French Capital: A Study of French Highly-Skilled Migrants in London's Financial and Business Sectors

A Report on Preliminary Observations

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Introduction

Although free trade zones have been created in several regions of the world, only in Europe 'has a genuine freedom of movement of persons been legally institutionalised alongside the freedom of movement of goods and capital' (Smith and Favell: 20). Within the context of EU mobility rights, it has been suggested that national borders are 'treated as if they have little or no significance for EU citizens other than as markers delineating locations on a map where languages tend to change' (Kennedy, 2008: 120). Although it could be argued that there has been 'less migrational movement than expected by the architects of the European Union' (Verwiebe, et al, 2010: 276), it is undoubtedly true that London has become a prime destination of European free movement (Favell, 2003). Data from the EU Labour Force Survey shows the UK to be a destination of particular attraction for the highly skilled, with one third of all EU non-nationals in the UK having tertiary-level credentials (Recchi 2008).

While there has been much research on intra-EU migration from the new accession countries (see Ryan et al, 2008; 2009), there has been little research on the on-going migration of French people particularly to London. While the Workers Registration Scheme monitors the numbers of migrants from new accession countries entering the UK, there is no single mechanism for the systematic registration of migrants from the old EU nations. Nonetheless, census data suggest a significant growth in French migration to the UK. While there were officially 38,000 French people living in the UK in 2001, by 2010 this figure had risen to 111,000 (Office of National Statistics). This corresponds closely to the Eurostat (2009) estimate of 114,000 French nationals resident in the UK. However, these figures are dramatically short of other recent, though unverifiable, estimates. The number of French nationals in London has been suggested to be as high as 300,000 (*Mail Online* Jan 24th 2010), and based on the French Consulate's estimates, 400,000 (*The Economist* Feb. 24th 2011). This has provoked the notion that London is the 4th largest French city after Paris, Lyon and Marseilles and South Kensington the 21st arrondissement of Paris (Favell, 2006)

The Study

The 18-month, qualitative research project, was based on data derived from 31 semi-structured interviews and one focus group, and explored the life and work experiences of the French highly skilled in London's financial and business sectors, and their families. A snowballing technique was used for the recruitment of participants, with purposive sampling adopted as a method for ensuring a sufficient population of selected key demographic categories: gender, age, family status and length of residence in London. The term 'highly skilled' was defined in terms of the OECD and European Commission/Eurostat framework, namely as those who have *either* successfully completed a tertiary education and/*or* are employed in occupational roles normally requiring such qualifications. The majority of our participants satisfied this definition on both counts.

Aims

Focussing on French highly skilled migrants in London's financial and business sectors, this 18-month exploratory study aimed to:

1. Explore the ways in which the pursuit of economic capital is informed by the generation and utilization of social and cultural capital
2. Examine the role of partners and family in the dynamics of social capital formation
3. Examine their experiences and evaluations of the costs and benefits associated with work and family-life in London, and how these inform decision-making pertaining to settlement and mobility
4. Contribute to our theoretical understanding of the formation of social capital in the trans-local spaces of the contemporary global city
5. Inform our understanding of the dynamics of intra-European mobility amongst the highly skilled, and of its policy implications at local, regional, national and EU levels

Participants

GENDER	Male	Female			
	16	21			
AGE	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
	1	9	20	7	0
MARITAL STATUS	Married	Co-Habiting	Single		
	23	5	9		
PARENTAL STATUS	YES	NO			
	25	12			
WHERE ARE YOUR CHILDREN LIVING?	UK	France	Elsewhere		
	20	2	3		
Rear of Arrival in UK	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010 -
	1	2	15	16	3
Did you travel to the UK with a relative?	Yes	No			
	18	19			
Were you subsequently joined by a relative?	Y	N			
	6	31			
Residential Status - Renting/Buying	R	B			
	16	21			
Prior Educational Level	Diplome	License	Maitrise	PhD	Not Specified
	6	11	16	2	2
Education in UK	Yes	No			
	16	21			

The Migration Process

Our findings indicate the range and diversity of migratory movements from France to London among the highly skilled group - Many of our participants arrived in London through an Inter-Company Transfer (ICT). Here, the logistics of the move were arranged by the company, considerably easing the process of relocation. For those participants on expatriate contracts, in particular, the move was facilitated by a generous relocation package. However, our findings suggest that, in the current economic context, the number of expatriate contracts may be reducing, and employees are encouraged on to local contracts with fewer fringe benefits.
In addition, we also found that many ICTs arrive in Britain on local contracts and thus receive only a minimum amount of financial support with their relocation.

