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Abstract

The world of work continues to change. Labour markets in most countries are increasingly shaped by policies of neoliberal deregulation while strategies of flexibility dominate public policy and corporate strategy across an array of sectors. At the forefront of these changes are the myriad labour market intermediaries that are used by workers and employees to enhance their ability to navigate ever more complex and volatile labour markets. For some, mediated employment, recruitment and work practices mean greater career progression and profit making ability, but for many others it means increased precarity, vulnerability and insecurity. This paper critically reviews existing literature within geography on three types of private labour market intermediary, namely; temporary staffing agencies and contract brokers; executive search firms and headhunters and; informal intermediaries such as gangmasters. The final section addresses the future for research in labour geography and, in particular, suggests new ways in which to broaden our understanding of labour market intermediaries and their impact on worker agency.

Introduction

Since the 1970s labour market deregulation and flexible employment practices have led to a “frenzy of academic and populist speculation about the future of work” (Wills 2009, 442). Recently described by the Labour Party leader as “nasty, brutish and short-term” (Wintour & Topping 2012) the contemporary UK labour market, and indeed that of many other countries,

is fundamentally characterised by the increasingly individualised nature of work and the growing ‘contractualization’ of employment (Standing, cited in Allen & Henry 1997, 180). For workers at the lower-end of the labour market this means increased risk and insecurity (Allen & Henry 1997) whereas, for the “desirably qualified” it can mean enhanced career development (Wills 2009, 443). Nonetheless, for employees of all types their future success and security increasingly depends on their ability to navigate ever more complex and volatile labour markets (Benner 2002). As such, employers and employees across an assortment of sectors and skill sets are using labour market intermediaries (LMIs) to help them do just that. Yet, Benner (2002, 86) points out that ‘few studies of labor [sic] markets even recognise the importance of intermediaries’. This is beginning to change as a growing body of literature reconsiders the significance of LMIs, and their explosive growth, on workers, employers and labour markets. This paper reviews the existing geographical literature across three groups of LMIs; temporary staffing agencies (TSAs) and contract brokers; executive search firms and headhunters; and the emerging research agenda in the less well developed area of informal intermediaries and gangmasters. The paper then suggests how future research can take forward our understanding of LMIs and their impact on labour agency.

Labour market intermediaries comprise a broad range of organisations that help match people looking for work with employers. The existence of these organisations is not a new phenomenon; public sector employment services, union hiring halls, and temporary placement agencies for example, have been around for a long time (Benner et al. 2007). However, the number, variety and impact of LMIs has increased significantly since the 1980s. As such, researchers and policymakers have focused their attention on certain types of intermediaries such as temporary staffing agencies and headhunters. But, others remain less well studied, for example, gangmasters and internet-based job boards. Chris Benner provides one of the few in-depth explorations, from a geographical perspective, of multiple LMIs. In

50 *Work in the New Economy* (2002) and *Staircases or Treadmills?* (2007) Benner and
51 colleagues examine the role of different LMIs among groups of workers in the knowledge
52 economy of Silicon Valley and in aiding low-wage workers in Milwaukee.

53 Traditionally the definition of a LMIs referred to the brokering or matching of activities in
54 which employers and job seekers use a third party to help find a ‘best match’ (National
55 Commission of Manpower Policy 1978 in Benner 2002). However, Benner (2002, 2003)
56 suggests that a more comprehensive definition should consider four fundamental functions
57 that LMIs perform within the labour market. These include: reducing transaction costs,
58 shaping compensation levels, risk displacement (particularly onto workers) and network
59 building. By considering these four actions Benner takes into account the traditional
60 transaction cost approach but is also able to consider the wider non-market social
61 relationships that shape the economic transactions between intermediaries and
62 workers/employers, and which are not driven solely by pricing and efficiency. The legal
63 definition of LMIs is also a point of contention especially in relation to regulation and the
64 repercussions for workers (Gonos 1997). Indeed, labour advocates in both the US and UK
65 have argued that a clearer legal status is needed for different types of profit-making LMIs in
66 order to “effectuate a fair regime of regulation for these formidable players in the labour
67 relations arena” (Freedland 2003; Freeman & Gonos 2005, 295).

