

**TRANSIENT WORKING LIVES:
MIGRANT WOMEN'S EVERYDAY POLITICS IN
LONDON'S HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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Summary

Migrant women constitute a significant part of the workforce in hotels and restaurants in London. They often earn poor wages for long, hard working hours, and suffer harassment and bullying by managers. Low levels of unionisation, high labour turnover, increasing use of agency work and the cultural diversity of the workforce, all weaken the bargaining power of hospitality workers. The industrial relations literature often considers migrants 'too vulnerable' for engagement in trade unions, because of their temporary and precarious status. Nonetheless, labour and civil society bodies have recently launched campaigns to organise the industry.

This thesis explores the possibilities for migrant hospitality workers to develop forms of resistance and political engagement to improve their working lives. Drawing on migrants' own perspectives, their embodied experiences at work and their experiences of politicisation, the research develops a critique of current forms of incorporation of migrants and 'atypical' workers by labour and civic institutions. The research methods draw from the traditions of workplace and feminist ethnography, involving two phases of participant observation in temporary catering jobs and in a trade union campaign across some hotels in London. In-depth interviews were conducted with the activists and the migrants involved in the participatory study.

By bringing together transnationalism and labour process studies my research develops an understanding of migrant labour that re-evaluates the social and political potential of migrants' everyday relationships in, across and beyond their workplaces. It shows that, although increasing casualisation of employment limits workers' organisational resources, growing diversity and mobility also prompt alternative modes of resistance to improve the lives of transient workers. The challenges this research poses for unions include overcoming the persisting 'masculine politics' of organising models, expanding unions' coalitions beyond an 'industry-based' strategy, and engaging directly with migrants' communities to promote self-organising through alternative educational tools.

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Introduction

This study is an ethnography of working and living conditions of low-paid migrant women in the hospitality industry in London. It explores how processes of transnationalisation impact on precarious migrants and investigates possibilities for developing forms of political engagement that improve their working lives. More specifically, the thesis focuses on how processes of political subjectivation emerge among non-citizens *despite and through* their temporary and mobile status.

The UK Hospitality Industry

Migrant labour has historically been a significant component of the hotels and restaurants workforce, especially in London. According to data from the Labour Force Survey for April-June 2006 there were about 250,000 migrants employed in the hospitality sector in the UK. In 2009 the LFS reports that 22 % of the workforce in the sector was born overseas (LFS 2007-2009).

Many of these migrant workers earn very low wages in exchange for arduous work and long working hours. They are often employed on a casual basis, they are rarely unionised, suffer harassment and bullying by managers, travel long distances between work shifts and are subject to unpaid overwork and wage withdrawals (Datta et al. 2007, Dutton et al. 2008, Evans et al. 2005, TUC 2007, Wills et al. 2009a). The hospitality sector experiences high levels of *labour turnover* and an increasing use of *subcontracting* for recruitment to third party agencies (McDowell et al. 2008a, TUC 2007, 2008). Official reports acknowledge how jobs within the sector are flexible in nature and commonly attract, beside workers from overseas, students and women wishing to work on a part-time basis. According to People 1st (2010b), a state-funded agency tracking main patterns in the industry, 59% of the UK's hospitality workforce are women.

The urgency of empowering the poorly paid and mistreated migrant workers employed in the sector in order to improve their working conditions is clear in itself. It is also emblematic of a broader challenge facing trade unions in Britain. The hotel industry is the centre of London's vast precarious and contingent labour market. For many this in itself makes the hotel labour force virtually beyond trade union organisation. Others see it as a major challenge and one that is most compelling when the phenomenon of migrant labour exploitation is positioned within the context of overall processes of casualisation and degradation of pay and working conditions in the 'invisible' yet critical sectors of the capital's service economy.

In discussing these issues most of the UK literature in the field of labour studies and industrial relations tends to conflate *migrant* with *vulnerable work* as the outcome of forms of 'non-standard' employment, such as agency and temporary work. The growth of migrant *agency labour* is considered constituting a particular impediment to traditional forms of workplace unionism since temporary and contract workers are often deemed too vulnerable for, or even lacking interest in, engagement in trade unions and other forms of collective organisation for better conditions (LC and Unite 2009, McKay 2008a, Wills 2005). A broader concern is that contractual fragmentation and cultural differentiation within the hospitality workforce, triggered by increasing transnational labour migration, further constrains workers' bargaining power (Matthews and Ruhs 2007, McDowell et al 2007). Nonetheless, some attempts have recently been made in London to organise those considered to be among the most 'unorganisable' workers, through campaigns involving labour and other civil society bodies (Healy et al. 2004, Holgate 2009a, Holgate and Wills 2007, Wills 2005).

Research Issues

It is apparent that the hospitality industry in London presents a combination of factors that make this sector particularly interesting in studying the effects that transnational migration exercises on the meaning and practice of politics in this sector. This concerns the ways in which people 'on the move' deal with their unpredictable lives and the temporary and precarious nature of their jobs. It also considers the everyday forms of resistance that takes place in and across their workplaces as well as more formalised forms of political engagement

In attempting to break away from established stereotypes the research asks: How do migrants employed in the hospitality sector in London resist their precarious conditions *despite* and

through their highly mobile, temporary and ‘vulnerable’ status? Is it possible to see this as a form of *political engagement*? In this same vein, the research examines the possibility of re-thinking labour turnover and mobility as terrains of struggle, away from victimising notions of migrant workers as intrinsically vulnerable and subject to hyper-exploitation. How do migrants in their everyday lives in and outside their workplaces challenge the ways in which institutions of the labour movement in the UK have traditionally operated? How do they challenge the ways in which they have been understood and ‘othered’ from the ‘indigenous’ workforce?

Taken together these issues relate to questions of class composition and mobilisation. In the context of London we need to re-examine the emerging forms of collaboration between labour unions and other community-based organisations in civil society promoting migrants’ and labour rights from a different starting point: one based on the *migrants’ own experiences of politicisation*. In this it is important to consider how the complex lives, *intersecting identities* and social relationalities of migrant people disrupt established notions of politics. This will enable us to envisage new formats of engagement, strategic alliances and collective action, independently from the transiency and contingency of migrants’ status.

Drawing across disciplines as diverse as labour studies, political economy, human geography, anthropology, cultural approaches to transnational migration and social theory, the ambition of this research has been to investigate simultaneously *both* the singular everyday acts of resistance of migrant workers in London and the institutional transformations triggered by collective processes of migrants’ organising.

The two main ‘fields’ of this ethnography reflect *this double dimension*. On the one hand the ethnographic observation focused on the relatively conventional forms of politicisation of (mainly women) migrants participating in a union and community organising campaign. The union T&G UNITE worked together with a broad civil society organisation called London Citizens in 2008 in some hotels in Central London to improve terms and conditions for all workers in the industry. On the other hand the fieldwork engaged with the everyday resistance at work of migrants casually employed in the hospitality sector, through covert participant observation, working myself as an agency waitress across some hotels and catering jobs in the capital.

The overall methodological approach affirmed by this study drew from Burawoy’s participant observation and ‘extended case method’ (Burawoy 1998, Burawoy et al. 2000) as well as from the

precious insights of feminist ethnographic and qualitative research (Mies 1991, Ackers et al. 1991, Smith 1987). It involved the continuous questioning and re-formulation of the categories that formed the foundation of this research project *in conversation with* the participants, by testing the *gap* between the theoretical concepts used and the reality of migrants' lives emerging from the field. Recent theorisations of 'intersectionality' as developed and applied by feminist scholars of work, migration and diaspora (Brah 1996, Erel 2009, McDowell 2008a, Nash 2008) provided the key epistemological lenses to explore the issue of migrant subjectivities at work and the ways they negotiate with the multiple constraints to their precarious working lives.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 offers a theoretical introduction illustrating various standpoints in the literature that attempt to understand the position of migrants amidst a complex network of regulatory institutions, labour market dynamics, social constructions and, not least, the agency of migrants themselves. The chapter also assesses the recent literature on the topic of migrants' organising by trade union and community organisations as a critical sphere of migrants' political engagement. Recent experiments of migrant workers organising in the UK and the US led to a focus on the debate that has developed about the (relatively successful) transfer of organising strategies across the Atlantic. The advantages of bringing together labour and transnationalism studies to uncover the social and political significance of migrants' mobility practices are explored, eventually returning to the potential of migrants' everyday forms of resistance in the workplace.

In *Chapter 2* the methodological framework adopted in the research is explained through the narration of my embodied journey across the field of hospitality in the capital, with particular attention to the epistemological implications and the ethical issues involved in the research. It highlights the subjective and embodied positionality of the researcher in the field, a 'privileged migrant' herself faced with the task of mapping, analysing and *engaging with* the complex network of institutions, political cultures, interests and powers around migration and labour in the metropolis.

In *Chapter 3* the hospitality sector in London is explored, following the accounts of the union officers, the organisers and the workers in the field. It starts with the descriptions of the structural features of the hotel industry to then move to the workers' and organisers' own

perceptions of the main issues at work. This chapter aims to describe the *labour and social composition* of such a highly transnationalised sector as hospitality.

Chapter 4 is the heart of the thesis. It investigates *the subjective experiences of politicisation* of the migrant women involved in the ‘hotel workers campaign’ and the potential and constraints of their active involvement as relatively temporary, precarious or established migrant workers. The chapter explores the forms in which existing constraints are embedded in relatively traditional, yet transforming, strategies of labour and community organising. It also highlights the major challenges for trade unions organising in the sector.

Chapter 5 offers an alternative perspective to help understand political subjectivation and resistance in the context of mobile and temporary labour through the everyday acts and desire for mobility, sociality and relationality of migrants in the sector to oppose the hard conditions of their work.

Chapter 6 draws the conclusion of this journey throughout the field of hospitality in London, both outlining the theoretical implications of the research and providing practical indications to expand migrant workers’ rights. Bringing together in particular *critical migration studies* and *labour process theory* my research develops a theoretical framework that goes beyond the sociological understanding of labour and migration endorsed by mainstream industrial relations and migration studies and re-evaluates the social and political potential of *migrants’ everyday experiences* in and across their *transient workplaces*.

A few days before completion of this work, migrants activists’ mailing lists diffused the news that a group of about seventy migrants among the cleaning and other ancillary staff of a well-known hospital in central London ‘disappeared’ before they were due to start their work shift. The hospital in question was the same one I was sent by one of the agencies I registered with during the period of my participant observation in catering jobs. The hypothesis shared by the activists was that the migrants had been targeted by a raid of the UK Border Agency. The raids organised by the government against ‘illegal working’ appear to be multiplying and receiving increasing legitimacy in the present context of economic recession, unemployment and growing racism among workers. It might be the case that some of the ‘disappeared’ migrants fled before the border police would arrest and deport them indirectly helping their employers withholding migrants’ unpaid wages. Certainly this episode helps understand how migrants’ *active involvement* in labour and community

organising cannot but strengthen solidarity among the workers and empower those who experience in person the harsh consequences of the conflicting processes of *informalisation* and *increasing regulation* of work and migration. This paradoxical interaction involves indeed, often violent, forms of political control of the mobility of labour. Yet, only by recognising the potential and irreducibility of migrants' subjective experience of work it is possible to open up processes of collective organising among migrants and precarious workers more generally.

The interdisciplinary approach developed through my thesis attempts to develop a more nuanced response to the complex questions of social justice that are generated by contemporary patterns of labour migration. My research aspires to contribute to the improvement of migrants' working lives through generating innovative ideas and concrete suggestions to promote their active participation in organising efforts and the expansion of the hybrid political coalitions that are emerging amidst the contradictory terrain of transnational mobility.

CHAPTER ONE

Situated Transnationalism: precarity, transiency and migrants' politics

Migrants, whether relatively mobile or settled, constitute a large majority of the workers in the lowest paid sectors of the labour market. They are often employed under temporary and precarious conditions in many countries across the world, including the UK. In order to penetrate the changing nature of the workforce in a sector with high employment of migrants such as the hospitality industry in London and understand the various forms of resistance and political engagement undertaken by migrant low-paid service workers, the thesis first needs to identify the *changing cartographies* of economic restructuring, labour markets and migration reforms through which migrants move. Bringing together labour studies and transnationalism in particular allows for a different understanding of migrants' *political agency*, directly challenging traditional assumptions persisting among trade unions about migrant workers either as competitors of the 'indigenous' working classes or as mere victims of capitalist restructuring. Trade unions are indeed in the process of re-thinking - together with other civil society institutions - some of their structures and practices as they confront the changing and complex *composition of labour* in those urban spaces where migrants have become a key protagonist of social transformation. What are the alternative conceptual tools to mainstream labour studies developed within critical approaches to migration that help explain new forms of political engagement by precarious and highly mobile subjects? What are the key sites and terrains where migrants express their subjectivity and everyday forms of resistance? What happen when cultural analyses of migrants' transnationalism and their 'mobility practices' seek to incorporate the study of workers' resistance within the labour process?

1.1 The point of view of industrial sociology on migration and migrants' political engagement

1.1.1 Migrant labour and the flexibilisation of work

Since the early research conducted by sociologists and geographers on the transformations occurring in 'global cities' such as London and New York during the 1980s and 1990s, migrant labour has been assigned a central role within the wider processes of labour market restructuring and in the social and spatial re-composition of the urban landscapes (Sassen 1989, 1991, 2001).

Migration has been described as a crucial component in the process of ‘institutionalisation of casual labour’ in the centres of capitalist development of the North (Sassen 2001: 324). Starting from the general observation that jobs in personal service and in industries such as catering and tourism were directly generated by major growth sectors, this strand of research highlighted in particular that migrants and members of ethnic minorities, who perform degrading and ‘backwards’ jobs, provided the low-wage labour essential to support the expanding service sector of the economy (including the highly specialised services of these financial centres and the high income life-style of those employed in them) (Sassen 1992).

The contradictory position of immigrants in the reshaping social geographies of large cities lay therefore in the fact that a large proportion of the new protagonist of the ‘post Fordist economy’ were incorporated in ways that rendered them invisible, as flexibilised, casual and undervalued service workers. ‘Migrants and women’ predominant in low-skilled, poorly paid hospitality jobs such as hotel and catering¹ were depicted in these accounts as ‘the systemic equivalent of the offshore proletariat’ (ibid. 322). One of the main arguments of Sassen (2001) was that it was not immigration itself ‘causing informalization’. Rather, the opportunities taken by migrants and women to do part-time and temporary jobs in those low regarded sectors of the urban economy were directly induced by structural trends in advanced capitalist countries (ibid. 291).

¹ At the time of the second edition of Sassen’s ‘Global Cities’ (2001) 20% of hotel and catering jobs in London were on temporary contracts, according to the former Greater London Council and Pay Unit. It was also highlighted that ‘the tourist and catering industries had used temporary work permits to recruit workers mostly from non-Commonwealth countries, including Turkey, Spain, Greece, the Philippines, and Colombia. They were favoured over Commonwealth citizens exactly when restriction on immigration laws were introduced for the latter and when, until 1979, temporary work permit were no longer issued. These workers had particularly vulnerable status because they lacked the right to settle (Sassen 2001: 309, note 22).

Similarly, recent research specifically conducted in the hospitality sector in London insisted on the relevance of global/local economic restructuring and regulatory mechanisms shaping the new configurations of transnational labour (McDowell et al. 2008a).

1.1.2 The gendered, racialised and contingent composition of the hospitality industry in London

The framework adopted in a recent qualitative investigation by social geographers into changes in low-paid jobs performed by migrants in London (including care and domestic work, cleaning and hospitality) (Wills et al. 2009a) explains how changes in the supply of labour have been directly induced by *neo-liberal state-managed* reforms and labour market deregulation. These facilitated the spread of *work subcontracting*, while employers' changing 'hiring queues' also had an impact on the new forms of division of labour in the capital. Through the notion of London's 'migrant division of labour' (Spence 2005, Wills et al. 2009a) these authors illuminate the interaction of various factors including new migration patterns into the city, labour market (de-)regulation and migration legislations and employers' hiring preferences.

Changing recruitment practices regarding migrant workers are deemed to be the outcome of social constructions about *racialised, ethnicised* and *gendered* bodies as appropriate for certain jobs, *reinforced* by the production of the differential juridical statuses for various categories of non-citizens (Erel 2009, Flynn 2005, McDowell 2008a, 2009, Morris 2002). The East European Enlargement and the opening up of the UK labour market to 'A8 workers' in 2004 had a major influence on employers' recruitment (Anderson et al. 2006), leading to a new segmentation among the migrant workforce, especially in sectors such as hospitality (Matthews and Ruhs 2007, McDowell et al., 2007). In this regard UK geographical research on migration increasingly draws from feminist notions of 'intersectionality' to illustrate the simultaneous and non-cumulative interaction along temporal and spatial lines of different economic, social and cultural axes of exclusion and differentiation shaping and constraining workers' lives and identities (Mc Call 2005, McDowell 2008).

Other research has shown how jobs in hotels, from waiting on tables to housekeeping, are highly 'feminised', with a disproportionate number of women employed in them (People 1st 2006, 2010a). They also reflect gendered roles, for example 'interactive' or 'domestic' occupations considered 'women's work' (Adib and Guerrier 2003). Sometimes these gender constructions are

reflected in the system of migration regulation, whereby ‘special work permits’ for certain groups of migrants are introduced for sectors with labour shortages, such as in domestic and care work (see Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2000, Kofman et al. 2000).

Scholars in this field found also a particular *intersection between migrant and temporary work*, concluding that the growth of agency work in service jobs in London was directly related to the parallel phenomenon of increasing transnational migration into the city (McDowell et al. 2007, 2008a). Indeed in the EU and in the UK there is evidence of an *effective correlation* between migrants’ labour and ‘non-standard’ and temporary forms of employment. In Britain in 2006 ‘non-national’ workers represented 25% of temporary agency workers (as compared to 14% of temporary workers as a whole and 5% of permanent workers) (Vosko 2010)². According to the 2009 Labour Force Survey, temporary employment was twice as common among migrant workers than the rest of the workforce (LFS 2007-2009)³. And still these may be an underestimation considering the LFS’ limited access to agency workers (Barber, 2008) and the inherent difficulty in recording the actual number of employees of third party agencies (Kalleberg 2000, McDowell et al. 2008a).⁴

The link between migrant and temporary or casual labour is a common feature also in US-based research emphasising how *social transitoriness* and *legal vulnerability* are the typical characteristics of migrants, almost making them a ‘tool’ for the flexibilisation of overall employment relationships (Ciscel et al. 2003, Smith and Winders 2008). These ethnographies of transnational labour and broader transformations of work highlighted the extreme *flexibility* of migrants’ *labouring bodies* and how the patterns of their recruitment, combined with their political

² In the UK the figures are particularly significant as compared to statistics at the EU level (in the EU 15) where the participation of ‘non-nationals’ among all temporary agency workers in 2006 was 11%, as opposed to 5% of permanent workers and 7% of all temporary workers (Vosko 2010: 146).

³ This despite the same research showing that migrants’ employment in agency work has actually dropped in the last year of recession between 2007 and 2009, contrary to fixed-term and part-time jobs which have increased among migrants (Cam 2010: 21).

⁴ Beside the LFS, the ‘Gangmasters Licensing Authority’ keeps track of the numbers of migrant agency workers. According to this source, only 25% of the 180,000 or so agency workers recorded by this Authority are UK-born. Considering that the Gangmasters Authority gives a quite underestimation (as it covers only a small number of sectors such as farming and food processing), Rogers et al. (2009) conclude that migrants are disproportionately represented in non-standard forms of employment, i.e. part-time, temporary and agency work, which are heavily exposed to a downturn.

and civic *invisibility*, constitute the marks of the highly exploitative practices of which they are victim. Migrants are depicted as manifesting ‘...*the ultimate social flexibility* that employers seek to evoke: workers who have no relevant past or indeed, legitimate expectations of the future’ (Ciscel et al. 2003: 337). Even those who have participated in union activism in their countries of origin are considered unlikely to engage and improve their conditions in the new system of employment (*ibid.*)⁵.

What kind of image consequently emerges from these accounts of transnational labour migration? What sorts of understandings of migrants’ agency are implied in approaches emphasising their temporary and vulnerable status?

Although it is significant that they describe the specific vulnerability of ‘new migrants’, for example on the grounds of greater *dependency on their employer*, this perspective risks *naturalising* migrants’ willingness to engage in more irregular, insecure and exploitative jobs. Similarly migrants’ *supposed hostility to political engagement* is mechanically deduced from their position in *the labour market*.

Despite the awareness of the vulnerability of workforces in sectors with high level of migrant labour employment, more recently, researchers within UK and US industrial sociology attempted to rehabilitate migrant labour away from an understanding of it as mere leverage of degradation and casualisation of overall working conditions. On the contrary they pointed to the advantages of organising migrant workers in the low-paid sector of the service economy where they are mostly employed. Some scholars even saw migrant labour as a new resource to promote trade union renewal and its re-connection to the broader ‘community’ (Fine 2006, Milkman et al. 2010, Holgate 2009a, Wills 2001, Wills and Simms 2004).

⁵ Similarly Smith and Winders (2008) described the working conditions of new Latino informal labourers against the background of structural changes in the agricultural sector in the US South, emphasising the adaptable, flexible and disposable character of their bodies as the key *site* of current forms of economic valorisation. See also Harvey (2000) on the body as a direct site of capital’s accumulation strategy

1.1.3 Trade unions and community organisations rediscover migrant labour

Since the early 1990s in Britain (as well as across most of the Anglophone world, including the United States, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand; and more recently in Germany⁶), new union organising strategies have been developed as part of the attempt to reverse the overall downward pattern of trade union membership⁷, with particular focus on *the involvement of migrant workers* (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998, Heery and Simms 2008, Milkman et al 2010). Migrants are indeed deemed to be a primary component of the ‘non-traditional’ workforce and ‘secondary labour market group’ in the (growing) ‘greenfield sites’ of the economy with a traditionally lower level of unionisation, which union organising aims to tackle (Heery et al. 2000: 50). The *broadening of the unions’ constituency* by switching the focus to the organisation of ‘women, the young, members of ethnic minorities [and] workers on non-standard contracts’ has been a core element of recent union organising strategies (Heery et al. 2000, Wills and Simms 2004).⁸

Indeed, union organising in the North American context also developed thanks to the upsurge of *struggles by migrant workers* in some cities. As a consequence an increasing optimism about migrants’ successful integration into the labour movement, working as a motor of ‘union renewal’, started to spread across the Atlantic (Healy et al. 2004, Holgate 2009a, Fantasia and Voss 2004, Milkman 2000). Organising experiments in the US showed that precisely those sectors

⁶ For one among the first publications around the question of union renewal following the organising model in Germany see Hälker and Vellay (2007)

⁷ In 2009, only 2.6 million (15.1 per cent of) private sector employees in UK were union members. According to the annual ‘National Statistics Report’ by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS 2010), until the last quarter of 2009, the proportion of people in employment who are trade union members (i.e. union density) in the UK was unchanged at 27.4 per cent in 2009 compared with 2008. However these steady levels are largely due to trade union membership falling at broadly the same rate as total employment over these two years. Indeed, trade union membership figures for UK employees fell by 2.4 per cent to 6.7 million compared with 2008. While membership for those in employment, fell by 2.3 per cent in the same period, union density among female employees rose by 0.2 percentage points to 29.5 per cent in 2009.

⁸ The organising model originally developed in the US as a broad renewal of union purpose rather than as involving mere recruitment strategies. It had a particular emphasis on the development of ‘community support’ for unionisation campaigns, expanding alliances *beyond the workplace* in the broader community and in political and consumer organisations (Heery et al. 2000: 40) ‘Organizing’ was primary identified in contrast to the “servicing model”: its main objective is to organise workers so that they are ‘empowered to define and pursue their own interests through the medium of collective organisations’ instead of a situation where unions ‘deliver’ collective and individual services to their members (Blyton and Turnbull 1998, Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998)

normally considered as the most difficult to unionise (such as cleaning, personal services, retail, distribution *and hospitality*) could disclose strategic advantages, including their *migrant composition*.

In particular the work of Ruth Milkman performed an important inversion in perspective from the ways in which trade union literature traditionally viewed migrant workers. Milkman (2000, 2006) proved the wrongness of the assumption that the ongoing process of *de-unionisation* and *deterioration of working conditions* in the US as much as in Europe was to be blamed on the 'new' precarious workers and immigrants. The recent history of labour organising in the service sector in Southern California, including the successful 'Justice for Janitors' campaigns, demonstrated on the contrary how immigrant service workers could emerge as the unlikely leaders in the battle for workers' rights. In the case of Los Angeles there are many factors explaining why migrant workers were particularly keen to organise, including the fact of coming from countries with strong traditions of labour organisation and political struggles, with Latino workers in particular showing a more 'group-oriented' mentality than their North American co-workers (Milkman 2008). There were also features of the *industrial sectors* where migrants were mostly employed that contributed to the success of campaigns engaging migrant workers on the ground.

1.1.4 The specifics of service industries and subcontracting for organising migrants

In the US context, the work of Beverly Silver (2003) particularly contributed to uncovering the points of strength that could transform 'weak sectors' with high rates of migrant labour into promising sites of union organising and 'living wage campaigns'. First of all the 'place-bound' nature of services such as cleaning, catering and hospitality, increases the possibility of labour organisation: the fact that the producer services complex cannot respond to labour unrest simply with geographical mobility (what Silver calls the 'spatial fix') introduces an element of dependency on the provision and productivity of labour *on site*. This is an element typical of the service sector across countries, as also emphasised by recent comparative research between the US and the UK in hotels and housekeeping jobs (Vanselow et al. 2009). However, the 'immobility of capital' in certain industries does not by itself explain the reasons for the emergence of new waves of labour unrest. Partly bound up with the impossibility of relocating these kinds of industries elsewhere, the 'community-based associational power' originally developed in the course of living wage campaigns in cities like Baltimore (Silver 2003) constituted a further positive factor supporting

migrant workers' organisation. It essentially means *building coalitions within the local community* in support of migrant service workers, that is, involving social actors differently interested in the wellbeing of the workers as members of their neighbourhood⁹.

Also in the UK the literature interprets the passage to 'community organising' as a response to the specific problems of *turnover* and the high degree of *contingency* of workers employed in service jobs (an outcome of the documented evidences of 'subcontracting by stealth' in London's cleaning services and hotels) (Evans et al. 2007). Since the practice of *subcontracting* disperses workers throughout different worksites under multiple employers, workplace-based organising becomes difficult. Instead, the associational power built with the wider community allows the campaigns to target not the immediate, visible employers, e.g. the subcontracted cleaning companies, but the real building owners and business tenants through 'in your face' street protests (see Waldinger et al. 1998, Bronfenbrenner et. al 1998). The objective of these parades directed at the buildings of the company's owner is in fact *to make visible* and *denounce politically* the use by these companies of subcontracting as a strategy to avoid unions taking on their workforce (Silver 2003: 110).

It is therefore apparent that the new labour geographies of neo-liberalism, while determining the decline of trade union power, also create new opportunities for campaigns to be shaped at different geographical levels, with community-based organisations employing the language of moral authority and political campaigning to promote the rights of disempowered groups such as migrants (Aguiar and Herod 2006). The notion of 'reciprocal community unionism' (Will and Simms 2004) highlights the possibility for the emergence of forms of *coalitions* where unions can work '*with communities rather than on their behalf*' and establishing a process of *mutual learning* between different organisations' expertise (e.g. from collective bargaining to direct action) (Holgate 2009a: 56).

⁹ Among the national networks of local coalitions in the US particularly appreciated in the UK literature and leading to similar experiments in Britain there are: 'The Industrial Area Foundation' (with roots among faith groups), from which the main CSO involved in the present research drew particular inspiration, the 'Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now' (based in low-income communities) and the 'Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy' tackling matters such as employment opportunities for black workers and support for temporary staff (Wills and Simms 2004: 67- 68; see also Fine 2000).

In the US context, the fact that unions acknowledge and support, together with community groups and NGOs, issues *particularly relevant to migrants* (e.g. legalisation, growing hostility and racism against migrants after 9/11, immigration restrictions) and the reciprocal opening of ‘workers’ centres’ and the union movement, are considered key in fostering migrants’ engagement (Gordon 2005, Milkman et al. 2010, Osuji 2010)¹⁰. Research has shown how migrant workers have been an integral part in the development of these grassroots organisations and pointed to the need to rethink their relationship with traditional labour movement institutions in more dynamic terms in order to overcome the *tensions* that still persist between them (Fine 2005, 2007). These developments in the US were triggered in particular by the migrants’ mobilisation in 2006, which saw a massive *presence* of both documented and undocumented migrants in the streets of cities like Los Angeles and Chicago reclaiming their rights to work and live in the country. This favoured the creation of new spaces of *politicisation* and the progressive opening up of trade unions and CSOs¹¹ towards migrants (De Genova 2009, Milkman 2008).

1.1.5 Limitations to migrants’ political engagement in the UK: migrants as ‘vulnerable workers’

In the UK the situation appears *less fluid* as unions and other organisations seem to be more reticent towards opening up their relatively blocked structures to the changes brought about by new migration and the restructuring of the labour market. On the one hand, as regards organising strategies in general, there are major constraints holding back the successful ‘transfer’ of this model from the US to the UK. These are deemed to include the difficulty of organising a ‘flexible workforce’ with highly individualised employment relationships; the failure to embed unionising campaigns into wider community mobilisation; and the general tendency to favour recruitment pure and simple rather than building sustainable workplace organisations (Heery and Simms 2008). On

¹⁰ Recent participatory research on the ‘LA model’ of organising low-paid migrant workers identified the potential in the growing collaboration between ‘workers’ centres’ (created to support and provide *advocacy*, especially to undocumented migrants) *and* labour unions adopting similar strategies to fight low wages and poor conditions in the most exploitative sectors (Milkman et al. 2010).

¹¹ CSO stands for Civil Society Organization

the other hand, as regards the *organisation of migrant workers* specifically, the approach of British trade unions appears to be imbued with traditional views emphasising migrants' *ethnic differences vis-à-vis* the indigenous workforce. Since at least the 1970s the issue of migrant labour has been discussed in the UK within the framework of 'race relations discourse', and *the incorporation of 'ethnic minorities'* into the trade unions. The use of 'like with like' recruitment, replacing falling membership, has been emphasised as the solution to assure *better representation* and involve more 'Black Minority Ethnic' (BME) workers in union activity through increasing the numbers of BME officials (Holgate 2004: 18)¹².

The major limitation of these approaches remaining within an *ethnic/representational framework* is that of taking for granted migrants' 'identity', attaching it mechanically to 'their' 'national community' and thus neglecting the multiple facets of migrants' identifications and belongings. Until recently the framework of 'ethnicity' appeared to be still-predominant and especially in industrial relations (Perrett and Martínez Lucio 2006; Fitzgerald and Stirling 2004), with migrant workers' problems often addressed in terms of discrimination issues under the unions' 'equality and diversity agenda' (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2009: 75). However, there has been increasing attention paid to the specificities of migration and the problems experienced by *migrants as migrants* in the labour market. Some authors within industrial relations in the UK such as Jane Holgate (2004, 2005, 2009a) explicitly argue for the recognition of migrants' particular problems in an increasingly fragmented labour market. For example, it would be more effective to organising them on the *basis of their vulnerabilities* rather than because of their concentration in certain industrial sectors as unions often do (Holgate 2009a: 20).

However the short-term and intermittent nature of migrants' employment has been, and still appears to be, a major concern for unions as they often relate 'the individualisation of employment

¹² The starting point was the acknowledgement of an increased occupational segregation by ethnicity or 'racialisation' of the labour market especially in cities like London. This, together with the observation that union density among ethnic minorities since the late 1990s *decreased less* than among white workers, provided the basis to argue that unions should commit themselves to invest more on those un-organised sectors of the economy where migrants are more numerous. While there was an increase in jobs of 96,000 in the hotels and catering sector in the UK (where the BME workers increased their numbers by 98,000 while white decreased by 2,000) with an overall decrease in union density (compared to the general increase of the number of workers) still union density among white male workers decreased more (-16%) than that among BME and women specifically (-10%). (LSE 2000, cit. in Holgate 2004: 3)

conditions' to the high mobility of migrant workers in generating major difficulties for union structures (Heery and Simms 2008, Holgate 2009a). Scholars have emphasised how while many UK unions are gradually adopting policies to integrate the 'new migrants', especially those from Eastern Europe, their efforts have rarely been successful. Often this has not been because the migrants were intrinsically 'hostile' to unions, but *because of their precarious employment*, their agency contracts and the temporary patterns of immigration (McKay 2008a).

It appears therefore how, despite the important attempt to re-evaluate the political potentials of migrant labour away from 'victimising' views of migrants or 'protectionist attitudes' towards the 'indigenous working class', there is a persisting 'integrationist approach' in the industrial relations literature regarding the involvement of migrant workers into existing labour institutions and CSOs.

In other words, an understanding of migrant labour as 'atypical' and vulnerable labour to be 're-integrated' into standard employment persistently underlies the mainstream industrial relations literature. Moreover the focus remains on the *institutions* incorporating migrants rather than on migrants' own *subjective experience* of political engagement. At a wider level, this approach parallels the wider idea of including and adapting 'atypical' forms of work to the 'standard' within the industrial relations debate on 'vulnerable work'.

1.1.6 Precarious work, migrant labour and the myth of 'standard employment'

It is not by chance that the term 'vulnerable work' has been preferred in the UK to that of precarious work in descriptions of the employment conditions *of migrants* and against the backdrop of *increased immigration* in the 2000s (MacInnes, Nazio, Roche 2010, O' Reilly, TUC 2008). Neither did UK industrial relations research explore in detail employment changes in relation to *changes in migration and citizenship*. Notions of 'contingent work' or 'insecure workforce' have been favoured (Heery 2008, Heery and Salmon 2000) to indicate a wide range of work patterns *lacking* the guarantees and security of past forms of 'standard', 'permanent' and open-ended contracts.

In contrast, feminist scholars in labour studies and political economy have recently applied the concept of 'precarious work' as a way of developing a critique of those approaches that are built on the basis of an imagined *standard* that, in fact, far from being universal, has always concerned only a particular part of the workforce: male and 'indigenous' (Vosko 2000, 2006, 2010; Vosko,

McDonald and Campbell 2009). In particular the research of Leah Vosko illustrates how transformations of citizenship and in the gender division of labour lie at the core of the contemporary expansion of precarious employment, in the European Union as well as in Canada and the US. Precarious work has in fact always existed for women and migrants, including during the so-called Fordist era when the 'Standard Employment Relationship' (SER) was dominant (Vosko 2010: 3). Both the disintegration of the 'male breadwinner/female caregiver' contract and profound changes of normative citizenship prove the impossibility and *undesirability* of a return to the 'SER'. On one hand, Vosko argues that there is no guarantee that this employment model would not reproduce its old exclusions. On the other, this scholar warns how 'a return to the SER would be a recipe for crisis in social reproduction' (ibid. 210) because the current precarisation of work already signals a crisis of social reproduction. A mere return to the SER would not provide a solution but rather create a 'tiered SER', as witnessed by the example that only the temporary and marginalised status of *migrant women* as domestic and care workers in countries in the North allowed the mass entry of ('indigenous') women into the labour market against the background of *degrading welfare systems* (see also Hochschild 2000). This produced a situation in which certain women's (i.e. highly educated national citizens) participation in SER is founded on the labour of temporary migrant workers working as domestics and carers (Vosko 2010: 214). As other feminist scholars have also highlighted, the 'end of the gender contract' has not meant that gender differences are erased in the labour market, or that the patriarchal division of labour has disappeared (Skeggs 1997, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). On the contrary, new stratifications of gendered and racialised labour have become apparent (Adkins 1995, Anderson 2000, Glucksmann 2009, Wolkowitz 2006).

Beside the changes in the 'gender contract', major transformations in migratory patterns have led to the disruption of the *traditional national understandings* of employment regulation. These are visible in expanding entry categories for *temporary* migrant workers in the US, Canada as well as in the EU. As against the overall tendency to restrict access of 'third country nationals',¹³

¹³ In the European Union context the term identifies migrants who are not citizens of a country member of the EU but are coming from 'third countries', i.e. from outside the EU.

and favour internal migration, international migration for employment towards industrialised countries is nonetheless expanding (Vosko 2010: 210).¹⁴

Similarly to Vosko, Papadopoulos and his colleagues (2008) have described the functioning of ‘normative citizenship’ highlighting the ‘national social compromise’ that characterised the way in which the post-war welfare state and its employment regime have been organised in the ‘Global North Atlantic’. They also emphasise the impossibility of reproducing that model under new social conditions, given the decline of an employment regime centred on workers’ rights as the rights of the white working classes. These authors also show how the particular system of ‘inclusion’ in the welfare system of certain countries in the North has always been partial. Sovereignty in the national social compromise was based on the *representation* of mainly economically defined social classes and their employment rights, and on the *control of conflict* by means of *practices of inclusion* of subaltern groups. Also the work of Vosko illustrates the modus operandi of mechanisms of *partial inclusion* through internal differentiation across citizenship, race and gender in the production of ‘inferior protective regulation’ or a ‘tiered SER’ (ibid. 214). Nonetheless, Vosko finally proposes the solution of *limiting precarious employment* by fostering both ‘gender equity’ and ‘post-national citizenship’ through the *normative* expansion of ‘labour market *membership*’. This argument partly remains within the same model of inclusion/exclusion that the author criticises in mainstream industrial relations (which does not question the territorial limits of employment regulation).

What Papadopoulos and his colleagues (2008) add to Vosko’s framework - which appears still concerned with the re-regulation of precarious labour at the margin - is the deeper consideration of the *social aspects of migrants’ precarity*, starting from workers’ subjectivities as the fluid field where the ‘embodied experience of precarity’ is lived (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 231). These authors concentrate in particular on the experience of undocumented migrants working in the hidden niches of the economies of the Global North to exemplify the ways in which in precarious work the ‘continuum of every day life’ is exploited. The labour of migrants workers as people lacking access to social security, often non-unionised and not even paid the minimum wage,

¹⁴ Key in the process of layering and differentiation of the SER are frameworks limiting non-nationals to temporary employment (i.e. by their entry category restricting migrants’ access to features of the SER such as permanency and excluding them from particular employment rights and protection) (Vosko 2010: 11).

illustrates how capital exploits *the totality of their subjectivity*. They are exploited not only as ‘the workforce’ but as undocumented migrants with the whole of the peculiar social conditions attached to their status as non-citizens, temporary, irregular and outside of the national system of industrial relations. More specifically according to Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007) the complex *subjective elements* constituting precarity include ‘hyperactivity’ (as the imperative to accommodate constant availability), ‘unsettledness’ (continuous experience of mobility) and ‘affective exhaustion’ (as an element of control of employability and multiple dependencies). Yet, it is important to recognise that the experience of precarity as the exploitation of the whole of the work-life continuum *is not co-terminous* with the regime of precarious labour. A ‘surplus of freedom’ emerges in the experience of precarious workers, which can be ‘reinvested into emerging modes of escape’, drifting away from current forms of control of work and mobility (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 237). This excess discloses the political significance of migrants’ precarity and ‘unsettledness’ as *not* always already *trapped* into a passive position in the labour market nor as simply hyper-exploited by employers.

While both these perspectives on *precarious work* emphasise the impossibility of a mere ‘return to the standard’, the second approach to precarious labour and migration also points to the importance of the subjective experience of precarity and to the social force hidden in the uncertain and mobile lives of migrants. There emerges therefore the need to re-think the forms of migrants’ political agency by understanding more deeply the *new social composition of labour* in cities like London and in low paid service jobs with high levels of migrants’ employment. This entails re-evaluating the transformative potential of the very mobility that characterises migrants’ lives and the ways it is linked with their everyday forms of resistance at work. In order to do that it is necessary to add *the point of view of transnationalism* to that of labour studies. Only by recognising the *spatial and subjective dimensions* of migration (and the new forms of its regulation), is it possible to explore the ways in which it directly impacts on the ongoing re-composition of labour, the new forms of work and employment and the instances of political organisation emerging in contemporary urban milieus. The encounter of labour studies with cultural analyses of transnationalism opens up new understandings of labour migration as a social force that cannot be merely read off from migrants’ economic drives or their position in the labour market.

1.2 The spatial and autonomous dimensions of migration: mobility as a terrain of struggle

1.2.1 *The point of view of transnationalism: changing migration patterns and mobility practices*

In the last two decades the perspective of transnationalism offered key insights for interpreting contemporary patterns of mobility and migration as well as migrants' forms of political and social engagement across national borders. Glick Schiller, Bash and Blanc-Szanton (1992) provided the pioneering definition of transnationalism within the field of anthropology. They highlighted the *circulatory patterns* of migration as not reducible to a linear movement from A to B, but rather characterised by the creation and maintenance by migrants of continuing social, economic, political and personal ties between the societies of origin and immigration. In this sense the 'transnational social spaces' (Faist 2000, Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Levitt and Waters, 2002, Pries 1999, 2001) that migrants build *over two or more countries*, as well as their localities of origin, can provide resources to improve their social position and make the most of their changing status (Goldring 1998).

More recently UK research in anthropology has emphasised how, favoured by economic globalisation, technological innovations and overall faster mobility patterns, migration is becoming a more 'middle class phenomenon', or at least, socially *more differentiated* than in the past (Conradson and Latham 2005b). Migrant workers do not simply repeat the routes of their compatriots who have already ventured to the countries of the North in search of work. Their trajectories do not merely follow the path of ethnic and family networks, but are more diverse, temporary, individualised, and yet, at the same time, more embedded in friendships and family networks (ibid). There is an increasing recognition of how household decision-making by 'transnational families', and *not* solely the choice of individuals 'dancing on the tunes of wage rates', contributes to determining the pace and routes of migrants' trajectories, their period of stay and circulation (Rogers et al 2009: 45). Furthermore the ongoing processes of *diversification* within the social composition of migration (also an outcome of the spread of skills and raising of qualification levels among migrants), have driven scholarly discussion of the emergence of 'lifestyle-oriented migration flows' (ibid. 36). In this regard, countries like the UK and cities such as London have experienced particularly intense social, economic and cultural *diversity* and increased complexity in their migrant population (Vertovec 2007, Will et al. 2009a).

The critical contribution of research on transnationalism and cultural approaches to migrants' *everyday practices of mobility* lies therefore in that it significantly stresses the impossibility of reducing migration drives to mere economic factors: migrants emigrate not only for jobs but also as a 'rite of passage' (Carter 1997, Benmayor and Skotnes 2004) whereby they try to acquire training, knowledge and experiences¹⁵. Against a structuralist view of transnationalism as descending from wider economic transformations, Aiwa Ong (1999) defined 'the cultural logic of transnationality' as 'the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across spaces' (ibid. 4). Together with the notion of 'flexible citizenship' it is created by the very practices of migrants across borders, fluidly interacting with the governmental instances of a 'graduated sovereignty' and increasingly transnationalised controls of labour mobility.

In this regard, while recent UK research on the mobility practices and survival strategies of 'middling transnationals' (Conradson and Latham 2005b) properly highlights the multiplicity of subjective drives and reasons to move (against the crystallised notion of the 'economic migrant'), it also risks *de-politicising* the issue of migrant labour and its exploitation. Current accounts of migrants' everyday mobility practices tend to reproduce the mistaken image of a de-regulated and permissive labour market (Conradson and Latham 2005b: 300; see also Vertovec 2004). In other words, by emphasising mobility as the major factor shaping migrants' experiences, mainstream approaches to transnationalism build a 'class-neutral' view of transmigrants and transform their mobility into a fetish, while *individualising* migrants' practices of survival.

On the contrary, critical literature of transnational migration by adding the perspective of social geography situates migration within an analysis of the broader neoliberal processes of 'rescaling' as well as within local histories¹⁶. This approach questions migrants' apparent ease of mobility. It illustrates how the 'temporary' or 'circulatory' nature of the new frameworks for immigration in EU countries, rather than simply facilitating the movement of migrants with EU

¹⁵ However, Riccio (2001: 591) emphasises how this experience often involves that of 'manhood' as a crucial element in the ideal of the 'rite of passage'.

¹⁶ Local histories, for Glick Schiller, include not only local economic development but the specific histories of immigration of a particular territorial locality. The contamination of migration studies proposed by this scholar appears particularly useful in that it brings together a cultural analysis of transnationalism, identity and agency formation across scales with spatial approaches to labour and broader economic restructuring (see also Schiller and Caglar 2011)

citizenship, constitutes only one aspect of migration policy. This is complementary to the parallel *restriction of borders management* and very controlled forms of ‘contract labour from elsewhere’ (Glick Schiller 2009:15). Also other scholars emphasised the increased complexity, circularity and stratification of the current movement of labour transnationally. Yet, under the notion of the ‘global multiplication of labour’ they also illustrated the ways in which migrants *participate* through their mobility and transiency in the creation of current migration and labour regimes (Neilson 2009, Neilson and Mezzadra 2008). What kind of alternative understanding of migrant’ political subjectivity is possible to draw from these interpretations?

1.2.2 Temporal and differential migration regimes: the multiplication of labour

On the one hand ‘multiplication’ means *increased division* through the *proliferation of borders* and their function in differentiating migrants’ entry according to *multiple and hierarchised statuses*. These mechanisms are well reflected in the recently introduced Points-Based System for immigration in the UK (PBS), which is founded on the principle of measuring migrants’ eligibility and their right to work in the country according to their monetary, educational and linguistic ‘assets’, *as well as* the holding of employment (Home Office 2008a, Rogers et al. 2009). Research has showed how the PBS produces the fundamental distinction between well-educated highly-skilled migrants regarded as positively contributing to the national economy and awarded a (limited) range of social rights, and a low-skilled ‘undifferentiated’ group of ‘warm bodies’ for bottom-end and *temporary jobs* with far fewer rights (Erel 2009, Flynn, 2003).

On the other hand indeed ‘multiplication’ means the intensification of control dovetailing with the *intensification of labour exploitation* (Neilson 2009). For instance in the UK, the registration scheme for A8 workers entails the differentiation of supposedly homogeneous categories, such as between A8 and A2, which *augments their exploitability* in the labour market. More broadly the PBS produces a mechanism of *differentiation* through classification, whereby some migrants often risk remaining ‘trapped’ in temporary employment relationships according to their status. Recent research on current changes in the border regimes of EU countries have emphasised how the *differential inclusion* (and not mere exclusion) operating at the national and EU border, ultimately also ‘lets in’ so-called unwanted migrants, although in an *inferiorised position* (Mezzadra 2006, Papadopoulos et al. 2008, Rigo 2007).