Motivations for migrating to London - The motivations for moving to London are not simply financial but may be associated with career advancement, developing new skills, and exposure to a wider international market. *'If you really wanted to move ahead you had to be in London' (Pierre).* Among our participants there were many who had moved to London on their own, as spontaneous movers, rather than through company transfers. Taking advantage of freedom of mobility within the EU, many of this group had fairly spontaneous and relatively unplanned migrations. These included a range of people, though most had migrated while young and at the start of their professional careers. Among this group we found quite a diverse range of motives for coming to London: Unlike those who had arrived through ICTs, the spontaneous movers often had less clear-cut career trajectories. They associated the move to London with: *'excitement, fun' (Beatrix)*; with the desire to improve their English, *'I wanted to move because I love London… to improve my English' (Jacques).* Some had arrived without any pre-arranged jobs: *'I just arrived. So, I decided on a Monday, on a Friday I was looking for a job in London' (Adèle).* Nonetheless, all had secured professional occupations within a few months of moving.

None of the participants had intended to relocate permanently to London. In fact, most had anticipated the move to be only 'for a few years'. Charles had come to London directly from France on an ex-pat contract and gradually became more settled in the city: *'I came for one year and have now been sixteen years in the UK' (Charles)* Most had stayed longer than expected and now anticipated that they would not return to France until retirement.

Ties and Networks

The enduring importance of friendship and business networks - While our research supports the view that the highly-skilled usually move fairly independently of social networks, our findings also highlight the enduring importance of friendship and business connections. Most participants arrived alone without any locally available network of friends or family in London. But our research also demonstrates how such highly skilled professionals go about building networks from scratch. Most participants were accomplished networkers. *'I'm very good at networking' (Aurélie).* For many building business contacts was something that appeared quite natural. *'It happens so naturally that you don't even think about it' (Bertrand).*

Network opportunities in London - Our findings indicate that there are numerous opportunities for business networking in London. Several people spoke about formal networking. Such events were considered by many as *'good platforms to meet people' (Charles),* where everyone had a 'common objective' to network. In a dynamic business environment such as London, with a lot of occupational mobility, there is a shared interest within the financial sector to continually make contacts. Interestingly, many participants contrasted the open style of networking in London with the more closed and hierarchical networks in France, especially in Paris: '*working for an investment bank here is very different and basically is a much more dynamic environment, much more 'go for it'… the French environment is more defensive and the English environment is more aggressive, much more acquisitive' (Richard).*

The challenging nature of making friends, especially with the English - While business networking was perceived as open and relatively easy in London, making new friends was regarded as something more challenging. *'It is very difficult' and it takes time to make friends, to get to know new people' (Damien).* The distinction between business and friendship

networks was emphasised by many. Work-based networks may not lead to friendships beyond: *'I had very good relations with people that never became friends' (Charles)*

Many participants noted that it was particularly difficult to establish close friendships with English people. Some asserted the 'reserved' nature of the English. Somewhat humorously Agnès suggested that English people may be intimidated to invite French people to their homes for dinner, *'because French people have this image of gastronomy' (Agnès)*

Friendship amongst international migrants - By contrast, most people found it easier to make friends with other migrants, especially work colleagues. '*It's very easy with international people to meet up, and to have a relationship, and even participate to parties or to be invited, and especially mixed couples and people from abroad'. (Bernadette)*

The 'drift' into French networks - Several participants stated that most of their friends were French. However, this is not necessarily a sign of ethnic exclusivity. A number of people remarked that they had tried to create expansive and diverse friendship networks in London but found, over time, that they were drawn to other French people: *'In the beginning I really wanted to be in an English environment so I wasn't going out and looking for the French...over the years I have been socialising more with French people than English' (Valentine)*.