68 The experiences of workers at all levels of the labour market can depend on the
69 organisational structure and remit of the intermediaries they interact with. Benner (2002)
70 identifies three broad types of LMI; private sector, membership-based and public sector.
71 There are numerous organisations within each group; this paper focuses on three different
72 types of *private for-profit* LMIs (TSAs, headhunters and gangmasters) and considers their
73 recent explosive growth and *active* role in shaping labour markets, changing employment
74 relations and *creating* markets. Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2010, 226) argue that “profit-making

intermediaries represent a unique fraction of capital... that provides an increasingly important range of labour market services”. Within low-end temporary and highly skilled elite labour markets academics have argued that private, profit-seeking LMIs are driving market development and changing employment norms (Peck & Theodore 2002; Faulconbridge et al. 2008). Whereas, public and membership-based intermediaries are more likely to emerge as a *response* to rapidly changing and volatile employment conditions (Benner 2002). Public sector and membership-based intermediaries such as training/education institutions, professional guilds, trade associations and unions primarily aim to improve the labour market outcomes for workers. While, private sector LMIs generate profit by selling their services to employers. Indeed, Peck and Theodore (1998, 660) note that “profit is derived from giving employers ‘what they want’” and “a premium is placed on meeting client expectations”, in many cases this means passing risks onto workers (Allen & Henry 1997).

Labour market intermediaries and flexibility

The burgeoning use of LMIs by firms and workers should be understood within the wider context of neoliberal labour market deregulation and the resurgence of *flexibility* within labour market policy and corporate strategy. Flexibility remains a contested and value laden concept, holding different meanings depending on those analysing it (see, for example, Buzar 2008). Peck (1996, 150) argues that “[t]o bundle all forms of contemporary labor [sic] market restructuring together under the generic and increasingly elastic term ‘flexibility’ is manifestly inadequate”. Indeed, there is insufficient room in this paper to unpack such a laden term. Nonetheless, we can learn a lot about the rapidly increasing use of private sector LMIs by exploring how others have analysed their role in relation to increasingly flexible labour markets.

Many have critically examined the massive changes in employment and labour markets since the mid 1970s (Osterman 1999; Kalleberg 2001, 2009). This ‘neoliberal revolution’ has been characterised by a period of intensified economic integration and global competition, the outsourcing of manufacturing and the concomitant emphasis on knowledge-intensive work (Kalleberg 2009). Furthermore, there has been an ideological shift in our *view* of work away from the secure, unionised, life-long career common during the post-war era towards contractualised, individualised and often insecure employment. Increased global competition has enhanced the need for firms to react quickly to market fluctuations while externalising the costs of market downturns. This has led to a systemic enforcement within public policy and corporate strategy of flexibility initiatives designed to enhance the functioning of ‘frictionless’ markets and corporate competition (Crouch 2010). The growth of LMIs has been a response to this fever of flexibility as well as a compounding force for it. Indeed, Benner (2002, 6) states that;

Flexibility in regional labor [sic] markets contributes to the growth of intermediaries, which in turn help facilitate labor market flexibility – in essence labor market intermediaries are a fundamental feature of labor markets in the information economy.

Firms may introduce flexibility into their corporate strategies in three ways; through attempts to individualise employment relations and wage bargaining by weakening trade unions; by multi-skilling workers within the firm and redeploying them throughout the workplace (internal or functional flexibility) or; through the use of part-time or temporary workers to facilitate rapid quantitative adjustments in labour (external or numerical flexibility) (Atkinson 1984; Atkinson & Meager 1986; Dale & Bamford 1988; Storper & Scott 1990; Peck 1996).