The 'multiplication of labour' perspective also emphasises how *divisions* and *complexity* of articulations expose 'lines of flight' opened up by the 'inventiveness' of migrants themselves, once they are forced to move between these multiple borders, as well as by other actors who may profit from these (e.g. labour brokers, higher education recruiters, temporary work agencies, etc.) (Neilson 2009)¹⁷. Multiplication highlights not only divisions but also *connections*, new forms of regulations and new spaces of mobility arising from the same complicating and increasingly sophisticated migration regimes. In other words, it is exactly by considering the complexity of mechanisms of migration and labour control, as not simply constraining but opening up spaces for migrants' practices of mobility, connections and sociability, that it is possible to envisage new forms of *political subjectivation*¹⁸.

However, the multiplication of labour mainly remains at the level of analysis of how migrant subjectivities are *produced* amidst new processes of differentiation and stratification of control mechanisms. There is little research regarding the ways in which migrants engage in and develop various forms of politics, actively shaping the world in which they live, work and struggle or how migrants' differentiated and multiple/linked subjectivities co-produce their own everyday realities.

¹⁷ Although past migration regimes presented a lower level of complexity as compared to the present, Burawoy studying the use of the 'Bracero programme' to manage Mexican migrants in the US in the 1970s, showed that, because of its '*elaborate but not always enforced system of regulation*' political control over the supply of labour '...is only a minor factor in the determination of the ebb and flow of migrant labour across the border' (Burawoy 1996: 62).

¹⁸ The term 'subjectivation' is preferred by authors such as Neilson because, drawing the Latin origin of the term, it is able to highlight the ambivalence of the 'subject' as at the same time 'sub-iectum' (passive) and (the active) subject of change. Another author, drawing from the French philosopher Guattari's notion of 'processus de subjectivation' and from Italian autonomist Marxism, defines 'subjectivation' as taking the conceptual place of 'the subject' (Berardi 2004). The important gesture accomplished by Italian autonomist thought (identified in the works of Mario Tronti, Romano Alquati, Raniero Panzieri, Toni Negri), consisted in the switch from the centrality of the worker's identity to the decentralisation of the process of subjectivation: 'In the place of the historical subject inherited from the Hegelian legacy, we should speak of the process of subjectivation. That means that we should not focus on the identity, but on the process of becoming' (Berardi 2004). For a 'relational' theorisation of subjectivity see also Blackman et al. (2008).

1.2.3 *Autonomy of migration and everyday politics*

The issue of control and *autonomy over mobility* was central to the critique of labour market segmentation theories operated within the German debate about the ‘special position’ of migrant labour in capitalist economic restructuring (Bojadžijev, Karakayali, Tsianos 2004). As against the structuralist analysis of migration as a ‘reserve army of labour’ underlying old and new versions of labour market segmentation (Piore 1979, Wills et al. 2009a)¹⁹ it was argued that migrants’ political subjectivity cannot be mechanically deduced from their position in the production system. This critique started from the acknowledgement of the mobility practices of migrant workers in West Germany defying the post-war ‘temporal regime’ of ‘Guest-workers’ with continuous movement through family reunification, *despite* the decision to stop the recruitment of migrants by the Government in 1973 (Bojadžijev 2003, Karakayali and Tsianos 2002).

Yann Mouliere Boutang (1998, 2002) defined as ‘autonomy of migration’ these rebellious forms of migrants’ mobility across borders and industrial sectors in terms of its (relative) independence *vis-à-vis* the political measures that aim at controlling it, highlighting the subjective and social dimension of migratory movements. Through the notion of ‘the right to escape’ (Mezzadra 2004) a parallel is drawn between migrants’ contemporary demands for citizenship and those of past factory workers’ and women’s struggles. Just as feminism involves a demand for control over subjective decisions regarding labour mobility, migration is linked to migrants’ claims of citizenship as the right to assert control over their own movement (Mezzadra and Neilson 2003).

More recently the autonomy of migration has been loosely defined as the notion that migrants, and irregular migrants in particular, elude state and borders controls in forms that demonstrate the autonomous, strategic, negotiated, irreducibly subjective and indeed transformative character of migration (Walters 2008: 189). A strand of ‘minor’ research in anthropology and

¹⁹ In the literature employing the notion of labour market segmentation, a *passive understanding of migration* persists, with migrants appearing either shaped by ‘push and pull factors’ or trapped in social constructs imposed on them by policy makers and employers. Wills et al. (2009a) maintain in essence the Marxian category of the ‘reserve army of labour’ by calling migrant workers the ‘London new labour reserve’. This perspective does not completely overcome the functionalism intrinsic in the description of migrants as ‘labour supply’ typical of the original theorisation of the labour market under *segmentation theories* (Piore 1979; see also Castles and Kosack 1973) because it retains an understanding of migrants as primarily economic-driven and as ‘costs-benefit’ calculating subjects.

sociology has recently documented *everyday instances of the autonomy* of transnational migrants facing the multiple constraints that they encounter in the sphere of work, legal entanglements, social and public life, residence and social rights (Andrijasevic 2003, Coutin 2003, Papadopoulos et al. 2008, Rodriguez 1996). In this way these scholars abandoned the pretentious historical purpose attributed to autonomous migration by the original analysis of migrants' acts of exodus as the expression of the potential subject of the 'multitude'²⁰. Indeed one limit of some of the research conducted within this perspective lies in that it has lately concentrated either on *border crossing* as an exemplar moment of subjectivation and subversion, or on the 'civic sphere' and migrants' claims to the state (Isin and Nielsen 2008), paradoxically bypassing altogether the sphere of work.

Within the autonomy of migration perspective only a few authors have recently explored migrants' political subjectivity tackling at the same time the fields of migration and labour. Nicholas De Genova (2009) has directly investigated this intersection *in relation to the temporary patterns of migration management* currently set by the US Government and migrants' political engagement. This scholar analysed the political response by working class migrants and their children against the parallel restriction and securitisation of migration controls in the US specifically drawing from the mass protest in LA in 2006. De Genova critically shows how the attack on 'illegal migrants' happened *at the same time* as the apparently contradictory campaign for the introduction of *temporary* 'guest worker schemes' as a form of legalisation *for some* (De Genova 2009: 446). In this sense it becomes increasingly clear how the *temporal management* of migration *and* temporary regime of *labour control* across different countries discloses critical spaces of agency and resistance by highly mobile workers. It is possible to see how migrants' mobility rather than constituting a mere obstacle to political engagement comes to represent itself a field of struggle.

Actually, even within labour studies, recent versions of the 'labour process theory' are paying increasing attention to the political potential of labour's 'mobility power', yet focusing on the workplace as a critical site of resistance. What are the implications of considering the

²⁰ Early articulations find their origin in Hardt and Negri's theorisations in *Empire* (2000) about migrants' flight representing hidden forms of subversion against contemporary regimes of economic and political control, as a 'causative' and 'constitutive force' confronting capitalism (Walters 2008: 189).

conflicting dimension of labour migration by re-positioning it in the everyday *experiences* of labour subjectivities *in the workplace* and within the *labour process*?

1.3 Migrants' everyday politics at work

1.3.1 Back to the workplace: the 'power' of labour mobility

Within the tradition of labour studies in the UK, the disruptive potential of labour mobility in the form of *labour turnover* has been a subject of investigation in that part of labour process studies focusing on workers' everyday forms of resistance *vis-à-vis* capitalist management (Edwards and Scullion 1982). The question of the mobility of workers between workplaces and as exit from work attracts increasing attention and sometimes explicitly in relation to transnational or intra-national migration under recent *reconsiderations of labour process theory* (Smith 2010).

In particular, there recently emerged renewed interest in the topic of mobility management and labour's 'power mobility'. This appeared both within critical research about transnational labour processes (Pun and Smith 2007) and in relation to the allocation of temporary labour through job agencies (Smith 2006). By identifying employers' need to control the 'double indeterminacy' of labour power at the origin of the spread of work subcontracting, Smith draws from the kernel idea of work ethnographies within this tradition of labour studies, that is the *irreducible relationship* between employee resistance and managerial control (Beynon and Nichols 1977, Friedman 1977). This is based in turn on the intrinsically unspecified nature of the magnitude of the work effort and the uncertainties of the labour contract with capital.

However, primarily the ideological attachment to workplace-based struggles and workplace unionism in the literature on industrial relations explains why 'exit' power has been overlooked as compared to 'voice', while the same approach tends to attach to the former an *individualistic attitude* restricted to workers with 'superior market strength' and overall detrimental to collectivism. Turnover and 'quitting' have been seen as strategies rather favoured by employers in getting rid of the discontent and more vociferous workers (Smith 2006: 393). On the contrary Smith contends that quitting remains a high expression of conflict within capital and labour relation and claims that research has not sufficiently considered the *disruptive and destabilising* impact of mobility power *on the labour process* and the *interrelations* between *effort bargaining* and *exiting*

behaviour (ibid.). Historically indeed capital has always had an interest in tying labour to a certain *place*, especially when workers became officially ‘free’ waged labourers (Smith 2006: 394, see also Mouliere Boutang 1998).

In this regard and reflecting in broader terms on ‘the Limits to Capital’ through the lenses of the mobility of both labour and capital, David Harvey (2006) argued that the emerging conflicts between the two should be understood in terms of *a continuous negotiation* or tension between employers and workers strategies and their *struggles of mobility* (ibid. 382).

However, in order to explore migrants’ politics of everyday life *in a particular sector such as hospitality* including both interactive and highly embodied, menial work, other types of resistance and dimensions of ‘labour indeterminacy’ need to be considered, beside the dimension of labour mobility. It is not only factors shaping the nature of service industries such as subcontracting and labour turnover that are relevant in the sector. *The very nature of the work performed* in the expanding ‘personal services’ of urban economies appear also crucial to understand the subjectivities of migrant workers employed in them. Re-directing the focus to the workplace, feminist sociology of work and ‘embodiment’ and labour process studies offer further theoretical material to reflect on the ways in which service workers resist the exploitative aspects of management control in the form of ‘embodied’ and ‘affective labour’.

1.3.2 Another dimension of resistance: the affective relations of embodied service workers

The types of work involving both *manual* activities and more *intangible* forms of labour in the customer service industries have been defined in terms of ‘aesthetic labour’ (Witz et al. 2003), whereby employers mobilize, develop and commodify workers’ bodily capacities as much as their various personal attributes (including deportment, voice, sexual desirability), with the aim of producing ‘an aesthetic style of service *and* sensory experience in the encounter’ (Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010: 229).

From a relatively different standpoint, other strands of literature directly interested in the *implications for resistance* of major changes in the nature and organisation of work in the last decades, have described work in the service sector in terms of ‘affective labour’. The early definition of affective labour emphasised the ‘immaterial’ rather than the embodied aspects involved in affective labour as *emblematic* of a new and implicitly more ‘advanced’ form of capitalist (‘post-

Fordist') production(Hardt and Negri 2001: 292). These scholars assumed that, exactly because of the peculiar social nature of immaterial and affective labour, this would disclose the potentials for new forms of cooperation between workers. This definition has been criticised for its assumption that workers' supposedly *enhanced subjectivity and autonomy*, would naturally 'liberate' resources for collective resistance to capital (Dowling et al. 2007: 3).

In contrast, studies of the workplaces where these kinds of jobs are performed have illustrated how the autonomy that new managerial strategies in the service sector may aim to valorise does not always produce subversive forms of resistance. Rather, managers' control and workers' coping strategies interact in ways that ultimately *both limit and produce autonomy* and/or a sense of *collectivity* among employees (Carls 2007). Similarly scholars within the tradition of labour process theory have emphasised the *ambiguity* of 'informal resistance' (Collinson 2003) especially in those jobs where it is not straightforward to distinguish the embodied and the immaterial nature of the work. For instance, as Wolkowitz and Warhurst (2010: 237) have emphasised 'workers may have a "double-edged stance" towards the desirable dress' prescribed by employers.

Amidst the continuous re-configuration of the *body-mind relationship* Wolkowitz and Warhurst (2010) highlighted how both emotional and aesthetic labour are relevant to understand how the body and workers' aesthetic presentation are directly incorporated in process of capitalist accumulation and increasingly made productive in the labour process²¹. But what about the *possibilities of resistance* emerging from this kinds of embodied, aesthetic and emotional work?

A range of different understandings of workers' subjectivity and their resistant relation to management emerge from current studies of the labour process in customer services and other hospitality sector work. Recent research conducted in London hotels for instance employed the Althusserian notion of 'interpellation' to describe the different ways in which workers internalise and oppose the 'naming practices' that managers employ to deepen the racial and gender attributes

²¹ In other words, the ongoing rise of the service economy induces management to valorise increasingly workers' subjectivities taking control of their 'heads and then hearts *but now also bodies*' (Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010: 228).

increasingly *segmenting* the migrant hotel workforce (McDowell et al. 2007, McDowell 2009). While importantly emphasising the bodily aspects of hotel work, McDowell and colleagues (2007) remain focused on how employers' assumption about stereotypical social attributes *are embodied and performed by migrant hotel workers* in ways that facilitates their allocation to different occupational positions. These authors drew also from Hughes's concept of 'emotional demands' to indicate how it is possible even for these highly fragmented workforces to introduce disruptive elements to management models of organisational effectiveness, while challenging traditional forms of oppressions which have emotional underpinnings (Hughes 2005: 616).

While examples of emotional and affective resistance will be analysed more closely in the chapter on migrants' everyday resistance at work, for the moment suffices it to say that a tendency persists to individualise workers' subjectivity and to view it as essentially mirroring managerial strategies of control. Even feminist workplace ethnographies exploring the subjectivities of gendered and racialised workers in the de-localised sites of transnational corporations (Cravey 1998, Freeman 2000, Lee 1997, Salzinger 2003, Wright 1997, 2006), although recognising the *fluidity* of managerial 'naming practices', tend to portrait workers' resistance as mainly reproducing management's gestures, discourses and strategies of control.

The point of view of *embodied labour* offers in this sense an alternative lens. The various forms of workers' 'embodied workplace activities' in the changing world of personal services open up new possibilities of expression for the 'resistant body' (Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010). Moving away from a narrow focus on control over the labour process and the workers' bodily capacities that employers are particularly interested in controlling, the body should be rather considered 'as itself a generative force' (Shilling 2008, cit. in Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010: 237). This perspective enables to uncover the forms of creativity and resistance carried out in 'other kinds of embodied workplace activities', which may remain hidden from management's attempts to make them directly profitable (ibid.). The notion of 'body work' in particular indicates new paths to explore the resistant forms of embodied labour (Wolkowitz 2006, 2002). By highlighting how the relationship with other bodies is crucial in defining the workers' own bodies in term of their job, the research of Wolkowitz helps to switch the focus to the *relational resources* opened up by the spaces of interactive labour and other types of bodily work. Actually the concept of 'body work' is used to identify specifically forms of employment that take the 'body as immediate site of labour' including all forms of work that imply 'care, pleasure, adornment and cure of others bodies' (Wolkowitz

2006: 147) and focusing on the ‘micropolitics of the intimate encounter’ between workers and customers (ibid. 3). Still, the theoretical implications of this perspective appear enlightening to understand work and resistance across a range of service jobs. They challenge both an individualising view of workers’ resistance and a Foucauldian perspective on the textualisation of the body that emphasise the external forces constraining workers’ subjectivity. Moreover, rather than limiting the renewed attention to ‘the body’ to individuals’ ability to craft their own selves and identities (partly reproduced within the neutralising reading of migrants’ mobility practices), this perspective allows us to reposition embodied labour within the ‘changing institutional environments’ of work and employment, as well as *the relations and social inequalities* in which social actors are embedded (Wolkowitz 2006: 173).

Thus, a focus on the relationships between workers, and between workers, managers, customers and union activists, within and across the workplaces where migrants perform their affective, emotional and aesthetic labour, is necessary to uncover the relational constitution of labour *and resistance* in these changing workplaces.

1.4 Conclusions: ‘Situated Transnationalism’

Bringing together and superseding the limitations of both labour studies and transnationalism on migrant labour appears particularly useful to understand the emerging subjectivities and the ‘everyday politics’ of migrants employed in low-paid service jobs. Indeed there appear to be two main orders of problems in the various accounts of migration and migrants’ political agency across the different disciplines.

First of all, a structuralist view of migrant labour persists within industrial relations and labour studies, which infers migrants’ possibilities of resistance from their position in the production process. In order to overcome this limitation it is necessary to add the perspectives of transnationalism and the ‘autonomy of migration’ to the mainstream approaches to migrants’ political engagement endorsed by labour studies. These appeared indeed victimising migrants and viewing them as vulnerable workers to be merely integrated into national trade unions, with their ‘anomalous’ position to be adapted to a supposed ‘employment standard’. In other words there seems to be a persisting ‘fear of mobility’ within traditional industrial relations, which appear unable to engage with the complexity of migrants’ ‘contingent subjectivities’. Transnationalism and

geography together with the autonomy of migration perspective allow to understanding the broader social, cultural and *political significance* of migration and how mobility becomes itself as a terrain of struggle and liberation for precarious migrants.

However, there is a second range of problems. Even when the everyday practices of migrants and their socially transformative character are acknowledged, this happens within a framework reproducing a rigid distinction between *individual* copying and *collective* resistance. Most of the literature on the everyday 'cultural practices' of transnational migrants (Conradson and Latham 2005a, Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Vertovec 2004) tends to look at migrants' resistance either as individualised *survival* tactics or as practices always already trapped within the regime of migration regulation by which they are produced.

Social geographers in conversation with industrial relations scholars have explored the 'coping tactics' of low-paid migrant workers in London across spheres as diverse as the *household*, the labour *market* and *the community*. They have made the important point that workers' lives must be situated in their *broader spatial dimension* including their transnational practices (Datta et al. 2007). However, even the recent studies in geography ultimately reproduce an image of migrants as merely *reacting* to a series of constraints and prevailing power relations that clearly 'erode their potential for developing strategic responses' amidst the difficulties of London's metropolitan life (Datta et al 2007: 409). By emphasising exactly the distinction between strategies and tactics these authors assume the false dichotomy between forms of 'strong' and 'true' resistance versus 'weak' coping. Similarly within labour and organisation studies of workplace forms of resistance in the context of emotional and interactive labour, although not directly in relation to the practices of migrant workers, workers' subjectivity is seen as mainly reactive and reproducing management discourses (Hughes 2000). In order to challenge these individualising approaches, the collective and relational dimension of resistance may rather emerge by paying attention to the 'embodied character' (Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010) of migrants' resistant experiences in and across their workplaces.

More broadly, how is it possible to re-think singular and collective action without diminishing migrants' autonomous everyday acts of resistance and survival?

There is value in drawing from the concept of *resistance* as elaborated by those workplace and feminist ethnographies sensitive to cultural aspects of class formation and to workers' everyday

experiences within and without their workplaces (Beynon 1972, 1973, Gluksmann 2009, Gottfried 1994, Lüdtcke 1993, Willis 1977). *In combination with* the ‘autonomy of migration’ perspectives, it is possible to re-think the very concepts of resistance and political agency regarding the everyday politics of non-citizens. In this regard a major contribution of De Genova’s research on migrants’ protests lies in the capacity to emphasise both histories of *collective mobilisation* and *singular, very corporeal*, acts of contestation by groups of individuals (De Genova 2009).

The literature presents the need to go beyond the narrowness of an ideological approach that merely celebrate the ‘oppositional moment’ of working class resistance (mainly as a taken for granted opposition of labour against capital) *as well as* the class-neutral, ‘apolitical’ and ‘a-conflictual’ approach of mainstream transnationalism studies that still poses migrants’ claims within the framework of citizenship as a *problem of belonging and integration*. By emphasising integration both industrial relations and culturalist approaches to migration risk assuming the homogeneity and conflict-laden nature of the society of arrival while flattening migrants’ strategies as merely responsive to individual needs (Harney 2010, Glick Schiller 2008). These models appear not able to respond to the profound changes in a world where the process of transnationalisation has become irresistible, in the field of labour as well as in other spheres of social life. Yet, the irresistibility of transnationality does not lie simply in the various ways in which migrants attempt to defy state border controls. They do more with their everyday experiences and means to self-organise new forms of sociability outside regulatory mechanisms (Stephenson and Papadopoulos 2006).

This is why it is necessary *to look inside the workplace* beyond false dichotomies between cultural and economic struggles, individual and collective action, *in conversation with* the ongoing debates on the transformations taking place in the institutions of the ‘labour movement’ and ‘civil society’ engaging with migrant people. The growing attention, across different strands of literature and disciplinary approaches to the question of how labour and politics are being transformed by migration opens up an important space for *re-thinking political agency*.

Considering the specific dimension of mobility characterising migrants’ working lives in a sector such as hospitality, it becomes clear that linking labour studies explorations of workers’ resistance *within the labour process* and their ‘mobility power’ (Smith 2006, 2010) with a critical reading of *transnationalism*, is particularly fruitful. Building on this it is possible to look at the different subjective meanings that *transiency* and *mobility* assume for *different kinds of migrant workers*, thus holding out against the temptation (common to both transnationalism studies and to

part of the autonomist approaches to migration) to celebrating border crossing and mobility as subversive acts in themselves. It is necessary to challenge a homogenous understanding of ‘the migrant worker’ as well as of ‘the transnational migrant’ by *unpacking the gendered, sexualised, racialised forms of differentiation* among the increasingly diverse migrant population in the global cities of the North, against the background of increasing formal restriction and securitisation of migration policy (intertwined with labour market de/re-regulation). Acknowledging the *situated* nature of transmigrants’ mobility practices, it is possible to *re-ground transnationalism* in the everyday, *relatively* intentional, *relational acts* of resistance of mobile and precarious people negotiating between regulatory constraints, their desires for freedom, sociality and reproduction.

Thus, broadly investigating the relationship between the transnational mobility of precarious migrants and their political agency and how their everyday acts of resistance transform rooted notions of ‘political engagement’, the thesis asks more specifically:

1. What are the possibilities of and constraints to migrants’ developing forms of resistance and political engagement in the hospitality sector in London? How do migrants in the sector become politically engaged and resist their precarious conditions *despite and through* their highly mobile, temporary and ‘vulnerable’ status? (Chapters 3, 4, 5)

2. How do migrants’ everyday resistance and *subjective experiences of politicisation* challenge relatively rooted class-based notions and models of ‘political engagement’ as maintained within the recent experiments in trade union and ‘community organising’? (Chapter 4)

3. In what other ways do migrants, despite increasing diversification and fragmentation in the composition of the hospitality labour force, draw from their *everyday relationships at work* to oppose their poor working conditions and support their uncertain lives? (Chapter 5)

4. What does it mean for trade unions and other civil society actors to ‘take seriously’ the constitution of the contingent, gendered, racialised and mobile subjectivities of labour when organising in a sector such as hospitality? What are the strategic ‘sites’ and ‘scales’ where union and civic organisations can engage in coalitions to offer institutional laboratories where migrants’ articulate their claims, express their subjectivity and find powerful resources to improve their precarious working lives? (Chapter 6)

CHAPTER TWO

Investigating work and politics *with* migrant women in London hospitality

Participation in social actions and struggles and the integration of research in these processes, further implies that the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest. The motto for this approach could be: In order to understand a thing, one must change it (Mies 1991: 63).

In order to penetrate the increasing complexity and divisions of migrant labour in the hospitality industry in London I required a methodological approach able to make sense of the specific *gendered* and *racialised* nature of work in the hotels and catering industry (Adib and Guerrier 2003, Dutton et al 2008). This led me to embrace a methodology based on an ‘intersectional approach’ (Brah 1996, Crenshaw 1991, hooks 1984, McDowell 2008a) able to consider *the interaction of multiple axes* of marginalisation constraining the lives of low-paid migrant workers in London²². Yet, more specifically, what were the most effective strategies of inquiry to reach out to these highly precarious and mobile workers? How do you go about accessing ‘the field of hospitality’ in London considering the *changing stratification* of its migrant workforce?

²²‘Intersectionality’ has been originally elaborated by scholars within critical race and black feminism studies (Crenshaw 1989, 1991, hooks 1984, Matsuda 1987) and more recently defined as ‘the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality’ (Mc Call 2005, cit. in Nash 2008: 2). The central point of this approach is not only that the dimensions of social inequality are multiple, intersecting and complex but also that they should be understood in a ‘non-cumulative’ way as relatively fluid axes of exclusion and differentiation, away from rigid categories of gender, race and class used as statistical indicators by policy-makers (McDowell 2008a). As a useful heuristic tool intersectionality has been effectively employed and is currently highly debated in feminist approaches to diasporas, labour and migration (see Brah 1996, Erel 2009, McDowell 2008a, Nash 2008).

Where were the *key spaces* and *sites* to detect and explore their everyday working lives and practices of resistance? What other *actors* were relevant to exploring migrants' expressions of 'political engagement'?

2.1 An urban and 'multi-sited' ethnography

Participant observation as developed by Michael Burawoy and his students in Berkeley (Burawoy et al. 1991, Burawoy et al. 2000) appeared the most suitable technique to unpack the multiple layers of stratification and the social complexity of the hospitality sector in London. The original idea of locating lived experience within its 'extra-local determinations' is at the core of Burawoy's 'unbounded' (and later 'global') ethnography founded in the roots of the work of feminist ethnographers such as Dorothy Smith's (1987). The feminist ethnographic approach re-emerges in the unbounded ethnography's drive to *extend* 'workplace ethnographies' into external aspects such as race and ethnicity, citizenship, markets and local politics²³. The main concern of most sociologists, anthropologists and feminist geographers working towards an unbounded and more fluid concept of the field through the idea of 'multi-sited research' (Clifford 1997, Falzon 2009, Marcus 1995, Marcus and Fisher 1986, Nagar et al. 2008) is that it stresses the need for innovative techniques of inquiry. These should be able to trace *the new connections* across national borders triggered by intensifying flows of political, economic and cultural forces²⁴. If 'transnational migrants' are considered agents of these intensified connections, then the very 'subjects' of my research *demand*ed a multi-sited ethnography:

²³ See Burawoy *et al* 2000; see also Glucksmann 2009 [Cavendish 1982], Gottfried 1994, Pollert 1981 and for more recent examples of ethnographies of gendered transnational migration Cravey (2005).

²⁴ For Falzon (2009) one of the reasons for the emergence of the idea and practice of 'multi-sited ethnography' is to be found in the acknowledgment that space is socially produced (Foucault 1995, Lefebvre 1991, Massey 2005, Soja 1989): '...the point is that the paradigm of globalization and its cousin, transnationalism, posed a major twentieth century challenge to ethnographic methods of inquiry and units of analysis by destabilizing the embeddedness of social relations in particular communities and places' (Falzon 2009: 6).

Although in my research I have not literally followed the migrants across national borders, the manner in which my fieldwork was constituted could be said to be captured by the metaphor of fieldwork as a *spatial practice* of inquiry. By travelling across a ‘global city’ for more than a year, back and forth between the different *sites* attended by the participants (e.g. job agencies, their relatively insecure workplaces, union buildings, street actions), my research on the ground resembled the embodied ‘habitus’ of ‘travelling in dwelling and dwelling in travelling’ described by Clifford in *Routes* (1997). However, whether I wanted to see it in terms of a ‘multiple-locale’ (Marcus and Fisher 1986) or ‘travelling ethnography’ (Clifford 1997), my fieldwork was in fact still concerned with one specific and *relatively bounded* place: the urban space of a ‘post-industrial metropolis’ such as London; the quintessential example of an economy based on an expanding personal services industry and predicated on the supply of migrant workers (Massey 2007, Sassen 1994, 2001). Indeed, the practices of its *differently positioned inhabitants*, negotiating with the changing structures of economic and political regulation and de-regulation, constituted this one particular locale as a *multiple locale in itself*. This led me to expand my ethnographic fieldwork *across different sites or settings*.

By following the participants from the union branch meeting to their homes, travelling with them on the bus across the long distances characteristic of the capital, accompanying the agency workers from hotels back to the agencies and sometimes joining them in their leisure activities, the whole space of the city was continually traversed, narrowed and expanded again by our frenetic movements. At the same time the participants themselves made my ethnography a multi-sited ethnography in the proper *transnational* sense of the term. Their transnational families and social ties; their practice of sending remittances back home; their multiple identities and desire for further mobility: if this did not make the field ‘global’ in itself, they identified a space of ‘connections’ and ‘imaginings’ that could be traced back and forth through transnational spaces²⁵.

²⁵ As Burawoy reminds us, global ethnography is not determined by whether the field by itself has a global reach or is bounded by a city, a community, or nations. The scope is to assemble the multiple connections while grounding ethnographies in local histories (Burawoy et al .2000).

2.2 The main phases and sites of the research

The data was produced in London between 2007 and 2009 through *two main phases* of ‘participant observation’ (Burawoy et al. 1991). While the two phases partly overlapped, one involved a total period of four months of *covert participant observation*, working as a waitress via registration *with two temporary job agencies*. The second phase involved more than a year of *overt participation* in a trade union-led campaign to promote the rights of hotel workers in Central London²⁶.

During the whole period of empirical investigation I collected the data in the form of ‘full fieldnotes’ (Bryman 2008: 420) recording observations and detailing any informal interviews and conversations I had with the workers, trade unionists and the other activists that I met in the *agencies, workplaces, trade union meetings and street actions*. These constituted the main *sites* of my ‘multi-sited ethnography’. The second phase of participation in the campaign also included a series of formal ‘in-depth’ (Bryman 2003: 321) or ‘ethnographic interviews’ (Spradley 1979, Erel 2009) with migrant women as well as with unionists and activists involved in the campaign.

2.2.1 *Entering the field of hospitality in London: moving between the spaces of ‘organised’ and ‘disorganised’ labour*

The initial access to the ‘field of hospitality’ was realised through the trade union branch, which was organising migrant workers in some hotels in Central London. I was introduced to the chair of the ‘T&G UNITE’²⁷ union’s ‘hotel workers branch’ by an acquaintance from the migrant rights’ activist network. Consequently I began attending the union’s meetings to get to know the leaders and union members and to start conversations with them. This initial phase of the research

²⁶ The strategic motives and ethical issues related to the choice of these two different techniques of participant observation are discussed below in the detailed section and in the one on ethics.

²⁷ The ‘Transport & General’ section of Unite is the UK’s largest general union, with approximately 800,000 members in every type of workplace. ‘Unite-the Union’ formed by the merger with the other union ‘Amicus’ in 2007 ([http://www.politics.co.uk/opinion-formers/Unite-the-union-TG-Section/welcome-\\$364486\\$1.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/opinion-formers/Unite-the-union-TG-Section/welcome-$364486$1.htm)).

helped me to map out the main *issues* experienced by migrant workers in the hospitality sector, the *key actors* involved around these issues and the *sites* of migrants' civic and workplace engagement.

While the trade union was a *strategic point of entry* into this *relatively informal* sector of the economy, it soon became clear that it was only *a channel*: the branch meetings were not a transparent *window into* the variegated experiences of hospitality workers in London. In other words, the problems perceived by the majority of the long-term union members, participating in union meetings, were not necessarily the same as those of the migrants who had just found work in the sector. It made a relatively significant difference whether a worker was employed in a major hotel chain, directly or through agencies, or on a casual or a permanent contract of employment. The fact of being a 'newcomer' from an Eastern European EU country or a migrant from outside the EU, relatively recently or somewhat settled, represented other major differences that impacted on the migrants' statuses as workers.

Therefore in order to expand my view of the field and better explore the challenges of this extremely differentiated (nationally, contractually, migration-wise) workforce, I needed to venture outside the walls of the union building and explore the workplaces myself. This was essential in order to detect the everyday relationships at work in this industry, going beyond the cases recounted by long-term employees. I needed to uncover the ways in which the recently arrived migrants entered the sector, why they chose this kind of work and how they related to it and came to terms to its highly exploitative conditions. I needed to find out about their mobility strategies, why they *were not* interested in joining the union, and in what ways they were seen as 'others' by most union members.

In this sense, starting from these different sites and 'settings' to explore the field of hospitality in London gave me the opportunity to compare *the attitudes towards work* and the different forms of *workplace resistance* and '*political engagement*' among two main groups of workers in the industry. Firstly, *relatively recent migrants* employed through temporary job agencies, and secondly those with a more *settled status* and stable conditions organised in the union. However, experiencing both supposedly 'organised' and 'disorganised' workplaces led me to *refine my research questions* and to *de-construct* the assumptions (Acker et al. 1991, Burawoy 1991, Ó riain 2009) underlying the categories of analysis that I used, including 'political engagement', 'workplace resistance', 'organised labour', 'new/old migrants', 'informality', 'precarity' and so on.

2.2.2 Covert research in the informal sites of temporary work

To examine these issues, my gatekeeper - the chair of the hotels branch - suggested the 'best' temporary recruitment agency (i.e. the worst with regards to terms and conditions of employment), where I could register in order to enter the industry and take a job as a migrant worker myself. In March 2008 I was officially registered as an agency worker at 'International Talent'²⁸ one of the well-known agencies in Central London supplying a high number of temporary migrant workers from all over the world to the local hotel industry (mainly for catering and housekeeping services). After a few weeks I registered with a second staffing agency close to the City, the 'East End agency', which supplied catering workers both to public hospitals and hotels. I recorded my observations, impressions, informal conversations with the workers and my own initial interpretations through 'full fieldnotes' (Lofland and Lofland 1995), which I wrote down either at the end of the day or just after the shift on the Tube or bus on my way home.

During this phase of the fieldwork I carried out assignments mainly in the restaurants of large hotels or at catering establishments in various hospitals and conference centres across the city where I was sent by the agencies. 'Covert participant observation' seemed the most appropriate research technique to access the field and, moreover, was to some degree the only feasible strategy of inquiry to obtain first hand data. The alternative research strategy would have been overtly asking the agencies' management permission to be registered and get a job as a PhD student researching a sector with high employment of migrants. If I had chosen this path, it would have probably taken me several months before finding an agency willing to employ a research student

²⁸This is a pseudonym. All the temporary staffing agencies and the workplaces visited during the covert research together with the individual informants have been granted anonymity and reported under pseudonyms. However, the real names of the organisations involved in the overt phase of the research, including the hotel chains targeted by the organisers, have been reported with the prior consent of the participants, given the very public nature of the union campaign in the hotels. The extracts from the in-depth and informal interviews report the details of the informants about their gender, 'race', country of origin, type of employment status, work assignment and where possible, the site where the interview was conducted. The length of settlement in London was also mentioned for the migrants that I interviewed in-depth. More details about the profiles of the twenty informants interviewed in-depth, including their citizenship, migration and parental status, are reported in the Appendix to the thesis (p. 270).

who was also exploring the poor working conditions of migrant agency workers in the hospitality industry (supposedly worsened by their employment status as ‘temps’). Even then, the main reason for choosing covert research was to avoid the managers at work treating me differently from others, or hiding or trying to reduce the worst aspects of the jobs since they knew they were being observed. In other words, overt research would have increased the ‘reactivity’ of the participants to the extent of substantially impacting on the results of the research (Bryman 2008; see also Calvey 2000, Graham 1995, cit. in Hammersley and Atkinson 2003).

While remaining aware of the impossibility of completely erasing ‘reactivity’ when doing ethnographic research (Burawoy 1998), I took inspiration from Barbara Ehrenreich’s vivid accounts of her experience as an undercover journalist taking on low-paid waiting jobs to test if it was possible to ‘get by’ in America following 1998’s welfare reforms (Ehrenreich 2001). Similarly, the more recent covert observation of Polly Toynbee (2003), the journalist who attempted to survive working in a series of low-paid jobs in London provided a further fascinating example for my ethnography. Only by ‘becoming one of them’, living ‘in their *time* and space’, confronting participants in their ‘corporeal reality’, enduring the *pain* of the work, did it become possible to access the experiences of these workers and understand aspects that would be not possible to discover otherwise (Burawoy 1991).

2.2.3 *Being an agency worker*

The registration with ‘International Talent’ and with the ‘East End agency’ threw me into the everyday world of newly arrived migrants. The long hours spent in the ‘recruitment hall’ of the agencies waiting for the ‘shifts’ to be announced or endeavouring to find a place in the crowd and ‘begging’ for more working hours, exposed me to the daily conversations, stress, fears, sense of degradation and indeed the *multiple perceptions of work* of the new ‘birds of passage’ (Piore 1979) in London hospitality. Similarly to many of my new co-workers, I had very little previous experience in the sector, such that I wondered: what were the best credentials to present at registration time to make sure I could get a job? What was required to become an agency waitress in the shortest possible time? I would soon learn that, rather, we had to *pretend that* we had a relatively long experience in the sector and then simply start working. I learned almost naturally the ‘ways it worked’ to be recruited by the agencies, either by talking and sharing information with the other applicants in the agency ‘hiring halls’, or simply learning what were the ‘necessary

references' to put in the curriculum. These were partly suggested by the standard electronic forms that we were required to fill in to register with the agency. I had to go through various misadventures and obstacles before actually starting work. This included long queues, bureaucratic issues with my Italian I.D. card, the need to show various forms of deference and submission to the agency staff if I wanted to obtain work and even 'informal' fees to pay to the agency in order to attend the 'training day' and eventually be assigned a shift.

Finally, in March 2008 I started my assignments as a waitress in the restaurants of large hotels in the West End. Here I learned the reality of being a migrant temporary worker in London: given the meagre pay and the casual employment patterns, it was necessary to collect shifts across the city by registering with more than one agency, in order to secure a minimum weekly wage. The 'East End agency' offered me relatively short and light catering shifts in various venues, from hotels to hospitals and conference centres. Most often, I was sent to join the catering staff in two Hospitals, 'the River' and the 'Westminster' in central London, and a few times I was employed for events management at the 'Business Centre'. In these workplaces the managers appeared to have a more 'human attitude' towards the 'temps', who were often young overseas students or came from relatively settled minorities who had worked in the sector for a relatively long time (although on a casual basis).

In contrast, my experience working night shifts at the 'Lush Cafe' (the large restaurant of a luxury hotel where I was sent by the agency 'International Talent'), together with a large crowd of relatively inexperienced and more transitory migrants, was particularly tough, both mentally and physically. I learned *about the jobs* in a relatively short time, yet in order to *actually do it properly* I would have needed more training than the one hour offered by the agency's staff. In itself the work was much more tiring than I would have expected, and it involved series of stresses, pieces of mistreatment and humiliation that the consciousness of being an 'undercover researcher' was not sufficient to attenuate.

My participant observation as an agency worker in hotels and catering services ended mainly because of *exhaustion*. I could not bear the burden of multiple shifts for more than four months in a row. This proved a testament to the strength of the other migrant women and their capacity to withstand the multiple shifts and the intensity of the work. How could the other workers do it full-time? And how could the migrant women employed by the agencies bear the burden of taking on multiple shifts every day travelling from one side of London to the other? It was

becoming clear how the hardship and the *physical effort* involved in work such as waiting and cleaning were crucial aspects of these migrants' lives, thus adding a further dimension besides the intrinsically precarious character of employment by temporary job agencies.

I never cancelled my registration with either of the agencies, but soon after I stopped giving my availability to work, both the agencies stopped calling me. This was in fact the most common way to employ the 'temps': either the managers would phone, even just a day before the shift, or the worker would go to the agency to look for shifts. However, those months had represented a sufficient time period to develop some relationships with my co-workers, listen to their stories and their main concerns at work, learn their manner of speaking, observe *the labour process from within* and engage in more in-depth informal interviews with some of them. Soon it was possible to discover much beyond their 'working lives' since most of the conversations in and between the spaces of work and non-work, in the agency and the hotels, mainly concerned the various activities they engaged in order to find their way through the city and their leisure time. Their approach toward work was fundamentally *instrumental*.

On some occasions my participant observation in the field of temporary migrant work extended beyond the 'walls of hotels' and the agency, to explore the intra-cultural dynamics characterizing the life of these migrants, revealing at the same time the squalor of their poor and crowded housing conditions and the beauty of their capacity to counter tiredness and loneliness with relatively easy spaces of socialising and festivity. Most of the 'temps' would in fact use their contacts at work to then organise parties and barbecues in their homes on the weekends, and sometimes, when the agency had been generous with shifts, arranging nights out to go clubbing and discover the endless possibilities for leisure offered by the capital. The intrinsic *social character* of hospitality work in hotels and catering, often requiring team-work, emerged as an important aspect of the working experience of the young and recently arrived migrants, while responding to their need for sociality *to sustain their precarious lives*. For other workers, however, for instance those obliged to work longer hours by migration-related problems and/or family responsibilities, the endless shifts performed for different agencies across different workplaces did not allow any extra-time to dedicate to leisure and other activities. Work seemed to make up most of their relatively lonely and alienated lives.

2.2.4 *The union branch*

While I was employed by the agencies I continued to attend the union's branch meetings. My participation in the meetings of the hotels branch of the T&G/UNITE union, and sometimes those of the 'Restaurant and Bars branch' – both organising hospitality workers in Central London – lasted for a period of *sixteen months*. I also took part in the various initiatives of the campaign that was launched in the meantime by that same union together with London Citizens, a large civil society, organisation and a third international partner, the 'sister union' based in the US, 'UNITE HERE'. The campaigners mainly advocated a Living Wage and overall better employment conditions for workers in the hotel industry in London, focusing in particular on one international hotel chain (Chapter 4).

In this phase of participant observation, considering the overt character of the research and the relatively public nature of the setting under inquiry I could produce field notes while the discussions and actions were occurring. Differently from the participant observation in the agencies and in the hotels, in this case I decided to disclose my research interests from the beginning. The *collaborative* nature (Burawoy et al. 1991, Malo de Molina 2005) of my project with the union (based on a shared concern about the improvement of migrant workers' conditions in the industry), led me *to avoid any form of ambiguity* with regard to my role with the participants involved. I provided the trade unionists with broader information about my research objectives at the first joint meeting of the hotel workers and restaurant branch in October 2007, obtaining their informed consent with regard to my attendance at their monthly meetings and for later conducting interviews with individual members of the branches. In the trade union, 'reactivity' did not represent a substantial problem: the knowledge on the part of the union leaders and members of my research objectives would not have jeopardised the conduct and findings of my collaborative participant observation.²⁹

²⁹ Overt participant observation could probably have engendered serious reactivity problems if my research questions were directly tackling issues around power relations and internal democracy within the trade union and in the CSO leading the campaign. Although these elements did arise, indeed being critical to the issue of migrant workers' engagement in both organisations, my overt role did not seem to impact on the overall development of the campaign.

Overall in this longer phase of the research I conducted a series of *semi-structured in-depth interviews* with 20 informants, 10 of whom were migrant workers and the rest trade unionists and other activists from the CSO involved in the campaign. In the cases of the female trade unionist and the organiser interviewed, their roles as migrants and activists overlapped as they themselves had a relatively recent migration background.

2.2.5 *'Multi-sit(uat)edness': moving between the union, the agencies and the workplaces*

Drawing from individual conversations with the trade unionists, the collective discussion at branch meetings and the informal dynamics in the agencies and in the workplaces, a major *tension* soon emerged. It identified a fundamental *split* within the workforce, and in particular between the 'established workers' (the majority of the members of the union) and the so-called 'newcomers'. This partly corresponded with the divide between agency and in-house workers, against the background of the increasing *subcontracting* of labour recruitment.

I decided to pursue this tension. The core of the workforce, represented by more or less settled migrants, felt *threatened* by the new ones, whose availability to 'work more (hours) for less (money) was perceived to reflect the typical opportunism of the 'economic migrant'. In this context the union appeared to establish its main role as *'protector'* of the settled 'core-workers', defending their working standards allegedly put 'under pressure' by the combination of new immigration and spreading practices of subcontracting. However, I wondered whether the 'new migrants' were really money-oriented and opportunistic, as depicted by their colleagues and by unionists. How did their practices reflect their *particular status* as migrants? What were the tensions emerging inside workplaces according to the narratives of the different actors? Were the 'newcomers' from the EU Accession countries behaving differently because of their recently *gained mobility*? What other forms of resistance were these migrants expressing *outside* of the traditional structure of labour organisation? How did their relative *detachment from work* impact on their sense of justice in the

The leaders and most of the members of the branch were also aware that I was doing covert observation as an agency worker in some hotels and supported my project, which helped to make my ethnography a *'collaborative enterprise of participant and observer'* (Burawoy 1991: 291)

workplace, and to what extent did this make them more individualised than others? Or were there different forms of collectivity and ‘relationality’ developed among them, actually allowing them to oppose or simply soften and thus bear the most exploitative aspects of their jobs?

The fluid character of my ethnography led me to develop a ‘multiple situatedness’ (Ó riain 2009: 304) through a series of ‘personal extensions’. Although these made me feel uncomfortable in some circumstances, such as the difficulty of moving ‘across interviews with the officers and institutions that shape the site’ (ibid.) and the experiences and accounts of the workers themselves, they also involved some benefits. Among these were the relationships that the ethnographer can build with the participants in the site, uncovering meanings that would otherwise be kept hidden by other actors in the field (ibid. 304). For instance, starting to work for the agencies myself provided me with a clearer understanding of the important function that that particular form of recruitment played for the newly arrived migrants. Where else would you go if you have just arrived, and your English skills are relatively poor and your social networks are not developed enough to allow you an un-mediated entry to that sector of the labour market? The agency almost represented a reassuring employer, a ‘home’, a point of reference, where migrants new to the city and (often) to the job could meet other migrants with similar experiences and start their meticulous passage into the capital’s precarious service sector. The *strategic use of subcontracted work* and the *temporary nature* of that passage appeared somehow inevitable for those with a good education and who had a high awareness of the process of *skill degradation* implied in taking a job in the hospitality industry³⁰. At the same time, through in-depth interviews with some of the ‘permanent workers’ (i.e. in-house and relatively settled) who were also members of the branch, it became apparent that their perceptions of their newly arrived and precarious colleagues were more nuanced than appeared at first glance.

³⁰ The fact that most migrants working in so-called ‘low-skilled’ jobs are in reality skilled or highly skilled, and that taking employment in the UK means accepting this form of ‘labour market devaluation’ has been widely documented in research on migrants’ employment (McDowell et al. 2007, Wills 2008).

2.2.6 *A different site: the hotel workers campaign*

During the campaign I looked at the ways the migrant women, both members and non-members of the union, engaged with it and also the *relational dynamics* between the different actors (workers, unionists, activists from the CSO). To this end, I kept in mind the issues and points of friction that emerged in the exploratory ‘overlapping phases’ of participation in the workplaces and the branch. How were the issues of subcontracting and the tense relationship between agency and in-house workers being tackled in the specific context of the campaign?