French Associations

French association participation - Many participants had some involvement with French associations in London, though this may reflect our recruitment strategies as many people were identified and contacted through these French institutions. Several people attended French events and frequented associations such as the French Institut. Others were involved in formal networking organisations like the French Chamber of Commerce and the Young French Chamber*: 'The French Chamber of Commerce… that opened quite a lot of doors' (Irène).*

Schooling - Given the proportion of our participants who were parents, the Lycée Charles de Gaulle was unsurprisingly cited frequently as an important association. For parents in general, establishing an understanding of, and making decisions in relation to, schooling in London can be fraught. This is especially true for migrant parents. Several participants chose to send their

children to the Lycée because the system was familiar to them and to the children. Other parents were conscious about future moves, either back to France or to another country, and so felt that the international Lycée system would allow a continuity of education for their children. A few parents had sent their children to local, English primary schools, as a way of improving their English language skills and gaining a familiarity with British culture. However, many decided to switch to the Lycée for secondary education.

Transnational Networks

Ongoing strong links with family in France – Most participants were committed to maintaining substantial and regular links with family, and to some degree friends, in France. This involved a blending of face to face meetings and virtual communication. Weekly and even daily phone calls were not uncommon. *'With the family its calling, not everyday, but every week for sure. I spend hours on the phone – big phone bills' (Beatrix)*

Travelling to France - All our participants visited France regularly. Although none were weekly commuters, most of them travelled to France several times per year. *'For holidays about three or fours times a year. And then I might pop down two weekends. So six or seven times a year' (*Adèle). For most people physical proximity was a huge advantage of living in London.

The speed and convenience of the Eurostar was appreciated by most: 'it takes two hours and 15 minutes on the Eurostar… it almost feels like the same country really' (Bertrand). However, those from the south of France complained of long and more expensive journeys home. *'I have to take some horrible Easy Jet flights to Marseilles. I don't go very often but we Skype and e-mail' (Noemi).* Ease of journey seems to influence frequency of visits.

Weakening ties with friends in France - Despite strong attachments to families, links with friends in France may weaken with prolonged separation. *'I see much less of my French friends than I used to...you have to make a conscious effort to reactivate it' (Sylvie).* Particular and purposeful effort is necessary to keep such relationships intact.

Integration and Identity

Challenging French Enclavism - Most participants both recognised, and were generally critical of, those who chose to enclave

themselves in a veritable 'French Bubble' in London. For most participants, the South Kensington 'enclave' was emblematic of a number of residentially-concentrated populations of French professionals who sought to reproduce, as comprehensively as possible, French lifestyles here in London. '*They try to be more French than the French' (Céline).* Very few showed any positive regard for such expressions of French insularity, and most distanced themselves from this.

Even those who lived in South Kensington, and who may be perceived as typifying such enclavism, disassociated themselves from any suggestion of exclusivity, emphasising instead their diverse connections across the city. Only one participant boldly stated that he was happy to mix only with a French crowd. *'When I am back home with my wife, I don't want to speak English... so the only friends we meet in London are French... we live a French life in London' (Frédéric).* Most participants extolled the virtues of engagement with, and integration in, London life.

The participants expressing a hostility towards such forms of French communitarianism were generally those with a high regard for 'Anglo-Saxon culture' and/or those committed to a political and cultural ethic of engagement as both duty and personal development. *'I refuse to stay only in the French crowd in London because I think when you move to a new country you don't have to stay only with the ex-pat crowd' (Luc).* Some had married, or were in a relationship with, British partners, and claimed a deeper embedding in British life. However, none of the participants had any plans to take British citizenship.

Identity slippage and embeddedness - The data pertaining to the identities of the French highly-skilled were complex. Whilst none of the participants felt British as such, and many recognised on ongoing French identity, most had experienced some 'identity slippage', felt embedded in London, and had experienced some distancing from France as a whole. No one, no matter how long their period of stay in the UK, felt British. However, a surprisingly small proportion of participants declared themselves to have an unmovable sense of 'Frenchness'. Many had experienced some degree of identity slippage. A process of embedding takes place over time, and with this, a certain distantiation from France. '*Being in-between, between two countries, between two cultures, not being really one, not being really the other' (Pierre).*

Connections with the region of family origin remain important on the whole, but most participants declared a degree of detachment from France itself. A substantial minority claimed to have only a nominal sense of attachment to, and identification with, France. In these cases, participants were generally those who expressed a strong internationalist and cosmopolitan identification, had declared an enduring desire to leave France and experience the world, and/or felt a particular appreciation for 'Anglo-Saxon culture'. The French parents who had a British partner simultaneously felt closer to British culture but remained committed to passing on their French identity to their children.