Certain LMIs such as TSAs and contract brokers facilitate flexible staffing arrangements and are increasingly used by firms to externalise employment and achieve greater numerical

flexibility (see Kalleberg & Marsden 2005). Other LMIs such as employment agencies and headhunters are expanding their remit of activity to facilitate labour market flexibility for both firms and workers and further aid in the navigation of complex and unpredictable labour markets, as such; intermediary institutions are reshaping the dynamics of flexible labour markets (Benner 2002).

It has been argued that TSAs play a strategically important role in delivering labour market flexibility by acting as purveyors of flexibility and offering a range of ‘flexibility packages’ across a growing number of sectors and countries (Peck & Theodore 2002; Ward 2005; Coe et al. 2010). By quickly sourcing large numbers of contingent workers and providing less restrictive employment contracts TSAs provide a new institutional medium through which firms can transfer the shocks of fluctuating product demand and off-load the risks of economic uncertainty onto workers who ultimately “bear the greatest burdens of this ‘new flexibility’” (Peck & Theodore 1998, 661, see also Allen & Henry 1997; Van Breugel et al. 2005).

Temporary staffing agencies and contract brokers

Temporary staffing agencies (also defined as temporary help firms/temporary work agencies) and contract brokers facilitate the outsourcing of jobs to contingent workers on open-ended contracts with limited fringe benefits (Purcell et al. 2004). Although the name suggests short-term placements, many ‘temps’ or ‘contractors’ are often employed on long-term or rolling contracts referred to as ‘perma-temps’ (Peck & Theodore 2007; Smith & Neuwirth 2008; Coe et al. 2010) or used by firms to screen potential permanent employees with no obligation through ‘temp-to-perm’ agreements (Ward et al. 2001; Theodore & Peck 2002; Benner et al. 2003). Research has shown that routine, peripheral work (e.g. call centre workers or production/warehouse operatives) and outside expert jobs, especially those where skills are

required only periodically (e.g. web developers), lend themselves particularly well to outsourcing via this type of intermediary (Purcell et al. 2004).

Employers utilise these arrangements as a strategic alternative to direct employment during fluctuations in demand, to cover short term absenteeism, when (non-firm-specific) expert skills are required, for seasonal agricultural work or unsociable shifts patterns (Peck & Theodore 1998; Purcell et al. 2004; McDowell et al. 2009). These intermediaries charge client firms a fee based on the hourly wage of each temp. Although hourly rates are not necessarily cheaper via these LMIs, clients often make cost savings through benefit reductions, lower exit costs and minimal screening and training (Purcell et al. 2004). TSAs and contract brokers can be characterised by the *triangular relationship* between the LMI, the temporary employee and the client firm (Forde 2001; Druker & Stanworth 2004; UNITE 2007). This relationship creates distinctive dynamics vis-à-vis direct employment or recruitment via permanent employment agencies regarding, for example; mechanisms of ‘dual control’ over temps (Gottfried 1991, 1992), the commitment of contingent workers towards host organisations (Van Breugel et al. 2005) and the deepening functional integration between intermediary organisations and clients – which allow the intermediary principal control over recruitment functions and/or an on-site presence at the client company (Forde 2001; Ward 2003, 2004) – this can blur the boundaries of the firm and distinctions between internal and external labour markets (Peck & Theodore 1998).

Different temporary workers are serviced by different types of intermediary (Purcell et al. 2004). Many have argued that the temporary market is polarised between TSAs which supply low-skilled ‘temps’ and contract brokers that supply specialist contract workers (Peck & Theodore 1998, 2001; McDowell et al. 2008). In most cases specialist agencies emphasise a value added approach, quality of service and customised supply in the interests of the client company *and* employees (Purcell et al. 2004). Benner (2002) notes that contract brokerage

firms allow specialised consultants to market themselves (through the intermediary) to a higher number of clients and provide an important service in the knowledge economy. Moreover, skilled technicians and IT professionals placed by contract brokers often act as *self-employed* or *independent* contractors affording them greater autonomy than lower-skilled ‘temps’ (Benner 2002; Purcell et al. 2004). Consequently, highly skilled workers, working on a temporary basis, often benefit from using contract brokers and may prefer this to permanent work (Benner 2002).