When I first went back to attending the branch meeting after I got the job, I thought that that there was simply no connection between the two settings. The gap between the space of the agency and that of the union building appeared simply *unbridgeable*. Nonetheless, the ‘question of agency work’ was somehow present in the branch meetings. It emerged during the strategy discussions with the organisers and, on some occasions, union members expressed their concern about the difficult conditions of their agency and ‘casual’ workmates. Sometimes there was even a certain space for the few agency workers involved in the union campaign to express their concerns and talk about their issues at work. Low wages, long hours and work intensification were certainly problems commonly faced across the different categories of workers in the sector. However, differences in the number of rooms to be cleaned, the *extra work-time* often demanded from the agency workers, the lack of sufficient rest between shifts, the length of time it took to travel to the various workplaces assigned by the agency, the insecurity of employment, bullying and lack of respect by the management were often mentioned as ‘usual’ problems of this ‘a-typical’ part of the work-force. But was the union making any attempt to involve these ‘marginal workers’? Should they really be presented as enemies or as undercutting the conditions of the ‘core’ employee? What were the tactics and limitations of the union and the CSOs’ attempts to involve new migrants in the course of the campaign?

The multi-sited and fluid nature of my ethnographic study undoubtedly opened up new realities and research questions. However, the underlying question common to the two phases of the participatory research focused on how migrant women in the industry developed forms of resistance both *informally* in their workplaces and *formally* through engagement in union and civic organisations. In this regard the issue of the ‘representation gap’ of agency/temporary migrant workers within the union became of central importance. Furthermore, attention towards the ‘institutional aspects’ relevant to migrants’ processes of subjectivation triggered new questions in

the unfolding of the campaign, related to the micro-relational and organisational elements of union and community organising models. Was the structure of the union and that of the CSO changing because of the new composition of labour in the sector? Were T&G UNITE and London Citizens transforming each other in the process of experimenting new tactics to involve migrants and campaigning around traditionally non-unionised workplaces? How did the various relationships between actors impact on this, and on their own perception of 'transient' and 'migrant labour'? How did these transformations actually *create or hinder opportunities* for migrants' empowerment and for them to develop forms of political engagement?

At one moment it seemed that the hotel workers campaign and the spaces opened through the new collaboration between the union and the CSO were offering an opportunity for different categories of workers, including agency and casual staff, to be involved in the union, find spaces of empowerment and improve their working conditions. However, the ways in which the organising effort in the two 'target' hotels was carried out, and the insistence that the recruitment of new members was combined with legal union recognition in those workplaces, soon led to the abandonment of other issues relevant to the everyday realities of the workers. This resulted in a deepening of the existing tensions between agency and in-house workers. The so-called 'new migrants' from the EU Accession countries, although present in various moments of the campaign, seemed to remain at the margins, at least until a later phase. Eventually the way in which the organisers and the trade union leaders defined the status of the workers in relation to their migration background, and to their capacity/interest/willingness to be part of the union and *engage in long-term struggles* in their workplaces, starkly impacted on the process of political engagement for the migrant women members and non-members of the union, and on their actual level of involvement in the campaign.

2.3 Narratives and acts

Bringing in the biographies of the migrant workers, asking them about their working lives, exploring their own perceptions of the developments of the campaign and of their own efforts to change the hard and insecure conditions of their work, was key to *refining* my research questions. The qualitative interviews conducted during the study were not literally another 'spatial site' of the research, but rather they added a different and crucial dimension to the process of participant observation. In this sense, if 'multi-situatedness is understood as meaning not just moving across

spatial sites, but spatialised (cultural) differences, it is not important how many and how distant they are, what matters is that they are different' (Falzon 2009: 13). Thus we can understand the interviews with both the migrant women and the leaders participating in the campaign as constituting another 'site' of the research in terms of a *social space* where specific relationships took place according to different techniques of inquiry³¹.

The deepening of the relationships with the participants through the interviews was important, for instance, to unpack the question as to the *fluidity of their practices of resistance*. It made it possible to recognise how even among the 'more established' (and supposedly settled) migrant workers, there was not a mechanical correspondence between their relationship to their longer term work and their 'level of engagement'. Their approach towards the workplace and to the existing system of industrial relations seemed not to have a straight impact on the migrants' multifarious acts of resistance and modes of participation in the campaign.

Hence the main discovery during the research process was the realisation of the need to unpack the very categories that both myself as the researcher, and the workers and unionists as 'the researched', employed to describe the workforce and the new stratification of labour in the sector. If I wanted to understand the *changes in social relationships* at work and their potentials for the positive engagement of these workers in struggles to improve their conditions, I needed to question my own categories of analysis that had emerged from the explorative study (i.e. before starting to work myself as a waitress). In this regard the space of the interviews represented a crucial terrain to open up the field.

2.3.1 Interviewing migrant women as a critical practice

In my interviews with women working in the hotels and catering industries, my focus remained on their work experiences, their position in the labour market, their educational background and qualifications, their migration status in the UK, their process of skills degradation

involved in their immigration and their desire for *occupational and geographical mobility*. The ways in which they tried to improve their working conditions also constituted a key question in the interview schedules. As regards the workers I met in the union, the question of how they became part of the union and were involved in the campaign was also central. Nonetheless, by asking about their migration to Britain, many other aspects of their lives also emerged: their family background, their previous lifestyle, the difficulties they encountered in ‘finding their way’ and ‘settling’ in London, their dreams about future migration and their practices of sending of remittances back home. The *patriarchal aspects* of their family relationships emerged especially in the case of single mothers, although they were not further investigated as central ‘gender factors’ of these migrants’ lives. Rather, I concentrated on the ways these other elements indirectly related to their workplace experiences were played out in, and indeed shaped by, the *relationships between the different actors* in the course of the campaign.

The interviews I conducted with the women explored their *life stories*. Yet their experiences were not considered merely as ‘discursive effects’ of processes that construct what ‘appeared’ as reality. Recognising that *experience* is already constituted within *the discourse about the self*, I share the view that the ‘social constructions’ produced through discourses are ‘felt as real’ and have indeed real effects which must be taken in their *materiality* (Brah 1996).

Feminist researchers employing life stories methods emphasise the possibility of an *empowering* use of *discourse about the self* as responses and strategies of accommodation and resistance of varying facets of power³² by relatively marginalised women (Erel 2009, Freeman 2000, Lee 1997, Salzinger 2003, Wright 1997; 2006). However, in my research I did not focus solely on the women’s experiences *as narratives*. Rather, the decision to combine *participant observation* and *in-depth interviews* helped me to take into account not only the meanings that the

³² Feminist research has highlighted the transformative potential of women’s own narratives continuously challenging discursive formations by revealing the *gap*, or claiming the difference, between the depiction of certain social, national, gendered groups as generalised objects of social discourse and their particular *embodied histories* (Brah 1996; Erel 2009).

participants attached to what was happening – the ways they were *making sense of their conditions*³³ - but also their very acts and practices in the unfolding of the events. In this regard Burawoy (1998) highlighted how the acknowledgement of the situational nature of experiences and knowledge produced in specific circumstances can be discovered considering both the *discursive and non-discursive* nature of the dimension of social interaction (its ‘tacit knowledge’ or ‘practical consciousness’) (Burawoy 1998:15). After all, the pain and exhaustion that I just begun feeling during my participant observation in the hotels helped me properly consider the very ‘corporeal’ dimension of these workers’ experiences beyond their ‘discourses’. My participant observation in both the hotels and the unions proved to me that ‘doing’ things with and to those we study’ (Garfinkel 1967, cit. in Burawoy 1998: 15), and not only carefully listening to their voices and their own interpretation about their actions, adds a series of rich and informative data and understanding to the investigation.

However, I also paid serious attention to classic ethnographic insights into the need to *combine* participant observation with *ethnographic interviews*, believing that, with only the former, the knowledge of my participants would have been distorted (Spradley 1979). For instance, exploring the discursive constructions of my participants was crucial to *understanding* their relatively conscious strategies of mobility and *relatively intentional* acts of resistance in their workplaces (Isin 2008). In sum, remaining focused on *both narratives and acts* appeared the best means of responding to the theoretical interest of my research around the co-constitution of subjects’ linguistic and non-linguistic gestures and the intertwining of broader structures, regulations and social discourses impacting on *processes of subjectivation*. Furthermore, in order to trace the *relational dynamics* in the process of the hotel workers campaign, it was important to consider *both* what happened and the women’s own theories and discourses about the development of the campaign. Participation and analysis of the ‘tacit knowledge’, in addition to the informants’

³³ *Actors’ interpretations of their own actions* and the meaning that they attribute to it are key to ethnography as the task of ‘thick descriptions’ is to ‘uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts, the ‘said’ of the social discourse’, and to construct a system of analysis on whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they *will*, will stand out against the other determinants of human behaviour’ (Geertz 1975: 27).

own narratives, implies a passage described by Burawoy in terms of a *reduction* of the ‘situational knowledge always in flux’ into *aggregate social processes* (Burawoy 1998: 15).³⁴

Feminist authors have described the same passage of reduction in more critical terms, as an act of *objectification* that is inevitably implied in the researchers’ analysis of the interviews, in their act of *summarising* another’s life and placing it within a *context* (Ackers et al. 1991)³⁵. Ackers and colleagues challenged this intrinsic tendency of objectification in their research on women’s consciousness formation, rather trying to transform it into a moment of ‘critical reflection’ (Ackers et al. 1991: 144). They did this precisely by *deconstructing the same categories that were the starting point of their research*, and by testing the *gap* between the theoretical concepts they used and the reality of women’s lives in the process of data analysis.³⁶

2.3.2 *Unpacking and de-constructing categories*

In my ethnographic study, only after the first round of analysis did I realise that I was partly taking for granted the category of ‘migrant worker’. I was also unconsciously reproducing the assumption that the relation of migrants to their *work* was the primary factor determining their willingness to stay or go. In turn I assumed that a stronger relationship with their place of residence would augment their propensity to be engaged in the union. However, in the course of the research my objective became precisely to unravel these same categories instead of letting them constrain my participants’ points of views and self-representations. Comparing both the unionists’

³⁴ In this sense the author distances his research methods from those ‘cultural approaches’ where ‘the display of multiple voices will be cumbersome’ (Burawoy 1998: 15).

³⁵ This passage however is inevitably linked to the researchers’ own epistemology: ‘If we were to fulfil the emancipatory aim for the people we were studying, we had to go beyond the faithful representation of their experience, beyond ‘letting the data speak for themselves’ and put those experience into the theoretical framework that links women oppression to the structure of Western Capitalist Society’ (Ackers et al. 1991: 143).

³⁶ Indeed this methodology appears very close to the ‘theory re-construction’ suggested in Burawoy’s ‘extended case method’ whereby theory *is the starting point and then is ‘re-built’* drawing from anomalies emerging from the field (Burawoy 1998). In this sense I embraced the *theory-led* approach to ethnographic research against the pretension of inductive methods as in ‘Grounded Theory’ to proceed from empirical data in order to produce ‘neutral’ theory (Burawoy et al. 1991).

perspectives and the migrants' own and mutual perceptions of their positions as relatively 'transient' and temporary in London allowed me to explore the ways in which these same categories were impacting migrants' relative tendency to be involved in the union and other organisations in their community. Analysing the ways in which the actors articulated their own categories opened up spaces for their deconstruction. In this sense, the *embodied nature of my fieldwork* itself, and the shifting and reshaping of my own research questions, presented me an opportunity to start the process of theory re-construction (Ó riain 2009, Burawoy 1998).

Another key concept questioned through the process of the participatory study was that of 'workers' engagement'. Throughout the conversations it became clear that my original concept of 'engagement' was imbued with bias with regard to 'what' made a migrant worker concerned and agentic about her/own situation at work. Inadvertently I was assuming in my own questions a positive relationship between being relatively settled or 'integrated' and developing forms of engagement and resistance at work. The migrants interviewed, implicitly rejected my own definition of the term by replacing it with a more 'social understanding' of their co-workers' 'engagement'. For instance an Eritrean woman employed part-time in the Food and Beverage service of a large hotel described her Polish colleagues as being 'dis-engaged' in the sense of being 'a-social' and unwilling to engage in and *deepen everyday interactions* at work. This attitude also reduced the possibility of extending these relationships outside the specific site of the workplace as well as the availability of the co-workers to provide or even receive advice on issues not directly related to work (e.g. mutual support and information sharing about health-related issues). 'Engagement' and 'dis-engagement' as interpreted by some did not directly dovetail either with participation in the trade unions or with the workers' relatively instrumental attitude towards work.

It appeared that I needed to change this category and challenge its *normative function* in my interviews with the women, especially insofar as it was unable to grasp the *nuanced forms of resistance* that non-integrated, transient and 'cynical' migrants were opposing to the exploitative conditions of their work. Aware of the biased and *situated nature* (Haraway 1988) of some of the conceptual framework that constituted my interview schedule, I gradually opened the interviews to the process of participation and started to use the language of my own informants to frame the questions.

However, at that point I still faced the problem of avoiding a dichotomous view between 'collective forms of resistance' and 'individual coping strategies' as practiced by different actors

according to their more or less *informal* position in the London labour market. The existing literature on migrants coping with the hardship of the capital's daily life (Datta et al. 2007), in reproducing the distinction between 'collective' or 'organised' strategies of resistance and individualised 'coping tactics', did not help me solve this puzzle. Instead, my decision to unpack individual strategies of resistance *within and without* collective and formalised processes of organising appeared to be a particularly useful way of overcoming that dichotomy *in practice*. That developed through a gradual acknowledgement that any 'collective' process of resistance and engagement in the workplace was indeed constituted by the *singular* and, at the same time, *relational* understandings and acts of the workers. The outcomes of those struggles were actually always already enmeshed in personal and relational understandings and emotions emerging in the development of the campaign (see Chapter 4).

In my research the generic category of 'migrant women' was also part of my theoretical assumptions and *expectations* about the field. In some ways the category 'migrant women' as the subject of my study *emerged from the very materiality of the field*, given that occupational segregation by gender of this section of the labour market was very pronounced since, in fact, women constitute the majority of the workforce (especially in highly feminised jobs such as housekeeping) (People 1st, 2010b). However the focus on migrant women was also implied in my initial theoretical preoccupations concerning the relative 'autonomy of migration' of my participants, i.e. in what ways mobility was *gendered*, if mobility was really 'detrimental' to politics, if there was the risk of idealising migrants' mobility by celebrating it as an act of resistance in itself (Clifford 1997, Ong 1999). Research by feminist geographers on transnational migration brought attention towards 'locatedness' and how the activity of social reproduction necessarily remained 'placed' as inseparable from production, (Cravey 2005, Katz 2001, McDowell 2008a; Nagar et al. 2001; Smith and Winders 2008). Thus the feminist point of view could add important insights to the understanding of the controversial relationship between *politics* and *transient labour* (or, in other words, between forms of subjectivation and mobility) in gendered form.

Not surprisingly, women also represented the overwhelming majority in the union branch. Many of these women had children living with them in London, while a few were not mothers or had children who were looked after by other members of the family in their country of origin. The striking contrast between the female composition of the branch and the almost entirely male union leadership soon appeared to be crucial to my understanding of the limitations on migrants'

processes of political subjectivation within the union. The union leaders were also mainly British citizens, with only one of Irish origins. The only female official, recently appointed to the role of branch secretary, was a relatively recent migrant from Brazil.

Moreover, the issue of agency labour as transient labour emerged as a challenge for politics but not in a clear-cut 'gendered form', or at least, not in the simplistic understanding of it (i.e. as a comparison between male and female migrants' experiences of temporariness). On the contrary, some of the campaign leaders' tendency to equate higher engagement with long-term workers itself ended up being imbued with a *masculine understanding* of work, identity and politics. For instance, in the case of the female housekeepers, they were *celebrated* and at the same time *trapped* in (male) unionists' accounts by their *gendered attributes* as 'caring', 'long-term', 'settled' workers.

The fruits of their sacrifices for the families and children were to be *protected* against the threat of the newly arrived, 'loosely attached', 'opportunist', 'new' migrants. Thus, a *gender analysis of the campaign*, rather than a comparison between how migrant women and men were differently positioned in their workplace and developed according to their workplace and civic activism, was formed as a major problem of the research. In other words, rather than a research *on* migrant women it became research highlighting the *gendered dynamics* that still excluded women as 'embodied historical subjects' and therefore distinguished from the category 'migrant women' as 'generalized object of social discourse' (Brah 1996). Drawing inspirations from Brah's ethnography on Pakistani women workers in London, which aimed to de-construct the social discourse producing the women as 'culturally induced' to economic inactivity, I wanted to understand migrant women working in the hospitality industry in London as *embodied subjects*. They are in fact constructed as gendered, racialised and internally differentiated according to the categories of migration and contractual status. At the same time I wanted to engage with them as subjects that were *negotiating* with those same structures and expressing *specificity*.

Eventually, the decision to keep the 'generic' term migrant women, despite being conscious of smoothing over the differences among women workers or banalising them, reflects a preoccupation similar to that recently expressed by McDowell (2008a), that 'the emphasis on difference and diversity, a neglect of the commonalities facing the new global proletariat', risks making it 'more difficult to organize across space and scale, across differences of locality, gender and lived experiences' (ibid. 505). Research that illuminates the struggles within and outside the labour market of these, mostly, invisible subjects should on the contrary aim at 'combining an

understanding of the specificities of different lived experiences with the commonalities of exploitation in the labour market' (ibid.). These are essential elements of a feminist politics of knowledge production. Choosing a certain unifying language beyond the mere representation of multiple voices appears, indeed, as a political statement, and a *political strategy*.

So where was this *gender analysis* of the campaign bringing me? On one level, considering the debates on organising migrant workers and union renewal, this study led me to develop a critique of labour union tactics and to draw some insights from the fieldwork as to how to actively involve, rather than merely incorporate, precarious migrants in certain locales. The *question of scale* from a 'union geography point of view' was going to be 're-discovered' away from the *normative position* of what would mean 'true political engagement', drawing from the various acts of transnational migrants themselves (their decisions whether or not to settle and their practices of mobility). Although, of course, *mobility did have an impact* on migrants' degree of involvement in local politics and union activities in the workplace, what was striking was the persistence of *masculinist values* in the labour movement and the vision of 'organised labour' as a taken-for-granted unified subject. This continues to contribute to the *isolation* of many migrant women and may exacerbate their exploitation.

In terms of my 'theoretical re-construction', the idiosyncrasies emerging from the body of my ethnography did not lead me to conclude that there was not 'autonomy' or specific implications of the fact that migrants secured some achievements *through their movement*, but that that action encountered various spatial and social constraints. What the migrants accomplished with their strategies of mobility and through their 'temporariness', despite and outside of union and civic politics, opened up a terrain for further investigation. In what ways were migrants, with their everyday acts of resistance embedded in their realities of precariousness and temporariness outside of formalised union politics, transforming the very concept of *political agency*?

2.4 Ethical issues

The process of formal and informal interviewing and the choices of conducting covert or overt participant observation involved a series of ethical dilemmas in the course of the research.

Indeed, it is not always possible to distinguish strictly between the covert and overt role of the observer: the researcher might disclose the identity and aims of the project at the beginning, but there are people with whom she/he comes into contact during the fieldwork who are not aware of the ethnographer's status as researcher (Atkinson 1981). The blurred distinction between covert and overt research can also emerge as an outcome of a strategic choice by the researcher, who can decide to reveal some aspects of her true identity according to practical and ethical considerations (Bryman 2008: 406). For instance, during my period of employment as an agency worker I decided to disclose some aspects of my identity as a research student to my co-workers, although I would omit some other aspects (i.e. that my work was instrumental to the collection of data). Being completely transparent about the reason for my employment could have made some workers suspicious and have jeopardised my own registration with the agencies. Eventually, I told the whole story about the reasons why I had started the work, and the main questions at the basis of my research, to those with whom I developed *closer relationships* and with whom I carried out informal *in-depth interviews*. Moreover, in the case of participant observation in the trade union's activities, the decision to conduct overt research did not mean that my identity as a researcher did not remain hidden to some of the workers who became involved in the campaign at a later stage. Similarly, I decided to make clear the reasons behind my presence and the motives of my study, at least to participants with whom I conducted in depth-interviews. The qualitatively different nature of the relationship built with the workers interviewed (Ackers et al. 1991), and the level of depth reached in the individual conversations with them and with the union leaders and organisers over a period of over sixteen months required me to seek a level of *transparency* and trust that allowed these relationships to consolidate the *participatory* and *collaborative* nature of my research.

While I was aware of the continuing power dynamics in the relationship between the researcher and the researched in both covert and overt participant observation (Acker et al 1991, Burawoy 1991) I pursued Skeggs' objective of avoiding a victimising view of the (women) participants³⁷. In the same vein I tried to avoid treating the informants as merely vulnerable subjects

³⁷ As emerged in research conducted with working-class women, Skeggs highlights how 'the young women' interviewed '...were not *prepared to be exploited*: just as they were able to resist most things which did not promise economic or cultural reward, they were able to resist me.' They rather: '... enjoyed the research. It provided resources

unable to 'resist' my own questions about their stories or any form of pressure emerging during the interviews. More broadly, the ethical standpoint of this participatory research was the belief that every co-production of knowledge involves 'taking sides *with*' the participants and that every thought is always *situated* (Haraway 1988) and implicated against all disembodied theory that pretends to speak from a 'neutral place of enunciation' (Malo de Molina 2005). *The co-production of data* and sites by both the researched and the researcher is an intrinsic aspect of ethnographic research: 'how you define site or sites has political consequences (Gillie and Ó riain 2002), but the ethnographic partiality (the 'cut') is not established by the ethnographer in an autocratic and arbitrary way. Rather, one is guided by the scholarly literature on a particular topic, the current state of methodology, and one's unfolding ethnographic insights on the ground' (cit. in Falzon 2009: 12).

Overall the leading principles of transparency and reciprocity informed the whole phase of collaborative research, which included my personal involvement in solidarity action with the union and supporting both individual members and collective initiatives of the campaigners during the fieldwork as well as after the empirical research was officially completed.

2.5 The boundaries of my participatory research: positionality, relationality, power

The advantage of looking from inside workplaces was highly valuable in the overall development of the research. The choice of participant observation gave me the opportunity to confront participants in their 'concrete existence' against conventional truths in the social sciences that artificially separate society in two parts, between the 'object of observation' and the 'neutral' and 'rational' scientist supposedly beyond social determinism (Burawoy 1991: 291). However, remaining aware of my *positionality* throughout the period of the fieldwork was crucial to understanding some of the *limits* of participatory or 'engaged research'. At the same time it made

for developing a sense of their self-worth...'and more importantly the feminism of the research provided them with a framework to explain their individual problems as part of the wider social structure (Skeggs 1994: 88)

possible to illuminate more aspects of the world of low-paid labour in this sector of London's service economy. Although I did in fact *become* an agency waitress for a few months, I was aware of being in a very different position to my workmates.

First of all *I was not working for the money*, but I was doing that work in order to collect data for my research. Moreover, although I had some of the attributes typical of the average worker in this section of the service industry (e.g. being a relatively young worker, a student and a somewhat 'recently arrived migrant' in London), there were other major factors that differentiated me from my co-workers. I was still able to withdraw from these precarious jobs at any time given any major reason to do so, and in any case I knew that I was more or less a 'visitor' in a world of hardship and insecurity where many others would remain trapped for a much longer time.

With regard to my *educational and class background*, the difference of my positionality was less apparent, because many of my colleagues in the agency held graduate or even postgraduate qualifications. We therefore shared a similar feeling of personal degradation by doing a job that was simply not related to our actual skills or our aspirations. Like many others among the young migrants from Brazil, Poland or India recruited by the agencies, I had to hide the fact that I have a Master degree in Social Sciences, not wanting to look 'weird' or trigger the suspicions of agency managers and employers. The differences in educational background were starker as compared with the 'longer term' migrant workers that I met in the union.

The fundamental question about my positionality gravitated around the fact of being considered myself a 'migrant' in the interaction with the participants. Overall though, being a 'migrant' (although still a privileged EU migrant coming to the UK to enrol in a postgraduate programme) made it somehow easier to start a conversation with the workers both in the agencies and the union and helped to partly 'break the wall' between researcher and researched (Malo de Molina 2005). In a sense I made a *strategic use* of certain aspects of my own 'intersectional identity', highlighting an example of how multiple subjectivities can be valorised in different contexts of participant observation. For instance I decided to emphasise my Italian *accent* not only to facilitate my access to the job agencies, but also in the everyday conversation with my colleagues (and sometimes with the women in the union branch) as a means of making myself appear 'more foreign' or 'more recently arrived', and thus closer to their positions and experiences.

At the same time, the overwhelming feeling of unease in doing manual jobs (which I have never trained to do) turned my 'educational privilege' into a disadvantage. What made me 'special' in comparison to others was at best my *inexperience* in the job rather than my 'higher education' (see also Ehrenreich 2001). However, something I should not underestimate, is that, unlike many low wage workers, I still had the advantage of being *white and*, being from a 'country like Italy', i.e. not having to deal with the persistent, although subtle, *orientalist stigma* attached to 'those coming from Eastern Europe'. This might have influenced the fact that on a couple of occasions I was discouraged by the managers themselves from applying for housekeeping jobs. Because of the unspoken cultural stereotypes about national embodied attributes, as a national from a Mediterranean country I fitted much more easily with jobs involving 'soft' and 'interactive' skills such as waiting work. At the same time I consistently saw the middle-age (often Eastern European, Latin American or African) women queuing in the other section of the agency's room applying for longer-term jobs in housekeeping.

Interestingly though, I found that there was something 'exceptional' about 'being Italian' and using an agency to find a job. Across the four months I could not find any Italian colleague in either of the agencies. As I came to understand, during my first year in London, Italians normally prefer to be employed through informal networks of co-nationals already settled in the capital and/or to apply directly for jobs in pubs, small cafés and restaurants (preferably Italian restaurants or pizzerias where your language, 'style' and 'affective labour' are valorised in the process of recruitment). 'We' Italians did not 'need' to use third party agencies, which were instead perceived to be for 'desperate people' from countries further away, and/or with less personal contacts and social networks. Thus, while Italians, together with the other minorities from Southern European countries, *used to be part* of the 'core' of the hospitality workforce in London during the 1970s, nowadays Italians employed in the sector would rather be either highly temporary and seasonal workers or else cover the few permanent posts (having 'climbed the ladder' into more 'professional' or supervisory positions).

My *nationality* also influenced another set of relationships involved in my participatory research in the trade union campaign. It impacted on the attitude expressed by trade union leaders and organisers towards me as a student from Italy doing research out of concern about working conditions in the industry. In the interviews, some of them also expressed a certain sympathy for the fact that Italians used to be a central element of the 'traditional core' of the migrant workforce in

the sector. However, my positionality as an Italian *and as a woman* participating in the union branch and the campaign was more multifaceted and contradictory. For instance, in contrast with my experience in the workplaces, the fact of *not being a native speaker* made my position somehow weaker in the union. Generally, the voices of the women members of the branch were partly curtailed because of their relatively weaker fluency in the language as compared to the branch leaders. *Indeed, confidence in using the English language* emerged as a major source of empowerment for the migrant workers, not only in the context of the workplace (e.g. to better challenge the harassment by managers), but also as a key factor in raising one's own voice during the meetings, and being able to put forward certain claims in the collective discussions. This was evidently the case because both the meetings of the branch and those with the civil society organisation partners of the campaign were highly structured. Although spaces for workers' interventions were mainly established in advance or 'authorised' by the chair, a smooth and effective use of the English language was key in determining the possibilities of empowerment for certain workers against others, or for the migrant workers *vis-à-vis* the leaders. Together with the language, the question of the specialised *legalistic jargon* of industrial disputes used by the union officers also presented *barriers* to members' full participation and I too had to become accustomed to expressions such as 'grievance', 'disciplinary hearing', 'victimisation', and the other terms related to the existing legislative measures to protect migrant workers from racist discrimination.

The increasingly legalistic 'language of industrial relations' and the power of specialised knowledge were directly related to the *gender dynamics* that also shaped my experience of participant observation in the union as a woman. What I later described as the 'either patronising or macho and aggressive tone of union organising campaigns' (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting), although lesser in the softer words and the 'relational' attitude of the community organiser, was something that I also had to face in conversations with some of the 'old' male union officers who were in charge of the campaign initiatives. At the same time, in conversation with them I observed the openings and transformations that their political culture and practices were undergoing. My growing awareness of the intersection of language and gender in shaping my own position within the union and campaign constituted a crucial aspect in my analysis and interpretation of the data, especially with regard to the question of the barriers that migrant women encountered in their process of 'engagement' in the official sites of labour organisation. This also contributed substantially to the 'theoretical reconstruction' of my thesis, highlighting the persisting

masculinist character of trade union organising strategies and the reproduction of fixed gendered political roles as a major impediment to migrants' empowerment.

A final limit to highlight with regard to my participation in the trade union campaign concerned *the issue of membership*. On one occasion during the first months of my fieldwork in the union I voluntarily mentioned to the branch chair that at some point it would be appropriate for me to become a member of the union. He was quite surprised that I was *not one yet*, and from that moment he asked me about my subscription at almost every opportunity until I finally decided to register. The issue of 'becoming a member of the union' engendered some uneasiness in my relationships with the union members and especially with the leaders.

On the one hand, my position toward the union was intrinsically ambivalent, despite the overt nature of the research, and my role somehow blurred between different identities. I was at once a student concerned with workers' conditions in the sector but also a researcher exploring the possible pitfalls of a union organising around those issues; an activist involved in a migrant workers' rights campaign with other groups in the city and a worker experiencing one of the worst jobs in the sector.

On the other hand, the collaborative nature of my research was somehow taken for granted and I understood the fact of 'becoming a member' as almost a symbolic gesture to 'seal' my actual engagement and support of the activities of the union. At the same time, the trade unionists' insistence – which made me feeling uncomfortable, possibly like many other 'non-union members' – even if unconsciously testified to the union's 'obsession' with the issue of *formal membership* of the different actors variously involved in the *relatively informal* space of the campaign. This became another important element in my analysis of the controversial relationships between this relatively traditional institution of the labour movement and the deep changes in the *composition and subjectivity of labour* in this precarious sector of the service economy, bursting into the 'old' world of industrial relations. The in-depth interviews with the trade unionists, the organisers and the migrants themselves provided indeed precious insights into the restructuring of the hospitality industry in London as well as into the main issues at work as subjectively perceived by its highly diverse migrant workforce.

CHAPTER THREE

Transborder working lives in London hospitality

Before looking into the forms of everyday resistance and political engagement of migrant service workers, it is necessary to uncover the ‘structural’ characteristics of the hospitality industry in London and how they are triggered by changing complex social dynamics. What are the prevailing regulatory devices, management rationalities and logics of division underlying the new stratification of the hospitality workforce? To what extent is this section of the service economy being restructured? Are the main ‘issues at work’ differently perceived among different categories of workers, and why? How do the views of trade unionists and organisers on the role of migrant labour in the sector and its ‘new stratification’ shape the political agenda and the understanding of the most urgent problems for hotel and catering workers? Drawing from the accounts of the various actors involved, including workers, unions and community activists and their everyday social relationalities, this chapter identifies the exploitative patterns of work in hotels and catering and the emerging intersections cutting across one of the most transient and precarious parts of the migrant population in the capital.

3.1 Structural features of the hotel industry

The major problem in the sector is increasing ‘casualisation’: the employers *substitute* permanent workers by temporary....Employers say that you have all rights even though you are temporary, but in fact they have *the power* to ask the agency not to send the worker back... (Tom, male, white, UK born, Irish origin, part-time officer, Hotels branch)

From my early interviews with practitioners and trade unionists with a long experience in the hospitality sector, the replacement of ‘in-house’ by agency workers was identified as a major cause of the overall degradation of working condition in the industry. The trade unionist describes the effects of a practice increasingly adopted by large and small hotels: that of *subcontracting* the recruitment of workers to third party agencies. The term ‘casualisation’ synthesises the new trends of ‘precarisation’ of work in the sector with the expansion of temporary and insecure employment and an erosion of employment rights supposedly brought about by the ‘flexibilisation’ of

recruitment. The downward pattern in the UK regarding pay and working conditions for hospitality and hotel workers in particular has been documented by quantitative and qualitative studies (Dutton et al. 2008, LC and Unite 2009, Lucas 2004, Vanselow et al. 2009). However, research on the worsening conditions of work in the sector seeks to choose from among various existing terms one which best describes the ongoing process of *restructuring* in the service economy and its impact on labour relations (May et. al 2007, Sassen 2001). ‘Casualisation’ and ‘flexibilisation’ can be understood as a consequence of wider, structural changes in the management of large hotels in the UK, including parallel phenomena of *internationalisation* of the hotel industry.

3.1.1 *Bricks and Brains*

Processes of outsourcing and flexibilisation of work involving hotels’ greater reliance on the ‘temporary staffing industry’ mainly respond to concerns related to the *timing* of demand and supply of labour (Lai and Baum 2005). However, this is not the only reason. Third party agencies can also provide the employer with a strategy to *manage differently* its overall relation with the labour force, while accommodating broader restructuring of the industry:

The practice of *outsourcing*, especially in Food and Beverage but also in other jobs, creates a situation where workers *have no relation with people but only agencies*. This division can be called ‘the split up of bricks and brains’, whereas *bricks* refer to the physical infrastructure of the hotels and the *brains* to the managerial skills. In other words, while the buildings are owned by real estate and private equity contracts, these externalise the management of their hotels to private management companies... even though they own the buildings, they don’t mind about anything else than the *rent*, in fact more rent means more return, so to raise the profit they just cut on wages (Tom, male, white, UK born, Irish origin, part-time officer, Hotels branch)

The ‘split between bricks and brains’ is described by the trade unionist as a critical change in the hospitality sector. The expansion of hotel chains corresponded with this industry becoming divided into two combined but clearly separable businesses: the provision of hospitality service and that of real estate (Clancy 1998: 131). As the informant also emphasised, this split triggers a situation where hoteliers care more about rent profitability than sales figures (BHA 2005: 13, cit. in Dutton et al 2008:100). This has become possible since large hotel chains have recently sold their property assets in order to improve profitability by relieving themselves of the burden of building and maintenance costs. In this way brand operations continue but *cost pressures* are placed on the small independent operator (ibid). The trade unionist’s general point is that this separation,

implying a high level of *segmentation in the governance* structure of the hotel, involves wage cuts for the workforce, overall degradation of working conditions and lower *quality of service* provided.

Prior to the Second World War, hotels and motels were in fact independent operations that combined different functions. From then until the late 1990s, the market was dominated by internationally branded hotels that were still ‘owner operated’: hotel companies such as Hilton and Sheraton owned both the building and the brand while small-scale and family-run enterprises were still dominant (Teasdale 2009). Nowadays, although most hotels are still small and independent, TNC-oriented³⁸ chains dominate the market as larger establishments provide most guest rooms and the majority of employment in the sector (Vanselow et al. 2008: 5).

Considering the industry management point of view (Teasdale 2009), two major factors contributed to the disjuncture between the owner of the property building and the hotel management companies. Firstly, institutional investors took an increasing interest in hotel assets, as a strategy to diversify their portfolios. As competition in the industry grew internationally, hotel chains, in order to improve their bottom lines and *satisfy their shareholders*, attempted to expand their resources, drawing from global capital markets by issuing stock publicly (Bernhardt et al. 2003, cit. in Seifert and Messing 2006: 557).

Secondly, the ‘bricks and brains split’ was induced by the fact that many international hotel companies decided that their core business lay in operating hotels and maximising the value and distribution of their global brands, rather than in owning real estate (Teasdale 2009). Studies in international political economy have explained this phenomenon, identifying it as an example of wider trends in the *internationalisation* of the whole service sector. By applying the ‘Global Commodity Chains model’ to the hotel industry, Clancy (1998) supplied an in-depth explanation of how the spreading of hotel TNCs impacted on their organisational and governing structures as well as on their internal labour relations: ‘Two overriding factors condition the global organisation of hotel chains: the nature of the service product itself, which creates firms-specific competitive

³⁸ TNCs stands for Transnational Corporations

advantages, and the ability to *separate* these advantages from actual ownership' (Clancy 1998: 131). This means that *reputation* becomes the major marketing factor for hotel corporations and explains the reason why the 'brand' is considered an essential *guarantee* for clients. This in turn derives from the nature of the 'commodity-hotel' to be consumed and the particular form of its consumption: as a 'good experience' which unlike other commodities cannot be tested in advance (ibid.132). Thus, as emphasised by the chair of the London hotel branch, while the management company concentrates most of its resources on the promotion of their corporate image, the owner appears only interested in the high rent. The landlord's relative concern about the way in which the hotel is run and its overall costs, including terms and conditions of employment, depends on the type of contract between the owner and the management company.³⁹

3.1.2 Outsourcing and work flexibilisation's strategies

In this regard, there is a 'second split' that must be taken into account in order to understand the current organisational restructuring of the hotel industry and its impact on employment conditions. As emphasised by Teasdale (2009), as 'most of these new hotel owners did not have hospitality knowledge in-house' they consider it more convenient to seek 'external help' rather than bring experts into their teams. That means that hotel owners, after 'buying' the brand of the chain and its main expertise, in turn *externalise the actual management* of the hotels to other private management companies. Services like Food and Beverage (sometimes leasing out the whole restaurant), housekeeping, laundry and security, are in fact increasingly outsourced to other management companies (Seifert and Messing 2006: 558; see also TUC 2007). The objective of

³⁹ 'If, for example, the owner's return is based on a turnover lease then the role of the asset manager need not include any review of the expenses of the business'; on the contrary under the terms of a management agreement 'typically, the owner's return is strongly influenced by the costs' (Teasdale 2009). Thus in the case described by the respondent the hotel chain targeted by the union seems to be linked to the landlord under a simple turnover lease-type of contract.

subcontracting is dual-faceted: *reducing costs* and *outsourcing risks* to the agencies (TUC 2007), including the costs related to the management of 'human resources'.

Therefore, it is possible to understand how the restructuring of hotel chains in the form of internationalisation and the split between real estate property and the actual management of the hotels' business have fostered the flexibilisation of employment relations and cost-cutting strategies in the sector. As emphasised by Seifert and Messing (2006): 'To improve their immediate bottom line, then, hotels and hotel chains have sought to introduce more 'flexibility' into their operations in the form of part-time, casual, and seasonal work, a strategy which has significantly diminished the attraction of investing in the long-term health or job satisfaction of workers' (ibid. 557).

This process of governance fragmentation and externalisation must be contextualised within the overall increased competition between large hotel chains at the origin of the apparently contrasting process of merging and acquisition by large TNCs. As research in housekeeping in particular has noted: '...while low skill and low wages are long-standing features of the hotel sector, industry consolidation and corporatization are leading to ever more competitive product markets (both local and global), resulting in management strategies that further degrade the working conditions of many hotel room attendants' (Scully-Russ 2005; Appelbaum et al. 2003, cit. in Vanselow et al. 2008: 17). As a response to consolidation and increased international competition, and in order to maintain the occupancy rate in relation to the expanded availability of beds (Vanselow et al. 2008: 6), some hotels have invested in *improving their customer care management* and more generally *the quality of the service* provided. This has translated into an increase in the number of features and amenities in guest rooms thus *increasing the workload* for maids and cleaning staff. Without a corresponding increase in terms of resources, this implies an *intensification of work for lower pay*, especially for room attendants (ibid. 7). In this respect, comparative research conducted in housekeeping departments in Europe and the US claims that the process of outsourcing actually serves a double objective. On the one hand it offers the opportunity for better *staffing with fluctuation* in demand (a structural characteristic of the industry), and on the other hand, it is an effective method to *cut wages*. Why then are the recruitment of labour and the control of its cost so important for hotel companies?

3.1.3 *The centrality of labour costs in the hotel industry*

The industry's intrinsic functioning explains why management's focus is on labour costs. As researchers in the field importantly point out, room cleaning, vegetable chopping in Food and Beverage and reception work are all jobs that *cannot be either offshored* or subjected to *automation* processes. In other words, the *immediate nature* of the service provision and the labour-intensive character of service jobs such as those in hospitality mean that they must be performed *on site* by *human beings* (Vanselow et al. 2008 :1). As emphasised by Dutton et al. (2008) the *labour intensive nature* of the work makes labour costs in the hotels high (as a percentage compared to the overall costs of production) and this is not because of a higher wage rate (which on the contrary remains among the lowest in the UK labour market), but simply because the *ratio of employees to guests* is high (especially in upmarket hotels) (Dutton et al. 2008: 102).

The fact that front-line service jobs are protected from the threat of relocation leads the literature to highlight the potential of both the state and trade unions to intervene in the organisation of work and production to raise standards. The other side of the coin of hotel's labour 'immobility' is that management decides to cut labour costs by 'importing' cheaper labour from other countries or recruiting it through other means. Before looking at the intersection between agency and migrant labour, it is worth deepening the analysis of the means by which recruitment agencies contribute to the management of labour and decreasing costs in the hospitality industry.

3.1.4 *The role of agencies: externalising, disciplining, intensifying work*

The interview with the hotel workers branch officer therefore helped identify the significant parallel in the industry between the *externalisation of management* services in large London hotels (i.e. the split between 'bricks and brains') and the strategy of *outsourcing the recruitment of labour* through the use of job agencies. There is however a particular dimension, normally overlooked, that makes temporary staffing agencies particularly congenial to helping hotels *reduce labour costs* and manage their workforce. This takes place mainly through the *transfer* from the hotel to the agencies of tasks related to human resource expenditure associated with new hires, such as recruitment advertisements, selection costs and training and orientation expenses, thus decreasing expenditure associated with HRM (Lai and Baum 2005: 96). According to research in the sector, even when hotel management doubt the overall advantages of using agency labour, the reliance on temp

agencies appears fundamental to *recruitment* and *replacing* leaving or retiring core staff (Vanselow et al. 2008: 13).

Moreover, *intermediary role* played by the staffing agency, acting as a 'third party' between the hotel workers and the official employer (the hotel chain), may lead to a process of 'distancing' or 'depersonalisation' for the workers. According to the trade unionist, this creates a situation whereas 'workers have *no relation with people* but only agencies' as the employee no longer recognises hotel management as her/his *immediate employer* (Tom, male, white, UK-born, Irish origin part-time officer, Hotels branch). Research on this topic has highlighted various *contradictory effects* emerging from the 'triple relationship' between employers, workers and agencies. Gottfried (1994) emphasises that the 'duality of control' lies in that 'the site of labour process is not (anymore) the site of contractual employment (...) but the subcontracting site' (Gottfried 1994: 305). In this sense, while the agency tries in different ways to *preserve* its status as the employer of record, (e.g. by hiring managers to retain control over the workers), the employer exerts forms of *direct control* on the actual labour process such that workers themselves often perceive supervisors as being the *real boss* according to the length of the assignment. Confusion and *uncertainty* over employment roles can lead to an *intensification of the pace* of work and an inclination to accepting poor conditions on the part of the agency worker, who cannot discern who is responsible for retaining them (ibid.).

Very similar changes in employment and recruitment patterns in the French context have been described in the literature in terms of the 'new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiappello 2007). This emphasises how the advantage in the use of external agencies lies in their capacity to ensure the *maximum disposability* of temp workers: '(...) outsourcing makes it possible to increase the *intensity of work* by using the pressure of the market which appears to be an uncontrollable external factor (...) Equally conducive to it are the 'availability clauses' that have proliferated in recent years, whereby the employer ensures the continuous availability of wage earners while being obliged to pay only for periods that have actually been worked' (Boltanski and Chiappello 2007: 245). According to these authors, the peculiar aspect of casualised and subcontracted work lies in the *exploitation of labour time*, which makes it possible to pay only *the time actually worked*, that is, excluding the time wasted on training and breaks which was formerly usually included in the 'fair working day' (ibid. 245) In turn, it is precisely the *status of insecurity* and management's continuous threat of not renewing shifts that ensures 'continuous availability' and allow for the

increase in *work intensity*. Ethnographic and participatory studies in other countries of the North have also shown how through the ‘institutionalisation of uncertainty’, temp-work agencies *limit temp-workers’ capacity to resist* their poor conditions of employment (Vosko 2001: 174).

Indeed, the participatory study in the temporary staffing agencies revealed how management’s ‘threat’ of not renewing the shifts represented one of the major levers of increasing workers’ availability and productivity:

Here it is not about favouritism by supervisors... It is not that which serves as a compensation or as an input to work better and harder. Rather, it is just *the fear of losing the job* that acts on everyone...The main *preoccupation* is that *the agency* is not gonna call me back because I performed very badly...’ (Ethnographic diary, shift at the hotel restaurant ‘Lush Cafe’)

Thus agency workers’ ‘continuous availability’ to work appears crucial in the overall arrangement of the industry although, as will be further considered, workers resist and respond to the practices of work intensification by withdrawing their supposedly ‘permanent availability’ (Chapter 5). There are other aspects of the industry that explain the increasingly central role of agency work and the ways in which it is reshaping the contours of its labour force. Considering these makes it possible to view the issue of temporary labour from a different angle.

3.1.5 *A two-tier labour force?*

It has been noted how the hotel trade is intrinsically characterised by a highly fluctuating demand and it has always relied on *seasonal* and *migrant labour* to fill in the vacancies in the busiest periods of the year. According to the TUC’s recent report on agency work (TUC 2007), the pattern of maintaining a ‘core staff’ and a ‘buffer zone’ is a *structural feature* of the industry, which derives from the oscillating demand depending on seasonal variations in tourism levels (ibid. 20). The ‘atypical’ contractual arrangements are therefore aimed at covering the ‘day to day operations’ required during the busiest times.

In a recent research on agency labour in London’s hotels and hospitals, McDowell et al. (2008a) pointed out how international hotel chains rely almost exclusively on agency work for their entry-level staff and also for some professional vacancies. In this sense, the key role played by the agencies in the ‘remaking of labour market conventions’ lies in supplying flexible and vulnerable

workers while ‘managing the costs and contradictions of employing temporary workers on behalf of the end employers’ (McDowell et al. 2008a: 751). The *increasing reliance* on agency work as a reflection of cost cutting strategies through subcontracting has been highlighted as a common trait of the industry across different countries (Bernhardt et al. 2003, Bolton and Houlihan 2009). What forms of subcontracted and ‘non-standard’ work are actually present in the sector in London?

