. Every weekend it was like rushing to leave Paris. In London, the weekend is gorgeous...There are so many things...; exhibitions, concerts, a visit, walking, parks, restaurants, shopping...".

The parks of London were prized as social goods facilitating: stress-offsetting commuting, weekend leisure, ‘time-out’ during the working day/week, but also as spaces enabling and even celebrating a certain kind of active and diverse public sociality. For Pierre, ‘I go to Hyde Park. I go with my kids. We do roller-blading, we do skateboarding...I’ve been meeting quite a number of people from all over the world over there...it’s a great feeling’. London’s green spaces were imagined as places of free and active public access in some part due to their safety. Pierre points to the absence of such safety in Paris; ‘you don’t take your family in the weekends to the Bois de Boulogne...It’s a place where people go for well...drugs, this and that’.

We would suggest that across a broad spectrum of subject positionings, including a range of age cohorts, and relationship and parental statuses, green space offers an important offsetting of the affective intensity of a city’s buzz, and is experienced as contributing significantly to the livability of the contemporary urban metropolis. It is perhaps no surprise then that natural environments have become an important feature of the brand images of many global cities (Vanolo 2008). In line with van Riemsdijk (2014), we would claim that ‘green space’ serves as an important, and under-explored component, of highly skilled migrants’ moral geographies and place attachments, and may serve as a key point of differentiation even between the most like-situated ‘alpha cities’

Conclusion

Our paper has sought to contribute to furthering our understanding of the human face of migration in the context of burgeoning middling mass of international highly skilled mobility. In this regard, it has insisted on the importance of adopting a place-centric perspective, and

utilised this to argue that highly skilled migration dances not only to the tune of instrumental economic logic, but also and importantly to the non-occupational dimensions of migrant desires, for themselves and for the qualities of the places where they dwell. We have suggested that the particularities of highly skilled migrants' place-centrism, and their 'sense of place', must be understood as an outcome of the interplay between: subject-specific, desire-infused and multiple motivations, partly pre-scripted perceptions and imaginings of their places of dwelling, and the affective/atmospheric qualities of those places where they live. We have argued however, that such places, and in the case of highly skilled migration we are mostly talking here about global cities, must also be understood as actively produced by the 'spacing' practices of those who live there, by the manner in which the social goods and people of a city are synthesised by space and place-making practices. We have employed the notion of moral geography to capture some of the ways in which places of dwelling may be signified in normative and judgemental terms. Importantly, we have asserted that this process does not occur in some place-specific isolation. Rather, that for our participants' moral geographies, London's 'sense of place' was constructed through the active employment of a comparative epistemology of place, whereby London was juxtaposed with Paris as an epistemological mechanism for 'knowing' London. Paris became 'significantly other' to London not because our participants were Parisian, because many were not, nor because they had all lived there, as some had not, but rather because their national identity, and their career 'interest' in global city locations for work and life, rendered Paris the principal 'other' to framing a 'sense of place' in London.

We explored the nature and functioning of this comparative mechanism, and the ways in which it operates for our participants to enable the production of a particular sense of place in London. Drawing on the work of Braudel (1977), and specifically the idea of the 'soft tissue

of urbanism', along with the notion of 'affective urbanism' (Thrift 2004, Conradson and Latham 2007), we show how London is granted a particular affective and atmospheric quality deriving from the open and civil nature of its public sociality, and in contrast to Paris. Secondly, we showed how our participants construct London as a definitively libertarian space and value the capital as more 'livable' than Paris on this basis. Thirdly, we examined our participants' attributions of the quality of 'buzz' to London. Fourthly, we explored our participants' account of London as a place of largely unprecedented cultural encounter, and in particular, how the spatial composition, and mode of occupation and usage of the 'pub', is signified by our participants as a key ingredient in framing London's affective quality, and its enabling of both buzz and a democratically inclusive public sociality. Finally, we examined the importance to our participants of London's green spaces as 'high quality sanctuaries' (Kjølørød 2013), offsetting the buzz and stress of urban life.

Our research offers insights, and supports a broader agenda of inquiry, into the human face of highly skilled international mobilities. In particular, it proposes a focus on the complex and meaningful ways in which highly skilled migrants 'actually live in landscapes of new belonging' (Knowles and Harper 2010: p. 7). It suggests the value of an exploration of the ways in which such international migrants employ comparative epistemologies of place. Such epistemologies are key to the construction of moral geographies in which a 'sense' of their place of settlement is formed through its comparative relationship to specific, biographically-informed, 'significantly other' places. These 'significantly other' places need not even be places where the migrants themselves have lived, or for that matter, places that are known (rather than 'imagined'). But they are places made pertinent to the task of comparison by the migratory trajectories of the migrant subjects in question, and are creatively employed by them in constructing an evaluatively-rich sense of the places where they settle.

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ⁱ *The Economist*, Paris on Thames, Feb. 24th 2011

ⁱⁱ London's parks, officially 'Royal Parks', were established in the main in the 17th century, and became publically accessible via the Crown Lands Act of 1851