On the other hand, TSAs pursue a low-margin high-volume business strategy targeting clients with large pools of contingent labour, emphasis is placed on cost, speed and “hassle reduction” (Peck & Theodore 1998, 665; Peck et al. 2005). The characteristically thin margins of the temporary staffing industry (TSI) have led to aggressive strategies of diversification (upwards) and internationalisation (outwards) (Ward 2004; Peck et al. 2005; Coe et al. 2007). McDowell et al. (2009) argue that low-skilled workers employed via TSAs are some of the most vulnerable with many of the risks offset by firms passed onto workers (Allen & Henry 1997; Peck & Theodore 1998). Furthermore, the emphasis on price and the inherent threat of competition within the TSI forces agencies to prioritise client relationships, leaving them little room to refute discriminatory hiring practices and other unscrupulous client demands at the risk of clients changing suppliers (Peck & Theodore 1998). The costs of this instability are borne by the lower end of the workforce where TSAs can institutionalise inequality and reify tendencies of segmentation creating hierarchies of inequality and new types of workforce stratification amongst the most vulnerable workers (Peck & Theodore 1998; McDowell et al. 2009).

The TSI represents itself as a passive market-enhancing service provider representing and reconciling the needs of supply (labours desire for non-standard work scheduling enhancing work/life balance) and demand (employers additional labour requirements) (Peck &

Theodore 2002). However, Peck and Theodore (2002, 147) argue that the TSI is in fact an “*active intermediary* in the job market”. They state that TSAs *make* their markets by providing new employment solutions and enhanced flexibility to firms. This has led to a host of insecure and precarious characteristics now associated with many national labour markets, such as; two tier compensation systems in manufacturing, the normalisation of pre-screening in clerical and administration work, deunionisation, the erosion of employer-sponsored benefits, the displacement of risk onto workers, lean workforce systems, the casualisation of public sector jobs and the restructuring of incentive systems (Peck & Theodore 2002). Far from the passive intermediary the industry would have us believe TSAs have had a huge impact on our labour markets.

The continued geographical and sectoral spread of the TSI has led to a rapidly developing body of research in economic geography. In 2010 Coe et al provided an insightful review of the temporary staffing literature in this journal. They identify three approaches to research on temporary staffing; the client firm perspective (why firms use temporary agency workers), the worker perspective (the consequences of working via a TSA) and, the agency perspective in which they place the third actor centre stage and suggest four areas of future research.

First, Coe et al. (2010) assert that future research should consider how TSAs ‘make a difference’ and actually construct markets by; reshaping employment norms through enhanced flexibility; the expansion into new sectors and countries and; by engaging in the political sphere as independent labour market commentators. Second, they urge future researchers to consider the fine grained ways in which wider labour market regimes including regulation, corporate organisations and welfare provisions (amongst others) shape nationally distinctive temporary staffing markets. Indeed some have argued that a city-by-city analysis of regionally distinctive temporary staffing markets is also important (Peck & Theodore 2002; Ward 2005). Third, as the market for temporary staffing expands geographically Coe et

al. (2010) call for research which explores why, how, where and with what effects the temporary staffing industry is globalising. Finally, they argue that although current research has addressed the role of TSAs in facilitating migrant employment once people have arrived in the country future research needs to consider the role played by TSAs in the mediation of migration.

Executive search firms and headhunters

Outside of temporary work, executive search agencies and headhunters play a pivotal role in the supply of specialised highly-skilled workers for permanent positions. Although the function of TSAs within low-end labour markets has encouraged critical debate, “at the opposite end of the labour market, there remains an absence of scholarship” (Faulconbridge et al. 2008, 211). However, within economic geography Beaverstock, Faulconbridge and Hall have begun to address this “troubling void” and examine the strategies and influence of executive search agencies in elite labour markets (ibid). In contrast to TSAs and contract brokers these LMIs are used to find highly-skilled permanent workers for the *core* workforce or those at the pinnacle of organisational hierarchies (Faulconbridge et al. 2009). In the highest echelons of these secretive intermediaries executive search firms charge a fee in advance of any placement and many refuse jobs with a starting salary below £100,000 (Jenn 2005).