As also emerged from the exploratory research, hotel and catering workers in London display a wide range of contractual *types*: they can be hired directly or indirectly by the hotel or through agencies, or they can be directly employed while remaining ‘casual,’ on a permanent or part-time basis. But how do the employers reduce labour costs in practice? There are various differences in terms and conditions of employment between *in-house* and *agency workers*. For instance, agencies do not provide sick pay or holiday pay and these workers are not paid for staying on to finish their workload after the end of a shift (TUC 2007). A major drive for employers by hiring agency staff for hotels lies in the possibility of avoiding those ‘fringe benefits’ (i.e. maternity leave payments and holiday entitlements) that hotels would normally pay to their permanent staff (Lai and Baum, 2005: 96). Another major difference between agency and in-house workers lies in the juridical definition of the ‘employee’ as opposed to the ‘worker’: the employment status of an agency worker is essentially different from an ‘in-house one in that she is not considered a *proper employee*. Rather, she is understood as a worker on a *contract for services* (TUC 2007: 8). This status implies only statutory minimum entitlements and workers’ exclusion from important rights and benefits such as protection from unfair dismissal, redundancy protection, a minimum notice period and rights to maternity and paternity leave (ibid.).⁴⁰

More recently the UK Government has introduced a legislative proposal which is currently under consultation. The proposal for the regulation of agency work theoretically imposes equal treatment for agency workers, although not complying with the EU ‘Agency Workers Directive’’s

⁴⁰ The general employment rights that apply to all workers independently from their contractual status are in fact limited to the right to the National Minimum Wage and to fall under Working Time Regulation (TUC 2007: 6).

prescription of a qualifying period of six weeks (TUC 2007: 30). In fact, under the UK legislation implementing the EU Directive as currently designed, temporary agency workers will be entitled to equal treatment 'with directly recruited employees in respect of basic working and employment conditions, including pay and holidays' *only after 12 weeks*⁴¹. The Government decided to delay the regulations' coming-into-force until October 2011 in order to '[give] recruiters and their clients time to prepare and plan' and because it was aware of the need 'to avoid changing requirements on business until the economic recovery is more firmly established' (TUC 2009). The TUC expressed its concern that agencies will circumvent the new rights 'by moving agency workers between jobs within the same workplace, or by rotating agency temps on short-term assignments between different employers. Moreover, existing loopholes in the legislation will provide 'rogue employers' the opportunity to use 'bogus self-employment' to avoid equal treatment rights for agency workers (ibid)⁴². Independently of the future development of this legislation and the actual possibility of its enforcement, it is apparent that different juridical statuses directly produce different material conditions between in-house and agency workers.

Differences in wages and their calculation between in-house and agency workers were particularly striking in the hotels researched. One crucial aspect which emerged from the fieldwork in the staffing agencies consisted in their *payment systems*, based on the 'piece-rate' where the payment is 'by results' rather than per hour. Management normally justifies the use of 'formal or actual piece-rate pay strategies' with the *need to match* fluctuating occupancy rates with staffing without having extra costs (Vanselow et al. 2009: 13). In practice, room attendants paid per room often receive a lower pay than in-house staff: if they do not manage to clean the established amount of rooms they risk not getting even the minimum wage but being paid according to their *level of performance*.⁴³

⁴¹ See for latest update <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2009/10/articles/uk0910019i.htm>

⁴² See TUC comments on the new regulation at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/law/tuc-17381-f0.cfm>.

⁴³ Even in a country like Germany, where outsourced cleaning contracts are required by law to pay the same rate set by collective bargaining in the whole hospitality industry, agency room attendants tend to earn a lower wage than in-house staff (Vanselow et. al 2009: 13).

Since the 1990s the debate in management studies and sociology exploring the restructuring or 'dismantling' of the 'previous world of work', described the major changes in terms of casualisation, job insecurity and the emergence of a 'dual labour market' (Berger and Piore 1980, Kalleberg 2000). The workforce is purportedly segmented between, on the one side a group of stable, qualified and protected workers with relatively high wages and on the other an unstable, minimally qualified and unprotected labour force dispensing subsidiary services (Boltanski and Chiappello 2007: 229). The implication is that those in a stable position are often represented to the casual as 'privileged' whereas the latter group is accused of being 'disloyal' and pushing down the terms and conditions of the former (ibid. 243). However, a simple dichotomy between agency and in-house workers does not appear adequate to grasping the more complex diversification of employment situations that can be found within hotels. McDowell and colleagues report how, while apparently only 6% of all British workers were employed in 2007 on a temporary basis according to LFS data⁴⁴, the *diversity of statuses* included under the category of 'temporary work' makes it very difficult to collect accurate data about agency workers. Extricating simple categories from the blurred boundaries between temporary and 'contract work' on the one hand, and between contract and agency workers on the other is no simple task, and contributes to the lack of certain data about the actual numbers of agency workers in each sector of the labour market (see also Kalleberg 2000). Evidence from qualitative research on case studies across different London service jobs (Evans et al. 2005, May et al. 2006), has demonstrated how hotels recruit more often through agencies rather than hiring fix-term contract workers, while in other services such as NHS hospitals, one can find mixed forms of recruitment whereby workers have permanent or temporary contracts while also being employed through agencies (McDowell et al. 2008a). While other staff such as casual and

⁴⁴In fact there are very controversial data on the actual number of agency workers in the UK. For instance McDowell et al. (2008a) contends that the estimation of Forde and Slater (2006) (drawing from the LFS 2004), suggesting that agency workers made up 16% of all temp workers, about 270,000, underestimate the real scale of the phenomenon and reports other data drawn from the Department of Trade and industry according to which the figure was closer to 600,000 (ibid. 755). The fact that official figures on agency work are usually an underestimate clearly appears when these numbers are confronted with those provided by the CIETT, the International Confederation of Private Employment Agencies. The CIETT estimates that in 2008 there were 1.22 million workers employed by agencies in the UK, which represents the third biggest suppliers of agency workers after the USA and Japan. This constitutes around 4.5% of the workforce, substantially more than other OECD countries. The same source reports that together with the USA and Japan, the UK accounts for the 55% of all agency workers worldwide (CIETT 2010: 20). The TUC report on vulnerable work (2008) claims that the real number must lie somewhere in between, while those who do not show up in the statistics must suffer the most vulnerable position.

seasonal workers are often considered as further ‘non-standard categories’, from present research it emerged how the picture in London hotels is further complicated by the presence of *other hybrid forms of contractual status* such as workers directly employed by the hotel but on precarious or casual terms.

Partly overlooking these differentiations, the trade union literature provides the simplistic picture of a ‘two-tier workforce’ in the hospitality sector (TUC 2007: 22) with growing (migrant) agency workers among those with the poorest working conditions. Therefore a common argument in the discourse of organised labour claims that casualisation has a dumping impact on all hotel workers’ terms and conditions, with agency labour *pushing down* the conditions of in-house employees. The TUC reports (2007, 2008) emphasise how ‘objectively’ in-house workers are ‘under threat’ of being *substituted* by the spread of agency labour. This understanding of competition within a *dual labour force* in the sector and the trade unions’ ambivalent stance toward temporary labour have contradictory implications for agency workers, as would emerge in the dynamics between workers and trade unionists in the hotel workers campaign.

3.1.6 Subcontracting and the ambivalence of turnover

In order to start demystifying certain assumptions regarding the dual segmentation of the workforce and the impact of subcontracting it is possible to pose the question: is the use of agency work always convenient for hotels and management companies in hospitality?

The literature provides some evidence of how important agencies are in helping large corporations cut labour costs. For instance research in London, considering the financial benefits of the use of agency labour thanks to subcontracting strategies in housekeeping departments, showed how hotels could save £1,000 in overhead costs per cleaner per year (Lai and Baum 2005: 96). Nonetheless, as regards hotels in the UK as a whole, the percentage remains quite low (Vanselow et al. 2009), unlike countries such as Germany where the incidence of subcontracting reaches 66%. According to these authors the use of manpower outsourcing strategies in the hospitality sector appears generally quite *uneven* across countries in the EU and is almost inexistent in the US (ibid.). One may thus conclude that the use of contract labour is at least *not always convenient* from employers’ point of view. According to other research (Dutton et al. 2008) based on interviews with hotel management, using temporary staffing agencies was considered problematic in that

agency workers were not as *loyal* as permanent staff, they needed *extra-training* and *turnover* was high. This led to further worries in relation to the *indirect labour costs* caused by *persistent recruitment, induction efforts* and basic training provision, while threatening the hotel's attempt to *improve the quality* of the service provided.

Still, employers report that agency staff is needed 'to meet the fluctuating labour demand in the industry' and to substitute for *reluctant indigenous labour* in certain jobs such as cleaning (ibid. 109). Overall, the evidence highlights the *diversity in management strategies* concerning the use of temporary or agency labour, according to the locality, the market segment as well as the social constructions attached to the jobs making them 'less attractive to 'indigenous' workers. The incidence of temporary work can be higher among international chains in the upper market in London rather than in smaller centres (Dutton et al. 2008: 110)⁴⁵. As Lai and Baum (2005) acknowledge, while hiring through agencies is not a new practice for head housekeepers, 'there is a trend to use agency staff for greater flexibility and cost effectiveness especially in urban hotels, in cities like London' (ibid. 95).

The reliance on agency labour appeared to be clearly growing in both the large hotels targeted by the union campaign at the time of this research (besides the establishment where I was sent by the agencies). This together with other research suggests that there is something specific about the *global* and *urban* character of London hotels that makes the use of agency labour more widespread. The global and urban traits of the hospitality industry in London are not sufficient to explain changes in turnover if they are not considered together with the *changing social composition of labour* in the capital.

⁴⁵ In another empirical research by Lai and Baum among the housekeeping departments of seven upmarket hotels in central London, in only one hotel was the ratio of agency staff to the total housekeeping workforce less than 50%. But in the remainder of the hotels, more than half of their housekeeping teams were drawn from external labour suppliers. The highest percentage was a hotel where about 90 per cent of the workforce are agency staff (Lai and Baum 2005: 96).

3.1.7 *The intersection of agency and migrant labour*

It has been argued that there is a specific correspondence between the employment of migrant *and* agency labour in London hotels as well as in other low-paid service jobs in the city (May et al. 2007, McDowell et al. 2008a). It is argued in particular that ‘the increases in the supply of transnational migrant workers, prepared to work under less favourable conditions than ‘local’ workers, have been facilitated by and have increased agency work’ (McDowell 2008: 754). This *interdependence* between labour migration and the increase in temporary work in fact emerged from a recent comparative research McDowell conducted in two different low paid service jobs (a hotel and a hospital) in London. The study revealed a particular connection between changes in *migration flows* and the relative rates of *turnover* in different parts of the service sector, such that the author concluded that: ‘Where turnover rates are low, the migrant division of labour reflects an earlier pattern of in-migration’ (ibid.764). However, other authors have argued that a focus on the so-called ‘new migrant communities’ from Eastern Europe has overshadowed the presence of other groups of varying statuses in the service and other low-paid sectors (Rogers et al. 2009: 40). Importantly, Rogers and colleagues recall that there are also large populations of refugees, asylum-seekers, students, skilled migrants, seasonal workers and others employed under different conditions in London’s labour market. To be sure, during the 1990s, before the EU Enlargement, there had been a wide influx of migrants from outside the EU (Africa and Latin America in particular). This is attested to by the fact that the number of work permits issued to foreign-born workers increased from about 40,000 in the mid-1990s to over 200,000 a year in 2004 (see May et al. 2007). However, some have argued that with the arrival of Eastern European migrants since 2004 the Government has considered the new large influx as reducing Britain’s reliance on low skilled workers from beyond the EU (Anderson et al. 2006, TUC 2003).

On their part, owners and managers report that as the A8 nationals came to the UK to improve their English and look for temporary employment in menial jobs, their influx *exacerbated* some of the employment features in the sector (McDowell et al. 2008a: 754). They filled in the ‘reserve army’ of vulnerable labour, willing to accept lower wages and conditions of employment. But it was also argued that these ‘new migrants’ were seen to display a ‘*different attitude* to service work’, a *better education* and *easier occupational mobility* as compared to settled migrants already employed in the sector (ibid.). This point shows how it is impossible to fully understand the phenomena of *turnover*, casualisation and the increasing use of agency labour in London hotels

without first examining the actual characteristics of the workforce. In other words, emphasis upon the 'internationalisation of the industry' is inadequate unless this is considered together with the ongoing *transnationalisation* of the labour force.

Before looking more deeply into the *changing composition* and the old and new stratifications of the hospitality workforce, it is worth identifying besides the structural features the main problems of the industry from the point of view of workers and organisers. In order to unpack the main issues at work as perceived by workers and union activists the *nature of work* and *labour processes* involved in the hospitality sector and the hotel industry in particular need to be considered more closely. These are indeed directly intertwined with the main issues suffered by workers in this branch of the service sector.

3.2 Unpacking the main issues at work

3.2.1 *The nature of 'hospitality work' and its organisation*

The types of work performed in the hospitality sector are so diverse that it would be misleading to describe 'hospitality work' as a homogeneous category. Its very definition may be controversial, as for instance the Labour Force Survey considers 'hotels and restaurants' as comprising one industry while the employers' association across the same sectors in the UK includes in the category of hospitality 'hotels, restaurants, catering, event management and temporary agency employment across these sub-sectors' (BHA 2010: 2). The present research employs a relatively wide definition of the hospitality sector including jobs in hotels, restaurants and catering performed in different public and private establishments (as in the case of the two NHS Hospitals and the Business Centre where I worked via an agency).

In any case, even within a single hotel it is difficult to enumerate the various types of tasks accomplished everyday by different members of staff. In the hotel industry jobs can be broadly differentiated between occupations associated with 'Food and Beverage' (including roles in

restaurants, kitchens, bars banqueting), and ‘accommodation work’ (including front-desk reception, portering and housekeeping)⁴⁶. Within each area, jobs are differentiated according to a rigid hierarchy, mainly on the basis of the social value attributed to the occupation, in turn corresponding to different levels of pay and conditions. While jobs in catering services, restaurants and ‘Food and Beverage’ departments, and also in reception, are characterised by their *interactive* nature (often involving the direct delivery of a service and customer-facing activities), cleaning jobs such as those performed by room attendants are often *isolated* and *invisible*. Some research has highlighted how despite ‘the rhetoric of team-work’, in housekeeping departments most working time is organised so that the maids work in *isolation* for long periods of time (Dutton et al. 2008: 112). Furthermore, room attendants remain *invisible* due to the fact that they are considered the *least skilled* of the hotel workforce and, in turn, because their work is socially looked down on for being dirty, physically demanding and repetitive (Lennon and Wood 1989: 229, cit. in Dutton et al. 2008: 97).

The different nature of waiting work and cleaning is usually framed in terms of the former being characterised by the interactive and ‘emotional labour’ involved in the delivery of the service and the latter perceived as merely manual and ‘low-skilled’. One room attendant described this as ‘common sense and basic housework, *what you would do at home*’ in recent research by Dutton et al. (2008: 113). However, other research has argued that even if chambermaids are not specifically employed as ‘guest-contact staff’, their primary function being ‘maintenance of facilities’, nonetheless they work in spaces where they probably do *meet* guests (Guerrier and Adib 2000: 691). The *interaction* may render them particularly vulnerable to harassment by customers, as this work also involves social aspects that are normally overlooked. It will be demonstrated in Chapter 5 how these aspects have implications for the relationships and forms of resistance that can be developed. In any case it is apparent that it is not straightforward to establish a clear demarcation between hotel ‘front of house’ and ‘back of house occupations’. Furthermore, at the level of work organisation, even where the service involves forms of affective and emotional labour such as in the

⁴⁶ Namely Guerrier and Adib (2000) distinguish between ‘Food and Beverage operations’ and ‘rooms division’ while Dutton *et al* (2008) differentiate between the former and ‘accommodation work’. In both definitions the second category includes reception work.

case of waiters and waitresses, Taylorist divisions of work and management techniques normally applied in 'low skilled' or 'manual work' are also apparent (Carls 2007).

As regards to the *organisation* of hospitality work across various occupations, workers are often under pressure to be *multi-skilled* and able to *switch* between different kinds of assignment. This happens notwithstanding the variety of labour processes involved and despite the fact that hospitality services are considered 'low-skilled work'. Philips and Taylor (1980) made the important point that the very definitions of work as 'skilled' or 'low-skilled' are ideological categories. In particular drawing from the examples of jobs as diverse as carton factory workers and clerical staff, they showed how these are constructed on the basis of *gender bias*: 'The classification of women's jobs as unskilled and men's job as skilled or semi-skilled frequently bears little relation to the actual amount of training or ability required from them. Skills definitions are saturated with sexual bias' (ibid. 79).

As emerged from the present study, while it is almost impossible to distinguish skilled or low-skilled jobs in a workplace such as a hotel, *multi-skilling* and *flexibility* are qualities highly valued across different work categories. This is especially the case in subcontracted catering jobs where the patterns of service and the unpredictability of the amount of guests to serve require waiters and waitresses and catering staff to be quick and versatile (Ethnographic diary, shift at the hotel restaurant 'Lush Cafe'). However, both in the case of staff shortages and, increasingly, *under pressure* of redundancies, permanent in-house hotel workers were also expected to multitask and take on assignments in other departments (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Cinzia, female, Black, Eritrea-Italy, part-time employee, Food and Beverage).

Besides the pressure for adaptability to fill in for various tasks, more broadly recent UK-based qualitative studies have revealed a long list of poor conditions suffered by workers in the hospitality and hotel industry in particular. This includes low wages, long working hours, lack of overtime, sick or holiday pay, delayed payments and unlawful wage deductions, health and safety problems, bullying, harassment and unfair dismissal (the Guardian 2006, Evans et al. 2005, LC and Unite 2009, TUC 2007). Most of these issues have been experienced by the hotel workers and waiting staff involved in this ethnographic study. In particular the interviews highlighted the practices of harassment and lack of respect by managers and supervisors, job insecurity, long working hours, unilateral imposition of flexi-time and overall *physically demanding* work. In-house

and agency workers often experienced different problems according to the different nature of their contractual status.

3.2.2 *Stratified and low wages*

One of our objectives in the information gathering was to find out what was the wage structure in the hotel. We elaborated a list where differences appeared between cleaners according to the agency employing them. The cleaners earned £5.75 a hour and the room attendants slightly more, the worst payment was for the so called ‘backyard boys’... ..so in a way the worst job is the least paid and then upward along the hierarchy...’ (Jim, male, white other, Italy, 6 years in London, part-time union organiser, hotel organising team)

According to the organiser of one of the hotels in East London targeted by the union campaign, the wage structure in London hotels appears to be mainly organised according to the specific nature of the assignment: the lower the ‘status’ of the job, the lower the pay. Wage levels also vary according to the particular position filled by the worker even within the same department, (e.g. housekeepers earning more than chambermaids), their employment status (in-house, agency and so called ‘casual’ workers) and to the particular job agency through which workers are recruited (often paid the minimum wage, if not less). As the respondent emphasises, the complex labour process involved in hotels follows a precise job hierarchy. Some may be considered ‘dirtier’ than room cleaning (and crucially, also gendered, as in the case of the ‘backyard *boys*’ in charge of throwing the waste away) and therefore can be more invisible and worse-paid than those performed by hotel maids. Waiting staff and luggage porters may be paid even less. Nevertheless, they can top up their earnings with tips more easily than maids (Dutton et al. 2008: 102).

The cleaning jobs performed by chambermaids and housekeepers are usually the most devalued jobs, highly gendered, racialised and historically considered ‘low status jobs’ (Seifert and Messing 2006). The lack of respect shown to maids and cleaners is often based on the cultural associations between them and the dirt they must remove (Glenn 1992). Cleaning work presents a peculiar aspect of *inferiorisation* that is linked to its *feminisation*: the fact that it is considered ‘women’s work’ reinforces the assumption that it does not require any particular skill but just those

that are performed on an everyday basis in the house (Adkins 1995, Bolton 2005)⁴⁷. However, these workers, while being those who earn the lowest wage and perform the hardest physical work, also constitute the large majority of the whole hotel's workforce (Dutton et al. 2008).

Recent research into low-paid service jobs in London performed by migrants (namely contract cleaning, hospitality work, home care and the food processing industry) found that pay levels in those sectors are extremely low, with 90% of workers interviewed (in a sample of 341 individuals), earning less than the Greater London Authority's Living Wage for London (£6.70 an hour) (Evans et al. 2005: 4). Average earnings were just £5.45 an hour (the National Minimum Wage at the time of the research), which corresponded with an average annual salary of £10,200 a year before tax and National Insurance (ibid. 4) (less than half the national average annual salary and less than one third of average earnings in London!).

An original analysis of the 'New Earning Survey' (1993-2000) and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2001-05) conducted by Wills et al. (2009) reveals that hospitality workers and catering assistants in particular received the lowest rate as their real wages. The real hourly earnings in occupations such as catering assistants *lost* £1.66 per hour between 2001 and 2005, and also fell as compared to the rest of working Londoners who gained an average of £0.71 an hour in real earnings in the same period (Wills et al 2009a: 36). Furthermore, while employees in London gained on average £2.88 more per hour than workers outside the capital, the differential in earnings for catering assistants between London and the rest of the UK had fallen to just 0.54% by 2001 (ibid.) Overall these numbers attest to the trend of *income polarisation* in London with those at the bottom end and in elementary occupations experiencing a decline in wages with those at the top growing faster (HM Treasury 2006, cit. in Wills et al. 2009: 33)

⁴⁷ Indeed, these assumptions problematically imply the historical de-valorisation of domestic and reproductive labour. The social construction of 'cleaning' and its lack of recognition as 'proper work' is in fact instrumental to keeping these jobs also financially and socially less rewarded (Glenn 1992). More broadly, Federici (2004) in her important historical reconstruction of capitalist accumulation argued that the *degradation of women's work and their social position*, and not only the division and specialisation of labour were key to the capitalist division of labour. Federici showed more specifically how the subjugation of women's bodies and the destruction of their power through the 'witch hunt' in the 15th and 16th century in Europe and America were central to the process of 'primitive accumulation',

Hotel workers studied in the present research, whose earnings were often around, if not below, the National Minimum Wage, appeared to be in favour of the demand for a London Living Wage advanced during the hotel workers campaign⁴⁸. Wages across the sector also appeared to be highly stratified according to contractual status and occupational roles. However, issues of pay increases were *perceived as less urgent* by in-house and relatively long-term employees than other workers, despite their general awareness of the *gap* between the staff wage levels and the huge profits of big hotel companies employing them⁴⁹:

I really agree with the campaign for the Living Wage: I don't see hotels closing down! They are a rich industry... they'll always make money. Why should people do such a hard work (because we work hard!) and we are *paid peanuts*. For example housekeeping... what is the hotel all about? About rooms! They should treat us with *respect* (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal - Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

While low wages are a characteristic problem in the industry, further squeezes in wages, work intensification and work insecurity are being pursued through new employment practices that have been associated with the introduction of subcontracted labour (Evans et al 2007). It is no coincidence that research has found the lowest pay in a luxury hotel in West London where agency Polish workers were working a piece rate of £1.70 per room, while the wages paid to in-house staff in similar hotels ranged from £4.85 to £5.20 per hour (Evans et al. 2005: 24). One of the main reasons why this group of workers experiences the lowest rates of pay lies in the form of *piece work*, through which money is in fact taken from the workers.

Wage deductions and unpaid labour

During the period of participant observation, both agency and 'casual' workers (directly employed by the hotel but on a casual basis), reported regular cases of *non-paid overtime work*.

⁴⁸ For the year 2009 and up to April 2010 the LLW is £7.60 per hour. Since 2003 it has been worth between £1.65 and £1.90 *more* per hour than the National Minimum Wage (see www.hotelworkers.org.uk).

⁴⁹ According to the British Hospitality Association the hotel industry's annual turnover was as high as £27 billion in 2006 (cit. in Dutton et al. 2008 : 96)

Taking the form of unpaid labour misappropriated by the employers, it represented one of the most odious forms of exploitation for the migrant workers met during the union campaign and in the job agencies. For one casual worker, employed directly but on a casual basis by a four star hotel, there was simply no alternative but to finish the amount of work assigned in the Food and Beverage department, even when this implied longer working hours:

... there are times when I am forced to stay until late in the evening... I mean *I am not forced but* in practice, even if it means to stay two or four hours over time... it is better to stay if you want to *keep the job* (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Fabio, white other, Brazil, casual worker, Food and Beverage)

Paid or unpaid extra workload appears easier to impose on workers employed through a third party agency, precisely due to their more insecure status and under the condition of *easier dismissal*. Another common way of deducting part of the hotel workers' wages through overtime work reported by the TUC (2007) is by composing the wage on the basis of 'payment per room' on an unrealistic schedule. In this way extra hours of work become the only available option to complete the assigned number of rooms. A maid from a luxury hotel in West London explained:

If you do not finish the number of rooms that you have been assigned you have to stay overtime without being paid. While, if you finish before anyway you have to stay until the end. And then there is always an 'extra room' to clean... (Cecilia, female, white other, Brazil, 9 months in London, casual, chambermaid)

An extreme case was recorded by the TUC, reporting a 7 hour 15 minute shift during which cleaners were supposed to complete 15 rooms (TUC 2007: 21).⁵⁰ If thirty minutes to clean a room may not appear a short time at first glance, it is necessary to understand how much pressure is indeed put on the room attendant considering the amount of tasks and hard work that she is supposed to carry out. Within those strict margins she has to clean and make up the room: vacuum and dust, clean bathrooms, make beds, change linen and pillows, and replenish soaps and other

⁵⁰ In the case of a French hotel, the 'unachievable goals' for a daily workload can reach extreme levels, with the rate of 2-4 rooms per hour depending on the hotel category (up to 18 rooms a day and occasionally even 24 a day!) (Guégnard and Mériot 2009 :106)

amenities (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper). The workload increases whenever 'deep cleaning' is required and shower curtains and carpets must be cleaned or replaced and areas around guest rooms such as corridors must also be maintained (Vanselow et al. 2009: 8). The increase in the number of amenities, a result of what some authors have called the 'dual competitive strategy evident across the industry of raising service quality while also cutting costs' often implies that the actual workload for room attendants augments as each of these features and complimentary items require further attention and maintenance (ibid.).

A further form of *wage deduction* can be encountered in relation to cases of unfair dismissal under threat of *deportation*, whereby the wage is not paid before the workers are handed over to immigration authorities on the basis of their irregular migration status (TUC 2007: 23). Various anecdotes of immigration raids (or the mere threat of them by employers) emerged from interviews with the members of the union branch and other migrant workers in the sector. Migrant workers are aware of the *fragility* of their colleagues with uncertain juridical status, the ways in which they are mistreated and how employers make use of it:

This problem of 'the illegals' is very *complex*...I mean, besides us who are legal and we have already problems at work...can you imagine, those who are illegal are a step down. They are treated very badly, they have just *to shut up!* I have witnessed that with my eyes: a little woman, a small woman from Ecuador...they treat her like *a dog!* She is so *scared*, goes to the toilet and cries and then she comes back to work...*There is fear, loads of fear*...(Corrado, male, non white other, Brazil, recently arrived, casual, room steward)

The research by Wills and colleagues suggests that precisely those migrants without legal status to work are preferred by employers, willing to adapt the demands of an increasingly 'flexible' labour market to an equally 'flexible' demand (Wills et al. 2009a: 58). The same research argues that, although this undocumented immigration was not policy-driven, it happened quietly 'under the radar of the Government'. As the Government makes control and surveillance of so-called 'illegal labour supply' stricter with changes in the migration regime, the 'undocumented' or those without the right papers to work are *pushed further down* into the informal economy and are more likely to carry out even more marginal and exploitative employment (MRN 2008).

3.2.3 *Wage expropriation by temp agencies*

Temporary staffing agencies recruiting migrants play a crucial role in the blurred margin between legal and 'illegalised' work. For instance, whilst cases of wage deductions have been encountered for both permanent and agency hotel workers, even more extreme examples have occurred in the case of agency work. Deductions from wage for lateness, even for one or two minutes, recorded by the TUC (2007), appeared also during my period of participant observation in the job agencies. The possibility of being subject to wage deductions was mentioned during the training day arranged by the agency in Central London. This was a form of 'warning' or 'disciplining strategy' to make clear in advance to the new employees that any form of delay would have been *punished* immediately and that, if repeated, could have implied the end of the contract with the agency (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency 'International Talent').

The temporary agency employed more subtle strategies of wage deductions and use of unpaid labour in the *management of work shifts*. On one occasion I was asked to remain in the 'recruiting hall' or 'preparation room' of the hotel 'Lush Cafe' (where the waiters usually get ready expecting to be called to the shift by the agency manager) because there was *something wrong* with my clothes. With the excuse of an improper detail in my waiting *uniform* (the soles of my shoes were of a different colour, instead of being 'completely black!'), I had to wait in the hall for one more hour until it came to light that the worker I *was supposed to replace* was available so that my shift was not needed anymore. When I went back to the agency *to claim back* compensation for the money and time⁵¹ that I lost to reach the workplace (especially considering the long distance and the expensive cost of transport in London), I was told that those costs were 'my business' and it was my responsibility to wear the 'perfect uniform'. That day another colleague, a girl from Latvia, was left with me in the hotel's hall. The almost invisible hair band she was wearing was of a slightly different colour than the one required... What a smart way of managing time shifts and exploiting

⁵¹ It will be considered how time is a precious resource for agency workers working in hospitality and catering as time management becomes a crucial aspect of making up a weekly salary, especially for those who combine different shifts in different workplaces across the city.

contingent workers, I thought as I was confronted with these two experiences (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency 'International Talent').

During the period of participant observation even more blatant strategies emerged on the part of the temporary staffing agencies in London, who appear to know well how to *rob* workers of their labour *time*. When I went for the third time after registration to the agency office in search of work, one of the agency's employees kindly whispered to me that I should provide an 'extra fee' of £ 10 (necessarily in cash), in order to have my name in the short-list of candidates for the training. According to the agency staff member, a Polish woman, that was a *condition* of participation in the *selection* of waiting staff for incoming shifts. From these different examples it appears how subcontracted work can provide various strategies to appropriate parts of a worker's wage (or even simply their *money*), with or without the actual work ultimately being performed.

3.2.4 *The manifold meanings of 'poor treatment'*

The TUC (2007, 2008) recently denounced the poor treatment of workers in this sector, including both *physical and psychological harm*. Risks of physical harm are indeed part of the very nature of the work as the workers have to carry out heavy and risky duties (involving bending, stretching, transport of heavy objects such as beds and vacuum cleaners, and can involve the use of dangerous products). Health and safety issues are particularly pertinent to housekeepers, as they are rarely given adequate supplies or protection for cleaning chemicals (Evans et al. 2005). At the beginning of the hotel workers campaign a serious issue arose with regard to the risks of poisoning connected to the use of a particular cleaning product used by maids across different hotel chains in London (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting).

Furthermore the TUC report (2007) cites forms of psychological harassment including *bullying* and punitive measures by managers against workers who complained, e.g. *by docking pay and dropping them from rotas*. In certain cases bullying and harassment are used as a straightforward anti-trade union strategy. In one of the hotels targeted by the union campaign the General Manager called workers from a group of maids and housekeepers to individual meetings. As explained by an in-house Portuguese housekeeper, this happened after the maids advanced a grievance against worsening conditions in their department. It had the intention of intimidating

them and making them withdraw their grievance (Arianna, female, white, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper).

Moreover, *impediments to promotion* can be used against individual workers labelled as 'trouble makers', while barriers to upgrading can be used as a 'retention strategy' to keep them in certain positions:

-Do permanent worker have difficulties in getting an upgrade?

With me the issue has been escalating for a long time... I always had a *voice*, I always have controversy with my boss, *although she liked me* and she wanted to *keep me*... So she did not give me a chance to go forward, because she thought 'she will get too loud'... I was *inconvenient* (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

In other cases promotion can be used as a straightforward *anti-union strategy* to *deter* new co-workers from participating in union grievances or become union members:

...And this is the most favoured technique employed by the managers! They offer you promotion as way to *calm down* those who are rebel or who they know are in the union... (Corrado, male, non white other, Brazil, recently arrived, casual, room steward)

Besides clear examples of *victimisation* against unionised workers, other, more or less subtle *forms of harassment* are recurrent. Diana, a Lithuanian woman working for a catering company in a London hospital through an agency, was subjected to forms of *sexual harassment* by one of the supervisors, who repeatedly insisted on going out with her after work. The behaviour of the manager eventually led her to change recruitment agency in order to escape the difficult conditions she was subject to (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Diana, female, white other, Lithuania, agency worker, catering shift at the Westminster Hospital). The literature on the hotel industry illustrates that sexual harassment is commonplace. This is especially the case as perpetrated against female workers in front-desk positions (e.g. receptionists) and in other forms of interactive work, but also regarding room attendants (Guerrier and Adib 2000). One of the last informal interviews I had, with a woman cleaner from Colombia, confirmed that sexual harassment by supervisors, especially *from the same ethnic group*, is common practice in cleaning work (Violetta, female, non white other, Colombia, 5 years in London, former contract cleaner).

3.2.5 *Time at work and work intensification*

'Long and anti-social hours' is a problem often mentioned by the literature specifically focusing on the hospitality sector (May et al. 2007, TUC 2007, TUC 2008). Agency workers were *expected* to be more *ready* to accept strenuous and irregular patterns of work because of their precarious employment status. The amount of hours worked by temporary workers, often registered with *different agencies* and therefore running between work shifts and across distant locations in the city, emerged as one of the most tiring aspects of the everyday lives of the migrant temps I met. In some cases they would work *17 hours a day* as a result of combining different shifts, with a few hours in between needed for transportation (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Bella, female, black, Eritrea, agency worker, shift at the hotel restaurant 'Lush Cafe'). Extreme 'stretching' of workers' physical capacities in order to complete their working day is not limited to individual or exceptional cases. It appeared a relatively common phenomenon, which partly emerged from the very structure of agency work and the workers' need to *combine different jobs* and shifts in order to obtain a sufficient income to survive in the metropolis.

However, the issue of long and antisocial hours and the impossibility for workers *to manage work time* according to their own needs were of great concern for both agency *and in-house*, relatively long-term, hotel workers. A 'part-time in-house' worker employed in the Food and Beverage department reported *conflicts* emerging over the *organisation of the rota* and the distribution of time-off for the week-ends and for longer periods of holidays:

The managers *changed my rota* without even asking! I was so upset, they know how time is important for 'mama-Cinzia'! You know, *I am gonna be flexible with you if you are flexible with me!* But at least you should ask in advance! (Cinzia, female, black, Eritrea-Italy, 8 years in London, part-time employee, Food and Beverage)

Usually the margins for obtaining a fair and balanced work schedule were very narrow and most of the time the negotiation with managers was vitiated by *favouritism* (a frequent problem highlighted by both the workers in the branch and those in the agencies). More generally, a major tension between work time and time for *reproductive duties* emerged in the case of the migrant women employed in the housekeeping department, including those in-house 'enjoying the benefits' of permanent employment contracts. These women had to struggle with anti-social working hours and the difficulty of finding time to spend with their children: '...taking care of them, bringing them up...and of course there is no time for other activities besides the family, especially for single

mothers' (Ethnographic diary, organising hotel teams meeting, Conway Hall). Although varied in some aspects, time management and overwork appeared to be common issues across contractual categories in the sector.

3.2.6 *Poor career structures and training*

The feeling of denigration is linked to the *frustration* produced by poor career structures and the straightforward impediments managers pose to women's attempts to upgrade job positions and pay. One long term Portuguese housekeeper commented: 'even though you give your best, sooner or later you lose your motivation'. In the Churchill or Mayfair the managers have introduced the 'trick' of the 'employee of the year', a form of competition including incentives to motivate workers to improve their performance and productivity. However 'workers remain sceptical, there was no real improvement' (Ethnographic diary, organising hotel teams meeting, Conway Hall).

The literature has explained the lack of internal training and poor career structures for maids to progress to higher positions (e.g. supervisory or managerial) as a consequence of the 'flat structure' and 'small size' of certain hotel departments such as housekeeping (Dutton et al. 2008: 116). However, the same literature recognises the *lack of clarity in opportunities* to upgrade and *access* additional training (for example in customer care) besides the basic statutory occupational health and safety training (ibid.). Indeed, workers may consider moving from cleaning to 'front of house' work, i.e. directly engaging with customers, to be a particularly rewarding progression. However, the research of Dutton et al. (2008) highlighted how moving to a managerial position does not officially require formal qualifications and how the passage from 'back of house' to 'front of house' positions remains rare and difficult. Interviews with hotel chambermaids revealed how the immobility of these structures is also maintained by the functioning of racial and gender stereotypes (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting).

Self-realisation at work through the opportunity to upgrade to higher positions within the same firm appeared particularly important among in-house workers who saw no other options apart from remaining in that workplace. However, differences also emerged among these workers. As will be further considered, the different degrees of importance attached to career depend on a variety of factors, ranging from the relatively recent migration status of the workers, their

educational background attainments, their ‘mobility plans’ (both occupational and geographical) and their relative *identification* with hospitality work.

3.2.7 *Dignity and respect*

The identification and selection of ‘the main issues at work’ in the hospitality sector is not a straightforward process, but rather comes from highly subjective and indeed political judgments. The hierarchy of the ‘problems at stake’, in terms of *urgency* and *range*, change not only according to the ways they are perceived by the workers, according to their *status* (contractual, occupational, agency/in-house, migration etc.) and their particular position within the *labour process*. In the context of the trade union campaign it was also influenced by the discursive capacities of the subjects experiencing these problems. The different priorities, issues and agendas emerging from the grievances during the hotel workers campaign ultimately reflected the power differentials between those who ‘organise’ these issues into demands ‘from the outside’ and the migrants who experience those issues directly but sometimes remain *voiceless*.

The first meeting of the ‘hotel organising teams’, staged by the trade union and the CSO, was meant to *actively involve* the workers from the campaign’s two main target hotels. In that occasion the demands for *dignity* and *respect* emerged as the most important from the accounts of the room attendants and housekeepers brought together in small working groups. Workers were supposed to discuss the questions: ‘what are the three main challenges for hotel workers? What would you ask your manager to change?’ In my working group the discussion focused on the issues of *lack of recognition* and *denigration* at work, while the major demand for change was about *dignity*. The results in the plenary were summarised as follows:

Group 1:

Main challenges: Respect, Wages, and Favouritism

‘Pushing’ (harassment) and discrimination

Demands: Wages changing according to inflation, non-arbitrary behaviour by employers

Group 2:

Main challenges: Development of staff (lack of, and impediments to, promotion and career progress)

Demands: allowing each department to run themselves (self-organisation of work in each department); introducing forms of staff representation

(Ethnographic diary, organising hotel teams meeting, Conway Hall)

While issues of *control over the labour process* appear among the demands, differential treatment and *favouritism* seemed to be felt most urgently. These unfair practices are reinforced by the *highly personalised nature* of the employment relationship typical of hotel and catering work, whereby workers and supervisors directly interact in relatively enclosed not mechanised spaces. As against the lack of respect on the part of the managers, a voice from the plenary asserted that ‘the workers are the soul of the hotel’ signalling a sense of *identification* with and *pride* for the work done well, as well as awareness of the workers’ *indispensability* to the functioning of the hotel as a whole.

This meeting chaired by the Civil Society Organisation involved in the hotel campaign in Central London offered an important *space* for the workers to identify and discuss the main problems they faced at work and possible solutions. Yet, it also highlighted differences in the positions of the social actors involved. While organisers from the CSO and the trade union officers in particular emphasised *financial aspects* and strategically focused on the demand for the London Living Wage, many workers explained how the *everyday* mistreatment, humiliation, bullying and lack of respect from the management, were the most frustrating issues they had to deal with. These forms of harassment and humiliation seem to be a direct consequence of the *degradation of cleaning work* as ‘woman’s’ and ‘unskilled work’ as considered above, and the overall lack of recognition of domestic services as ‘proper work’. Indeed, as emphasised by researchers in the field, far from being un-skilled, hospitality work and cleaning in particular are forms of jobs that require high ‘personal attributes and capacity’ e.g. ‘the ability to work hard, stamina, flexibility in terms of working hours, and attention to details’ (Grugulis et al. 2004, cit. in Dutton et al. 2008: 113).

The Brazilian maid recently arrived in London, who was not used to this kind of work commented:

The work is *too hard*...they pretend much more *beyond the human limits*... it is physically unbearable! I am trying to look for something else. I want to start an *English course*...and then there will be more possibilities. But for the moment...‘trabajar como una mora!’ (Cecilia, female, white other, Brazil, 9 months in London, casual, chambermaid)

The woman implies that these jobs involving intensive labour are bearable only in the short term, i.e. until she will work out *exit strategies* from her current low paid-job and start to develop

herself by starting a language course. Indeed certain participants perceived their problems differently according to their subjective trajectory, their present migration status and future 'mobility plans'. The *social composition* of the workforce in the sector combined with *management strategies of division* further diversify the perceptions of the major issues experienced at work and possibilities for resistance and improvement among migrant workers in the hospitality sector.

3.3 The new stratification of migrant labour in London hospitality

A particular history of immigration in the metropolis and more recent changes in the composition of the workforce, state and labour market regulation combine to constitute a complex stratification⁵² of labour in the hospitality industry. According to Salt and Millar, in 2006 foreign-born workers accounted for 21 % of all workers in this sector in the UK.⁵³ Among both migrants and non-migrants 40% of all the workers in this sector have non-standard contracts and are low-skilled (ibid. 755). In London these workers are overwhelmingly employed in the service sector and in low-wage jobs (Datta et al. 2007, May et al 2007). The Labour Force Survey 2006 supplies

⁵² The notion of 'social stratification' in the sociological literature emphasises a *hierarchy* of social positions from the high to the low status. To 'social inequality' it adds the fact that 'inequality has been hardened or institutionalized and there is a *system* of social relationship that determines who gets what and why' (Kerbo 2006: 10). The term stratification is preferred to that of segmentation or segregation for its specific theoretical implications. First of all it aspires to avoid the residual determinism and structuralism of segmentation theories (see Chapter 1). It is also intended to avoid the 'categorical' nature of segregation analysis, while recognising relevance of the ranking of differences along class and status, gender and ethnic lines proliferating among the workforce used in combination with feminist intersectional perspectives (McDowell 2008a). Here, however, the emphasis on stratification draws specifically from recent analysis of the historical process of capitalist development by autonomist and feminist Marxism (Federici 2004). According to this analysis Marx's original understanding of primitive accumulation is re-interpreted as a *continuous process of accumulation of differences and divisions* within the working class (along gender, race, age lines), whereas not only the differentiation of work-tasks but also the *social degradation* of women (and other unwaged labourers) has been central to alienating workers from each other (ibid. 115). Thus maintaining Marxian notions about the dynamics of (wage) stratification and class hierarchy, but complicating them by returning to centre stage excluded categories that Marx's explanation of 'free wage labour' reproduced (women, the unwaged reproduction workers, slaves etc.), I draw from those critiques that highlight how hierarchy is continually re-stratified along the international and sexual/racial division of labour through ongoing enclosures and the imposition of discipline ('disciplinary integration') (De Angelis, 2007: 72).

⁵³ Precise calculation of the number of foreign-born employees is rendered impossible by the fact that the number of illegal entrants in the UK cannot be established (McDowell et al a2008: 756; see also TUC 2008). It is possible to make an estimate using the number of National Insurance numbers allocated to non-British nationals: this rose from 349,200 in 2002-03 to 713,500 in 2006-07 (Department of Work and Pensions 2007, cit. in McDowell et al a2008 : 756)

further interesting data about the characteristics of the labour composition of the hotel sector: between 56% and 59% of hotel workers in the UK are women, 11% from ethnic minority and 40% between the age of 16 and 24 years old. The workforce also appears to be segregated by gender: almost half of all hotel workers are employed in low qualified 'elementary occupations', such as cleaning jobs in which 95% of employees are women (LFS 2006).

A more recent and fine-grained analysis of the Labour Force Survey by Wills et al. (2009a), shows that in 2004-05 foreign-born workers constituted the 76% of the workforce in occupations such as chefs and cooks, 62% among catering assistants and 69% of cleaners (Table 2.4. Wills et al. 2009a: 42). In terms of concentration of certain nationalities in specific parts of the economy and in particular jobs, the recent survey realised by Wills and colleagues highlighted the concentration of Eastern European workers in hospitality jobs, whereas 32% (from a sample of 423 people) of adult Brazilians were employed as cleaners and Ghanaians and Nigerians mainly in cleaning and care jobs (ibid. 44).

That year 2006 saw the largest number of migrant workers registered entering the UK, with Polish workers constituting the largest single national group (McDowell et al. 2008a: 755). With the accession of eight Eastern European countries into the EU in 2004 the British Government decided to open the labour market to the new member states from the first year of membership (in the EU only Ireland and Sweden applied the same policy). This had a substantial effect on the hospitality industry (see also McKay 2008, Krings 2008). Although in 2006 the Government decided to restrict access to work to the migrants coming from the A2 accession countries (Bulgaria and Romania) under fear of an uncontrollable numbers of newcomers putting excessive pressure on the internal market (Krings 2008), the 2004 accession continued to have a large impact on those sectors traditionally employing migrant labour⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ The Accession Monitoring report (Home Office 2006) recorded that, of the 500,000 workers from A8 accession countries the majority (61.5%) were Polish, while out of the 50,000 entering the London labour market alone, 29% found jobs in the hospitality sector during the first year after accession.

Considering these latest developments it is worth questioning if the relationship between agency or more generally ‘casual’ and migrant labour (McDowell et al. 2008a) represents a *continuum* in the history of the hospitality sector. What are the new elements in the *stratification* of labour in London hotels? And what are the main consequences of current forms of divisions for the lives of the migrants at work and for their potential to fight and improve their poor conditions of employment?

3.3.1 The different accounts of the role of migrant labour in the hospitality sector

In the interviews with the trade union activists different accounts emerged about the characteristics of the workforce and the ways they relate to the high level of migrant employment in the sector.