Europe - Europe was rarely seen is a positive source of identification, but was considered useful as an aid to career escalation. Although only a minority of participants reported any substantive sense of feeling European, in identity terms, all participants recognised the practical utility of the freedoms of mobility brought by the European project of labour market integration for career escalation. Many also pointed to the virtues of intra-European cultural exchange as an enriching aspect of individual and national life, but most were sceptical of the value of a project of further political integration.

London as a Place to Live and Work

London was understood, and valued, as simultaneously international and British – London's most important *British* quality was also that which made it so international in its character, namely its 'Anglo-Saxon' orientation towards individualism, and its fundamental tolerance of the consequences of individualism in both life and work. Most participants recognised the uniqueness of London's character both nationally and globally, and that this owed much to the truly international nature of its demographic composition. It must be said however, that many of our participants lived and worked in particularly internationally-orientated contexts.

London as libertarian and cosmopolitan - London was highly prised for its libertarianism. Many pointed to the personal freedoms that this brought, particularly for women. All participants pointed to, and greatly appreciated, the 'astonishing cosmopolitanism' of London, and many contrasted this to Paris's more segregationist multi-culturalism. '*I like the fact that in the street there are about seventeen different nationalities' (Charles).* Such cosmopolitanism was viewed by all as enriching life, and as a veritable model for the good society.

London offers a quality of life that Paris cannot - London was highly regarded by all for its green space, and by most, for its beauty. '*Especially in the spring, London is such a beautiful city: trees everywhere, flowers everywhere. Its definitely not the case in Paris' (Valérie).* Whilst Paris was recognised for its architectural qualities, it was not considered by most participants to provide as many life-enhancing amenities as London. London was particularly enjoyed for the extent and variety of its cultural attractions, particularly museums and galleries, and for its geographical proximity to France.

London is expensive - London was universally considered expensive, particularly in terms of its housing, and limited by an inefficient metropolitan transportation system, and congestion. It was also judged by most to be inherently stressful.

Changing residential choices - The residential patterns of the French in London have been concentrated in particular areas of central west and south west London. This has largely been due to the proximity of French schools, the quality of housing and neighbourhoods, and the desire to be close to work and international transport. This residential concentration has resulted in the production of areas that are notably French in character. But this is now changing. A greater distribution of French highly-skilled are choosing to live outside these areas, and many made play of this decision as a sign of their commitment to 'integration'. '*We chose this area for work and because it was not too French' (Agnès).* However, most of the parents had chosen to place their children in French schools and as such continued to be drawn to French residential neighbourhoods to limit travelling times for their children.

London as career escalator - Without exception London was perceived as a destination for career escalation. London, and to some degree the UK as a whole, were seen as markedly meritocratic. Employment opportunities were perceived as being open to all those with a capacity to demonstrate potential. London's labour market is deemed unfettered by the kind of past-orientated credentialism seen as characteristic of the French model. *"Here, in terms of work, its more about what you can do, whereas in France its what diploma you have" (Valentine).* Promotion was perceived as similarly open, and unencumbered by restrictions of age or tenurenship.

Business culture as national culture - Business culture was seen as largely pragmatic and outcome-driven in London (and more flexible, efficient and effective for it), in contrast to the more theoretical and analytical approach of the French. Though many suggested that the length of the working week could be long, many pointed to the absence of French-style, artificially-extended, working days, driven by the need to impress managers. *"You don't have to overdo things. Once it's done it's done. You don't have to pretend you're staying for any reason" (Pierre)*

Politeness at work - Though many participants referred to the tendency for the British in business to be less direct and frank about their true estimations of one another's performance and value (and some pointed even to a 'two-faced' quality to this), the 'politeness' of working life in London was referred to positively by most. This was contrasted by many to the direct, and in some cases aggressive, nature of the working relationships in France. *"If I've got something to say I will say it, and that for me is typically French" (Adèle)*

Future Mobilities

Future Uncertainties - Future migration plans were, for the vast majority of the participants, remarkably unclear. *'We Stopped Making Plans' (Chantal).* Many expressed a distinct sense of indeterminacy about their futures, with some extolling the virtues of such uncertainty. 'Keeping one's options open' to opportunity and change was a striking feature of the data.