These intermediaries have been particularly important in the “war for talent” (see Michaels et al. cited in Faulconbridge et al. 2009, 800) as emphasis is placed on the need to recruit talented executives that can drive innovation and increase profitability in the knowledge economy. This process is intensified by the growth of “mobile talent” as experts are “poached” from rival firms in order to avoid missing-out on new ideas and star candidates from outside the internal labour market (Faulconbridge et al. 2008, 214-217). As such,

headhunters and executive search firms provide highly specialised, value added networks which tap into geographically dispersed elite labour markets and find talented candidates. Vinodrai (2006) argues that in niche industries these intermediaries may be less effective. For example, in Toronto's design industry the fuzzy boundaries of the occupation cause confusion among some larger headhunting firms that do not understand the industry, rendering them of little use to designers. Yet, headhunters and executive search firms are now present in many professional industries with specialist boutique consultancies in niche sectors or large agencies with specialist divisions (Jenn 2005).

As is the case with TSAs, Headhunters and executive search firms play an active role in shaping employment relations, changing recruitment practices and *creating* markets. Faulconbridge et al. (2008) argue that headhunters reproduce demand for their services through internationalisation of the industry which allows them to promote market-making rhetoric, navigate best practice guideline restrictions and promulgate the legitimacy of headhunting above direct recruitment. The tactics used in the geographical spread of the elite search industry depend on and reproduce rhetoric associated with the knowledge economy. Headhunters ensure that corporations entrust the search for their highest executives to elite search agencies in the belief that there is little alternative and without these intermediaries they risk inefficient recruitment, losing out on the best candidates and ultimately compromise their competitiveness. As such, Faulconbridge et al. (2008) argue that headhunters have cultivated the awareness of and desire for headhunting across different geographical markets.

Further to this, Faulconbridge et al. (2009, 801) argue that executive search firms play a significant role in defining the nature of 'talent' thus "determining who does and does not classify as a talented individual". They refer to this as a "new boys network" in which skilled workers are required to meet key markers of cultural capital and 'talent' determined by headhunters. This creates a "geographically inscribed hierarchy and exclusiveness" and

means that certain candidates dominate at the expense of those that do not fit the markers set by headhunters (Faulconbridge et al. 2009, 807). As such, the proliferation of executive search firms within elite labour markets means certain skilled workers may be marginalised and disadvantaged along lines determined by LMIs.

Beaverstock et al. (2010) and Hall et al. (2009) also examine the ways in which elite search agencies embed themselves in labour markets. They analyse the expansion and internationalisation strategies of executive search firms and consider the ‘softer’ processes of ‘professionalization’ and ‘legitimization’. They argue that these softer processes such as reputation building and creating a culture of acceptance require greater attention when considering the strategies of unbounded professions. Earlier work by Clark (1993) suggests that minimal barriers to entry create distinctive characteristics within the executive recruitment industry and as a result there is a mix of high and low quality consultants in the UK. Therefore, trust producing mechanisms such as contingent fees, reputation (corporate and individual) and regulation (contractual agreements) of the executive recruitment industry are important in mitigating decline in service quality and possible market collapse.

There are similarities between intermediaries that specialise in permanent and temporary recruitment not least the focus on profit-driven employer centric services, minimal barriers to entry and the off-setting of risk onto workers. Furthermore, their growing diversification and internationalisation into numerous countries and sectors of the labour market leave most with little choice but to utilise their services in some form. However, intermediary organisations and their actions do not always exist within formal or regulated spheres. The following section provides an overview of the approaches and emerging research amongst informal intermediaries, specifically the practices of gangmasters in the UK.