Different understandings of the *vulnerable status* of migrant workers as a factor in their employment arose from the interviews. For instance the organiser of the campaign explained the use of migrant labour as a structural element in the industry, emphasising the ‘slavery-like’ nature of their employment. This is considered the main tool in the hands of the employers to maintain high returns:

When you start *working with them* you realise that the *whole business is based* on their exploitation. This is a *legalised slavery*: the only reason why they make so much profits in the industry (...) The majority of them are migrants, *they don't know the law*, they do not know the regulation (Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign)

According to the organiser (herself a migrant recently arriving in London during the last wave of immigration from Poland) employers deliberately rely on the relatively *greater vulnerability* of migrant workers as compared to non-migrants. The fact that ‘new migrants’ tend to be more numerous among agency workers is thus considered a consequence of their weak ability to directly alter the terms and conditions of their employment as they have *limited access* to legal knowledge, bargaining and formal representation through union membership (McDowell et al. 2008a: 755; see also TUC 2008). Certainly the fact of *being non-unionised* affects migrant workers’ ability to negotiate for better working conditions, thus contributing to their greater weakness *vis-à-vis* their employers. At the same time however, reflecting on the ‘position’ of migrant labour in the

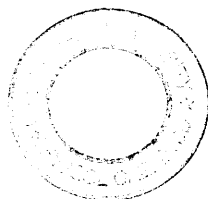
hospitality sector, it seems that a *double dependency* exists between the two sides of the employment relationship:

(...) but we know that the hospitality sector *would collapse* without migrant labour. They would have to raise wages to bring British people to work...Suddenly without migrant labour they should pay a living wage (...) Basically this is a question of the 'share of the cake...' (Tom, male, white, UK born, Irish origin, part-time officer, Hotels branch)

The informant draws upon the view, quite widespread among the trade union movement, that labour immigration provokes a general *downward pressure* on national wage levels (because of their low bargaining power in negotiating the right 'share of the cake'). In labour studies literature 'immigration' is also generally considered as one of the factors impacting on low-wage work in the UK. 'New inflows' of labour migration are considered likely to hold down pay and conditions (at least in the segments of the market where immigrants compete with 'indigenous' *low-skilled* workers) (Mason et al. 2008: 72, see also Lloyd et al. 2008).

Research on London low-paid jobs provides evidence for a correlation between workers' migration status and their poorer conditions of employment (Datta et al. 2006, Evans et al. 2005). The *parallel* rise in low-paid jobs together with a dramatic increase in the foreign-born population, resulting in low-paid jobs filled by foreign-born migrants, has been named in the literature on the specific characteristics of London's labour market, as the 'London migrant division of labour' (Spence, 2005, May et. al 2006).

Often in the literature on the degrading conditions in *hotel work* the use of migrant labour is understood as a major *tool* for cutting labour costs in the face of increased competition (TUC 2007, Vanselow et al. 2009). Authors like Wood (1997, cit. in Dutton et al 2008: 101) highlighted more generally how *reliance* on 'marginal workers', including women, the young, casuals, part-time, students and migrant workers, is one of the main *business strategies* to cope with varying patterns in demand and keeping wages down. In this regard it must be remembered that the actual impact of immigrants on the internal labour market is indeed quite controversial. Recent official research (Somerville and Sumption 2009) reports the general consensus that 'the labour market effects are small overall, but if there are negative impacts on wages and employment they are experienced by previous immigrants, especially those with limited English language skills; manual workers in jobs that do not require language proficiency; individuals on benefits or otherwise marginalised in the labour force' (cit. in Rogers et al. 2009: 48). Similarly, the research of Wills et al. (2009a)



emphasises the link between the new migrant division of labour and the growth of the ‘other reserve army’ of indigenous and minority groups ‘on benefits’ created by UK welfare reforms.

It has been considered how the idea of the ‘reserve army of labour’ to explain migrants’ special position in the labour market was criticised by the autonomist perspective in relation to the system of ‘Gastarbeit’ in Germany (see Chapter 1), highlighting the active intervention of the state in shaping migrants’ juridical status and its constraining effects. In recent time, Rogers et al. (2009) argued that the much-debated issue of wages and ‘social dumping’ pressuring national workers as a consequence of increased in labour immigration and competition for jobs, is in fact, rather, connected to *political and juridical interventions*, both at a UK and EU level. These obstruct the rights of unions and governments to extend pre-existing collective agreements to migrants or contracted workers.⁵⁵

From the present research, it will become clear how the reality of the labour market and its new stratification *complicate* mainstream understandings of the impact of labour migration on ‘indigenous’ low-waged work as well as a reductive view of migrant as just vulnerable labour.

The unionist from the restaurant branch stressed the ‘temporal dimension’, that is, the *relatively recent migration* and length of settlement shaping the level of migrants’ exploitability:

I do not think it’s a matter of colour, or where they come from ...the hotel industry is very good at identifying the group of workers willing to accept low pay... it doesn’t matter if they come from Eastern Europe or Somalia.... In the mid-1980s when the conservative government stopped issuing work permits for the hotel industry, employers were going to job centres in Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool and Newcastle: there were so many young people on long term unemployment that if they offered them a living job in London they were not gonna refuse the offer! And they were actually accepting lower wages than the Portuguese accepted when coming as refugees in the 1970s... ‘this is *the latest group of migrant* we can exploit, therefore we do it’...(Roger, male, white, UK born, full-time union officer, Restaurant and Bars branch)

⁵⁵ See for instance the effects of the judgements of the European Court of Justice in the ‘Viking and Laval’ cases, which strengthened the rights of employers to use contracted labour, as opposed to the rights of the trade unions and national governments to enforce existing bargaining agreements (cit. in Rogers et al. 2009: 50)

While the trade unionist's account confirms the important correspondence between low pay and migration status, he also seems to assume that *the newcomers* in particular (independently of their nationality) will constitute the group ready to accept the lowest conditions of pay and employment. In his view 'internal migrants' may be 'favoured' by employers because of personal characteristics including their *long-term unemployment*, their *young age* and the attraction to them of living in London. This response reflects the emphasis in contemporary political debates as well as in the literature about *the reliance* of employers on the recently arrived EU migrant workers in the sector, (the so-called 'Polish factor'). Especially in bottom-end services, business is meant to be making profits out of a situation where the market 'is flooded with *desperate, exploitable Polish women*' (quot. in Dutton et al. 2008: 108, my emphasis).

But are these women really so desperate? Can we understand the new competition between workers (indigenous, old and new migrants) in the sector as driven mainly by *wage differentials*? What are the other factors shaping the dynamics of exploitation and the new stratification in everyday work experiences in London hotels?

The interviews with the workers (both temporary staff employed through agencies and those permanently and directly employed through hotels) and with the participants of the trade union campaign exposed how a mix of social constructions, racial and gender stereotyping and complex tensions put into question a simplistic reading of the labour market situation affected by recent patterns of immigration as polarised between 'new migrants' versus 'old immigrants'. A mechanical understanding of their exploitation, whether simply based on their more recent migration status or on their willingness to accept lower wages, appears unable to grasp a changing situation where a *multiplicity* of levels of discrimination, complex social dynamics and processes of *mutual stereotyping* take place in and outside the workplaces.

3.3.2 *The 're-racialisation' of the workforce*

With regard to the 'ethnic diversity' of the workforce in the industry, recent qualitative research exploring London's low-paid labour market revealed how the 'division of labour in the hotel and hospitality sector were more diverse and seemed to reflect changing patterns of immigration' (May et al. 2008: 18). Other research documenting the shift from 'multicultural' diversity to the 'super-diversity' of the overall population in Britain (Vertovec 2007) showed how

immigrants are represented across a wide range of industries but are strongly over-represented in the hotels and restaurants sector, where they comprise 60% of the workforce across the UK (ibid.19). The high diversity of the industry has to be understood against the background of a recent change in migration patterns in the UK, signalling a turn from labour migration from Commonwealth countries to asylum seeker-led immigration from the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa as well as post-Enlargement immigration from Eastern European countries (Dwyer and Bressey 2008: 4). It is moreover difficult to draw a definite ethnic break-off at the national level for the sector due to the changes from 1991 to 2001 in the categories used in the Census in England and Wales from national to hyphenated identity (e.g. from Black-Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani to Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British', White, White Irish and Mixed).⁵⁶

At the time of the research, in January 2008, a survey was carried out by the hotel branch revealing that, out of their 493 members, 19.4 % defined their ethnicity as Black, 3.3% as Asians, 28% (with a 4% increase from 2004) as 'White Others', 19.5% 'Non-White Others' and 10% remained unknown (Unite the Union, Changes in Branch 1.1393 Ethnicity, Region 1)⁵⁷. While the union officers highlighted in the report that the term 'Non-White other' did not provide specific information because it probably brought together people as diverse as 'Latin Americans/South Americans and Arabs', they felt confident in saying that that 'the increase in White others is surely down to Central European migrant workers' (ibid.). While this local data shows how the Enlargement constituted a central factor in the changing ethnic composition of the workforce, recent research has highlighted the *parallel increase of racial tensions* among the workforce in London (Dwyer and Bressey 2008, Wills et al. 2009a).

⁵⁶ On a micro-scale the mentioned qualitative research in London reported that two-fifths of workers in hotels and hospitality were 'non British-White' (Southern European and Portugal in particular) while a growing proportion (27.5%) were from Central and Eastern Europe (especially Poland and Lithuania) and 58.5% of hotel workers were women (May et al. 2008: 18).

⁵⁷ It may be also worthy of note that according to the branch report 'the percentage of members not declaring ethnicity is increasing'.

To be sure, independently of the specific status of ‘recently arrived migrant workers’, race and ethnicity represent an important tool of *differentiation and division* in the hands of employers. Racial and ethnic constructions can be used as strategies to control the workforce and hinder unionisation. However, the issue of racism needs to be explored not only in relation to the employers’ strategies of control and division within the labour process, but also within the dynamics between workers (see Roediger 2007)⁵⁸ and between workers and union leaders, in order to uncover further points of tension in the process of union organising.

Research in the hospitality industry mainly focused on the ways in which national and racial stereotypes determine *employers’ recruitment practices* in the sector (Matthews and Ruhs 2007, McDowell et al 2007). Here the *relational aspects* between workers, employers and activists involved in the reproduction of racial and other social and juridical constructions have been examined as part of the everyday experiences of the migrants and their social relationships at work.

Drawing from Brah’s concept of ‘differential racialization’ (Brah 1996) racial constructions operating between co-workers are not to be conceived of in terms of a *dichotomy* between white and black as much as racism in general ‘should not be conceptualised through simple bipolarities of positivity and negativity, superiority and inferiority, or inclusion and exclusion’ (ibid.15). While acknowledging the processes of exploitation, inferiorisation and exclusion that underlie histories of racism, Brah points to ‘the ways in which racism simultaneously inhabits spaces of deep ambivalence, admiration, envy and desire’ and how ‘different racialised groups are positioned differentially *vis-à-vis* one another’ (ibid.) This approach is especially useful for exploring the ways in which migrant workers themselves contribute to shaping racial divisions within their workplaces through their *everyday social relationalities*.

⁵⁸ Within labour history with regard to the relationship between racism and the labour market, the work of David Roediger (2006) allows to consider how racism is the product of practices that come ‘from both above and below’ according to an approach that ‘takes the agency of working class people seriously’ while considering ‘working class whiteness as a gendered phenomenon, particularly expressing and repressing male longings and the perils and pride of republican citizenship among them’ (ibid. 11).

3.3.3 *Perceptions of race as device of division: favouritism and national affiliations*

Looking inside workplaces, it became clear how national stereotypes and ‘racial tensions’ contribute to shaping the everyday relationships between hotel workers. These tensions intertwine with other stratifications to create *favouritism* and *differential occupational mobility* and career opportunities among workers.

The major line of division initially appeared to be one between the ‘new’ Eastern and Central European migrants following the EU Enlargement and the relatively settled migrants, so called ‘BME’ people. A series of *attributes* was attached to Eastern European workers in particular, often seen by their fellows as either ‘hardworking’, ‘opportunist’, ‘money-oriented’, keen to ‘stick together’ and therefore self-isolating national group: Sometimes they were depicted as deliberately racist:

-Did you experience any kind of discrimination or prejudices in your workplace, especially towards the new immigrants from Eastern Europe?

Yes this definitely! ... *they* are leaving you out...In the last years even in my department if I have to work only with Polish...I hated this! They speak their language ...you try to involve them but nothing, (they have) their own *mentality*, their way of thinking, they do not want to be involved in something else...(Cinzia, female, black, Eritrea-Italy, 8 years in London, part-time employee, Food and Beverage)

Or, according to a long-term worker from Nigeria:

The Poles I guess...they just come to *make money*! As far as they give them work... like in my hotel, if they see you are *taking sides*, they don’t give them the extra hours they want...and they really *want to get money*...they need work so they have to *shut up* to get what they want (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

This last description reproduces the widespread stereotype about the new migrants being ‘hardworking’ while linking this with a strong ‘economic opportunism’. Recent research in UK economic sectors including agriculture, construction, hospitality and domestic services (Anderson et al. 2006) showed how employers appreciate the A8 migrant workers in particular on the basis of their supposedly ‘hardworking’ and ‘reliable’ qualities.

In this interview however, the Nigerian housekeeper emphasised the *system of incentives* set up by management in the housekeeping department as designed to exploit the new migrants' flexibility and their willingness to extend their working day. They are not intrinsically 'hardworking' as the employers' stereotypes assume, but are induced to embody this stereotype on the basis of their *specific more precarious status*, either as new migrants or as agency workers. While the Nigerian housekeeper described the specific status of the 'new migrants' from a relatively distanced position emphasising their greater disposability, a Caribbean maid working in a luxury hotel in West London felt directly *threatened* by the new co-workers from Eastern Europe. Attachment to money, individualism and a tendency to form separate groups on the basis of their nationality were also emphasised as peculiar characteristics of the new migrants:

Polish people, they don't know English. They talk directly to the supervisors in *their own language* (...) People from Eastern European countries they do not know what is the union about... they do not want to know about the job, they just think about the money. Moreover they are *privileged*, they can find other jobs easily (Stella, female, black, Jamaica, housekeeper 6 years, in London, in-house, chambermaid)

In this account East European workers are described by the Caribbean migrant as a group able to use personal contacts to gain *easier access to promotion*, enjoying better treatment at work and overall more opportunities in the labour market. Instances of *favouritism and differential treatment* by the managers toward East European co-workers worked mainly along the lines of the common *nationality and language*. It must be said, however, that for the Jamaican maid a negative perception of the colleagues from Eastern Europe was generated in a *particular circumstance* in which the woman was subject to *direct racial* discrimination on the part of a Polish colleague on the basis of her skin colour. Stella's antipathy towards the 'newcomer' was then reinforced by a further episode where a concrete opportunity for promotion in her department was compromised because of favouritism towards a colleague from Poland who had family connections with the supervisor (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting). Career opportunities and *access to promotion* can reflect racial and national discrimination, while these are also shaped by a mixture of other factors related to the *migration background* of the employees.

Issues of favouritism on the basis of racial constructions and cultural divisions similarly emerged from the interviews with the hotel maid and the room steward from Brazil, interviewed about their relationship with their co-workers from A8 countries:

-Are there particular divisions or conflicts among the workers in your hotel?

I have none in particular but now there is a new manager from Poland and clearly they have a *special relationship* and we feel like *harassed* by them. We are *more diplomatic* in dealing with people...May be it has to do with *culture*...because they are coming from *Communism* ...the manager has got this thing... to impose his will over his employees: 'you must do what a hell I say!' (Cecilia, female, white other, Brazil, 9 months in London, casual, chambermaid)

The Brazilian hotel maid here makes a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them' along the line of nationality, from which she derives two clearly defined *cultural attitudes*. The difference of the East European migrant workers (Cecilia is like them a 'recently arrived migrant'), lies primarily in their *cultural and historical background*. In particular their *past experience* under the Communist regime in their country is assumed to have determined their oppressive and authoritarian attitude. The account of the Brazilian housemaid 'naturalises' the attitudes displayed by the colleagues from the A8 countries, by mechanically deriving them from the history of their countries. It will emerge how also trade unionists often contribute to an *essentialised vision* of migrants from Eastern Europe as being intrinsically prone to racism.

As the hotel maid further explained:

(...) There are two things: on the one hand there is favouritism for people of the same nationality, on the other hand there is a *cultural element*, *we as Brazilian, we are not used to oppression* (...) Of course there are also supervisors from Brazil... Oh yes, the divisions are incredible...! (Cecilia, female, white other, Brazil, 9 months, casual, chambermaid)

The account of the Brazilian worker shows how national stereotypes trigger antagonisms also between 'white' workers such that 'racialisation' appears to function mainly through essentialised cultural differences assigned to a certain ethnic or national group: Authors like Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) have pointed out how racist practices are increasingly legitimised through cultural differences rather than being strictly related to biological interpretation of race or stigmatised skin colour (Yuval Davis 1997, cit. in Erel 2009: 34). While in the experience of discrimination of the Jamaican hotel maid there was an underlying *black/white tension* that clearly

conditioned her suspicion towards new co-workers, other forces may be at stake in shaping the mutual perceptions between the East European migrants from the EEA countries⁵⁹ and those from Latin America. Despite their common status as *recently arrived migrants* the friction between the EEA and the non-EEA must also lie in the unspoken difference in their *immigration statuses*. The *benefits* of the EU membership that the A8 migrants recently began to enjoy may contribute to developing the Brazilians' *perception of distance* or even *hostility* towards them.

3.3.4 *Permanent workers vs. 'newcomers' and agency workers*

Some of the migrant workers interviewed appeared aware of management *manipulation* of the existing differences among the workforce (in terms of *nationality* as well as *contractual status*), showing a lucid understanding of the *mechanisms of differentiation* within the organisation of work and as a tool *to weaken* workers' collective efforts. While emphasising the distinction between 'permanent workers' and 'newcomers' in her hotel, the Portuguese housekeeper in the hotel in the West End described how divisions were played out exactly when the managers attempted to change the hotel rulebook:

They are trying to put us in the same position as the 'newcomers' (...) they tried to take away the bonus given to us by the Intercontinental...

-And are 'newcomers' also organising to change these conditions?

They reacted against this thing, it's *not fair* they should have the bonus as well, perhaps they should have appealed to the people that created the frictions between them... because it is about money, and money matters (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

⁵⁹ Workers from the 'European Economic Area' (EEA) and their family members covered by the EEA Regulations 2006 (amended by Statutory Instruments in 2009/1117) and enjoy the right of free movement and work in the United Kingdom without explicit permission. The contracting parties to the EEA Agreement are the EU and its 27 members plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

While the housekeeper laments the fact that the previous contractual conditions of the permanent workers are pushed down to the level of ‘people who have just come’, she also points to the fundamental *injustice* at the basis of the differential treatment received by the recently arrived workers. The particular history of the large hotel chain where the Portuguese woman has been employed for almost thirty years included the recent restructuring in the governance and ownership of the hotel (essentially the new management company, the Hyatt, taking over the previous one, the Intercontinental). These changes brought about a series of alterations in workers’ terms and conditions, which created a *proliferation of employment contracts*. In this sense the ‘frictions’ between workers are clearly based on the existence of multiple contractual statuses that generate *anxiety* among the in-house (‘permanent’) workers seeing their conditions ‘pushed down to the level of the people who just came’ (both ‘new immigrants’ into the country and ‘newcomers’ into the job as opposed to ‘established’ migrants who are in many cases also in-house). However, while the respondent seems clear about the dynamics at the basis of the new tensions in the workplace, she is not exempt from reproducing and reinforcing those divisions either. *The changing contractual conditions* enforced by the new management company can be therefore considered another aspect that intersects with the aforementioned stratification in terms of race, nationality, gender and migration status. Conflicts can also emerge between in-house, long-term workers and ‘newcomers’ as the former are often asked to provide training without trained in turn nor paid to accomplish this task:

(...) Before I got pregnant I have been asked to do some training. But I was not gonna do work *for free!* They offered me *as remuneration other shifts...*and then if they (the new employees) ‘failed’ they said I would not get anything! I mean it is not my fault if they do not actually learn! And by the way, *I was never trained to become a trainer...*(Cinzia, female, black, Eritrea–Italy, 8 years in London, part-time employee, Food and Beverage)

The part-time worker emphasises how the *costs of training* are in fact *outsourced* to permanent in-house workers, while overtime is paid in the form of additional work offered to the staff in case of shortages (with evident financial convenience for the hotel!). By expressing her refusal to ‘work for free’ the woman gives a powerful example of her awareness of the perverse forms of exploitation taking place in London hotels and the interrelations between poor training provisions, unpaid labour and divisions among workers. In this regard, considering training for example, it has been observed how problems occur when the role of trainer is not official and the costs of the common practice of ‘learning on the job’ are borne by existing workers, thus deepening the tensions between old and newcomers (Dutton et al. 2008: 115).

A very different perception of the division between permanent and temporary workers emerged from the interview with the Lithuanian woman working shifts for catering services through temporary work agencies. Diana's account appeared deeply imbued with stereotypes against her *black* colleagues, *especially* if these were employed on a *long-term contract*. The interview with this agency worker sheds light on the interweaving of the division between permanent and temporary, or indeed 'in-house' and 'agency' staff, with other divisions involving racial and gender constructs and aesthetic attributes. Diana seems to reproduce a series of strong racial and cultural stereotypes toward workers of other nationalities that she encounters both at work and at home:

To work with Indians is not so bad but live with them...they are dirty! And untidy... and their smelly food is everywhere when they cook...the food for them is like *religion*!

At work they are intelligent, while black people are *primitive* ...Actually there was a black girl working in that hotel ...She is *permanent*, but she is *not good looking* nor she does good job...These people....they work front-house! ...but in that hotel they are *rude*! And if you become permanent after few years no one can kick you out (even if you don't do your job properly) (...) In fact if you are permanent you can also *relax*, especially once you have got the promotion... (Diana, female, white other, Lithuania, 1 year in London, agency worker, catering)

Here the racial prejudices expressed by the Lithuanian woman target the black colleague working front-of-house *and employed directly* by the hotel. This illustrates how exactly the higher position of the black worker in the occupational hierarchy is a key factor determining Diana's sense of frustration. Although she does not show the physical characteristics that Diana deems necessary for waiting work and does not perform her work properly, nonetheless she is in a *privileged position* in the *occupational hierarchy* of the hotel. However, rather than interpreting Diana's racist prejudices as 'intrinsic' or 'inherited' from the country of origin (as some workers and trade unionists did), it is possible to understand the worker's attitude as enmeshed with stereotypes well rooted in British society and products of a mixture of 'institutional racism', government discourse and *employers' bias* attached to different groups of migrant workers. Racism, rather than a 'cultural symptom' or the expression of the individual's nation and its history, may be seen as a *mutual construction* directly produced and *exploited* in the labour process as well as shaping labour market segregation. In this particular case it is embedded in the temporary migration and work regime in which Diana is trapped, comprising the division between 'temps' and 'permanent' workers *intertwined with* racial differentiations.

3.3.5 *The ambivalences of national clustering for the control and disciplining of the workforce*

Most of the workers emphasised how the formation of ‘cliques’ fosters practices of *favouritism* within nationally homogenous groups. The Polish union organiser (arrived in London as a non-EU migrant before Accession) discussed the issue of favouritism as one of the fields where national differences and racist attitudes are strategically employed by the managers to divide workers and *secure the loyalty* of some ‘privileged’ groups against others. Thus the process of ‘national clustering’ and the formation of separated groups in different departments or even hotels may be seen as a way for management to control and discipline the workforce.

Grouping migrant labour on the basis of nationality was evident in hotels in Glasgow and in London⁶⁰ according to the research conducted by Dutton et al. (2008), emphasising how the tendency to cluster by nationality can be useful in terms of smoothing the labour process as it eases language communication in housekeeping departments. However it can also have ‘negative consequences for individual workers’, as when workers speaking English only as a second language encounter problems with health and safety instruction (Dutton et al. 2008: 108). The Italian sociological literature investigating the use of migrant labour in the North East region of Italy, emphasised the use of management techniques of division of the workforce according to ethnic lines as part of the very organisation of the labour process, whereas *using ethnic affiliations* appeared effective to make labour more *productive*, e.g. by valorising their common language and cultural elements (Rambaldo 2007, Sacchetto 2004, 2010).

More generally the tendency of employers segmenting migrant workers into particular ‘niches’ through the operation of *local stereotyping* has been documented as a common trend in the low-paid service economy in the US (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). In Britain research specifically focusing on the hospitality sector highlighted the particular case of Polish workers, who are often preferred by employers on the basis of their supposedly ‘superior work ethic’ as compared to the British workers depicted as ‘uncommitted’ (Matthews and Ruhs 2007:17). These authors pointed

⁶⁰ In one case study 75% of the staff were Portuguese while in another hotel all staff were from Eastern European countries (Dutton et al. 2008).

out how employers 'in search of cheap labour' and high productivity *construct their hierarchies of migrants* along the lines of nationality on the basis of the economic disparity between their countries of origin and the UK.

In the present research a *mixed pattern of national clustering and diversification* emerged from the experiences of the workers interviewed, thus reflecting a variety of strategies managers and supervisors use to organise work patterns in the hotel and manage the labour force across different jobs and departments. The interview with a British officer from the restaurant branch added an important dimension to understanding the implications of national groupings in London hotels. In his view employers' strategies appear to be changing in the course of time *according to the composition* of the workforce:

Well, it is a big problem in the hotel industry and they know that whatever they can do to keep people divided... now *it is very rare to find a predominance* of one nationality in one department, it is very different from the past...then you would have recognised that 90% housekeeping department was made by Filipinos *and that made it very easy union organising!* They used to give you £250 bonus if you *recruited a friend* and she *stayed* for more than 6 months...everybody started to recruit their mates...(...) My wife is from the Philippines, we used to work in the same hotel where the staff was composed entirely by Filipinos... they came even *from the same province!* They all spoke the same *dialect* and every hotel in the early 1970s was like this (Roger, male, white, UK born, full-time union officer, Restaurant and Bars branch).

This account draws attention to a significant shift in HRM strategy. In the past hotel employers used to favour national clustering, especially in strategies of recruitment and retention. However the trade unionist emphasises a process of *diversification in management strategies* as it appears increasingly difficult to find a whole department with workers from the same national background. National homogeneity can thus be perceived as a *disadvantage* and is to be avoided by employers and managers when it facilitates workers' self-organisation and unionisation. While expressing the common concern among trade unions that *diversity is counterproductive* for workplace organising, the union officer also makes a critical point about *employers' reliance on national and ethnic networks* to secure an easy and ready supply of labour. In this regard, recent research on migrant labour in the hospitality sector has emphasised employers' use of ethnic and *migrant networks*. This shows how, with the large inflows of Eastern European workers and the increase in the number of migrants 'available for legal employment', the *informal practices of recruitment* via word-of-mouth and migrant networks has proliferated even in the largest of hotels (Matthews and Ruhs 2007: 27). These informal strategies of recruitment based on ethnicity do not

only serve the objective of *securing* a large supply of workers, but also respond to employers' *ad hoc* and *fluid* management practices since the migrants from the same 'network' are able to 'manage themselves' by substituting for one another whenever the shift has to be covered). In this sense ethnic networks are used both for reasons of *workforce retention* and labour market *flexibility*.

Why then did the informant emphasise differentiation over homogeneity as a prevailing management practice? Indeed one can observe how strategies change according to the specific conditions of the 'local' workforce, the circumstance of that particular section of the labour market, recruitment practices and workers' organising efforts (in the given example *a change* in employers' strategy occurred as soon as ethnic homogeneity appeared to facilitate cohesion and organising efforts among the workforce). Other research also provided evidence of how national homogeneity can be problematic for supervisors to the extent that they sometimes avoid it deliberately. McDowell reported how a hotel researched in West London changed recruitment agencies to prevent the 'dominance of the agency labour force by a single nationality' (McDowell 2008: 761). Polish workers were depicted in this case as 'headstrong' and inclined to form undisciplined 'cliques', in contrast with employers' generally positive impression that they are 'reliable' and hard 'working' (Anderson et al. 2006; Matthew and Ruhs 2007).

In contrast, in that case study, the group of Vietnamese workers who used to be predominant in the department, depicted as 'soft and compliant', did not represent a challenge for the management. This example indicates how the effects of favouring homogeneity or diversity in the workforce are contingent upon the specific *social constructions* attached to the particular national. Moreover, while today's relatively informal practices of recruitment through ethnic and friendship networks resemble those described by the trade unionist with regard to the Filipino community, the particularity of the current use of networks lies in the aspects of *self-management* of workers amidst the flexibilisation of labour time. Considering in particular the high level of *labour turnover* in the sector, employers may be more interested in using ethnic-based networks to secure the workforce and assure a certain level of supply easily adaptable to high fluctuation in demand.

3.3.6 From favouritism to 'self-exploitation'

Furthermore the experiences of the workers emphasised how *ethnic clustering* does not necessarily mean cohesiveness or favouritism among a national group, nor does it necessarily

facilitate union organising as some of the trade unionists implied. Ethnic homogeneity in the workplace (or at department level) can in fact sustain mechanisms of *self-control and disciplining* among the employees of the same nationality. Across the internal *occupational hierarchies* existing within hotels or in catering services, a common national background can on the contrary foster exploitative practices among workers. A telling example was provided by a Portuguese housekeeper describing the dynamics between the ‘new Eastern Europeans’ in her hotel:

... I think *these people* should be looked after because they are not aware of their rights, they do not even know *how they come* into this country...through people from their country who are actually *using them* in a way...They are been told: ‘you do as I say otherwise *I kick you out!*’ And this is actually what it is happening in the hotel ‘cause we have this horrible person in our department, the assistant, and she is Romanian...Romania is not a country with a very good *reputation*, you know, and she is this kind of person... she brought friends of friends (to work in the hotel). And she is employing other Romanians, she does what she wants with them! I do not know *what kind of power* she has got on these people (...) they do not speak English, Italian, French nor Spanish...(Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28, years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

The housekeeper’s account critically casts light on the complex relationships between migrants from the same country and the way in which power dynamics between them impact on the labour process and are used to *reinforce hierarchies* at work. By emphasising how Romanian supervisors were able to *bring in* co-nationals through a chain of ‘friends of friends’ this account signals how the use of ethnic networks appears still to be central to the process of recruitment within hotels. However, the woman also illustrates how national clustering within workplaces can play an important role, in terms of exploiting *internal hierarchies* and *lines of command* between co-nationals using other types of pressure. In the case illustrated, because of the workers’ ‘lack of knowledge’ of their own rights at work, their poor English and their consequent isolation, the Romanian supervisor is able to exert a special power over her co-nationals on the basis of a *specific dependency*, making them work hard under the threat of dismissal.

3.3.7 ‘Second class’ whites? *The specificity of the migration status*

Indeed there is a particular reason why Romanian workers find themselves treated by supervisors as more disposable than other migrant workers:

She is *using* them I don’t know what their conditions of work are, if they are *illegal* or not, I think they can work with a contract. ‘Cause we have some *self-employed* people, there are at

least three girls and some Bulgarians (...) And many of them have been told 'if you do not do what I say tomorrow you do not have a job' (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal/Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

The respondent refers here to the 'exceptional status' of the two nationalities of workers from the so-called 'A2 countries'. Since accession in 2007, workers from Romania and Bulgaria are in fact officially barred from working in the UK (until the barriers to free market mobility are completely opened for all) unless they can prove they are 'self-employed' or else work in a restricted number of sectors where there are extreme shortages (i.e. agriculture and food processing). It becomes clear how the *uncertain migration status* of workers from these East European countries means a relationship of submissive dependency on their co-nationals who are already in the country and who have achieved a relatively more stable position in terms of employment and migration status.

It is possible to interpret this phenomenon as an instance of the 'multiple constructions of whiteness' that characterised the last two centuries of the history of labour migration in Britain (McDowell 2008b). A parallel emerges between the current divisions between white Eastern Europeans and the situation in post-war Britain where the Government preferred 'European Volunteer Workers' from the Baltic States to those from other European countries. With the exclusion of Romanians and Bulgarians, McDowell argues that nowadays we are witnessing a 'rhetoric of racialised national stereotypes that distinguishes between 'bad' Bulgarians and Romanians (...) and 'good' hard working Others' (ibid. 59). The fact that Polish workers themselves were eventually included in the group of 'privileged workers' (who could benefit from free access to the UK labour market) did not exclude the parallel widespread labelling of them as 'the scourge of the local working class' (ibid. 60). These reflections are reminiscent of Brah's consideration about the 'plurality of racisms' operating among peoples, beyond simplistic and dichotomised visions (Brah 1996).

It seems therefore that the EU workers have themselves internalised to a certain extent the same stereotypes attached to the A2 migrants. Similarly to the Brazilian maid (who differentiated Brazilians as 'more diplomatic'), the Portuguese housekeeper draws a series of assumptions about those countries' 'bad reputation', *naturalising* the Romanians and Bulgarians' ignorance of their rights, their vulnerability and submission to authoritarian supervisors. At the same time though, by uncovering the *relationships of dependency* among workers from the same national group in the

workplace, the influence of the current regime of migration regulation becomes strikingly apparent. This, in combination with a certain use of ethnic networks, appears to be employed not only as a means of smoothing and securing recruitment, but also extending and '*externalising*' the *management and disciplining of labour* in the workplace to the *internal power dynamics among migrants*. This is achieved also on the basis of *their mobility differentials*. In other words, it is their relatively more *precarious migration status* that provides the basis for this form of intra-ethnic exploitation. Overall the new forms of division among the workforce envisaged by trade unionists in this specific sector were ultimately directly shaped by recent changes in UK legislation.

3.3.8 The intersection of racial stereotypes and migration regulation: managed migration and the 'points-based system'

In 2005 the hospitality sector was excluded from the 'work permit scheme' for labour migration introduced in 2003 to respond to shortages in low-skilled jobs in the UK. The scheme had previously made 10,000 permits available every year for workers coming from outside the EU. Various authors and commentators agree that this exclusion reflected the intention of the Government, following the European Enlargement and the decision to open the labour market to the workers from the 'Accession countries' to *fill* shortages in the sector with the expanding numbers of Eastern European migrant workers coming into the UK. The news initially worried representatives of the hospitality industry who informed the Home Office that low-skilled migration was an 'essential support' to the industry (Home Office 2006: 29, cit. in Dutton et al. 2008: 103). The new 'Points-Based System' for immigration recently introduced in the UK formalised the restrictions imposed on overseas migrants seeking employment in the sector. In fact, the decision by the Migration Advisory Committee not to activate the 'tier three', which represents *the only possible channel* for 'unskilled' non-EU workers to enter the country legally, makes it impossible for a non-EU migrant with any particular or recognised skills to apply for a job in hotels, restaurants and other sections of the UK hospitality industry.

Is the legislative change leading towards a wholesale *replacement* of job posts with the arrival of A8 workers? How is racial and ethnic segregation in London hotels being re-shaped by the increasing *differentiation in migration statuses* among the workers? Can the new situation be described in terms of a conflict between *old* and *new* migrants from the 'A8'? The various actors involved in the hotel workers campaign expressed differing and contradictory views on these issues.

3.3.9 *The changing stratification of labour after EU Enlargement*

According to the officer from the union hotel branch, the new stratification of the workforce in London, reflecting tactics of division on the part of the managers, explicitly work along racial lines:

-Do employers really prefer now *white* Eastern Europeans to so called 'ethnic minorities'?

...there is a lot of individual racism as well but this is expressed openly only when there is an underlying culture of acceptance...Blacks are relatively *more expensive* and this is a huge turn in the last 5 years...Black people are *under attack* by a white cheaper working class who...Those countries have no large black population themselves haven't been connected to *any colonial past* such as France, Italy so quite old fashioned racist views, they are anti-Muslim as well...I mean I giving you a snap shot view (Tom, male, white, UK-born, Irish origin, part-time officer, Hotels branch).

According to the respondent, something paradoxical has recently been occurring in London hotels in terms of racial segregation: the EU Enlargement has produced a situation where the white workers who obtained freedom of movement are keener to accept relatively lower wages than workers from Black ethnic minorities. This situation translates into new migrants from Eastern Europe 'pushing down' the working conditions of the 'established' migrant communities, who are mainly black immigrants from former UK colonies (Caribbean, South and Central Africa, India, Pakistan). Research in London hotels has effectively reported patterns of 'substitution' of Eastern Europeans for ethnic minorities, showing for instance how room attendants who tended to be mainly Afro-Caribbean now have been replaced by 'new immigrants' (Dutton et al. 2008: 108). However the trade unionist also implied that while migrants from A8 countries are favoured *also for their colour*, they themselves harbour racist attitudes and discriminate against their black colleagues. The new divisions also work via the tensions brought about by a migrant population that is 'not used to' the UK's multicultural society. Whilst the trade unionist acknowledges a form of 'institutional racism' in British society, a supposed 'superiority' of the UK model of integration, as compared to the intrinsic racism of the ex-Soviet countries which 'haven't been connected to any colonial past', appears to underlie his statement.

The way in which racial divisions and labour market tensions among hotel workers are shaped by new waves of immigration appears to be a real problematic. Bridget Anderson (2008) emphasised how the effective *competition* between Black UK workers, non-EEA nationals and

nationals from EU member states for low paid and insecure work *is incorporated* into the labour market, helping produce ‘deep racialised antagonisms’ among them. These hostilities are reinforced precisely by the tendency to cast the latter group’s racism as being ‘natural’, a consequence of these migrants’ provenance from a ‘homogenous society’ (Anderson 2008: 8).

The ‘race relations approach’ traditionally embraced by trade unions in Britain does not acknowledge racism as a pervasive phenomenon nationally, and leaves untouched notions of ‘Britishness’ as the national norm while pre-supposing the ‘tolerance’ of the host population (Gilroy 1987). Whilst the multicultural politics of integration may themselves be superseded by a new emphasis on ‘Community Cohesion’ by the policy debates on new racial tensions in the British society, criticism of the race relations approach remains useful to understanding recent changes in the workforce and how they are perceived among trade unions. As Erel (2009) and Anthias (1992) have highlighted, the promotion of ‘good race relations’ assumes that the ‘Other’ *adapts to* and integrates into British society thus missing out the ‘complex and shifting hierarchisation of different ethnic groups’ (e.g. the different meaning of the category ‘Black’). This criticism appears even more relevant today considering the increasing complexity and *differentiation of migration statuses* and their interlocking with *ethnic stratification* as has emerged in the present study. The changing internal hierarchies (such as those encountered among white Eastern Europeans) cannot be accounted for by an approach that ultimately assumes the category of ‘race’ as a given (Erel 2009: 28).

Impressive parallels with the current (re-) stratification of labour force in the US may shed further light on the current means of substitution and exclusion employed in the hospitality industry across the Atlantic. A trade unionist from Los Angeles, visiting London as a partner of the campaign with the union and the CSO, provided insights into the intricate map of divisions between workers by comparing the intertwining of racial constructs and workers’ migration status with the situation in the US. In particular the respondent drew a parallel between the white migrants played off against BME people in London, and the ‘brown-black conflict’ among the hospitality workforce in LA:

In the hotel industry in some cities African-Americans used to be the majority and now hotels hire Latinos and there is a *black-brown tension* (...) Here the most vulnerable group of workers are white, not because they are *white* but because they are *immigrants*... the same with the Latinos in the US... not because they are brown but because they are immigrants,

the most recent ones ...When I tell the Latinos back in the US that the whites here are the most vulnerable group of workers they start laughing! That cannot be true 'cause their *perceptions of whites* is that they are strong, they *can move*, they *know their rights*...(…) O yes...colour becomes *almost irrelevant*...it is migration! You cannot find *whiter skin* than these Polish workers have...I mean (in the US) there is also a white working poor population...(Steven, male, white, North American, union officer, hotel division of UNITE HERE (LA), donor of the campaign)

This account provides a valuable explanation of the role of race and migration regulation in shaping new divisions among migrant workers on both sides of the Atlantic, illustrating how *migration status* itself acts as a category of differentiation together with those of race gender, class and ethnicity.

While other respondents identified 'tensions with Eastern Europeans displaying racist attitude towards Blacks' (Babacar, male, black, UK born, Caribbean origin, full-time union officer, race relations committee), the conflict between old and new migrants was synthesised in terms of current *policy attention* being restricted, even within the trade unions' debate, to new Eastern Europeans as representing 'the true migrant workers'. For instance, when I asked: 'In the UK political debate on immigration, do you believe that generally speaking ethnic minorities are not considered migrants?' the reply was: 'Well, they are *invisible* in policy terms...' (Babacar, male, black, UK born, full-time officer, Caribbean origin, race relations committee).

What does the invisibility of the 'other' migrant workers (i.e. post-colonial migrants from now well-established communities) say about the functioning of the current stratification of migrant employment? The new system of regulation favouring EU as against non-EU migrants seems both to sustain old and create new 'racialised categories'. The new system was in fact brought in at a particular moment, exactly when new tensions were palpable in British society:

The Government policy was very much affected by discourses on race...they said *we can make all our labour needs from Europe*...they didn't say that by accidents but against the

backdrop of a politics hostile to *asylum seekers who were not white!* It has been going on in the press for years...That was a coded way of saying: 'well, we are not actually letting people into the country!' *Migration, immigration and race* have always been part of the political debates in this country...They go right back to the 1960's at the time of the Powell 'Rivers of Blood' speech⁶¹ (Babacar, male, black, UK born, Caribbean origin, full-time union officer, race relations committee).

When trade unionists have been questioned about the possible consequences of the new changes in UK migration policy, the issue of *race and immigration* emerged once again:

If under the 'points-based system' there is no channel to non-EU workers, will the sector become *entirely composed* of workers from the EU Accession countries?

When West Africans arrived ten years ago, at that time the Filipinos were saying 'all these Africans are coming and accepting low wages'...In a few years' time the Eastern Europeans *will not accept anymore low wages but there will be another source of cheap labour....*(Roger, male, white, UK born, full-time union officer, Restaurant and Bars branch)

The trade unionist reproduces a way of looking at migrant labour as *mechanically accommodating* to the demands of the labour market (i.e. there will always be a new source of cheap labour ready to substitute for the previous workforce). But he also indirectly acknowledges a form of *agency* on the part of the workers as he explains the process of substitution including the *reluctance* of more established migrants to accept low wages. However, another trade union officer was perplexed about the feasibility of a full *substitution* of Eastern Europeans for Black ethnic minorities in the hospitality sector as a consequence of the new Points-Based System:

Is the hospitality sector going to be completely replaced by white EEA migrants?

⁶¹ The 'Rivers of Blood Speech' by the Conservative MP Enoch Powell in Birmingham in 1968, called for resolute and urgent action against Commonwealth immigration and against proposed anti-discrimination legislation in the UK (the Race Relations Bill). This is remembered for its racist content, an important landmark in the history of political discussion of immigration matters. On that occasion Powell proposed voluntary re-emigration by 'generous grants and assistance' for those migrants supposedly taking over the rights of indigenous workers. He also advocated the rejection of the right of family re-union, an argument which is worryingly re-appearing in contemporary debates in the UK and other EU countries.

It won't be the reality! This does not reflect the reality *because that sector is unregulated...* because you have got agencies and employers who *do not take responsibility* for the workers, they take whatever it comes along...(Babacar, male, black, UK born, Caribbean origin, full-time union officer, race relations committee).

In this sense the respondent expresses a different view from the one provided by the literature discussing the 'rescaling' of migrant and agency work within an enlarged EU (McDowell et al. 2008, Krings 2008, McKay 2006). Rather than a simple shift in the origin of temporary staff 'as new Europeans take the place of earlier rounds of migrants into the city' McDowell et al. 2008a: 767), precisely because of the informal recruitment practices of job agencies dominant in the sector the new regulation will not necessarily restrict access to hospitality jobs to migrants from the EU. The recruitment of non-EEA workers will continue but through '*other*' channels. Rogers and colleagues (2009) also highlighted how the combination of increasing restrictions and the effects of the recession may eventually foster a rise in *informal and undocumented* migrant labour.

Workers from non-EEA countries will not *just leave* the country because of changes in the system, especially if one considers the other, relatively compelling reasons for them to stay or move:

The effects of the Point-Based System will not be that all these people *simply go away...*

Many people attached to an 'indentured situation', either because they have paid agencies to get here and then having to pay a *debt* and that has got serious implications for themselves and their families... they've got to find work anyway! *And anyway employers need workers...*(Babacar, male, black, UK born, Caribbean origin, full-time union officer, race relations committee).

The union officer highlights the fundamental *unpredictability* of labour immigration and the existence of both multiple subjective drives and structural constraints acting beyond a mechanical understanding of the labour market and people's patterns of mobility. At the same time he substantially emphasises the labour 'needs' of employers in the sector, irrespective of existing regulation. To be sure the new Points-Based System would contribute to *another form of racialisation*, not necessarily excluding black workers from the 'low skilled sectors', but rather favouring a situation where almost 'all documented workers will be white and all undocumented workers will be black...' (Babacar, male, black, UK born, Caribbean origin, full-time union officer, race relations committee). In this sense the question over the *effects of the new restrictive*

regulation does not concern only relatively settled migrant communities but also the possible creation of an increasingly *informalised* (and *illegalised*) non-EU labour force as a result. While the role of temporary staffing agencies proved central to these processes of informalisation and will be further explored, both in the EU and the US the impact of government regulation and de-regulation also appeared key to what critical migration studies have described as the state's production of 'illegality' and 'deportability' of labour (De Genova 2004, 2002)⁶².

But as against the view of the new and temporary, regular or irregular migrants either as merely *victims* of greater exploitation or as individuals driven by a calculated and utilitarian labour market attitude, Chapter 5 will further explore how the *voluntary* transition of workers to other jobs and their *high turnover* can be actually problematic for employers and disrupt management's control of labour retention as well as workers' loyalty and productivity.

However, first it is worth acknowledging how the complexity of the divisions and new stratification in the hospitality industry in London also became clear in the context of the 'hotel workers campaign'. Indeed, this offered a rich terrain to test the ways in which these divisions are both developed and challenged by the different actors involved and how they impact not only on the relationships of migrants at work but also on their relatively informal *spaces of politicisation*. How did the aforementioned perceptions of *racial, gender* and *occupational divisions* play out in the process of migrant organising? How did workers *become active* within and outside trade unions in the context of the campaign, and what do their *subjective experiences of engagement* suggest about the limits of current attempts at 'community organising' in London?