The Primacy of Career - Career opportunities were most commonly cited as the prime reason for either staying in the UK, or leaving. In line with pre-migration expectations, working in London had enabled all of our participants to achieve career escalation, and securing further consolidation of this progress was for most, the priority. *"As long as I can make a living, a decent living, and my kids are happy, if I have to move I will move. If I think the opportunity is better somewhere else, I will move to this other part of the world" (Odile).* There was a near universal assertion that in London, one was working in *the* prime location for career development in the fields of business and finance, and that all future migration options would have to be considered in this context

The Importance of non-economic variables - Though career was most commonly cited as the prime determinant of future migration decisions, other factors were given great importance. The interests of children (and especially their education), partners, and a range of quality of life variables, were often cited. *"It's not just a*

personal project"! (Charles). Future potential migration decisions were accounted for as a collective process.

Settlement, attachment and accumulation -
Future mobility options were for most participants framed by a recognition that time spent in London brought with it important forms of attachment, investment and settlement. *"There's more at stake I suppose" (Adèle).* London was universally valued as a place to live and work. In terms of life, all participants expressed their appreciation of unprecedented levels of freedom, cosmopolitanism, green space and accessible cultural attractions. A number of participants had also established relationships with, or married, British partners. In terms of work, most participants were aware that future migration carried with it the potential to disrupt, and devalue, the career investments made in London. Accumulation is often best served by staying put!

France as a lifestyle, rather than a career, destination -
There was a wide variety of responses to the question of a return to France. Very few had any immediate plans to return, and those who did, had specific employment arrangements in place. The overwhelming majority considered the French economy and labour market to be obstructive to re-entry, and even where a job could have been found, career progression was anticipated to be difficult. Many expressed outright opposition to what they considered to be the hierarchical, closed and nepotistic nature of French business. *"If I had to work in France, it would be an absolute disaster. Sorry, I mean by that it would be extremely difficult...also to read the ways. How to operate...everything is to learn new codes all over again after twenty years abroad" (Pierre).* Those who conceded the possibility of a return to France were, in the overwhelming majority of cases, clear that this would only be as a consequence of family responsibilities or retirement. *"To go back to France would mean having to start again" (Sylvie)* –

Europe as a migration destination -
Europe (beyond the UK and France) was regarded in broadly positive terms by many participants as a potential migration destination, with particular value being placed on proximity to home and the ease of movement. Demographic diversity, quality of life and cultural belonging were also cited in favour of Europe. However, most participants pointed to a range of practical obstacles to migration to a European country. Language barriers, the effects of the economic downturn and restrictive labour markets were all cited. Many participants pointed to the negative implications of ongoing a-symmetry in the social welfare provisions of different European countries. Switzerland was commonly referred to as a desirable migration destination.

Migration beyond Europe -
Approximately one third of participants pointed to the possibility of future migration beyond Europe, with the U.S, Asia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand specified. For those prioritising career opportunities in the business and financial sectors, New York, Hong Kong and Singapore predominated, as these offered potential to match or out-do London in terms of career escalation. Long-haul destinations were also valued by some as offering new life enhancing experiences, at least for the short-term. However, many also cited: distance from Europe, family dislocation, cultural dissonance, and visa restrictions as limitations of these destinations. For those concerned to maintain links with home, these limitations were such that they would only consider such locations for short periods, and where the career opportunity was exceptional. The prevalence of the use of the English or French languages was commonly referred to as important in the decision to migrate beyond Europe. *"I would be happy to go to Asia maybe for a bit...it would depend on how long and I guess I could pretty much go anywhere in the world for a couple of years because a couple of years goes quickly and you can adapt very easily" (Claudine)*

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