Informal intermediaries

294 Perhaps the most well-known account of informal for-profit LMIs in the UK is associated
295 with the drowning of 23 cockle pickers in Morecombe Bay in 2004 that were recruited and
296 organised via a gangmaster. The gangmaster was convicted for their manslaughter while the
297 owners of the company that traded the cockles faced no charges as the ‘indirect’ employers of
298 the cocklers – a bleak yet lucid illustration of the offset risks afforded to employers by some
299 LMIs. A recent report by Oxfam states that “workers employed through gangmasters are
300 some of the most vulnerable and exploited in the UK” (Oxfam 2009, 1). Yet, this group of
301 workers and the associated gangmasters have received little attention in labour geography and
302 could be considered as one of the “often-neglected groups” within the discipline (Lier 2007,
303 829). This is surprising considering the UK’s resurgent use of gangmasters since 1980s - far
304 from a historic relic of the feudal system nor confined to the gruelling work regimes of less
305 developed countries – gangmasters are a fundamental feature of capitalist agriculture and
306 have become a common and necessary intermediary for many unskilled workers and
307 employers within agribusiness enterprises (Brass 2004). The work by Strauss (2012b, 2) has
308 begun to address this as she considers the resurgence and social reproduction of gang labour
309 in the UK in relation to “neoliberal imperatives to create flexible labour markets”.

310 The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) was established in 2004 to officially license
311 labour providers in agriculture, horticulture, food processing, shellfish gathering and forestry
312 sections thus protecting workers and employers by ensuring that gangmasters operated within
313 the law. However, its success in reducing the exploitative nature of gang labour especially
314 within supermarket supply-chain agriculture is questionable (see Strauss 2009, 2012b).
315 Moreover, Oxfam reports that abuses by unlicensed, informal gangmasters still exist in
316 sectors beyond its remit (for example in construction, hospitality and care) and against
317 workers fearful of whistle blowing. Indeed, the fuzzy boundaries and limited regulation
318 concerning the activities of informal gangmasters requires greater theoretical and empirical

exploration. Furthermore, Strauss (2012b) promotes further research on the scalar complexities of gang labour which take into account the regional and national institutions and regulation that mediate the processes of work.

There are strong ties between gangmasters and the use of migrant workers (see Kuptsch 2006). Evidence presented by Oxfam suggests that individual and organised networks of gangmasters encourage workers to move to the UK by facilitating travel, accommodation and employment. These practices are often associated with illegal and exploitative practices such as forced or coerced labour, smuggling and trafficking (Schmidt 2006; Oxfam 2009). This has been compounded by EU accession and the influx of Eastern European workers, both independently and via gangmasters. During this time in 2004 reports of abuse by intermediary organisations increased markedly (Oxfam 2009). Indeed, McDowell et al. (2009) argue that economic migrants are often forced to accept the most precarious jobs while limited regulation in the UK labour market (compared with the rest of Europe) has led to competition among the migrant workforce for casual positions at the ‘bottom-end’ of the labour market. Moreover, Andrees (2006) reports that the vast majority of migrant workers that use intermediaries are using informal employment agencies and gangmasters¹ and are more likely to experience coercion and forced labour as a result.

The practices of gangmasters and their role in the exploitation of migrant workers have been portrayed in films such as *It's a Free World* (2007) by Ken Loach and *Ghosts* (2006) by Nick Broomfield. However, the practices of these agents and their role in the movement of workers over national borders is one of the most under researched topics in migration research (Kuptsch 2006). Further research within economic geography on the role of gangmasters in the UK might also draw on discussions and evidence from the temporary staffing literature as well as the inevitable links with existing work on coerced and forced labour (see Strauss 2012a).

Conclusion: LMIs and labour geography

This paper has critically reviewed the literature on three broad types of LMI and provides one of the few attempts to discuss the impacts of multiple LMIs in one place. As a means of drawing these approaches together, here I suggest directions for future with labour geography.