⁶² De Genova (2004) in particular talked about the 'legal production of illegality' with regard to the functioning of the US-Mexican border, which exemplifies a migration regime that 'includes' migrants precisely on the basis of their undocumented status, and in turn produces their greater vulnerability and exploitability in the labour market. The racial divide corresponding to this production of illegality is in turn essential to the forging of labour and citizenship, and its differentiation and exploitation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Migrants' political engagement and the making of new collectives

The hotel and restaurant industries have the lowest union density of any sector in Britain (3.9% in the last quarter of 2009) and the lowest workplace union presence (9.6%) (BIS 2010)⁶³. In the same period, London registered the lowest union density across industrial sectors among the English regions (BIS 2010: 17). For sectors such as hospitality, the literature in industrial relations has therefore mainly concentrated on the question of how *unions should organise* in 'greenfield' sites to increase membership in a context of high mobility and flexible migrant labour (Heery et al. 2000). However, this chapter attempts to explore, from the point of view of the individual and institutional actors involved and *their relationships*, the particular forms in which generally disaffected, low-paid and highly exploited female migrant hotel workers *become active* in the course of a campaign to improve their working conditions. The recent unionisation effort led by T&G UNITE in some London hotels offers a rich field of experience to explore the possibilities of empowerment of migrant workers and migrant women in particular, whose *subjective experiences* of involvement appear to be directly entangled with broader transformations underway in the UK trade union movement. How do mutual perceptions and stereotypes among workers, trade unionists and organisers impact on the migrant women's potential for political engagement? How is migrant labour in the low-paid service economy of a large city in the 'Global North' triggering the crisis of trade unions, and yet at the same time opening up the space for innovative forms of collective organising? How are traditional notions of *community* and the *workplace* at the core of trade union organisation and their understanding of 'political engagement' reshaped through the migrant hotel workers' intense and multifarious experiences of *participation and leadership*?

⁶³ Interestingly though, according to the Labour Force Survey data, "female had the highest union membership only in hotels (cit. in BIS/ONS 2010: 12).

One of the direct actions organised during the ‘hotel workers campaign’ in London made evident the complex relationships emerging between the institutions and the migrants participating, and their different understandings and strategies towards politics.

4.1 An anomalous picket

I am sitting on the bus with Stella, after accompanying her and her daughter to a parent-teacher meeting. Tonight we decided to join the picket of the Churchill Hotel. This four-star hotel is owned by a multinational chain and has been selected by the organisers as one of the main targets of the ‘hotel workers campaign’ led by the civil society organisation (CSO) ‘London Citizens’ in collaboration with Unite the Union. Recently, the permanent staff of the Churchill feared that their working conditions had been threatened by the management’s attempt to change the hotel’s rulebook regulating their terms and conditions of employment, including retirement benefits, annual service bonus, and bereavement leave. After various changes in the hotel’s governance (it passed through the hands of three different companies within the last ten years), the new employers started to harass the workers in various ways. The main issues at stake were the introduction of new management rules in the housekeeping department (making work harder, especially for room attendants), changes in the rota system, the perceived ‘threat of substitution’ of agency workers for ‘in-house’ employees, and not least, bullying and harassment against the staff. The presence of a ‘core’ of long-term unionised workers, mainly of Portuguese and other Southern European origin, led both the trade union and the CSO involved in the campaign to count on that particular building to organise the workers and, hopefully, obtain formal union recognition.

This was the first time that Stella participated in a solidarity action like this. Encouraging participation in the picket by workers from other hotels is a tactic meant to foster mutual support between members from different workplaces and strengthen solidarity across the industry. Stella believes that that is important: since all workers’ conditions in luxury hotels are very similar, one day she will find herself in the position of needing support from co-workers from other hotels.

The journey takes quite some time from the periphery of North West London before we get to the luxury hotel in the centre of town. It would be faster to travel by Tube but given the high price of moving around the capital, low-paid workers cannot afford more than a weekly bus pass. In any case, this is a good opportunity for me and Stella to make the most of free time together and

share some of our impressions about the campaign and the union meetings of the ‘hotel workers branch’.

Stella *became a member* only recently. The full-time union officer was in charge of her grievance and helped a lot, pursuing her case from the beginning. However, Stella built a closer relationship with the chair of the hotel branch who is keen to make jokes, entertain the branch members and ‘ask you other things like how you are’, that is, besides issues strictly related to work.

In front of the hotel there are still few people and there is an awkward atmosphere. This is not only due to the unusual character of occupying an anonymous public space for a protest in the middle of the city, without even being large in number. The workers might also feel threatened by the shining panes of the grandiose building, as well as by the severe glances from the security guards, who stand at the entrance and warn us to remain at a distance. The superior indifference of the rich guests going in and out of the sumptuous hotel may contribute to creating a sense of unease among the group of workers, unionists and activists gathering in front of the building. However, gradually, the atmosphere warms as new workers come in support of the picket, together with neighbours, elderly men and women from the parishes and other ‘community groups’. They are the members of London Citizens, this peculiar ‘organisation of community organisations’ leading the campaign together with T&G Unite. The organiser employed by LC is coordinating the action.

This is an opportunity for Stella to express her solidarity with her fellow workers as well as her broader *desire to participate* in the union’s activities. When the union officer from LA, visiting London in support of the campaign, questions her about her current work and her activity in the union, she answers that, after seven years working in the hospitality sector, she is now employed as a maid in a large hotel just nearby, where working conditions are also very hard. Joining the union was at first a *basic tactic* to seek defence against the racist attitudes of a colleague at work. Later, she started to attend the branch meetings and appreciate the advantages of being in a collective. Stella seems so proud to be there, standing in the cold, at the entrance of that seemingly impenetrable palace, holding a banner that claims the right to a Living Wage for all hotel workers *in the city* and demands respect and dignity at work. After all, the organisers’ main objective is that the workers should obtain some form of *visibility*.

The one hour-long picket in front of one of the most well-known hotels in the West End, although not attracting mass participation, seems to achieve its fundamental goal of hitting the

hotel's *corporate reputation*. Could any of the hotel maids, even those earning the Living Wage, ever afford to spend even just one night in the same hotel in which they work and toil every day? Are the clients aware of the continuous harassment that the workers suffer from a harsh management? Reaching *broader public opinion*, and appealing to the guests' moral disapproval over the poor conditions of those serving them are other key components of the overall strategy endorsed by the campaigners.

It is possible to observe a variety of attitudes and behaviours from the ways the different actors occupy the picket area. The officer from the hotel branch stands at the centre on the pavement in front of the hotel entrance, holding a placard with slogans to shame management. During the demonstration the trade union leader may be mixing the 'LC methods' (a more *relational* and dialogical attitude toward the employers) together with the *adversarial* tactics traditionally endorsed by trade unions. Strong determination and high self-control describe his attitude, as he is aggressively confronted by the general manager who comes out of the building threatening that the union will pay for its initiative. In the trade unionist's eyes, this reaction on the part of the general manager itself reveals the success of the picket: the bosses appear genuinely annoyed and concerned about the action's effects on the *hotel's public image*. An important objective of the action seems to have been accomplished.

The community organiser's behaviour is clearly different. Agnieszka appears very confident and faces the attacks by the general manager with a smile. This tactic seems to reflect the underlying philosophy embraced by the organisation she belongs to, which generally prefers *negotiation* to more confrontational approaches. The latter are associated with a traditional labour movement direct action strategy based on the assumption of a fundamental *conflict of interests* between workers and bosses in labour disputes.

The multiple attitudes emerging from the actors during the event are not, however, as sharply distinct from one another as they may seem. Rather, processes of cross-pollination emerge in the course of the action and are evident in the informal meeting that follows. I was surprised when the branch secretary asked all the participants to express their 'feelings' about the initiative. This is a procedure normally used by LC, encouraging feedback from the participants at the end of a meeting or an action, following its own 'relational' or 'one to one' approach. This prioritises *reflection* and *mutual listening* as means to improve active participation from all the members.

Some trade unionists claim however that ‘one to one’ was an everyday practice of the hotel branch even prior to the beginning of collaboration with LC.

In the informal discussion around the table of the fast-food restaurant where we gather after the picket, many enthusiastically affirm the capacity of a small group to have *created*, through a brief demonstration in front of the hotel, a strong sense of mutual support and determination. This means *a sense of collectivity*, which everyone considers very important for the workers inside, despite the fact that they have not actively participated in the demo. Nonetheless, some doubts remain about the weakness of not having any workers from that specific hotel directly outside in the picket. The dilemma between *protection* and *exposure* for the workers starts to appear as a central strategic and political question in the process of the campaign. In this regard it is interesting to hear the visiting unionist from the US’s first impressions of the picket as he compares it to similar actions against major hotels in Los Angeles. The pickets organised by the trade union in LA are not necessarily better-attended, ‘it depends, sometimes they are more, sometimes they are less...Yet, for sure they are more often or more regular’. The main difference is that, the trade unionist remarks, ‘in LA we have the workers’ (Ethnographic diary, the picket at the Churchill). That is, the workers are already stronger inside that particular workplace and they can ‘afford’ to participate in the picket and ‘confront their employers directly’.

What remains of that short-lived but significant action is difficult to tell. Nothing concrete was apparently won through that protest. But there are some elements that might make this event a particular case of informal and still-powerful ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2008) while condensing many of the contradictory dynamics that will emerge throughout the ‘hotel workers campaign’. Engin Isin, as part of his research on the genealogies of ‘being political’, theorised the concept of ‘act’ to describe the ‘self-constitution’ of migrants as non-citizens into claimants of rights. Particularly interesting in the shift of focus operated by *acts* of citizenship are the dimensions of *temporality* and *creativity* that make this idea different from other approaches to migrants’ political engagement, and useful especially in relation to the study of transnational and transient labour. Isin is interested in exploring ‘the question of how subjects become claimants under *surprising conditions* or within a relatively *short* period of time’ (Isin 2008: 17). In contrast to the preoccupations of trade unions regarding the high mobility and turnover of migrants, acts of citizenship do not ‘need’ time but rather require creativity to trigger that ‘rupture in the given’ that constitutes an act able to give rise to social transformation. The *unintentionality*, *affectiveness* or

irrationality of those acts make up their creativity and unpredictability and constitute 'activist citizens' who *create the scene*, rather than simply acting out already written scripts (Isin 2008: 38).

Outside the Churchill Hotel, in a few minutes a relatively small group of people was able to create a quite powerful atmosphere despite the highly intimidating environment. The apparent lofty social status of the guests passing by the picket, and the violence of their indifference towards the poorly paid and mistreated workers was not enough to silence the desire for contestation expressed by the protesters standing outside the Churchill. This was one of the most diverse group of 'activists' I had joined during the sixteen months of participant observation in the campaign. It included the Nigerian woman active in the union branch and the Portuguese housekeeper, who simply came to support the Churchill workers despite their long days at work at another luxury hotel; also a journalist from a Polish newspaper; elderly neighbours from the local parishes; a silent Mongolian guy who just finished his shift as a room steward; a young temp worker from Slovakia; and Stella, holding the banner together with the septuagenarian trade unionist from the restaurant branch. Despite the hostile environment, we were able to build a lively scene, improvising and creating a space of communication and contestation. Stella reminds everybody: 'these people pay us very low wages'. The gap between the luxury of the service provided and the poor working conditions is simply outrageous. But this is our moment, a space for expression, a *very ordinary* and at the same time *exceptional moment* to yell out our everyday experience of injustice.

This scene is a very traditional and relatively mild form of labour protest: a picket outside the workplace. Yet it is a very anomalous picket. It is too late in the evening to stop workers from entering the building and there is not even a strike for them to join. This traditional form of protest is being transformed by the presence of new *actors, tactics, solidarities* and *interactions* that may also begin to say something about the crisis at the core of the trade union movement. It is faced with the challenge of organising an increasingly *diverse, vulnerable* and *transient* workforce. Nonetheless a positive transformation may result from this crisis, whereby established structures and strategies are revitalised by their encounter both with the practices of other organisations outside of traditionally understood 'class politics', and by the workers themselves with their complicated and mobile lives.

Indeed, few industrial sociologists have discussed the particular challenges brought about by the representation of *migrant labour*, primarily as part of the problem of how to represent so-called vulnerable, contingent and mobile workers (Heery 2009, Burawoy 2008), and less often from the

point of view of the particular *status* of migrant workers (Milkman 2006, Holgate 2000, 2004, 2009, Martinez and Perret 2009, 2006) (see Chapter 1).

The trade union campaign subject of this study identifies some of the challenges of representing and organising migrant labour in particular in a global city such as London. It reflects some of the issues discussed in the literature on the application of the US organising model in Britain and its contradictory outcomes (Wills 2005, Heery and Simms 2008). However, it also discloses a critique of trade union representation and of the current process of organisational renewal by focusing on migrant women's experiences of political subjectivation besides their formal union membership: Before exploring the subjective experiences of the various actors involved in a particular phase of the hotel workers campaign, it is necessary to set the context of the organising strategies, and the main actors and alliances underpinning it.

4.2 The hotel workers campaign: overall strategy, main actors and key developments

The new 'Union Central London hotel workers' branch' of T&G was established in the mid-1990s in only two workplaces (the Carlton Tower and the Selfridges hotels), and since then it has increased its membership five-fold (LC and UNITE 2009). Yet still in 2005 less than 10% of the hotel and restaurant workforce in London were covered by a union agreement. For these reasons, and considering the hostile environment, the main activities of the union concentrate on grievances and disciplinary hearings *for individual workers* (Turnbull 2005).

During the last decade the branch was one of the founding members of West London Citizens, an alliance of 36 civil society organisations and community groups across four London boroughs. Since 2005 UNITE and LC have campaigned for the Living Wage and the employment rights of hotel workers in collaboration with other civil society groups (LC and UNITE 2009).

I started attending the meetings of the hotel workers branch in autumn 2007 when the union was at the stage of considering an *investment* in the sector, with a view to launching an organising and recruitment campaign in some Central London hotels. They considered this in particular given the opportunity to receive support from London Citizens and the US union UNITE HERE, both involved in campaigning for improved pay and conditions for workers in the industry. A further consideration was that basing all activities around the workplace and on individual servicing had

proved ineffective in advancing hotel workers' conditions. It was felt that organising a 'themed campaign' conducted with other organisations and focused on collective grievances instead was a good way to re-launch *collective* organising (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting).

Furthermore, there were particularly clear opportunities since the Olympics were due to come to London in 2012. This presented an opportunity to spotlight a normally invisible part of the service workforce and provided a certain leverage to pressurise politicians and entrepreneurs in this key industry in the capital's tourism sector. They could exert pressure with the argument that improving overall conditions in the industry (including those of the workers) would prepare London to be in the best position to welcome this global event. In collaboration with LC, the union would focus on those hotels where a consistent membership base was already in place.⁶⁴ The Churchill Hotel (part of the Hyatt international chain) offered relatively fertile conditions for pursuing *union recognition* claims.

4.2.1 *The Living Wage and subcontracting*

The 'hotel workers pay claim 2009', officially announced at a branch meeting in the summer of 2008, included strategies to increase membership under the mantra 'educate, agitate, organise'. It also provided for the establishment of organising committees in each workplace to put forward a petition focused on the issue of securing a wages rise. After the claims were submitted, bargaining procedures would begin in union- recognised hotels and grievance procedures in those without recognition (Ethnographic diary, organising hotel teams meeting). The focus on the pay claim provided the 'theme' for the campaign in the framework of the overall demand for a Living Wage across hotels in London⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ The only union-recognised hotels at that time were the Sheraton, Thistle and Renaissance. The other (non-recognised) hotels mentioned as targets were the Churchill, Radisson Edwardian, Kensington Close, Hilton, Dorchester and Claridges.

⁶⁵ The Campaign for the London Living Wage was launched by an assembly of community leaders in East London in 2001. They stood alongside a range of trade unions united in the effort to organize outsourced staff employed in East London's public service and in large corporations based in Canary Wharf and the City of London (Howarth 2005: 40).

LC, with support from the hotel unions and UNITE HERE, had already launched the Living Wage Campaign (LWC) for the hotel sector during the summer of 2006, at a demonstration outside the 'Hilton Metropole Hotel' in London (Evans et al. 2007: 93). The Living Wage is understood by its supporters to be a strategic demand for the hospitality sector, particularly because it covers all the workers irrespective of their employment status, of great importance in an industry with such a high level of *labour subcontracting*. Following the struggles in Baltimore, where Living Wage Campaigns were firstly initiated, this strategy served to make 'governments, corporations, and universities responsible not only for the treatment of the workers in their direct employment but also for the behaviour of the subcontractors they hire' (Silver 2003: 110).

The 'pay claim' was included in the broader strategy for the hotel organising campaign in November 2008. Together with its focus on wages, the campaign also emphasised the '*reduction of agency work*'. High levels of agency work were a direct consequence of increased subcontracting practices, considered as a factor in weakening unionisation in the sector and overall serving to make workers' conditions more precarious (Ethnographic diary, LC and Unite meeting).

As documented by recent comparative research on the hotel sectors of the US and Europe (Vanselow et al. 2009), while low-skilled and low-wage work are long-standing features of the hotel sector, industry *consolidation* (mergers and acquisitions) and *corporatisation* internationally are leading to an ever more competitive market, resulting in management strategies that further degrade many hotel workers' working conditions (Appelbaum et al. 2003, Scully-Russ 2005, Seifert and Messing 2006). These processes of merging and internationalisation of the industry simultaneously provided a new basis for *global cooperation* between unions. At the joint meeting of T&G-UNITE and LC in July 2008 it was made clear that that London Citizens, thanks to funding

Since 2005, as a response to pressure by Living Wage campaigners, the Mayor of London has taken the responsibility for the publication of the annually updated Living Wage figure for London, taking into account the higher costs of living in London (from housing to transport). According to the most recent calculation report, the London Living Wage is defined by the Family Budget Unit as a 'wage that achieves an adequate level of warmth and shelter, a healthy palatable diet, social integration and avoidance of chronic stress for earners and their dependents' (GLA 2009). Some of the limitations also recognized by authors supportive of this demand relate to the 'problems of implementation' (Luce 2004), the relatively small numbers of workers covered (Freeman 2005) and the limited impact on overall poverty rates' (Neumark and Adams 2003, cit. in Evans et al. 2007: 87)

provided by the US union UNITE HERE, was ready to appoint an *organiser* for the London hotels campaign. Meanwhile London Citizens organised a ‘student organising academy’ over the summer as a first preparatory stage of the campaign, gathering young practitioners, students from overseas and local union activists together in London for about a month. They worked to conduct research in the industry, map the different market shares, register the presence of unionised workers across workplaces and, eventually, identify the hotels which could become the main targets of the campaign.

4.2.2 *The scale of organising: global and local alliances*

Eventually the LC summer academy decided to target two large hotels, namely the ANDAZ in the East and the Churchill in the west side of the city. The fact that they belonged to the same international US chain (the Hyatt) testified to the connection of the union with UNITE HERE, which was providing the funding for the LC organiser and was involved in campaigns against the same hotel chain across the Atlantic. However, the decision also signalled a major shift from the strategy followed by T&G in the past, as when it attempted to organise the Dorchester Hotel in 1999. At that time the hotel was selected on the basis that it was a stand-alone hotel. A motivation behind this choice was that the hotel constituted a ‘single bargaining unit’ under the terms of the Employment Relations Act and it was therefore thought to offer greater opportunities for winning union recognition (Wills 2005).⁶⁶

The union’s failure in recognition ballots at the Dorchester may have contributed to making it aware of the limits of an organising campaign based on a *single workplace*. The new organising initiative, selecting the two hotels on the opposite basis that they were part of an international chain, appeared to be a conscious strategy to create *solidarity across workplaces* and against a ‘global’ *common enemy*. The ‘non-mobility’ of service jobs such as those in hospitality and cleaning

⁶⁶ According to then new legislation introduced by the Labour government in 1999, if employers refuse union recognition the union can resort to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) to adjudicate over the case. While this offers an opportunity for recognition despite the anti-union laws introduced by the previous Conservative government, the strategy followed by T&G at that time reproduced the idea that campaigns are won or lost in the workplace (see Wills 2005).

actually renders *global cooperation* between workers less problematic, because they cannot be relocated and do not compete against each other on cost (Anderson et al 2010: 387; see also Silver 2003).

Indeed, the meeting with trade unionists from UNITE HERE, the partner union in Los Angeles, acted as a catalyst for the development of the campaign and fostered enthusiasm among the workers. They seemed energised by the idea that colleagues in the US, with very similar working conditions, were successfully organising against the same ‘global employer’. In the following weeks the London and American officials, together with the LC organiser, conducted a series of video interviews with lay activists from the two hotels (mainly women with migrant backgrounds employed in the housekeeping departments). They were informed that their testimonies would be shown to the American co-workers. The objective was to highlight the many common concerns and convince workers on both sides of the Atlantic that they had a realistic chance of winning their struggles. However, as soon as *tensions arose among the workers and management pressure* increased in the Churchill, and the attempt to set up ‘hotel organising teams’ did *not* consolidate in the ANDAZ, the workers started to look with increased scepticism at the possibility of ‘building a union’ like their co-workers overseas. US colleagues suddenly seemed very *distant* from the concrete everyday issues faced by the migrant women workers in the London hotels (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting).

What were these tensions about? How did the trade unionists and organisers deal with them in the course of the campaign, and how did they end up alienating the workers from the unionisation effort? Focusing on the ‘micro-developments’ of one specific phase of the campaign over the collective grievance in one of the Hyatt hotels sheds particular light on the constraints on the active involvement of the migrant women workers.

4.2.3 ‘Pressure for recognition’: the developments of the grievance at the Churchill Hotel

Four years before the beginning of the campaign, the Churchill Hotel was sold to the chain Hyatt. Since that point working conditions and staff morale deteriorated significantly. Permanent and in-house workers were concerned in particular with the *new handbook*, which was meant to introduce new terms and conditions, threatening their established entitlements to bonuses and pensions (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting). The new situation was a result of

changes in the governance of the hotel and the fragmentation of the workforce in *different contractual positions* (Chapter 3).

The primary aim of the organising campaign was to *obtain union recognition*. It sought to build on the existing levels of union membership, which offered some hope that recognition ballots were winnable. However, management responded with classic ‘divide and rule’ tactics to disrupt workers’ unity around the demands some union members were advancing to resist the changes in terms and conditions introduced in the new handbook. The management reacted by ‘inviting’ workers to individual negotiation and to put forward individual complains. A group of more active Portuguese workers was attacked by managers and labelled as a ‘mafia’ accusing them to be forcing colleagues to participate in the collective grievance. This appeared to be a blatant attempt to block the recruitment and organising process by trying *to isolate* the key union activists. Both the union and LC initially emphasised the importance of remaining united and the right to collective action, and they offered support and encouragement to the women who were most exposed. The branch officers also advocated that the workers should stand up against victimisation of union members to resist the management’s attack, while also using this as a tool to build solidarity and recruit new workers into the union. However, further retaliation by the managers punishing individual workers by calling them to disciplinary hearings, or else suddenly changing the rota for those involved in the grievance, provoked *extreme stress and anxiety* among the workers (Ethnographic diary, informal interviews with union members, Hotel workers branch meeting).

In December the aforementioned *anomalous picket* at the Churchill took place in response to the management’s victimisation of union members. Some of the workers felt empowered by the initiative, which combined a mixture of ‘in your face’ and ‘direct action’ strategies as well as ‘soft tactics’ to persuade the management to engage in further negotiations. The diverse composition of the group of protesters that gathered outside the Churchill that night might be seen as an initial step towards building solidarity between workers from different workplaces and *drawing from alternative power sources*, such as civil society coalitions, to support low-paid migrant workers.

In LC’s view direct action tactics are essentially based on the idea of *increasing visibility* and transforming an internal, *workplace-based* issue into a *public* one, whereby the whole community and not only the workers is involved (Ethnographic diary, LC meeting). However, in some cases members of the community are mobilised *instead of* the workers themselves, precisely because of the need to *protect the* workers against dangerous exposure to victimisation.

The contradictory aspects of this type of demonstration – not including those who are directly concerned – emerged in an interview with a lay organiser at a previous action in front of the hotel in the East End during the summer:

...That demonstration has been called with *the consent* of the workers inside that hotel but at the action itself *there was only the community organisation* and other activists and *no one* from the hotel, and not even workers from other hotels... (Jim, male, white other, Italy, 6 years in London, part-time union organiser, hotel organising team)

Although the picket at the Churchill also lacked the presence of workers from the inside, it still managed to raise the morale of the hotel maids as it was able to *break their invisibility* by denouncing their poor working conditions while protecting them from direct exposure. However, bullying and harassment by the management at the Churchill continued. Meanwhile, the workers felt *pressurised* by the union itself, which had not abandoned its own main objective of reaching the numbers needed for union recognition. The trade union leaders and the organiser pushed those already involved in the grievance to help in registering the actual members of the hotel and recruiting new workers. At the meeting with the lay activists the organiser recognised that the women workers were being put under too much pressure by the union leader:

I was looking at their faces....after a long day at work where they are bullied, having someone else shouting at you (...) I do not want them to feel stressed or disappointed or *let down*. I do not want them to be *pressurised* but at the same time we have to find a way to get *our message across*...(Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign)

Recent research on union organising in London hotels also highlights the risk of *increasing* the burden for those who are already paying the cost of hard and/or insecure employment by urging the workers to *produce activists* who can lead organising campaigns (Wills 2005: 149). This may be a particular instance of the broader controversial issue of reaching a trade-off between workers' *protection* and the request for their *active participation* under the organising model. This model, while highlighting the organiser's 'facilitative role' in stimulating the direct engagement of workers, assigns lay activists the tasks of recruitment to build workplace organisation (Heery and Simms 2008: 36). The union in fact maintained its focus on new members' recruitment.

In the first months of the following year, the low morale of the workers gradually led to the exhaustion of the forces necessary to continue the campaign in the two hotels. Some of the workers

felt they were let down by the union and others said that the grievance took too long (Ethnographic diary, informal interviews with Churchill workers), with the result that the attempt to run ballots for recognition was abandoned. Eventually, some workers left the union, or else threatened to leave T&G and join the GMB, the other union also present in the same hotel. Focus seemed to have turned back to the Hilton hotel where a group of Polish agency workers took the lead with a grievance. The agency workers appealed to the union against the unfair working arrangements of the hotel management: the agency workers were supposed to clean a greater number of rooms per shift compared with the workers directly employed by the hotel. However, after a few weeks the LC organiser was appointed to another job within another industrial sector (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting).

4.2.4 *Tensions between agency and in-house workers and the positions of the campaign leaders*

It is necessary to consider factors other than the aggravated pressure on the workers in order to explain the constraints on the organising effort at the Churchill. The energy of the union organiser during this phase of the campaign was almost completely absorbed by more urgent issues that started to affect workers in the housekeeping department. These were mainly related to promotion, pensions, health and safety issues, bullying and harassment, and soon overshadowed the strategic demands around pay and the Living Wage. These issues were further aggravated as new *tensions* emerged among the workforce. The *individualising tactics* used by the managers to disrupt the organising process found a fertile terrain in the growing *divisions* emerging in the workforce, along the lines of different nationalities, migration status and especially the workers' *contractual status*. This happened in spite of strategies adopted by the campaigners intended to overcome at least some of these divisions.

It has been already mentioned that the '2009 pay claim', proposed in the framework of the broader campaign for the London Living Wage, was considered a particularly suitable theme for organising workplaces with high levels of *subcontracted work*. The argument was that, while it would be difficult to organise agency workers on their own, they could engage in a wider Living Wage Campaign fostering *unity* with in-house staff and a multitude of allies in *the wider community* (Evans et al 2007). The Living Wage Campaign can thus be considered a form of 'community unionism' in that it aims to exert pressure on employers to win a living wage *for all sub-contracted* as well as in-house staff (Holgate and Wills 2007).

It became apparent in the course of the campaign at the Hyatt that the focus on the Living Wage *was not sufficient* to bridge the distances between the different categories of workers because it did not address the specific problems experienced by agency workers, neither it helped smoothing the tension between the latter and the workers employed in-house.

In the Churchill in particular, the very issues involved in the collective grievance were a symptom of the growing *tension* between in-house workers and so called ‘newcomers’. The recent restructuring of the governance and ownership of the hotel (essentially the new management company, Intercontinental, taking over the previous one, the Churchill) generated a *proliferation of employment contracts* among the workforce, according to workers’ period of employment at the hotel and a new management policy favouring *contract work*. The existence of multiple contractual statuses triggered *anxiety* among the ‘in-house’ workers (often corresponding with the ‘old guard’ of settled migrant minorities) fearful of seeing their conditions ‘pushed down to the level of *the people who just came*’ (referring both to ‘new immigrants’ in the country and ‘newcomers’ in the job).

The Portuguese housekeeper employed by the hotel for almost 30 years and highly involved in the campaign, described how these divisions were played out as part of the management’s attempt to change the hotel handbook:

They are trying to put *us* in the same position as the ‘*newcomers*’ (...) they tried to take away the bonus given to us by the Intercontinental...The are trying to *break the group* to destroy us...(Arianna, female, white other, Portugal–Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper).

In this case the label ‘newcomers’ is invariably associated with the agency workers and with the workers employed through the incoming management company (the ‘Hyatt employees’). While the respondent seemed clear about management’s exploitation of these tensions in the workplace, this did not stop her from reproducing simplistic divisions between ‘settled’ in-house workers and ‘new migrants’ employed by third party agencies (Chapter 3). So how did the union and the LC organiser position themselves on this matter? How did their *understanding of these divisions* contribute to determining the development of the campaign?

Indeed, many of the union officers and some LC members retained the underlying assumption that agency workers were detrimental, or at best indifferent, to the fate of the organising

effort in both the hotels. The union's particular emphasis was to defend the conditions of 'core workforce' against the downward pressure brought about by the introduction of subcontracted work:

The general pattern consists in the hotel trying to reduce the core personnel of *established migrants*, relying more on *contract work*. The point is *to defend the previous contract* and working conditions (John, male, white, UK born, part-time officer, Hotels branch).

In the case of the Hyatt hotels, the discourse and strategies of the trade union leaders therefore seemed to reinforce the tendency of playing agency against in-house workers. Another tendency emerging in the discourses of the trade unionists was that of associating agency workers with 'new migrants' (mainly from Accession countries) on the one hand, and in-house with settled migrant workers on the other:

...the hotels...they want to destroy the terms and conditions that *these long-term service workers* have because with the attack on *work standards* that have been in the last 15-20 years... you can *replace* these people with people from Poland or Lithuania! I mean, *nothing against them but*: if I employ these new ones, I can save £5,000 a year (Tom, male, white, UK-born, Irish origin, part-time trade unionist, Hotels branch).

Indeed the point about *reducing* the number of agency workers was officially included in the political demands of the campaign run by the union and LC:

We try to attack hotels at the business end, to *reduce agency labour* because as a union we find very difficult... you can understand... It is impossible to organise. Even on 39% turnover, if you have got a 100% of unionised members it makes only 40% of union membership... this is an impossibility! (...) They are *buying* waitresses like baked potato... you cannot organise baked potato: 'I am here only for three months, what shall I do in the union and what shall the union do for me anyway'?

If the idea of 'building a union' is inextricably linked with a *long-term investment strategy* engaging with workers with 'vested interests' and willing to 'fight for their job' (Roger, male, white, UK born, full-time union officer, Restaurant and Bars branch), organising workplaces with a high level of turnover and subcontracting is simply an impossibility. Nonetheless, opportunities to organise agency workers appeared under *particular circumstances* towards the end of the particular phase of the campaign under study, when the organisers decided to re-focus their efforts on the Hilton hotel:

-Is there any realistic possibility of involving casual or agency workers?

I think there is! For example in Hilton hotel I am getting them organised, but this is a long term teaching process... this is just developing *relationships*...because most of them are Polish and they do not speak English... I invited them to the meeting in LC and only one came, I had to do some training for them about power, collective action...but *in Polish!* (Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign)

When I interviewed the campaign organiser a year after the end of the campaign, she reiterated her belief that there is nothing intrinsic impeding agency workers from becoming the protagonists of organising campaigns in the hotels:

-And how many of the people involved in the Hilton were agency workers?

All of them! I mean Lev (the leader) was an agency worker... So it is not that there is no chance to organise them: they are agency workers only because the hotel does not want to employ them, but if the hotel would, they would work for the hotel longer, *they would rather have a stable job*... there are some who leave quickly after few months, people *who cannot bear it*, but many people have been with them for 3, 4, 5 years even if they are agency, this is just a job...(Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign)

There does not appear to be specific prejudice or pre-established distrust on the part of the organiser about the possibility of agency workers taking a lead in the organising campaign. However, the organiser too reproduced a one-sided vision of agency work. Saying that not being employed longer-term is not of the worker's volition still implies the idea that *transitoriness* is an obstacle to political engagement and that commitment is related to a more continuous relationship to the workplace. But the organiser illustrates at the same time how under *favourable circumstances* agency workers can be successfully organised. Indeed one of the leaders at the Hilton, a Polish agency worker, appeared able to mobilise many of his co-workers, win a collective grievance and obtain full respect from the management, who would contact him before taking critical decisions.

In the case of the Hilton, the *subcontracting of a whole department such as housekeeping* provided a further important condition for starting the organising process. Moreover, in that context the organiser's efforts to involve workers from her own migrant community through *training and educational* activities seemed to be facilitated by the fact that the organiser could approach these workers *in their own language*. This played a crucial role in encouraging 'vulnerable workers' to

start their grievance.

In contrast, in the case of the Churchill Hotel, it appeared that the workers were so fragmented and tensions so entrenched that the organising attempts were eventually abandoned by both LC and the union. The overall strategy seemed to turn the focus to other targets involving ‘key actors’ in the ‘wider community’: the campaigners switched their attention *to the hotel employers* who appeared willing to pay a Living Wage to their employees and become a “beacon” by encouraging other companies to cooperate and start paying the LW (Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign). More specifically, the official strategy endorsed by the union and LC for the hotel sector in ‘Rooms for Change’ (March 2009) proposed to set up a certification system in collaboration with the Mayor’s Office and ‘Visit London’. This would mean *crediting* those hotels that achieved the best standards of treatment for their employees (including the Living Wage and ballots for Trade Union recognition). Only those hotels receiving accreditation would be recommended for visitors to London during the 2012 Olympics.

However, that switch of focus from the workers to the employers and the ‘wider community of stakeholders’ was a sign of the controversial relationship between union and community organising models and their ambivalent attitude towards the involvement of migrant (women) workers on the ground. Apart from the earlier-discussed growing divisions and pressures among the workers in the Churchill and the specific barriers to the involvement of agency workers triggered by the organisers’ own understanding of the industry’s labour composition, it is worth exploring in depth the *history of the hotel workers branch*. This entails a study of the ways in which its activity developed in collaboration with other ‘community-based organisations’ in the field of migrants’ rights. In this regard, the *historical genealogy* of this particular branch itself contains the seeds of the challenges that the union today has to face in its attempts to organise migrant workers in this section of the service economy. These include the controversial relationship between the industrial basis of the branch and the different backgrounds of its members, the ways to deal with specific problems suffered by migrant workers and the uneasy relationship between ‘industrial and community objectives’.

4.3 Unions and migrant workers in the hospitality industry: the historical trade-off between community and industrial organising

The T&G union (the former TGWU and since 2007, 'Unite the Union') has been at the forefront in the attempt to organise migrant workers in the hospitality sector since 1972, when the 'International Catering Workers Branch' was established. As one trade unionist from the Unite hospitality branch highlighted, at that time the union did not have a forward-looking strategy to establish a branch with the specific task of organising migrant workers. Rather, the International Catering Workers branch originated from the relatively spontaneous initiative of a group of activists from the Portuguese Educational and Cultural League in London together with the TGWU's regional administration. The immediate antecedent of the international branch was in fact 'The Portuguese Workers Branch', whose objective was to recruit workers exclusively from the Portuguese migrant community. It soon became clear that, if there was to be any real hope of organising hospitality workers from other countries such as Spain, Italy, Cyprus or the Philippines, as well as 'internal migrants' from various parts of the UK, the branch needed to be re-named and re-launched as the 'International Catering Workers branch' (Roger, male, white, UK born, full-time union officer, Restaurants and Bars branch).

It is already apparent then how the union faced difficulties in dealing with the *different communities of migrants* employed in the sector, with ethnic divisions and the occupational segregation by nationality creating tensions among employees in individual workplaces. Moreover, the tendency of certain communities to approach the union with the objective of establishing a separate union branch with an organiser dedicated to the *individual provision of services* to workers of their *own community* was soon rejected by the politics of the union. Rather, the union branch endorsed the view that 'while support from the community groups can be a crucial factor in recruiting and an organising driver, it is the *workplaces and companies* employing workers from the community that are the *targets* and not the community itself' (Turnbull 2005: 13). Thirty years later, the new hotel workers branch passed a resolution that re-affirmed the *workplace or industrial sector basis* of its union strategy. While welcoming support and involvement of groups from ethnic

minority, migrant and refugee communities, the central principle of the branch is to unite workers on an *industrial basis*. After all, industrial organisation was a character common to all TGWU branches across sectors since its early formation, representing a relative exception as compared to the historical development of trade unionism in Great Britain⁶⁷.

More specifically, since the initial attempts at migrant worker organising in the hospitality sector, the TGWU was presented with a series of key challenges: the *scale* at which precarious migrant service workers are most successfully organised (for example local, global, industry, community level); *the type of coalitions to be built* with community and civil society groups; and the complex issue of *identities around which workers unite* in traditionally highly flexible and fragmented sectors of the labour market (for example organising migrants as migrants, as members of certain ethnic communities or as workers of certain industries). In turn, the question of workers' multifarious 'identities' is entangled with the multiple forms of stratification that cut across these workers' contractual statuses, as much as the gender, racial and other axes of discrimination dividing them (Chapter 3).

The hotel workers campaign, in throwing the union into closer collaboration with both local non-union actors and other unions from overseas, represented an attempt (and an opportunity) for the branch to move *beyond its workplace and industrial focus* and counter the overwhelming trend towards individual representation activities. But the development of the campaign and the unfolding of the relationships between the union and the other civil society actors involved, eventually proved incapable of allowing for and *sustaining the active participation of migrant hotel workers into the union* and the improvement of their working conditions.

⁶⁷ As highlighted by Wills and Simms (2004) trade unionism in Britain in its original historic form manifested both strong roots in the local community and a distinct occupational identity. In the wake of industrialisation *working class communities* developed their sense of collectivity through working and living together and on the basis of a relatively homogenous occupational identity (as for instance in the case of 'mining villages, ports, textile towns, engineering centres and urban neighbourhoods' where workers in the late 1800s started to fund mutual societies, working men's clubs and trade unions (ibid. 62) (see also Beynon and Austrin 1994). In the first decades of the 20th century trade unions gradually spread to less-skilled work in factories, while showing their capacity to link up their activities with broader issues in the community (such as on the occasion of the rent strike in Glasgow in 1915 and up to the 1984-85 Miners' strike).

Neither the obstacles to building a global strategy involving employees of the multinational hotel chain from London to LA, nor the question of the division between agency and in-house workers, sufficiently explain the failure of the campaign. Deeper factors related to the underlying *political cultures* and the *tensions* between the two organisations involved contributed to hindering the greater involvement of the women workers and the improvement of their conditions.

4.4 The ‘gendered division of political labour’: the organisers’ accounts

Upon becoming politically engaged migrant women encountered the *masculine culture* persisting in the organisations in charge of the campaign and the strategies they use to involve workers. In particular the values of ‘masculinity’ shaped the trade union’s culture of labour organising in ‘gendered’ terms, limiting the empowerment of women workers’ during the initiative to ‘build the union’. Partly also because of the CSO’s assumptions, a gendered understanding of politics characterised the overall dynamics of the campaign and impacted on the daily functioning of the hotel branch as well as *on the relationship* between the union leaders, the workers and the LC organisers. For instance, some of the *tensions* in the collaboration between the union and LC emerged in gendered terms, even beyond merely ‘strategic’ or ‘technical’ differences in their visions of how to conduct the campaign and how to deal with migrants and vulnerable workers.

After the meeting with the lay activists from the Churchill Hotel, the LC organiser expressed her concern about the trade unionists putting too much pressure on the workers, commenting:

I told him I was a *bit upset* with them and he told me *he was as well*. Well, maybe I am just the *nice girl* and he is the *bad man* who is going to *tell them off* and I am the girl who is *always nice* to them and asking about their stories and I just realise...(talking to him) I thought *this is not about organising*, it is a different thing ...I can tell them that they have *our support*, but they think sometime we come as *fairies* to solve their problems and everything will be good and *we will sort it out*...(Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign).

While emphasising the shortfalls of a model of ‘service unionism’ based on individual ‘case work’, the organiser here also contests the role that the whole organisation of the campaign and the collaboration with the union *implicitly assigned* her. She exposes how the deeply gendered nature of labour movement organisation translates into the structure of new ‘community organising’ strategies, whose methodologies and approaches are described respectively in ‘masculine’ and

'feminine' terms. The Polish woman appears to be struggling with the paradox intrinsic to her typically feminine task of 'negotiating' and 'facilitating' worker organising. She finds her position problematically divided between *providing support* and encouraging workers' own *active involvement* and independence. She complains against the union and her own organisation, which more or less indirectly established the conditions for a *gendered 'division of political labour'* between her and the male union officer. *He* can afford to be 'harsh' with the workers at the meeting (in this particular instance all female) and paternalistically 'tell them off' when they fail to provide new members for the union. In contrast, *she* is supposed to be 'nice' and offer them support at any time.

The female organiser questions whether this is ultimately about 'organising workers' at all, expressing strong frustration about the difficulties of engaging the workers on site and the various constraints to unionise the workplaces. At the same time, the testimony of Agnieska identifies the contradiction at the very core of the process of 'empowering the dis-empowered', in that she herself remains in an external position, *outside* the migrant workers' everyday experience of exploitation. Hers is indeed a position mediated through the *gendered* politics of representation and its underlying masculinist values.

Jon Tosh (2005) among other social historians studying the developments of British civic and domestic life since the Victorian era, defined 'masculinity' as a *social status* to be *demonstrated* in a specific social context *and* as a peculiar form of 'psychic subjectivity' (and thus not only comprising a set of cultural attributes). The relevancy of Tosh's approach lies in that it prominently poses the question of *the relationships* between masculinity and femininity and between masculinity and patriarchy by exposing how 'public affirmation' is crucial for masculine status, at the home, work and in 'all-male associations' (Tosh 2005: 35). This perspective is particularly useful for understanding how the contemporary organisational culture of trade unions is still imbued with traditional masculinist notions of politics developed through the history of the labour movement in Britain.

Apart from the work of social historians, feminist geographers have also offered an enlightening analysis of masculinity, focusing on 'gender relations in working class communities' as they developed historically in the UK (McDowell 1999, McDowell and Massey 1984)⁶⁸. Embracing the perspective of social geography adds an important dimension to understanding how a strong sense of belonging to a certain *place* (the 'territorial dimension' of the working class community) constitutes a critical element of the transmission of this *sense of belonging* from generation to generation. In particular it is apparent how 'pride in the tradition of hardship' (a typical code of masculinity) combined with a male *sense of place and camaraderie*, 'go hand in hand with a particular form of labour politics' (McDowell 1999: 102). For instance, institutions such as the working men's club, the pub and the Labour Party committee rooms were and continue to be typical sites of 'masculinist solidarity' (Campbell 1984, cit. in McDowell 1999: 99). Similarly, social historians working with the notion of masculinity showed how male associations including craft guilds, chambers of commerce and professional bodies existed to promote the pursuit of business but also to foster a certain version of *male conviviality*⁶⁹.

Therefore, understanding the process of women's involvement in the course of the campaign demands consideration of how entering the *political space of British trade unions* means that the women hotel workers (often from a migrant background) have to confront a specific culture and understanding of class and labour politics with exclusionary dynamics. Of course, the gendered nature of labour politics is not exclusive to the history of the UK, and different examples of masculinist politics can be found in countries across the Anglo-Saxon world (McDowell and Massey 1984, Milkman 1985, Shor 1992).

⁶⁸ A critical history of women in the trade union movement in Britain as such developed relatively late during the 1980s. This offers an historically detailed account of the gendered nature of the organised labour movement since its original constitution (Boston 1987; see also Rowbotham 2001).

⁶⁹ In this sense 'homosocial alliance' is explained as both a fundamental element of maintaining masculine privilege and as *imposing a discipline on male individuals* (for example prohibiting homosexuality) in the interests of patriarchal stability, while at the same time assigning the domestic space to women and the public sphere to men (Tosh 2005).

A deeper analysis of the values underpinning male-based craft guilds and trade unions therefore underlies a particular link between (*national*) *working class culture*, *the notion of 'skilled work' and masculinity*. More broadly, labour historians have made important observations as to how *craft* and *occupational identity* are crucial to understanding the formation of working class communities in Britain, and how a 'moral topography attached to the occupational map' arises, with exclusionary consequences not only for women *but also migrant workers* (Withers 1991). More recently, US-based research on migrant employment in the service sector highlighted how the specific composition of the workforce represented by immigrants actually put into question established notions of 'skilled work'. It demonstrated 'how the distinction between skilled and unskilled work become blurred when considering in particular migrant labour in the service (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). With regard to the gendered social construction of skilled work and politics, feminist sociologists of work illustrated the corresponding feminised nature of certain 'occupational unionisms' related to particular 'women's jobs' constructed as 'professional'. To take an example from the hospitality sector, 'waitress unionism' in the US, while deeply precarious from its origins, grew out of a strong sense of skills specialisation and a 'code of conduct' within that occupational category (Cobble 1991). This sentiment was so prevalent that the possession of certain skills and a certain sense of the profession in some cases represented a pre-condition of joining the trade union, the latter functioning almost as a 'guild' and protecting the category of (mainly women) workers in that particular industry.

It is apparent that an analysis of the *persisting* element of working-class masculinist culture among trade unions, acting as a barrier to migrant women becoming active participants, is inseparable from an understanding of accumulated *notions of masculinity and femininity in relation to politics*, to the *social construction of skills* and of the *division between the 'public' and the 'private' spheres* (Brown 1998, Landes 1998, Philipps and Taylor 1980). Second-wave feminists argue that going beyond a liberal understanding of the public sphere entails recognising how the categories of public and private are coded by gender and race divisions. This in turn puts into question the homogeneity of supposed communities and identities, while emphasising the presence of a 'multiplicity of public spheres' within our highly stratified 'late-capitalist society' (Fraser 1997, 1998). Access to these different 'spheres of publicity' can therefore be relatively empowering for women, disenfranchised and highly mobile subjects. However, mere access is not a guarantee of empowerment (Landes 1998) as it would become clear from the women workers' subjective experiences of the campaign. As against the historical neglect of women in accounts of working

class communities, feminist research across the Anglo-Saxon world has illustrated the significant and active presence of women throughout the history of labour struggles (Glucksmann 2000, McDowell and Massey 1984, Milkman 1985). At the same time, their (relative) 'absence' could be considered important in reflecting upon the way in which the labour movement thinks of and reproduces itself in male terms and how it in fact continues to constrain the political engagement of women, migrants and differently gendered and racialised social groups⁷⁰.

4.4.1 *The 'virile syndicalism' of union organising*

The officers and organisers expressed in highly gendered terms their varying narratives concerning women workers' potential and limits in developing their agency within the union and the campaign. This points to the ambivalent role trade unionism has had historically and currently in fighting and reproducing sexual and racial stereotypes within the workforce, as argued in the literature across the Anglo-Saxon and European world (Ignatev 1995, Roediger 2007, Rose 1993).

Both the trade union branch and the civil society organisation therefore contributed to shaping and strengthening gendered roles in their own organisations and among the migrants, partly posing again a new version of historical forms of 'virile syndicalism' (Shor 1992). The term was used by this labour historian to describe the masculine identity that impacted on the discursive terrain of a revolutionary union such as the Industrial Workers of the World in the early 20th century Australia, valorising notions of courage, individual initiative, integrity and male comradeship⁷¹. In this sense it is important to acknowledge the historical specificity of that (and of

⁷⁰ For instance, Campbell (1984, cit. in McDowell 1999: 99) showed how certain political claims and forms of organisations within the labour movement such as collective bargaining or the priority of pay over holidays claims (what she calls the diverging priorities between women and men with regard to 'the economy of time') are themselves profoundly gendered processes.

⁷¹ In the case described by Shor, an 'obsession with direct action and sabotage' can be detected in the way the union launched its attacks on capitalism and the ruling class (Shor 1992: 85). In the discourse of the 'Wobblies' (IWW) 'courage' and 'individual initiative' were key to the reshaping of 'manhood' (and what it means to be a man inside and outside the workplace) in the particular period of crisis and reshaping of industrial discipline and techniques following World War I. One criticism of this masculinist model of unionism stresses that the IWW's emphasis on workplace activities and masculine power 'tended to neglect the important community connections, networks that included the mobilisation of the whole working class' (ibid. 95). By contrast, the IWW in the US was able to organise successful

any) particular version of masculinity and its changing hegemony across space and time. Still, the need to reconstruct power and authority in the workplace in that particular period of change in the industrialised world of the North, may display some patterns in common with the attempts to re-establish a largely lost sense of 'work-identity' and 'class consciousness' in current forms of labour organising and 'union renewal' in the UK and the US.

In this regard, the response of the trade unionist from LA shows how new organising models are still imbued with a traditionally masculinist trade union culture. The exaltation of the qualities of courage and sacrifice, which are *required* from female workers in order to enter the union, describes the exceptional process of personal 'transformation' involved in the effort to build a union in their workplace. These personal attributes are also considered essential in the officer's model of union organising:

These women we are dealing with...People become transformed through these fights...it is not just about building power... It is about leaders! (...) someone was pulled in, interrogated for an hour with the boss, it was awful, the emotional burden... but she came out of it, she is taken a big step! We have to make sure that the leaders are not too far removed from the rest, from the people, but we need those leaders and they are gonna change most of the things... (Steven, male, white, North American, union officer, hotel division of UNITE HERE (LA), donor of the campaign)

The *identification of leaders* is considered a crucial step in the union organising model. This is partly inherited from the community organising approach developed since the 1970s in the US (see Alinsky 1971), on which London Citizens bases its strategy. However, the application of the 'organising agenda' in Britain resulted in a system whereby new members recruited by the organiser become the primary agent of recruitment of other fellow workers within a unionisation initiative (Heery and Simms 2008).

But to what extent does the emphasis on 'bottom-up organising' and on the empowerment of workers on the ground through the (romanticised) image of lay activists as intrinsically democratic,

strikes relying on the role of pre-existing women's and ethnic networks (see Cameron 1985).

really work in practice? To understand this, it is vital to consider the set of stereotypes and ‘moral values’ that the American officer’s narrative attaches to the process of union engagement and to the *selection* of leaders. The officer’s account attributes significant value to the *courage* and the spirit of *sacrifice* demonstrated by the women union members leading the Churchill grievance. The woman *proved* herself able to face the intimidation of the aggressive management who forced her to attend a disciplinary meeting without witnesses. She eventually ‘came out of it’, as if out of a storm. Using a language emphasising the values of *strength*, *heroism*, *emotional control* (which can be understood as traditionally masculine attributes), the trade unionist appears to express, at the very minimum, a *paternalistic attitude* toward the female leader. This attitude contradicts the original intention of the organising model, namely to facilitate the empowerment of lay activists and to support bottom-up and sustainable workplace organisation.

The issue of *leadership* and its inter-relationship with masculinist notions of politics appears to be tremendously important in the shaping of the campaign’s power dynamics as well as in understanding the potential for empowering the female migrant workers. The literature on union and community organising in Britain has prioritised the identification of leaders as a first indispensable step of an organising campaign in traditionally ‘hard to organise’ workplaces. However, the disadvantages of reproducing hierarchies between members and lay activists have only rarely been considered⁷².

Overall these women seem to remain trapped in a *passive position* insofar as they are considered an *object of success* for the trade unionists, who ‘win one worker a time’ (Steven, male, white, North American, union officer, hotel division of UNITE HERE (LA) donor of the campaign). The use of certain symbols, the actual composition of the union staff (men in leadership positions) and the persistence of a political language emphasising ‘goals’ and ‘investment’ appears to maintain a tradition of trade union movement organisations tied to the ‘interests of white male workers’. Some of the literature in sociology of work interprets these trends as an example of the

⁷² For instance Perrett and Martínez Lucio (2006) addressed this issue specifically in relation to the use of informal or ‘community leaders’, putting into question the greater internal democracy of community groups.

mismatch between changes in the composition of the workforce and *persisting* gendered forms of union organising (see Kersley et al. 2005, Milkman and Voss 2004, Pocock 1997).

Partly sharing a view of ‘union organising’ as the way to renew the labour movement and the idea that it also provides a way for migrant workers to ‘*emancipate*’ themselves from their *vulnerable position* in the labour market, a relatively different understanding of women’s leadership emerged from the interview with a representative of the union’s regional committee dealing with women, ethnic and sexual minorities. In the woman officer’s view, organising should be prioritised over formal union recognition. This particular model has also adopted changes in the ways in which leaders are identified: for example, they do not necessarily need to be union members but rather ‘points of reference’ for the community of migrant workers (Sheila, female, white, UK born, regional organiser for women, race and equality). After all, as a community organiser hired by T&G in earlier campaigns in the service sector in London argued, identifying leaders is not an end in itself, but rather should be seen as *a step in the process* of empowering workers that may continue beyond the actual achievement of the specific goals of the campaign (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with former T&G cleaners’ organiser; see also Nunes and Alzaga 2010).

According to the woman officer, choosing female leaders sooner rather than later, not merely to fulfil empty quotas among committees and branches or to ‘tick the boxes’ of ‘equality policies’, but rather to create a real extension of responsibility in favour of women’s inclusion, will ensure internal democracy and more effective representation. Following this assumption, the respondent argued in favour of a closer collaboration between the organising unit and the women’s committee within the union. She believed that the two bodies could help to identify and overcome a very difficult point of intersection of discriminations (racial and gender) while enhancing migrant women’s capacity to become ‘active representatives standing up for their members and for themselves’ (Sheila, female, white, UK born, regional organiser for women, race and equality).

4.4.2 Gendered structures and the micro-politics of the union branch

Partly aware of the constraints on women actively participating in the union’s activity, both in the workplace and in the branch, the officers were questioned as to the possible means of improving *the functioning* of branch meetings in order to facilitate the participation of women.

Their different perceptions of the nature of union activity and its boundaries in turn proved to be highly gendered.

When I asked the branch secretary how it was possible to improve workers' participation in the branch meeting, he instead highlighted how:

... people keep coming for individual advice while we insist on collective issues...and with regard to the branch meetings, I think they rather need more *discipline* (John, male, white, UK born, part-time officer, Hotels branch)

While blaming the workers for being individualistic, certain officers are preoccupied with conducting meetings in an orderly and efficient manner, prioritising this over increasing members' participation in the meetings. On the contrary, the issue of how to better involve the workers in the actual functioning of the branch was never explicitly tackled during the campaign. However, contentious disputes arose between the union leaders about the ordinary functioning of the union and in particular whether it needed to become a space for *broader socialisation* beyond resolving technical and legal issues around job grievances. The female part-time employee of the union restaurant branch, a woman with a recent migration background, advanced the idea of promoting the union as primarily a 'social space', whereby workers' *families* should also be involved.

We should have a party every month! We have a big saloon in the union I think we should have the (branch) meeting there and then they could come with *the wife and sons*... Like creating *a communication* with families... (Maria, female, white other, Brazil, part-time, trade unionist, Restaurants and Bars branch, 7 years in the UK, former care worker and housekeeper).

The female trade unionist sees the creation of social spaces for the workers, and for women in particular, as a possible way to *expand* the branch's range of activities from work into broader social issues whilst also suggesting alternative channels to foster their *sense of collectivity*. Rejecting a vision of the union as reducible to either a bureaucratic institution, a mere tool to resolve legal cases through the expertise of officials, or to a workplace-based collective engaged in direct confrontation with the employers, the Brazilian union employee exposes the potential of the union to be a space for education, socialisation and personal development. The 'women and politics course' for instance:

...it lasts for one week. We go there on a Sunday and... *you don't believe* what we do there! We have a pub there, you sing, we have bingo...we develop *a sense of the group: Between social and learning...* And we can watch films but they have *something social to learn* (Maria, female, white other, Brazil, 7 years in the UK, part-time officer, Restaurants and Bars branch, former care worker and housekeeper)

It is hard to believe that the union can even be a space for having fun. But playing bingo and getting to know each other within a different, more relaxed and playful environment may actually make it easier to build a 'sense of the group', a sense of 'collectivity' even within a relatively old-fashioned spaces of sociality such as a trade union.

With regard to the structure of the branch and the question of promoting women's involvement, the male union officer expressed a different and more rigid idea than his colleague:

There could be the idea of a '*women's night out*' organised by the branch, but the branch cannot be entertaining, like a 'social', the two moments should be *separated...*the community organiser should try to organise it! (Tom, male white, UK-born, Irish origin, part-time officer, Hotel workers branch)

The idea of a 'women's night out' as a separate moment from the business of the branch meetings reproduces a particular understanding of what a political space such as the union *should be*. The branch chair partly recognises the beneficial aspects of turning the branch into a stronger 'social' point of reference for the women members, who may be particularly isolated because of their work patterns or their recent migration status. However, the two respondents show a substantial difference in approach. The woman officer's everyday involvement with migrant workers and migrant communities due to her engagement as an *interpreter and cultural mediator* for the union probably contributes to forming her position in favour of the union being a social space, a reference point for workers *and their families*, beyond issues strictly related to the workplace. In contrast, the male officer from the hotel branch considers it more 'appropriate' that the community organisation should take charge of 'the social' including 'outside activities' separate from the everyday business of the union. This, he seems to imply, must remain a place for 'proper' political discussion of work issues and legal grievances.

This understanding of the branch as a relatively 'disciplined' space devoted to 'proper political discussion' around collective work issues and the resolution of individual legal cases, may indicate a notion of politics rooted in the trade union's culture as the 'conscious expression' of

working-class struggles (Rose 1993). Once again, the gendered distinction between the private and the public (in this case respectively identified with the space of the family and that of the union), contributes to shaping a specific understanding of the nature of 'true' political action and engagement. Even in those critical Marxist analyses that particularly emphasise the relevance of cultural aspects at the basis of working-class identity and politics, conceptualisations of 'class-conscious action' as *rationally directed* to altering the relations of production persist.⁷³

Furthermore, they still entail the idea that forms of resistance directed toward the *goals* of workers as a *collectivity* (the only ones which count as 'political') are distinguished from the *immediate gains* of actions in the service of family needs. In contrast to this distinction between the 'apolitical space' of the private and the 'political public', critical labour history emphasised the importance of the household in class formation and labour history (Van der Linden 1993). The marginalisation of the domestic can be considered part of the operation of defining who and what 'counts as agency', and assuming male-centred activities as model for political and social action (Rose 1993:152).

While the *gender dimension* of these different understandings of political engagement and socialisation emerged clearly in the interviews with the officers, the *migration background* of the female union employee of the Bars and Restaurant branch and her recent experience of work in the *care and hospitality sector* in London may also explain why her perspective differs from that of her colleagues. She expresses a different understanding of what a union should do to involve migrant workers and women in particular. Indeed she may be less embedded than her male counterpart in the masculinist culture and history of British trade unionism that assigns a rational and effective model of socialisation and consciousness to the specific political space of the union.

⁷³ Scott (1985) revealed how some of these themes are present in E. P. Thompson's 'The Making of the English Working Class'. See also Steinberg (1991).

Recent reflections in social sciences literature on the masculinist characterisation of the working class and its constructions of political consciousness shed light on the ways in which specific notions and imaginaries of what *ought to be the* 'political awareness' of certain subjects are often projected from the outside (Walkerdine et al. 2001). Adding an important perspective to the debate on *social class formation* from the field of critical psychology, these authors put into question common assumptions at the basis of the links between structure, consciousness and action, which often exclude the emotional and unconscious aspects involved in people's location and practices. They point out how the traditional sociological discussion around class takes for granted that the production of a change in consciousness among working-class people will somehow 'naturally' activate their 'potential' as 'proto-revolutionary group' (Walkerdine et al. 2001: 27). On the contrary these feminist approaches emphasise how it is necessary to focus on social and psychological practices through which ordinary people live and cope ('the practices of living' at the core of 'processes of subjectification') as to avoid falling into the normative 'political imperative' which perceives the masses as 'not resisting enough' (ibid.). This latter position can be interpreted as stemming from the fantasies of the political left, attributing its own desire for social change to an almost reified notion of the working class (ibid. 13).

In contrast, consideration of elements of *irrationality* and *emotion* in the ways in which migrant women perceive their own location and everyday practices in their workplaces and relatively informal political spaces, offers valuable insights into the dynamics and constraints of the hotel workers campaign and *the possibilities* for their own active involvement. Understanding unconscious and affective elements beneath the level of rational politics may also make it possible to discern how the process of politicisation for these women is inseparable from their dynamics of socialisation in and outside of the union. It is therefore necessary to turn to the migrant women's own experiences of political engagement.

4.5 The different forms of engagement of migrant women: negotiating gender constraints, becoming agentic, accessing the public

What was *the driving force behind* workplace and political participation on the part of the women involved in the hotel campaign? What is specific about women *with a background of migration* that shapes the nature of their engagement? What is these migrant workers' understanding of civic and political engagement as compared to that of the organisers? How do

their informal practices, desires and expectations demonstrate the limits of trade union action and open up new possibilities for organisational and social change within and outside the union? Their relative proclivity to join the union and become active members did not seem to be motivated by a previous experience of unionisation or engagement in other forms of civic or political activism, nor conditioned by the development of a particular 'political awareness' either in the country of origin or immigration. This partly differs from the evidence suggested by past and more recent research on migrants' involvement in trade unions (Milkman 2006, Phizaklea and Miles 1980).

For instance, in the case of one of the most active members of the branch, Priscilla, her father's experience of political persecution back in Nigeria contributed to her 'political education' and a greater awareness of social injustice in the workplace. However, even for her, as for many workers in the branch the *initial impulse* to join the union seems to have stemmed from a very mundane and *specific* issue arising at work (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper).

In the case of a Portuguese housemaid, also relatively militant in the union branch:

I do not even remember when I started to be in the union... I just probably needed it at that time... there is always a need, in the other places it is the same, but in the hotel industry there are always unfair things going on! (...) and this (time) it was because of my boss (...) she wanted me to do the early shifts and it was rather difficult... I was on my own ...I had to drop my son and she wanted me to do expose the child to such early hours in the morning! (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

Also for Cinzia, the part-time worker at the Hyatt hotel's restaurant, issues around her maternity status represented a central motivation to seek *the union's protection* at the time of her initial subscription, according to a clear 'cost-benefit calculation'. She decided to stop paying the union dues for a while, when after giving birth, the payment of the monthly fee started to weigh too much on her domestic finances.

For most of the respondents, registration with the trade union was indeed almost a random event that 'happened' mainly on the basis of suggestions made by friends or fellow workers and on the basis of contingent needs and a generally calculated approach. This appears to confirm the trade unionists' complaints about the 'opportunistic' attitude of members conceiving union membership as a mere 'insurance strategy', as well as the broader pattern identified in the literature regarding the

changes in workers sense of affiliation to unions (see Healy et al. 2004, Wills 2005). However, further opinions and perceptions gathered from the workers during the campaign revealed a wide range of *non-calculative* aspects in the process of workers' involvement. These aspects rather appeared relatively interlinked with some of the contents of their work.

4.5.1 *The language of invisibility and dignity*

While the official strategy drafted by the campaigners emphasised the 'economic relevance' of the whole industry to the economy of the global city (LC and Unite 2009), the workers pointed to the 'social value' of their work as a further reason to demand respect.

Seeking to find substitutes for means closed off to precarious workers in resisting their working conditions (searching for points of commonality and alliances between insecure workers), the Spanish collective 'Precarias a la Deriva' (2005) drew up a typology associating different forms of struggles according to *the particular nature of the work* performed. An analysis of contemporary forms of *feminised and precarious* work (such as that performed by migrant women employed in service jobs) that looks contextually at their forms and possibilities of rebellion, shows the overlapping of *multiple positions* across broader categories. This resists the tendency to derive rigidly separated categories of workers from the broader transformations in the labour market and production (for example 'chainworkers' vs 'brainworkers', or, as it will be considered, 'immaterial' 'material'). For instance, according to the Precarias' mapping of precarious workers' resistance in jobs like cleaning, domestic and sex work, where the content of labour is 'directly invisibilised', conflicts and forms of unrest would likely express themselves in the 'demand for dignity' and 'recognition' of the *social value* of the work done.

If the content of the work performed by the maids in the housekeeping (but also that of the cooks, porters or room stewards and by those hotel workers in 'back of house' occupations not having direct contact with the guests) falls into the Precarias' category of 'invisible labour', *demands for dignity* and for the recognition of the social significance of the work performed indeed appeared prominently in the discourses of organisers, trade unionists and especially the workers. In the LC hotel action teams' organising meeting almost all of the workers divided into groups mentioned as their most urgent problems: 'lack of recognition', 'denigration', 'bullying' and 'harassment' (Ethnographic diary, organising hotel teams meeting, Conway Hall). These demands

were particularly related to impediments to promotion and career advancement suffered by some of the long-term women employees (Chapter 3). During the plenary the different discussion groups agreed that the main challenges for hotel workers in London could be synthesised in the demand for 'respect and dignity', which often came before financial issues, the demand for the London Living Wage or problems with favouritism and obstructions to career development

Although 'invisibilisation' is a major characteristic common to different jobs in hotels (especially those not involving a direct relationship with guests), room cleaning and waiting work can easily fall in other typologies outlined by Precarias a la Deriva (2005) such as 'jobs with repetitive content' and with 'little subjective investment for those involved'. In reality, striking differences emerged among various respondents within very similar jobs, whose level of 'investment' in their work also depended on *the length* of their employment in that particular sector and workplace and, more generally, on the *nature of their recruitment*. An interesting comparison can be made between two main leaders of the campaign employed in the Hyatt: Cinzia, a relatively young worker, employed part-time in the Food and Beverage department, holding a wide range of work experiences and wanting to move away in the near future, and Arianna, a single mother in her late forties, who spent almost thirty years working as housekeeper in the same hotel since arriving in the capital.

4.5.2 Contingent leadership

Cinzia developed a quite *ambivalent relationship* with the union. She was originally approached by an organiser from the student academy during the phase of recruitment of potential leaders to help create 'action teams' in the hotels targeted in the campaign. She was almost 'flattered' by the suggestion that she could become a leader. Cinzia recognises the *contribution* she was able to make to the campaign by involving other workers thanks to her 'sociable character' and her ability to talk fearlessly to the management. Nonetheless, she articulates her argument around contradictory patterns, emphasising her willingness to 'help' the union and the organisers, and the 'pride' of having been chosen as a leader, while continuously operating a strategy of 'distancing':

-How would you describe your involvement in the campaign?

I mean, I give them all *the support* because I agree about the campaign, *we are all human beings*...and we all deserve *respect!* (...) I think they came in the right moment and found me...and they said '*you are the girl we want!*' You know, I am a *passionate person*: if you treat me badly you do not get anything from me! ...

-And now, do you still feel involved in the campaign?

'Umm...yes and no...I mean I don't mind helping ...but taking more responsibility is not the case ...and my kids come first! (Cinzia, female, black, Eritrea-Italy, 8 years in London, part-time employee, Food and Beverage)

Family responsibilities are Cinzia's priority life. She told me how her part-time employment is the outcome of the compromise she reached with her partner, who is currently engaged in a postgraduate course and looking after their children when she is at work. This is why she cannot devote time left over from her engagement at the hotel to 'extra activities', as this would breach the 'domestic balance' she has established with her husband. Cinzia's partner's opportunities in higher education are particularly valuable considering the migration background of both members of the couple, and this may be re-invested in the future. For all these reasons, there is no possibility that 'Mama-Cinzia' (as everybody at work calls her) could ever find *more time to be involved* in the campaign or to follow the union's activities more consistently. Cinzia's experience of engagement may be therefore seen as an example of *contingent activism*, based on the particular circumstances of the campaign and the fact of being selected by the organisers as a potential 'informal leader'. This sense of engagement can be easily abandoned to return to the 'ordinary stuff', the everyday 'life's work' (Katz et al. 2003). Cinzia admits that she never attended a union branch meeting and her relationship with the CSO involved in the campaign, mainly mediated by her *personal* relationship with the organiser, is much stronger than her affiliation to the union.

The issue of 'time for politics' has been critically explored in research on precarious work and lifestyles and identified as a central element in constraining political activism for contemporary precarious women workers and migrants (Neilson and Rossiter 2005, Papadopoulos et al. 2008). Yet it is not merely 'lack of time' due to her multiple responsibilities that prevents Cinzia from engaging further. The respondent perceives the union and the campaign as something she might give her *support to* from a distant and an *outside position*. She *does not belong* to them. Moreover, there are reasons beyond mere 'self-interest' for re-joining the union in the light of the initiation of the campaign:

...But now, you know, with the involvement of LC and the campaign everybody came back... my friend told me I should have registered once again (...). And actually it is like a circle: the money I pay I've never used it, but I am helping someone else meanwhile...it is a protection for you and then I may need it in the future (Cinzia, female, black, Eritrea-Italy, 8 years in London, part-time employee, Food and Beverage)

There therefore appears to be a residual, positive *perception of the principle of mutualism at the basis of the trade union* and a fundamental belief in the usefulness of the associative form of the union. This might appear surprising, especially coming from a part-time, apparently 'disengaged' and 'individualised' worker such as Cinzia. In this case, neither a particular sense of identification with her work nor a feeling of attachment to a particular workplace (she has changed between about ten different workplaces in less than five years) can be considered the basis of this woman's sense of mutuality and collectivity with her co-workers. Rather, Cinzia's *migration background*, her current position across a complex web of transnational belongings and relationships between Italy, London and Jamaica, and the consideration of *further mobility plans* in the near future, are elements that contribute to her *lack of attachment* to the workplace. This leads to a *relatively individualised and contingent relationship* to the hotel workers campaign, while *still* supporting principles of collectivity and the associative power of the union.

Temporary or *contingent forms of engagement* raise crucial questions regarding the emergence of new forms of involvement and resistance. They reflect the profound changes in the very nature of work and the relation to the public and political spheres on the part of migrant, women and 'contingent' workers. These require different approaches from those developed within industrial relations mainly addressing these questions insofar as they jeopardise unions' own existence, and suggesting 'technical' and 'policy' means of adjusting to these transformations (Heery 2009, Healy et al. 2004). The relative distance and disaffection many respondents express regarding their work and their occupational location have broader implications for the new way in which it is possible to understand migrants' agency and their political subjectivation (Neilson and Rossiter 2005, 2008, Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

4.5.3 'Desperate' engagement

A greater form of *attachment to the workplace* can be identified in the account of Arianna, the housekeeper whose long-term employment appeared as one of the reasons for her *determinate* support to the collective grievance in the Churchill. Although she was aware that her active

involvement in the campaign could cost her the job, and despite the fact that her *exposure* as a member of the union caused her major problems, she seemed determined not to abandon the fight in the face of management harassment. Arianna seems to *hate* her job but at the same time she would *never leave* it, and this is not only because her family responsibilities would not allow her to quit:

-So now for you the challenge is rather to stay and to *show* them...

At first obviously it is due to my *responsibility*, to my *private* life... you know I was a single parent for quite a long time... it counts! But after a certain time *I proved to myself* I can do whatever I want 'cause I have got *the experience*, I know how these things work and it is all good for me to *be so stubborn*... but I have got a hope, I see the light at the end of tunnel (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

The experience that Arianna acquired *at work* over many years of sacrifice provided her with the psychological strength necessary to overcome the deep *material* and *existential insecurity* of life after she arrived in London. The fact that she proved able to reach the level of *economic independence* necessary to sustain herself and her son was thanks to her efforts and *investment in her work* in a particular occupation and particular workplace, eventually restoring her sense of *self-confidence*. Perhaps this is why, despite her position at work visibly deteriorating under the new conditions and because of management victimisation, she cannot and *does not want* to leave it.

Have you ever thought of quitting, of changing work or simply your hotel?

I have, but it keeps coming to my mind again... The first few years maybe I thought, of course I thought (of quitting). But after a long time in a place: it is gonna be hard... I got scared, too tired of things... will life be ok? But now, now it is more like pride you know... I have been there such a long time I've given my life to that place, the place owes me... (Arianna, female, white other, Portugal/Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

Although her long term experience in the sector should not make her afraid of quitting and finding a new job, the *feeling of uncertainty* that discouraged her to look for another job in the past seems now to return in the current moment of crisis. *That workplace* is a 'safe place' compared to the precarity of the present and future. However, the main reason to now fight for better conditions and keep the job appears mainly grounded in the belief that this workplace belongs to her and even 'owes her' a reward after so many years of hard work and sacrifice. Her unwillingness to imagine

herself working anywhere else may say something about *the ambivalent attachment* long-term workers developed towards a workplace normally characteristic for its transient nature.

The *desire to belong* and be *identified with* a certain occupation and a workplace, despite ongoing conflicts with it, may partly reflect the respondent's migration background. This seems to contribute to a persisting sense of 'precariousness' broader than a mere lack of income security (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). Despite her long years spent in this country, a single woman with most of her family contacts still in the country of emigration may nonetheless see the workplace as an important *refuge* and element of *continuity* in London's hectic and alienating life. Literature in cultural studies on the individual experiences of diasporas in London have indeed widely explored the psychological elements of *loss* and *desire of belonging* characterising the fragmented identities of migrant subjects (Brah 1997, Cravey 2005, Erel 2009).

Returning to the typology proposed by Precarias a la Deriva (2005), in the case of 'jobs with higher level of investment' workers tend to engage in conflicts based upon 'refusal, absenteeism and sabotage'. Surely this is not the case for Arianna, whose investment in her work may shape her rather 'conservative' attitude to restoring her previous conditions of employment via the grievance. While demonstrating great determination as a union rep, her action still remains limited to a formalised complaint, far from assuming any kind of radical opposition. Rather, the very structural constraints to developing forms of resistance in hospitality work and the particular feeling of isolation, fragility and precariousness also shrouding long-term hotel employees, appear to limit them to a generalised (although still meaningful) demand for respect or a formal complaint through the union.

The cases of Arianna and Cinzia show how *the specific nature of their labour* and the structural aspects of the industry they are employed in are to some extent implicated in the different possibilities of resistance open to them. However, they also show how their different levels of investment, affection and the 'value' they attached to their jobs, interlinked with their 'mobility plans' and relative 'settledness', impact on their engagement, implying various degrees of determination, 'stubbornness' and resistance in keeping up the fight. After all, Arianna is also not really concerned about being the 'leader' of the campaign. Her investment in the campaign and the attempt to unionise the hotel where she works seem rather to stem from a *sense of belonging* to the

particular community of 'her hotel' and the desire of *restoring* the previous conditions. In contrast, her relation to her work remains highly individualised as much as it is intertwined with her experience of settling as an immigrant *and as a single mother* in London.

4.5.4 *The desire for knowledge and sociability: between exposure and protection*

While both these two stories maintained a common element in their pattern of *contingent and individualised* engagement in the campaign, a different drive to join the union and become involved in the campaign emerged from the interview with other members.

A peculiar trajectory into the union arose in the case of Stella, one of the newest members of the hotel branch, whose participation in the union has, since the beginning, been contradictorily characterised by a sharp sense of *independence* as well as of *isolation*:

All started by *my own initiative*: I alerted the Human Resource management of the racist behaviour of a colleague against me, and then HRM appealed to the General Manager. He told me: 'forget about it', he would go to speak to her. But the union officer *helped* me to *write the letter* (...) you know, at the beginning I was playing it *roughly*, appealing directly to the manager, then I joined the union... (Stella, female, black, Jamaica, 6 years in London, in-house, chambermaid)

Stella established an *emotional relationship* with her boss who appeared willing to *protect* her against the racist discrimination from her fellow worker (a recently arrived migrant from Eastern Europe). The tensions arising between (more or less) recently arrived migrants – combined with the worker's own sense of isolation from her colleagues from Eastern Europe who tend to 'stick together' on the basis of their nationality – seemed to lay at the core of Stella's decision to appeal to the union. In her eyes the branch gradually came to represent a *point of reference* and *support outside the workplace*. Joining the union may provide a *guarantee* against possible retaliation by co-workers and by management. Stella considers that there is a range of more or less 'rough' means of self-defence available to the workers. At one extreme there is an emphasis on *legal support* that the union can provide to its members. However, this is not just a 'cold' calculation of the benefits of joining the union as a 'useful service'. Access to legal support is important but there are other broader beliefs and values that drive Stella's engagement:

... I like the law! I want to learn about this! It is important to know about your rights (...) but also sometimes law and tribunals are not enough... (Stella, female, black, Jamaica, 6 years in London, in-house, chambermaid)

For the chambermaid being part of the union is both a means of protection *and* a channel for *personal engagement, education and socialisation*. Her active participation in the picket in front of the Churchill Hotel in support of other workers, apart from any immediate or personal need, showed how the branch is for her both a way of expressing solidarity and her own desire for change *and* sociability. Despite differential power positions clearly persisting within the branch, shaping the relationships between members and officers within the union, the *affective* rapport developed with the older leaders of the branch, more so than with her fellow workers, appears a central motivation behind Stella's consistent attendance at the union meetings and her involvement in the campaign. It cuts across existing power relations and gendered dynamics, revealing their continuous enmeshing with *relations of support and care*, even within a relatively structured and bureaucratised political organisation such as a trade union.

While even radical discourses on the gendered organisation of work and politics have tended to reproduce the confinement of care and affectivity to the private sphere and to discuss them as 'feminist issues alone', *affects*, together with the role of empathy, the development of relations, sexuality and interaction are in fact interlinked with larger frameworks of power and their contestation (Shukaitis 2009). They are indeed both forms of labour and at the same time primary tasks of socialisation, crucial in 'keeping a society together', from the private sphere of the home to the 'public' and collective space of a trade union branch. In this sense Precarias a la Deriva (2003) refer to the 'communicative continuum sex-attention-care' understood as socially narrated and historically stratified constructions whereby 'affects' acquire a key role in linking places, circuits, families and populations. This contribution by Precarias a la Deriva is a useful means of re-discovering the radical potential of forms of 'affective labour' in building 'inclusive revolutionary class politics' focusing on the nature of care and other forms of reproductive work (Shukaitis 2009). But affects and relationality can also be considered *immediately relevant* in the shaping of new forms of collectivity and (political) subjectivation among a highly *feminised and invisibilised area of work* such as hospitality. Embracing this perspective also means putting into question and re-thinking traditional forms of class politics and labour organisation. The idea of constructing 'points

of aggregation' in order to *appropriate alternative communicative channels* across invisible networks of mutual support through the spaces of feminised labour, represents a form of intervention no longer aimed at building mass forms of organisation ('aggregation capacity') but rather based on a 'consistency capacity' oriented toward building 'intense and dense networks of relations' (Colectivo Situaciones 2007: 89).

Stella clearly seeks *another space* to express her desire for engagement *outside* the family and the local community. A relatively isolated and recent migrant, she does not even have relations with members of her 'ethnic community' or people in the neighbourhood where she lives. The union represents for her both a space to develop her sociability but also a source of *self-development, self-education, and empowerment*, opportunities that would not easily be offered at work. When I asked her why she started the training course in the union, she answered:

To *learn* about other *experiences* and people's *fears* (...) it is good to take notes during the training to learn *how much you can say in front of the employer*. *Anyway you won't be saying much*, there is not a great deal of *responsibility* and activity if you become a rep, and if you say something you say it in general and you can *turn it over to the higher authority...* (Stella, female, black, Jamaica, 6 years in London, in-house, chambermaid)

The need for a *space for learning, personal development and sociality* outside the walls of both the home and the hotel, emerged with clearer emphasis in the account of Priscilla, a very different personality and a relatively long-term member of the branch:

-Why did you join the union?

You know people perish because of *lack of knowledge*! I want to be able to *know my rights!* Up to the system. It is good because *it exposes you*, and to me...*I like exposure!*

I want to know what I do not know and it is good to know, (...) And it keeps you *active!* Especially with my age! *I do not want to be lonely...*I am 50 plus!' (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

Acquiring legal knowledge and awareness of one's own rights again appears as a central reason for these women's participation in the branch and in the campaign. However, here *the desire to know* is linked with the *pleasure of being exposed* and of taking responsibility *on behalf* of the group: In the branch meeting Priscilla reports how she has often been *victimised* by the hotel management for the simple fact of being a member of the union. However, similarly to Arianna, it

is precisely this role that gives her strength and motivation while compensating for the fear of loneliness and the impossibility of ‘fulfilling’ herself at work. Priscilla, after many years working in the housekeeping department, is looking forward to finishing her training course and becoming a care worker. The role of union *representation* in her workplace seems to compensate for a general sense of degradation, the everyday fatigue and *frustrations* in her work. Even though she is a long-term worker and a very active member of the union, this Nigerian woman expresses a certain level of *detachment from her work* and lacks any sense of a supposed ‘work-identity’ as a ‘hotel worker’. Rather, the union provides a space allowing her to develop an alternative perspective of personal development, since it may give her the option of an alternative career as a trade unionist.

Priscilla’s taking *pleasure in exposure* is directly linked to her role of representation of the other members and the formal acknowledgment and legitimisation for that role attributed to her by the *authority* of the branch. The personal relationships established with the officers and the privileged position that she enjoys as an active and vocal member of the branch are significant factors shaping her sense of *belonging to the union*. Priscilla’s leadership role conceals the ambivalences of active engagement, identification and representation as her attitude in the meetings embodies and reproduces the power dynamics of the branch. Ultimately, Priscilla contributes to the overall sense of *orchestration* and the theatrical tone of the speeches at the meetings. She is *given voice* from the other side of the table, from where the chair and the secretary ‘conduct’ the discussion. She often mirrors the same emphasis on workplace collectivism the officials reiterate, and she is expected to encourage her colleague’s activism. Yet, only rarely do other members have *the courage* or the opportunity to add anything. It is difficult to interrupt and intervene in what often appears as the ‘script’ of the branch meetings. In this regard, the distinction proposed by Isin (2007) between ‘activist citizens’ and ‘active citizens’, the latter acting on the basis of an ‘already written script’ can be very useful in reading Priscilla’s ‘performance-like’ interventions and, more generally, the dynamics of the discussions and the relationships at the branch meeting.

Overall the *affective* participation of both Stella and Priscilla’s in the union branch remains *to them* an important expression of political agency, although constrained by the ‘script’ set up by the (mostly male) leaders and embedded in the micro-politics and power dynamics broadly induced by the gendered nature of its political culture.

The power dynamics embedded in the reproduction of a legalistic *language* during the branch meetings and in the process of ‘translation’ (Solomon 2007) are directly entangled with the

cultural and racial stratification persisting in trade union organisations. Nonetheless, they do not exhaust the possibilities for individual empowerment and for *autonomous initiative* on the part of the workers. In the complex web of affects and powers flowing between the different actors in the campaign, possibilities for empowerment continue to exist. The *ambivalence* between desires for *protection* and *exposure* differently expressed by the migrant women involved emerge precisely at the intersection of their dissonant claims for active involvement and their forms of ‘negotiation’ with the cultural and structural constraints of union politics.

4.5.5 *Migrant women as leaders: between incorporation and informality*

A mixture of autonomy from and incorporation into the bureaucratic structures of the trade union emerged in the particular experience of leadership of Maria, the woman from Brazil who recently became an officer of the ‘Restaurants and Bars branch’. After many years of work in the care sector Maria found *her own way* into the union. She first appealed to the union to denounce *the exploitative practices of the job agencies* she used to work for:

The first thing was that the agency did not pay me properly (...) In 2005 I was so upset... I put a claim in the tribunal with the union but then *they said* I could not win the case...And I said: ‘that’s ok, if you don’t back me *I’ll go on my own*’...You see? I went along the case and... *I won!* Only after when it was time to establish the amount (of money to claim back) the union supported me... (Maria, female, white other, Brazil, 7 years in the UK, part-time, union officer, Restaurants and Bars branch, former care worker and housekeeper).

As against the general sense of disappointment towards the union that initially refused to help her (apparently on the basis of the informal patterns of her employment), the ‘do it yourself’ slogan became the one guiding Maria’s approach to the union. As soon as she recognised that the union was not able to provide the legal support she was expecting, she offered her own voluntary work to supplement for the union’s failing:

...and I said one day ‘I will come here I will work *voluntary: you do not need to pay me...*’ And I started to work. I started to come once a week and then after two months I was working every day and the union started to pay me travel expenses...

Maria’s availability to work in the union for free characterises her gradually increasing involvement with the union and her sense of agency along strong voluntaristic lines. At the same time, her behaviour represents a *calculative strategy of visibility* (especially in terms the higher

level of the union bureaucracy) that will eventually afford her a formal position. Although Maria's role within the union is still quite informal ('I do not get a proper salary, this job is made ad hoc for me), this woman values other aspects related to her responsibilities in the union. This simultaneously provides her with a means of developing *self-esteem about her skills* and the possibility of gaining *resources for further education and training*, while reinforcing her awareness of the indispensability of her role within the overall union structure:

... As soon as I came here everybody asked me for advice! *I knew*, because I studied psychology and sociology back in Brazil... it is not as being a lawyer in a tribunal but *I knew everything* and then the general secretary said 'you should do courses 'cause you can be *productive*', So I started courses I did twenty *courses* here. Now union pays me university and they pay me to survive (...) for travel expenses to come here and to go to school...(Maria, female, white other, Brazil, 7 years in the UK, part-time officer, Restaurants and Bars branch, former care worker and housekeeper)

The particular case of this woman's spontaneous involvement in the union and her contradictory relation to it begins to highlight broader patterns of *crisis* and *transformation* affecting the whole organisation, in particular in its relation to migrant and low-paid service workers. Maria's specific role in the union is to initiate and maintain relationships with migrant workers and their communities, working as an *interpreter* with those who cannot speak English. When we discussed the ways in which the union builds connections with communities in order *to involve* migrant workers, she mentioned both the difficulties and strategies to improve the current structures and policy of the union:

-Would you like to see more people with a migrant background and language skills helping you? I am just fighting for that! (...) But they don't come here, they have *no commitment, nor motivation*... There should be a team with clear roles according to the language, two or four people *with a supervisor*.

The officer of the Restaurants and Bars branch seems to define the absence of an official structure specifically dedicated to involving young migrant women employed in the sector as the main reason for the lack of commitment by lay activists in the union. Whilst suggesting possible means of improving the union's outreach to migrant workers, Maria barely conceals her personal interest for *visibility* and *career advancement* within the union and her desire to occupy a position of leadership: The figure of an official at the juncture between the membership and the union bureaucracy may embody the conflicting drives intrinsic to the union's approach as it confronts the new migrant workforce. Her example suggests the need for more structures and resources

specifically provided for the recruitment and engagement of migrant workers in the sector. However, she seems to demand for herself an *informal space of intervention* to develop relationships with workers when she insists that union branches should be spaces for sociality beyond the resolution of work grievances. It is indeed impossible to build the necessary connections with migrant workers' communities without *informal practices and personal contacts*. Maria's patronising attitude towards members and her peers (especially towards the other volunteers working in the Latin American communities section of the union) perversely reproduces the 'top-down practices' of the *logic of recruitment* residual in the 'union organising model' as well as its fixation with 'leadership development'. Ultimately, neither seems to have facilitated a true involvement on the part of other migrant workers on the ground.

Nonetheless, the past experience of the migrant former care-worker as one *embodied* and *affective* work experience may reserve her a *liminal space of autonomy*, partly resisting the process of institutionalisation of her position. This exists in a space between community-based and more structured and hierarchical models of union organising, as her personal desire for emancipation appears trapped in a position of authority within the structure of the union as well as in that of the community of migrant workers that she 'represents'. This would later have controversial effects on her relationship with the 'Latin American Workers Association', whose office would eventually be 'kicked out' of the union's building. This woman's ambivalent experience as both a migrant *and* as a union representative, constitutes a significant element of the complex process of hybridisation of trade union and community organising practices, as well as testifying to the *crisis of representation* with which these are enmeshed. Her testimony helps identify the challenges of the changing composition of labour in the urban economies of the North and the difficulties labour unions face *in collectively organising* migrants' subjective desires of resistance, affectivity and mobility.

4.6 The lessons to be learned from the hotel workers campaign

4.6.1 *The advantages and pitfalls of 'community unionism' and the question of 'the right scale'*

To summarise one of the reasons for the failure of the organising effort in the Hyatt hotels (and in the Churchill in particular) lay in the *pressure* on already over-stretched workers to recruit new union members. The tension created by the 'pressure for recognition' may reflect a broader contradiction within union organising models. Although their primary intention is to empower 'rank

and file workers', the fact that this aim is often tied to the achievement of *certain goals* within a certain timeframe can foster a reaction by workers against 'opportunistic recruitment', while the union needs time to build *trust* by demonstrating a presence in that workplace over the long term (Heery and Simms 2008: 35).

The very spirit of 'investment' typical of union organising campaigns, whereby efforts are concentrated on the 'strongest hotels' in order to deliver *quick victories*, makes it more difficult to involve workers on the ground. Indeed, the stronger personal relationships and the practice of 'one to one listening' that the LC organiser developed with the migrant women from the hotels, although not sufficient, proved more effective in prompting workers' active involvement. Research comparing recent attempts at union organising in the UK with the US experience showed how even if traditional recognition agreements are not secured, by involving allies and workers from across the sector in a political movement for change, it is possible to successfully exert pressure on employers (Heery and Simms 2008). The experience of Justice for Janitors in LA for instance has shown that Living Wage agreements can be won *without recognition* (Wills 2005: 156; see also Milkman 2006). However, winning the legal case for recognition remained a priority during the whole period of the London campaign for both the unionists and the LC organiser, who were convinced that only a unionised workplace could provide workers with enough leverage to gain power and win the grievance. This obsession with recruitment may be identified as a direct implication of the union branch's attachment to a workplace-based model of organising.

For sure, despite the emergence of new alliances with civil society groups, the *historical legacy* of the T&G branch and its culture of *sector-based* industrial relations must have impacted on the actual development of the campaign. However, even the 'expansion of the struggle to the broader community' was neither a guarantee of empowering vulnerable workers, nor did it eventually achieve the improvement of their conditions. In this regard, a limit of the Living Wage Campaign as a form of community unionism lies in its assumption that *workers in vulnerable positions* (such as migrant and agency workers), cannot advance their interests by themselves. Hence, while community campaigns try to overcome the tendency of workplace-based organising to expose workers to too much pressure, the opposite risk is to exploit 'extra-workplace' sources of power to the point of completely *bypassing the workers themselves*, with their specific demands and needs marginalised.

In other words, awareness of the difficult position of the workers involved in the campaign and the need to protect them should not lead to the abandonment of the idea that the workers need to be in charge of their struggles. 'Contracting out' the protest to the outside community or delegating other actors in the civil society to negotiate the workers' demands leads to a further pitfall, the resulting bargain being completely dependent on the 'goodwill' of the employers. This risk is embedded in the 'stakeholder' politics engaged in by organisations like LC. In this respect, recent trends in campaigners' strategies focusing on the 'certification and award scheme' for those hotel employers willing to pay a Living Wage, contribute to further turning attention away from the workers in favour of employers,. The main objective of the campaign becomes 'naming and congratulating the first Living Wage hotel employer' (LC and UNITE 2009) rather than investing in the *sustainable organisation* of workers on the ground. Moreover, by proposing agreements on an *industry-wide* basis across London, LC and UNITE endorsed the idea that these problems are best dealt with on a *city-wide* basis.

The *city-wide scale* may well represent a strategic economic and political hub to direct organising efforts, offering a key site to establish 'zonal agreements' while still maintaining a 'multi-scalar' approach to trade union renewal (Anderson et al. 2010). Focusing on urban battle-grounds can indeed offer a series of advantages for unions to expand their influence over precisely those 'weaker spheres' of union organisation such as urban services where migrant workers are most concentrated (ibid.). However, if the negotiation of work standards established at a particular geographical level is limited to the inclusion of institutional and industry-based actors, there is a risk of failing to cover precisely that 'transnational workforce' that the geographical approach to industrial relations identifies as a major strategic reason for directing organising efforts to 'global cities' (Anderson et al. 2010, Herod et al. 2003).

As regards the issue of the 'right scale' at which to organise migrant workers, while in the initial period of the campaign the union seemed to reach a fruitful balance between *local* and *global* strategies and allies, it lost ground on both counts as the campaign unfolded. The enthusiasm among the workers in the Hyatt, initially prompted by the successful examples of their co-workers *overseas*, seemed to wither away as soon as the struggle at the workplace level appeared *unsustainable* because of management retaliation and the delay in the resolution of the grievance.

In terms of local strategy, although the CSO subject of the study was an umbrella organisation involving various migrant communities, faith groups, NGOs and members of civil

society organisations, these did not appear to play an active role during the phase of the campaign here examined. The question therefore arises as to whether it is possible to define the hotel workers campaign as an experiment in *community unionism* at all, since the ‘expansion’ of the campaign to civil society actors was eventually restricted to institutional partners in the local administration and in the industry itself. How would the campaign have developed differently with a deeper involvement of the *union members’* and *workers’ own communities’*?