The sub-discipline of labour geography is dedicated to understanding labour as an *active maker of social space* and has developed a diverse body of research with “an explicit focus on the spatiality of particular worker struggles” (Lier 2007, 821 see also Castree et al. 2004; Castree 2007; Rogaly 2009). As labour geography continues to develop and extend its areas of analysis, the *agency* of labour has come under increasing scrutiny. In an attempt to move beyond the rather abstract discussions of labour agency Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2010) encourage a re-embedded understanding of labour agency through further study of four social arenas that are fundamental to labour and its political organisation, these are: capital, the state, the community and *labour market intermediaries*. They offer an analytical path for labour geography which requires future research to reconnect the agency of labour with the economic and societal systems that surround workers. Hence, taking account of the existing research as well as Coe and Jordhus-Lier’s proposition I suggest the following research agenda to help understand what role geography may play in the relationship between LMIs and the agency of labour.

First, future research on LMIs should consider how these organisations are changing the *spatial* dynamics of labour agency. LMIs have created a distance between the employee and the employer both spatially – as workers move between multiple workplaces – and emotionally – as workers have little industrial relations contact with their “real employer” (Wills 2009, 444). This creates structural disempowerment for workers because the mutual

dependency between worker and employer is severed by the intermediary thus making collective bargaining impractical (Wills 2009). Wills argues that workers need to navigate the intermediary and find new ways of bargaining with their real employer. She presents examples of alliance-building between workers and groups at different geographical scales which have allowed workers to target their real employers and improve working conditions and wages. Future research should therefore give greater consideration to how LMIs disrupt conventional employment relationships and in turn affect the spatiality of labour agency i.e. where and towards which actors agency is directed.

Furthermore, Lier (2007, 826) notes the tendency for research in labour geography to “overlook worker agency that is not articulated as collectively organised”. However, LMIs provide workers greater opportunity to express individual agency and improve their experience of work. For example, the use of contract brokers by skilled workers improves their ability to approach multiple employers thus increasing employment choice and allowing for greater individual worker agency. While, limited contractual restrictions on temporary contracts allow temps to move between different TSAs in order to gain better hourly rates – although still disadvantaged by the precarious nature of agency work – this demonstrates how LMIs allow workers to move quickly to ‘better’ jobs thus demonstrating individual worker agency. Moreover, James and Vira (2012) document the strategic use of a diverse range of LMIs by call centre workers in India used to circumvent limited internal job ladders and move to better paid more favourable jobs in other companies, another example of individual worker agency facilitated by LMIs.

Hence, future research on LMIs should consider their influence on worker *mobility* and the effect this has on worker agency. Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2010, 218) identify that “strategies for matching capital’s (potential) mobility” are an essential aspect of the agency of labour. This paper has shown that informal LMIs present a particularly important group in this

393 respect, as such, it is therefore important that future research also accounts for the role of
394 formal *and* informal LMIs in mediating the movement of workers and reshaping worker
395 agency amongst migrant and other mobile workers. In the facilitation of migration LMIs are
396 actively reshaping the spatialities of worker mobility thus having a dramatic effect both in
397 constraining and enhancing worker agency.

398 Finally, there has been a tendency for research on LMIs to focus on North America and
399 Western Europe. Research on TSAs has made the biggest contribution in moving beyond
400 these industry heartlands to consider ‘temping’ in Eastern Europe (Coe et al. 2008), Australia
401 (Coe et al. 2009a), Sweden (Coe et al. 2009b) and Canada (Vosko 2000). Yet, there has been
402 little work which considers the role of TSAs within the global South. James and Vira (2012)
403 and Endresen (2010) provide noteworthy exceptions to this regarding the role of LMIs in the
404 career progression of call centre workers in India and labour hire agencies in Namibia,
405 respectively. Nonetheless, the study of other LMIs would benefit from further work on their
406 impact beyond the US and Western Europe. Furthermore, future research may benefit for
407 studies which consider the links between a broader range of LMIs. For example, the use of
408 internet-based job-boards which have become a “standard component in many job search
409 strategies” (Benner 2002, 117) yet, have received little attention for their impact on workers
410 experiences and labour market functioning.

¹ The ILO Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour was carried out in 2003. It surveyed 644 return migrant workers from Albania, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.

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