More broadly speaking, while campaigning to improve migrant workers’ rights in low-paid jobs has the intention of holding politicians to account, building solidarity across different actors in the community and educating the ‘general public’ about migrants’ poor conditions of employment, there are still *political choices* to be made in the process of creating those alliances. For instance, even if there are strategic reasons for engaging with ‘the Mayor’s office, the Greater London Authority, the British Hospitality Association, London hotels and the Olympic Delivery Authority’ (LC and Unite 2009), there are also a series of other actors in civil society and urban social movements who can be mobilised to increase the power and leverage in the process of bargaining with both employers and political representatives. Here the experience of ‘social unionism’ or ‘social movement unionism’ (Turner and Cornfield 2007) in the US – where the unions’ attempt to build larger alliances with associations *directly* involved with migrants as well as activist groups mobilising around migrant rights – provides alternative examples of how to build forms of community unionism more rooted in the social realities of migrant workers. Similarly, the case of the London campaign contrasts starkly with the combined initiatives of local unions and community-based ‘workers centres’ to directly engage migrant and ethnic group organisations and their *work and non-work* related claims, which flourished in the 1980s and 1990s in the US (Fine 2006).

Overall, the *lack of active participation* of migrant workers in the organising process and the union’s lack of confidence that they could ultimately be organised may be identified as the main reasons for the failure of the attempt to unionise the Hyatt hotels. Indeed, besides the shortfalls of the ‘strategic’ choices, it is clear that achieving workers’ active involvement in the campaign would have required more funding to sustain training and skills development courses for lay activists as well as for the union to recruit at least one more organiser for the campaign, ideally one with the right language skills to engage with relatively marginalised and ‘new’ migrant workers. In turn, the lack of active participation appeared to have been shaped not only by ‘ineffective’ strategies or

mistaken assumptions, but also by more *deeply embedded social dynamics* that marked the complex relationship among the migrant workers, members and non-members of the union, the union officers and the campaign organisers from LC. These contributed to reinforcing one of the main lines of division within the campaign, that between ‘newcomers’, *migrant and agency*, and in-house workers, leading to the failure of community organising as a true attempt to empower migrants and built genuinely horizontal coalitions to improve workers’ conditions.

4.6.2 *The challenge of organising migrant labour as contingent labour: beyond ‘regulation at the margins’*

Ironically, the *particular migrant composition* of the hotel workforce was never really considered a potential advantage in the campaign’s organising strategy. The original principle of the hospitality branches according to which ‘migrants are the solution, not the problem’ (Turnbull 2005: 13) seemed to be taken for granted rather than updated in the face of the new tensions and divisions along the lines of different contractual and migration categories within the workforce as a consequence of new migration patterns. A complicating factor was that, in the workplaces investigated, the majority of union members did not even consider themselves ‘migrants’, as they were mainly part of the settled post-colonial migrant population who have historically comprised a large proportion of the service workforce in London. The ‘in-house’ workers (often coinciding with relatively settled minorities) seemed to distance themselves from the ‘new-comers’ (mainly migrants coming from Accession countries but also recent non-EU migrants).

Generally the union and LC ultimately *reinforced these same divisions* by drawing an equals sign between ‘agency workers’ and ‘new-comers’ on the one hand, and between in-house workers and ‘settled minorities’ on the other. This inadvertently contributed to disrupting the organising effort in the Churchill Hotel. At a wider level, the description of the industry as emerged in the ‘strategy paper’ published by LC and the union towards the end of the campaign clearly exemplifies a persisting tendency by both organisations to play off long-term service employees *against* agency workers:

When directly employed, long service workers who still enjoy previously negotiated better terms and conditions leave the industry (many feel that they are being chased out), they are being *replaced with* cheaper agency workers. This has the net effect of reducing the number of experienced and committed workers. It is a vicious circle. Low pay and low status lead to high turnover; the use of agency labour simply compounds the problem. Unsurprisingly, there is a persistent perception in the UK that the hospitality sector represents low status

employment career opportunities; many young Londoners do not see it as a career option. The industry is as a consequence denied access to an available and additional supply of labour (LC and Unite 2009: 6).

While recognising that there is an *interdependence* between agency work and poor conditions of employment, the ‘industrial strategy’ endorsed in the campaign mainly ‘blames’ agency work, or at least reduces agency workers to disposable labour. High turnover is mainly described as being an effect of increasing substitution and completely induced and controlled by the management *in order to* maintain the low pay and uncertain terms of employment in the sector. As opposed to this, the *retention* of experienced staff and the *reduction* (if not complete exclusion) of agency labour are believed to be the best ways to improve hotel workers’ conditions and to sustain the overall growth of the industry. This position reflects what the literature calls the ‘high road strategy’ for the hospitality sector, whereby *training* and *retention* of long term employees are emphasised as key elements in improving the overall performance of the industry (Vanselow et al. 2009).

Turnover is intrinsic to the hospitality sector *also in terms of* the *social composition* of its labour force. Acknowledging this would lead to a need to rethink organisational forms on the basis of the real issues faced by workers in those sectors. In this regard, some scholars in the UK like Heery (2009) have the merit of having explored how British unions have *historically responded* to contingent forms of work and made concrete proposals on how to reform unions’ ‘scale’ and ‘methods’ of representation according to the needs of this part of the workforce.⁷⁴ Heery’s model of ‘engagement’ importantly recognises workers’ agency in the choice of non-standard jobs and opposes the tendency to see casual labour as merely disadvantageous, thus promoting the idea that solidarity can be based on ‘multiformity’ rather than on ‘common interests’, indeed based on the ‘male, full-time, open-ended employment’ (ibid. 17).

⁷⁴ Heery (2009) distinguishes between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ forms of representation, the former involving membership rules and arrangement for workers’ participation in union governance, and the latter collective bargaining and other legal attempts to regulate the employment relationship.

Worksite or enterprise-based unionism are therefore deemed unsuitable for improving the conditions of highly mobile workers with multiple employers. This understanding moreover points to the need to ‘upscale’ current forms of representation beyond a workplace and collective bargaining model and onto a broader scale, whether regional, occupational or sector-based. This involves, for instance, the need for unions to be able to *regulate the broader market-place* where contingent workers circulate, for example supplying workers’ ‘portable benefits’ or training to sustain their ‘human capital’.

It is apparent that the flipside of this ‘upscaling’ is that it partly remains within a *regulatory and service model* of unionism. Trade unions appear either as providing ‘advocacy’ to enforce ‘special rights’ for the contingent workforce, or as proper *labour market actors* providing training, security benefits, ‘job matching services’, almost driven by their own interest to increase their ‘competitive advantage’ over agencies. Furthermore, by providing better-trained workers and assisting their retention, unions become themselves labour ‘suppliers’ in niche contingent markets in need of maintaining their ‘stock of skills’(Heery 2009: 13), rather than empowering workers to increase their bargaining power. In Heery’s proposals the acknowledgement that traditional forms of ‘collective bargaining’ may not be effectively available, nor suited to the new contingent workforce, risks downplaying other forms of ‘internal’ rather than ‘external’ representation, such as workers’ own participation in union governance. It ultimately focuses on the *regulatory mechanisms* by which unions can support workers’ individual ‘employability’ in an increasingly insecure marketplace. While this position critically emphasises the *political willingness* of unions able to trigger real change in their internal political ‘opportunity structures’, and ‘prioritising’ the interests of agency and contingent workers, these are implicitly still considered the exception to the rule, the ‘non-standard’⁷⁵, whose anomalous situation needs ad-hoc and regulatory solutions.

It has already been considered (Chapter 1) how agency work cannot be simply ‘reduced’ nor automatically erased by incorporating ‘marginal’ workers into the fabric of the ‘Standard

⁷⁵ Heery (2009) claims that in the UK, after growth in the 1990s, the three categories of ‘directly employed temporary workers’, ‘agency workers’ and ‘self-employed’ or ‘freelancers’ did not meet an ‘inexorable upward trend’ but remained a minority (ibid. 15).

Employment Relationship' (SER) (Vosko 2010). A fascinating critique of the genealogy and erosion of the 'SER' revealed how a major aspect of current state policies on immigration across Europe, the US and Canada is precisely that of *limiting 'non-nationals' to temporary employment*. This is achieved either by *differentiating* immigrants by their *entry category* or through policies hindering migrants' access to features of the SER, such as *permanency* and particular employment rights and protections (Vosko 2010: 11) (aspects reflected in the UK Points-Based System for Immigration). In order to overcome the shortfalls of these practices of 'regulation at the margins', the same political will stressed by Heery could be more audacious still. Rather, it could bring into question the dichotomous view in many labour market segmentation theories which divides the workforce between the standard and the non-standard, and excavate more deeply the social characteristics and the transformative potential of temporary and precarious work.

Returning to the case study, the dynamic between agency and established workers as imagined by the trade unionists entailed the idea that long term immigrants would feel more attached to their workplace and *therefore, because of their stronger 'occupational identity'*, would be keener to become involved in trade union activities. While undoubtedly agency and temporary workers have less interest in participating in long-term workplace trade union struggles, and employers can deliberately use subcontracting as a strategy to weaken unionisation, it is necessary to abandon any dichotomous views of the labour market. As against an account of the workforce split into two 'tiers' between agency and in-house, or 'standard' and 'non-standard' workers, Ali Rogers and colleagues (2009) argue that the labour market, especially in a time of recession, is so segmented that the very distinction between a 'primary' and 'secondary' labour market becomes blurred. However, from increased fragmentation arises an opportunity for unity, precisely by acknowledging that, 'by creating a group of workers who are particularly constrained, vulnerable and dependent on employers, this undermines the position of the workforce more generally (Rogers et. al 2009: 22).

In this sense a major shortcoming of the campaign can be identified in the lack of any attempt by the leaders of UNITE and LC to effectively deal with the controversial issue of *agency work* as *migrants' work*. Therefore a useful direction for unions and other organisations willing to involve migrant workers in the struggle for social justice and better conditions for all precarious and poorly paid workers may be to 'take more seriously' the reality of temporary, 'non-standard' and *transient* forms of employment. It should also work to understand their increasingly 'normal' and

generalised character, especially in correspondence with new patterns of labour migration into the country. These are the result of both the ‘liberalisation’ of the EU labour market as well as of the *overall informalisation of employment conditions* (in spite of and through increasing restrictions to migrant labour in the UK).

Beyond the simplistic view of economic migrants as ‘peripheral labour’ pushing down the conditions of the ‘core’, it is important to recognise that not only purely economic choices by individuals on the basis of *wage differentials*, but also other factors related to families and household choices shape the current temporal rhythms and composition of *the movement of labour*, with consequences that labour organisations must also take into account. These reflections ultimately suggest the need to deconstruct a victimising view of migrants and that the advancement of the working conditions and rights of migrants, minorities and low-paid workers cannot be realised without a genuine transformation of labour unions and other CSOs, their internal structures and political strategies and an acknowledgment of the specific challenges and subjective needs brought about by ever-increasing forms of transient labour.

4.6.3 Gendered constraints to migrants’ empowerment: the limits of organising campaign

Besides the complex intersection between migrant and agency labour in the hospitality industry, which both the organisations leading the campaign appeared unable to properly understand, the ‘gendered politics’ of the union and its partners represented a major obstacle to an effective organising process. More generally the *masculine character* associated with political labour activism and persisting in the new organising models, appeared to be a crucial factor shaping constraints and possibilities for *all* the actors involved (including the migrant women organisers) in the ways they expressed their political subjectivity. This traditional masculinist culture was also assumed in the practices of the CSO, which reproduced gender stereotypes by associating its own ‘softer methods’ with a more consensual approach, risking losing the dimension of conflict altogether and eventually inscribing its action into a mediating ‘stakeholderism’. In contrast, ‘face to face’ and more confrontational forms of actions were associated with the traditional style of workplace dispute between workers and bosses, emphasising notions of *strength* and *oppositional power*. Indeed it was apparent how both the ‘adversarial mode’ of bargaining typical of labour unions and the more ‘collaborative’ tactics endorsed by LC aim at re-establishing a ‘balance of

power' supposed to exist between the social parties, defining the common reformist nature of both the organisations.

Elements of 'virile syndicalism' seemed to persist in the recent organising strategies, whereby traditionally masculinist values of courage, sacrifice, strength and *emotional control* were considered conditional to the possibility of the workers to *winning* a union in their workplace. The *patronising* attitudes maintained towards the workers by both the organisations' leaders appeared also to signify the extent and meaning of gender constructions in society generally, which furthered limited the subjectivities of the workers involved.

This case presented many of the internal constraints to the 'success' of the organising model already indicated by the literature (Heery and Simms 2008). These include a lack of resources, insistence on the objective of union recognition rather than building sustainable workplace organisation and a lack of support from the union hierarchy. However, this last point may indicate the political nature of the issue at stake. It is in fact difficult to distinguish internal from external constraints to union organising (Heery 2009). But the migrants' perception of not being taken seriously by the union as a whole may explain how the workers' own opposition or 'external resistance' to the organising efforts of the leaders may well be interpreted as rational or reasonable, rather as mere evidence of disaffection, individualisation, or cynicism. The opposite outcome can be an *excessive burden* on those workers chosen as informal leaders, already afflicted by intense working patterns, which may eventually lead to their withdrawal from the struggle.

More broadly speaking, the limits and weakness of the organising model should be considered from the points of view of the persisting constraints on workers' protagonism. The possibilities for 'rank and file' participation (Turner 1998) in organising campaigns are in turn embedded in a web of complex power relations, but also *affects* and *mutual expectations* among the actors involved in a particular context, rather than being determined by the achievement of 'quantifiable goals'. Although the LC organiser seemed to place more value on the everyday relationship with the migrant workers and 'the process' of empowerment, rather than merely the 'outcomes' of the unionisation campaign (which indeed appeared to be of great value to the workers), the focus on strategic objectives and the 'spirit of investment' characteristic of the organising model eventually appeared to overwhelm both organisations. The fact that even the migrant female organiser of the campaign remains a 'professional', organising the workers from an *outside position*, confirmed and synthesised the intrinsic paradox of 'organising others', while

posing important questions around issues of leadership and representation. The intrinsic *limits of representational politics* appeared in the tendency of both the unions and the CSO to *incorporate* migrants for their own institutional survival or publicity, without prioritising or sustaining processes of subjectivation and empowerment of the migrant women involved.

4.6.4 Beyond the boundaries of gendered politics: forms of subjectivation and affective resistance

While the women's experiences of engagement were in turn conditioned by their varying mobility plans and their relative degree of settlement, the affective relationships developed with the leaders and their *longing for knowledge and sociability* were crucial components in triggering these women's *drive to get involved* in the union (rather than rational calculations or a coherent form of 'political consciousness'). The interviews with the workers revealed how their subjective reasons for joining the union and/or becoming active in the campaign were not necessarily dependent on greater political awareness or experiences developed in their country of origin. Rather, the immediate and material conditions of their work, or a broader *sense of justice*, together with the wish to express solidarity and to stand up for their own rights, led them to seek support and join the union. Their *migrant status* and condition of mobility and transiency (which will be further explored), appear at the same time as both a *deterrent* to sustained political engagement (as in the story of Cinzia) and as an *incentive* to join the union in search of a point of reference, expressing a desire for settlement (as in the story of Stella). In any case, the *temporariness of the job and the temporary nature of settlement* did not represent particular impediments to contingent but still significant forms of participation and leadership development (in the case of Cinzia).

While Milkman's work, significantly, destroyed 'the myth of migrants' unorganisability', the opposite risk would be to essentialise their position as a 'heroic' subject of the new working-class vanguard (Bojadžijev 2006) exceptionally well-disposed to collectivism. Despite this, there are certain exceptional cases where precisely the combination of migrant status and long-term employment in a certain workplace produces a stronger attachment to the job and a higher determination to fight for better conditions (in the

case of Arianna). Still, even this high degree of engagement can express itself in highly individualised, isolated and *fragile* forms.

Returning to the broader question of *political consciousness* and forms of subjectivation among migrant workers, the organising campaign indicates the need to abandon a rigid notion of political consciousness as the condition for political engagement and to disentangle both from similarly ossified notions of working-class identity. In the case of these women migrants, political action may rather be understood in the form of ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2008), On occasions they enter the political stage in *anticipating* rather than following possible processes of political conscientisation. The latter is in fact continuously being produced, and it assumes multiple languages and identities⁷⁶.

In this sense the criticism to mainstream theories of individualisation, by asserting that differentiation not necessarily leads to increasing individualism within the workforce (Bradley and Healy 2008), also suggests how the very *experience of struggles* rather than already existing forms of identity, consciousness and class affiliations can trigger political engagement. Besides the desire for learning, the sense of social justice and the search for points of reference, sociality and the affective relationships built through the campaign resulted to be quite significant in fostering women’s involvement. Similarly, on the side of the organisers, the process of contamination, which led one of the trade unionists to reconsider the importance of ‘one to one’ strategies in involving migrant workers (Tom, male, white, UK born, Irish origin, part-time officer, Hotels branch), points more widely to the relevance of *relationality*, *affectivity* and *care* as crucial aspects of building powerful collectives of resistance (Shukaitis 2009).

⁷⁶ The notion of ‘conscientisation’, translated from the Spanish *concientización*, meaning to ‘work to create new understandings of daily lived/felt realities of oppression, injustice and/or inequity’. Clover (1995) refers to the work of authors such as Freire and Greene to show how they combine political action and social critiques based “on overcoming false consciousness by rejecting an absolute and static view of reality” and revealing hidden structures and ideologies (Greene 1995: 61). But it is not “simply bringing what is hidden into consciousness... it is a breaking into consciousness of hidden dimensions of our reality through... reflective engagement” (Freire, cit. in Heaney & Horton, 1990: 85, quot. in Clover 1995: 632)

The double desire for *exposure* and *protection* determined the workers' ambivalent relationship with the union as well as their forms of participation to the direct actions in the campaign. From the point of view of the migrants, actions across workplaces not requiring their direct involvement and exposure in front of their employers, might have created a positive, although contingent, sense of solidarity that fostered in turn their participation in the campaign and their *affiliation* to the union and the CSO. While the organisers highlighted the reluctance of workers to be exposed, assuming their self-interest and opportunism, most of the workers appreciated the possibilities offered by the employment of 'hidden membership' tactics through the cross-workplace actions as a way to protect themselves from the risk of victimisation by their employers. In the organisers' view also it appeared as a useful tactic generating new forms of solidarity and a new sense of collectivity. However, the issue of *hidden engagement*, expressing the workers' ambivalent perceptions of forms of *visibility and invisibility*, leaves unresolved the question of how to favour forms of empowerment among vulnerable workers in their own workplaces and confront the risk of reproducing further layers of *intermediation* and *representation* that contribute to hindering their agency.

When reflecting on the particular constraints and possibilities for migrants' engagement in forms of political subjectivation, and the institutional transformations that correspond to these potentialities, a controversial testimony such as that of Maria may help synthesise the ambivalences involved in the process. Her twin desire for independence and incorporation, *reproducing* dynamics of power that hinder the agency of the other migrants and women in the union, reflects a broader contradictory trend characterising ongoing process of hybridisation among labour and civic society organisations even when they succeed in involving migrants. The conflict between patterns of formalisation and informalisation; professionalisation and cross-pollination with communities; autonomy and the *desire for representation*; is apparent among all of those involved in the process of 'becoming leaders'. At a wider level, looking at the history of the London hospitality branches, the absence of a conscious political investment from the hierarchies of the union bureaucracy ever since the foundation of the international hotel workers branch 'from below' (by the group of Portuguese workers), constituted both an element of weakness and strength. This was expressed in the *marginalisation of the branch* on the one hand and its relative *autonomy* and radicalism on the other. However, for the woman newly employed in

the union *expanding the dimension of informality* means creating more spaces of *sociality* within it and going beyond the mere resolution of legal issues at work. Imagining the expansion of labour struggles into broader chains of *support, care, and sociability* beyond the workplace may suggest new possibilities of creating a sense of collectivity, independently of its contingent nature.

The cross-pollination between organisations and institutional actors required both significant resources of *time* and *care* (as opposed to goal-oriented, ‘productivist’ organising methods), especially on the part of the Polish female organiser, and also the willingness of the other (male) officers to genuinely *engage with change*, beyond established notions of work identity and ossified political cultures. These processes of hybridisation may paradoxically contribute to more *sustainable* alliances over ongoing struggles around migration, developing independently from the action of institutionalised networks in ‘civil society’.

How did then migrants in the hospitality industry express their resistance to their poor working conditions *besides* the existing, relatively institutionalised, forms of collective engagement through the union?

CHAPTER FIVE

Migrants' everyday acts of resistance: mobility strategies and excess sociability

The subjectivity of migrant labour is quite material and practical, indeed corporeal. It remains an unsettling presence that persistently disrupts the larger stakes of securing the regime of capital accumulation. This subversive potential is characteristic of the social force of all labour, ever indeterminate in its centrality-as subject-within while yet against capital (De Genova 2009: 461)

Writing about 'resistance' in relation to migrant labour is a complex matter. The very definition of what counts as 'workers' resistance' has long been debated in literature across labour and cultural studies (see Beynon and Nichols 1977, Jermier et al. 1994, Ong 1984, Salzinger 2003, Scott 1985). When it comes to migrant workers' resistance and 'political engagement' in their workplaces, mainstream literature in industrial relations and sociology tends to privilege a rather 'integrationist' approach. Incorporating migrant labour into trade unions is presented as a means for the labour movement to resist the patterns of deregulation, casualisation and degradation of working conditions in the labour market and counter declining union membership trends (see Chapter 1).

In analysing the hotel workers campaign it emerged how the leading organisations still largely subscribed to the view that the 'temporariness' of migrant workers' *status* is an impediment to consistent, *long-term* forms of engagement considered more effective within traditional understandings of (workplace-based) 'resistance'. Agency and other forms of 'non-standard' employment appeared to be primarily considered as a *threat* to *established* and permanent workers' conditions, or else agency workers are depicted as merely vulnerable and in need of *protection through incorporation*. At the same time, in the local campaign involving collaboration with non-union actors, much like within the literature engaging with trade union renewal, there emerged the growing realisation that traditional labour institutions need to address the increasing presence of forms of contingent, precarious and migrant employment in order to lead effective reforms and come to terms with the overall pattern of *informalisation* of workers' lives and employment conditions.

The relevance of the ‘affective dimension’ between workers and leaders and of ‘informal spaces’ of socialisation for successful migrants’ organising was also recognised in the accounts of the activists of the London hotels campaign. While the importance of affective relationships among workers and between them and union leaders and community organisers in the process of unionisation was sharply apparent in this case study, affective resistance within the campaign largely remained *channelled and constrained* by the unions’ structures and *methods of representation* including collective bargaining and legal grievances.

This chapter endeavours to go beyond this ‘representational’ framework as well as the ‘union renewal’ approach that underlies most of the literature on migrant worker organising. Rather, starting from the *everyday realities* of migrants across their *multiple* workplaces, and the relationalities they have developed in, outside and between them, it explores the forms of resistance and negotiation that migrants express in ‘dealing with’ the complications of their transnational working lives.

5.1 Temporary work, mobility power and escape

In Chapter 3 it has been considered how the *high labour turnover*, one among the structural features of the hospitality industry, expresses an intrinsic ambivalence. On one hand it is the result of businesses’ deliberate use of agency and temporary labour to cut costs while responding to the fluctuating demand typical of the tourism sector. On the other hand, the high transiency of labour is often represented as a major problem for an industry often facing problems of retention and shortages (People 1st, 2009, 2010a). Similarly, while the industry requires a flexible workforce that can be easily laid off and recruited again at a time of greater demand, the poor pay and conditions of hospitality jobs make workers less reliable. In any case, the control of the ‘labour supply’ remains a central issue for management in the sector.

However, here the *ambivalent nature of high labour turnover* in the sector and the spread of temporary work are explored *from the perspective of the migrants* involved in the research. The everyday experiences of the women and men encountered in the agencies during the participatory study, and the ‘exit’ or ‘mobility strategies’ they opposed to the poor and precarious conditions of their work, shed light on the complex implications of temporary employment and the particular forms of exploitation it entails. Thus what follows first looks more closely into the mechanisms of

recruitment, training, ‘employees’ relationship with the agencies, the agencies’ strategies of Human Resource Management (HRM) as well as the actual manifestations and organisation of the *labour process* in jobs such as waiting. In this way it is possible to grasp the multiple forms of negotiation the workers engage in to deal with the everyday stresses of their work as well as the deeper fractures these provoke in managerial control regimes.

5.1.1 *Tensions in agency work: dual control and shifting loyalty*

Exploring the ‘dualistic nature’ of the workforce in the hospitality industry as divided between a ‘core’ of relatively established and protected workers and an unprotected section of ‘newcomers’ mainly employed through agencies, research has considered how the *ease of dismissal* functions as a lever leading temp workers to be more submissive and available than those employed in-house (Chapter 3). However, the experience of participant observation among temporary job agencies in London highlighted how the *uncertainty* of the subcontracted employment relation also impacts on the employee’s *loyalty* toward her/his organisation, putting into question temps’ supposed availability to work when needed and on flexible working patterns. In response, temporary job agencies supplying labour to catering companies and hotels in London appeared able to create a sense of *dependency* among their employees, who typically showed a stronger sense of ‘attachment’ towards their agencies than towards the hotels or catering companies where they actually worked. This was particularly apparent in the case of the largest agency in Central London, where the staff adopted a discourse based on the idea that the agency was the ‘real employer’ and that fidelity was to be *proven to them* by ‘behaving well’ with the clients and the guests, the end ‘users’ of the service (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency ‘International Talent’). The emphasis on the provision of a *high quality service* and the need to maintain the *reputation of the agency vis-à-vis* the clients, ultimately highlights the power of a system of ‘triple dependency’, which consists in:

the agency management inculcate in the minds of us temporary workers the idea that our possibility of working lies ultimately in their hands, establishing *when, for whom and for how long* we will work. *At the same time*, we depend on the will of the clients, who will *evaluate directly* our performance and complain to the agency in the case of any problem. There is a further actor involved in this complex chain of dependency and labour control, *the guest*, who stays at the *top of the hierarchy* and who will be the final judge of our work. The role of the agency is in this case to *remind* the workers about the attitude of submission and deference that ought to be maintained towards the guests, who, according to management

rhetoric, are sovereign and must always be satisfied (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency 'International Talent').

Therefore, as opposed to the trade unionist's description of the process of 'de-personalisation' involved in the use of *third party* agencies (Chapter 3), this system of triple dependency appeared to be sustained by a substantially *personalised relationship* that the agency manages to create with its 'employees' through a series of discursive practices and 'promotion' mechanisms. For example, agency workers' loyalty was ensured by assigning more weekly shifts to those who accumulated 'seniority' in the agency. In other words, the *length of registration* with the same agency becomes a 'proof' of consistency and *reliability* on the part of the workers such that those registered for longer deserve preferential treatment as compared to the newly arrived (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency 'International Talent'). In this way the agencies also become *agents of selection* of 'the best temps' (Boltanski and Chiappello, 2007) in the process of recruitment, by distinguishing between the more and less reliable among the workers 'on training'. Moreover, the agency's management appeared to endorse a *paternalistic tone* aimed at mobilising *fidelity* and *loyalty* among generally disenchanted workers. As they often repeated during the induction day: '*we are your family*', that is, we are those who *care* about making sure that you will get paid and who *recommend* you to possible new clients (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency 'International Talent').

Partly following the agency's management strategy on prizing 'seniority', some of the temp workers consistently attended the agency with the hope of eventually 'upgrading' to the position of being recruited directly by the hotel and becoming 'rota workers'. It becomes clear how one of the functions assumed by the agency is that of *substituting for the employer* in accomplishing all the services related to the management of human resources (HRM). During the phase of my recruitment to the agency, it was clear how hotels tend to *externalise* not only the management of the provision of the workforce, but also its retention and renewal. *Re-asserting the employer-employee relation* through discourses about dependency and loyalty can be considered an important device in HRM, which is in turn articulated through a series of principles of *work ethics*.

5.1.2 Disciplining temporary bodies and minds: 'the training day'

During the 'training day' at the first Staffing Agency it appeared how *the shift of loyalty* was buttressed by the management's discourse to the workers about the need to maintain a certain

attitude and the related importance of ‘social skills’ and ‘adaptability’ in hospitality work. The agency staff emphasised the ‘posture’ that workers were expected to assume towards the guests and how ‘presentation’ (including an obsession with hygienic norms, emphasis on aesthetics and emotional self-control), was more important than anything else in the delivery of the service, ‘even if you are not confident about your skills’ (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agency ‘International Talent’). This rhetoric demonstrates how agencies can serve not only as an institutionalisation of flexible labour (Vosko 2000) but also as *a means of workers’ socialisation* into a certain regime of service work *by disciplining their bodies* according to a set of norms and inculcating in their *minds* submission and deference towards clients and supervisors. Furthermore, by promoting the idea that this kind of work was mainly about ‘soft skills’ *rather than* technical abilities, the agency management encouraged young migrants to ‘improvise their skills’, even though previous experience in the sector was a formal requirement for registration. Besides the emphasis on attitude, posture and presentation, considered essential in front-desk jobs, other values that the agency managers tried to inculcate in the workers were *availability, adaptability, flexibility, multitasking* and *proactivity* (Ethnographic diary, temporary staffing agencies ‘International Talent’ and ‘East End’).

Research has shown how employers and agencies try to increase the workers’ *labour effort* by emphasising such capabilities. According to Boltanski and Chiappello (2007), in contrast to previous Taylorist forms of work, exploitation can be increased by using workers’ more generic ‘human abilities’ such as relating to people, emotional involvement and commitment (ibid. 249). While these ‘generic capacities and skills’ are characterised in the authors’ eyes by the fact of being ‘less and less measurable’ than those prevalent in the Taylorist organisation of work and production, the participatory study in one hotel restaurant highlighted *the persistence of Taylorist elements* in the organisation of the labour process and its standardised and automatised patterns. Even if it is true that the Taylorist model did not seek, or was not able to achieve, the valorisation of human abilities in that it treated workers ‘more like machines’ (ibid.149), in the case of subcontracted waiting work a more complex picture emerged with a *mixture* of such elements.

During the recruitment phase the employment relationship appeared highly *personalised* and tended towards the *internalisation* of managerial values, *simulating* the language of participatory management in ‘high quality’ and ‘high commitment’ work environments while actually *reproducing* low-paid, hard and degraded work. At the same time, in the phase of service provision

the overall organisation of work did indeed demonstrate aspects also common to the Taylorist assembly line, including *strict measurement* and control of the pace of work, standardisation and anonymity:

In the 'Lush Café' (pseudonym) the waiting staff must follow *rigid protocols* when serving the tables: the white mass of thirty waiters and waitresses will serve the tables following a narrow and precise trajectory between the kitchen and the dining room, going through the corridor always in the same direction and *never* using the back door. The tight control and the homogenisation of rhythm, direction and pace of the labour process assure a certain intensification of speed and *increase productivity*. These aspects of work organisation are essential and do not allow for *any form of flexibility and individual initiative*, which need to be avoided especially given the lack of experience of most of the agency staff. You will be rudely told off if you take more time with a particular request from a guest. *Terrifying* the young agency workers is the best way to extract the most labour effort *in the minimum time*. Our shift does not even cover the whole duration of dinner. In turn, the three-hour shift is divided into a series of phases, each one corresponding to the course included in the menu. From the main to the coffee the work process includes a range of *well-measured* gestures which do not allow for time wasting and extra interaction with the guests. Any time the waitress or waiter approaches the table she/he will be asked to remember a load of details and at each round, bring in and free the table of *certain* items, but only those prescribed, otherwise the manager will stop you from working and you won't have the shift renewed... (Ethnographic diary, shift at the hotel restaurant 'Lush Cafe').

The *hybrid* nature of contemporary forms of managerial control in the service sector has been highlighted in recent research exploring the ways in which management increases the need to *control employees' affects*, although it does so against the backdrop of an overall tendency toward 'rationalisation' of the work process (Carls 2007). In this sense the 'neo-Taylorist' reorganisation of work, coinciding with a strengthening of direct hierarchical control associated with industrial production or low-qualified service work (Ritzer, 1996, Springer 1999) often displays a *combination* of participatory and hierarchical forms of control over workers' subjectivity. Similarly, the question of labour *measurement* has been critically examined with particular regard to the very nature of service work, entailing aspects of 'immaterial' or 'affective labour' (Caffentiz 2007, Dowling 2007), as will be further considered.

5.1.3 *The question of productivity*

For sure, both the employment of neo-Taylorist techniques in the organisation of service work and the discursive practices of 'participatory managerialism' on the part of the agencies appear to reflect a primary concern among agencies and employers: the relatively *low productivity*

of temporary labour. Indeed, it became apparent that the implications of *subcontracting recruitment* in the hospitality industry are rather controversial. Temporary work may have the disadvantage of being not only less reliable but generally less productive, due to the *discontinuity* of employment and the worker's lack of *attachment* to the firm or workplace.

The manager of the staffing agency I worked for in East London complained during the job interview about the fact that the margins for the agency to *replace* workers in the face of high turnover were not actually very significant. The constant supply of labour for this sector in London, a result of the increased presence of migrants arriving in the city in search of work – especially after EU Enlargement – would initially appear to suggest the relative ease of firms *replacing* workers at any moment in time. However, the agency manager lamented the fact that in reality it is not always so easy to fill in vacancies in the industry considering that '*jobs are not always good*' (Ethnographic diary, job interview, temporary staffing agency 'East End').

The way in which a long-term employee of a luxury hotel in West London explained the high labour turnover in the sector turns common perceptions on their head. The woman clearly identifies the use of temporary work as a *response* by management to the *high mobility* of the workers:

... People keep on coming and going! *So* they decided to employ agency...

And, for you, why do people *leave*?

Because the workers *do not accept* poor wages! (...) the employers of *these foreigners* did not even pay the minimum wage ...these workers are willing to work from morning to night! That is why they *called them in* now. (They work) 6-7 days a week... and when they finish morning they go to the evening shift 'cause they want to have *extra money* (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

The decision to 'rely on agency work' appears in this sense a *consequence* of the fact that workers want to keep these jobs only for brief periods as they *refuse to accept* the poor wages and conditions of employment typical of the hospitality industry. At the same time, the *replacement* of workers who decide to leave the job relies on the supposed availability of 'newcomers' to work for longer hours. Yet, the latter still 'choose' it on the basis of expected financial benefits.

Through these insights, the *conflicting nature of labour turnover* and the possibilities arising for workers on that terrain begin to emerge. Overall, the effects of ‘dual’ or ‘triple control’ exerted by the regime of agency work have highly ambiguous results, especially in relation to workers’ *productivity* and *mobility*. The threat of disposability and the lower protection in terms of labour rights pressurises temporary workers to intensify their work, yet at the same time, as other research has illustrated, the agencies’ clients have few sanctions at hand to *enforce productivity* levels (Gottfried 1994, Krasas Rogers 2000). Despite agency workers often not having direct control over the labour process because of their temporary engagement and the difficulties they face in accessing forms of collective organising, they can develop forms of resistance drawing from the very *indeterminacy* of the employment relations typical of temporary work, as will be demonstrated in later examples. Overall, the contradictions involved in the patterns of labour turnover and ‘supply’ in the sector are to be observed not only as the expression of techniques explicitly aimed at cutting labour costs and undermining workers’ bargaining power, but on the contrary as a *response to workers’ mobility choices and their own understanding and strategic use of flexibility*. This will be explored across the various accounts of more or less temporary and precariously employed migrant workers.

5.1.4 Migrants’ strategic use of flexibility: gaining time, acquiring skills, maintaining mobility

According to the characteristics of the staffing agency (location, scale, numbers of employees, the features of the hotel served) workers chose temporary work relatively *voluntarily* and perceived the flexibility of the job more or less positively. In many cases the *value of flexibility*, with the *freedom to arrange working time* according to different needs, was *worth more* than the financial reward, especially among young migrant agency workers. At the same time, many of the ‘temps’ appeared *aware* of the disadvantages of low pay and the overall poor terms and conditions of sub-contracted work:

Can you imagine, that canapés costs £2.70: almost our hourly wage! Well, on the other side *it is not such a bad work for us*, it is *more flexible than other jobs*, even though there are not tips... it is not like in a pub or bar *where you have fixed hours...* (Ethnographic diary, catering shift, ‘the Business Centre’)

According to the account of the young black workmate encountered at the catering shift in the Conference Centre, despite her lucid awareness of the gap between the wage and the cost of the food served, she valued the flexible job pattern more than the actual conditions of employment. To be sure, the relative 'rationality' and 'calculability' in the choice of temporary work for the migrants interviewed depended on their relative labour market strength and their previous professional experience, as illustrated in past research on the voluntary character of labour turnover (Edwards and Scullion 1982). The *age* and the *migration plans* of the worker also appeared to be important factors. Interestingly though, for some of the workers defining themselves as 'professionals' with a long experience in the sector and a long period of living in the country, reliance on temporary recruitment agencies was either a strategy during periods of unemployment or else a personal choice reflecting a particular 'life style' (Ethnographic diary, catering shift, 'the River Hospital').

For instance, among 'in-house-part-time' workers the choice of not engaging in a permanent employment contract also appeared to be driven by a direct preference for flexibility, considered valuable in the arrangement of their working day. While this was often dictated by family responsibilities (especially in the case of women with young children), in some cases it was accompanied by a discourse about the will to escape the *boredom* and *routine* of permanent work. In the case of a Portuguese man who had been working for long years in the catering sector, his *choice* to work through agencies was justified by his own personal 'nature', which he described as '*flexible, hyper-active, multitasking*' and by the fact that he actually *enjoyed* continuously changing workplaces *and social environments*. In this man's emphasis on being *adaptable rather than specialised* in one particular sector or particularly good at doing *any job*, there emerged something akin to a new sense and different understanding of what constitutes a 'successful career'. The fact of being called by different agencies and companies was on the contrary a *confirmation for him* of his eccentric sense of *professionalism*.

How does my Portuguese co-worker express his subjectivity here? To a certain extent the fact that he celebrates the 'value' of flexibility and identifies success and professionalism with 'adaptability' might be interpreted as a sign that he has simply *internalised* the agency managers' normative discourse of flexibility. However, he *refuses work identification*, the idea of belonging to a *certain workplace*, and insists on the *enjoyment* of leisure time, jealously guarding his non-work space as a kind of *compensation* for his precarious working status.

The example of this ‘permanent temp’ worker, who draws a clear distinction between work and life, also highlights some of the direct implications that a certain attitude towards work has at the level of *loyalty*. While temp-workers are normally considered less keen on union organising because of their high mobility, the same fact of being *external* and *contingent* implies a weaker loyalty to the employer (McDowell et al. 2007: 21). Nonetheless, ‘temporariness’ appears as residual in the contradiction between the fact of being produced and harnessed by the flexible labour regimes of the service industry, and the ‘strategic uses of flexibility’ relatively deliberately pursued by migrant workers themselves. After all, as Gramsci argued, the concrete behaviour of workers, and not only their attitudes, are central to understanding resistance: although workers may adopt the ideologies of dominant groups, their practices can reveal a *partial rejection* of those ideologies.

In another case, a ‘permanent-part-time’ worker directly employed in the Food and Beverage department of a luxury hotel expressed a lack of loyalty towards the employer, which did not exclude a *positive attitude* to hospitality work in itself. This woman worker’s attachment to the company was in fact weakening since changes in the management caused the worsening of overall employment conditions in the hotel:

I don’t give a shit about this company! Why should I care!?! ...I do now the very minimum required since things are going so badly...This company, they don’t give me much money but you do not know how much I am learning from them for what I want to do for my future... They don’t have a clue what I am learning! For me, customers are customers, it is the essence of the work. So, for instance, scrambled eggs are £10. Only for a couple of eggs it is not fair! I suggested to having plain eggs for £7 (Cinzia, female, black, Eritrea-Italy, 8 years in London, part-time employee, Food and Beverage)

Although the job is not financially rewarding for this woman, she is confident about the possibility of *re-investing the skills* she is acquiring in this job while ‘learning from the mistakes’ of the management. Whilst she does not feel *any attachment* or loyalty to this particular company, by critiquing the new management policy on the menu, she expresses her own sense of ‘work ethics’ by asserting a fundamental principle of hospitality, namely that the guests deserve the best treatment at reasonable prices. In this sense, as Carls (2007) has noted, subscribing to a ‘rather traditional work ethic’ of service integrity in fulfilling one’s own duties does not correspond with the internalisation of company culture or the identification with it. Rather it can be interpreted as ‘an appropriation of sense and of competences, as employees clearly identify their capacities for empathy and conflict-solving in relation to customers as production, or rather, service-knowledge

underestimated and disregarded by management' (Carls 2007: 53). In this case though, as will be further analysed, the worker will materially *invest* this 'appropriation of competence' into a project which involves moving forward both in *professional* and *spatial* terms.

5.1.5 *Work dis-identification, detachment, exit*

While 'long term-part-time' workers' expressed a certain form of *pride* for the work done well and the dignity of the 'profession', among *recently arrived migrants* there seemed to predominate a clear *dis-identification* with hospitality work. This form of *detachment* may be understood in the light of the specifically financial focus of their temporary engagement. However, it will also become apparent how not all of them migrated to London with the clear objective of making money or saving for the future, but rather as a result of a mixture of desires for experiential, educational and material gains.

Felix starts with me the shift at the 'Lush Café' at 6 pm. It's also his first time but he looks quite relaxed. Even when the maître shouts at him and humiliates him because of his poor English, Felix seems to remain indifferent. The irony of the winks he exchanges with his Brazilian mates helps him to *get through* the shift trying not to pay attention to the harassment of the management. He tells me that *he does not care* being treated badly by the maître as much as he doesn't care about the job. Felix works in different places and with different agencies; he planned to stay only for a short time in London with the aim of learning English: *shift work* fits perfectly with his daily schedule. Moreover this is not his real job after all. He used to be a graphic designer in his country. He left his job, to learn English, to see Europe, to travel... he is young. *He feels free*. Is this a privileged kind of migration? Felix shares a room with another Brazilian in the council estates at the edge of the financial ghetto. Also his flatmate complains about London. In the last five years he couldn't go back to his country. In the US was even worse after the immigration became stricter. There is no privacy when you are sharing a room. But, for Felix, this is only for a short time. I can see a certain degree of self-control in him in the way he 'manages' his temporariness (Ethnographic diary, shift at the hotel restaurant 'Lush Cafe').

It appears how migrants' *mobility in the labour market* and their strategic use of flexibility when employed in agency jobs cannot be understood without considering their migration trajectory and strategies of *spatial* mobility. These aspects will be further analysed. For the moment it is worth noting how other types of 'external subjectivities' on the part of migrant temp workers imply different and contradictory attitudes toward work.

Detachment towards the specific content of work was expressed in terms of *lack of motivation* in the case of my Lithuanian co-worker.

Diana seems to prefer to be sacked *rather than show any interest in the assignment*. Her main tactic is *slowing down* and *avoiding work* whenever possible. Yet, as usual, she stays longer than the foreseen schedule. It is already 4:30 pm, she is tired and tomorrow she is gonna work for *15 hours* or so, till 2 in the night she said (Ethnographic diary, catering shift at the 'Westminster Hospital')

Long working hours are 'normal' patterns when migrants try to combine different shifts by different agencies and when they have to reach workplaces travelling over long distances from one part of the city to the other. An apparently schizophrenic modus operandi therefore emerges in the case of some of the recently arrived migrants who, while assuming a clearly *instrumental attitude*, a form of *disenchantment* towards work, and trying to reduce effort to minimum, at the same time subscribe to a peculiar 'work ethic'. Employers' stereotypes usually essentialise this attribute in the figure of the temporary 'economic migrant' as the paradigm of the flexible 'hard worker' (often in racialised terms, see Martin and Ruhs 2007). Broadly, this is part of the 'flexible migrant worker's' *taken-for-granted disposability* to work extra hours. Far from reflecting any form of loyalty to the company or pride for the work done, often it is clear that the reasons for this flexibility are rather to be found in the hope of being called in once again by '*showing* that you are more flexible with time' (Ethnographic diary, catering shift, 'the River Hospital'). However migrants' flexibility is not always easy for managers to render valuable.

5.1.6 Exceeding management control: the paradox of disposability and 'organised flexibility'

While the agency or management often *assumed* that the workers would be available to work longer than established in the original schedule, this expectation was disappointed by the *refusal of temps to extend the work shifts*, due to their engagement in other agencies or for other personal reasons. This instance more broadly expresses an intrinsic *tension* between the requirements of maximum flexibility on the part of temp workers (to adapt to the fluctuating demand of labour in the sector) and the need for workers to 'organise their own flexibility' and manage their multiple jobs and schedules. My black workmate at the catering shift in 'the River Hospital' eventually *conceded* just 15 minutes more when he was asked to stay longer. There therefore arises a fundamental difficulty in *matching* flexible patterns between the demand for labour and the needs of individuals to plan their own working day *across different workplaces*. At the same time, the very *uncertainty* of the employment relationship contains in itself *continuous possibilities of exit* that jeopardise the 'availability clauses' (Boltanski and Chiappello 2007) and the assumption of 'continuous availability' at the basis of the use of casual and subcontracted work.

The *difficulty of dealing with different agencies* and the bad treatment received from the manager led my Lithuanian workmate in the catering job to cancel her registration with the agency precisely because the managers did not make any effort to help her to balance her different shifts. After *quitting the agency* Diana had to face a relatively long period of unemployment but she was relieved from the burden of ‘dealing with those horrible people’ (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Diana, female, white other, Lithuania, agency worker, ‘the East End agency’).

5.1.7 *Temporariness, mobility and turnover as terrains of struggle*

As already discussed, Human Resource literature considers the issue of labour turnover and its impact on the productivity of workers as ‘problematic’ areas for management in the hospitality industry. ‘People 1st’, a state-funded agency whose main task is to track skills shortages in the hospitality sector, claims that the high level of turnover in hospitality (taken together with ‘leisure travel and tourism’ as a sector)⁷⁷ ultimately costs some £414 million a year, including training and recruitment (People 1st 2009). It reports that productivity in the sector is the lowest of any sector in the UK economy and just half that of other EU countries. The state-funded agency explicitly relates low productivity in the industry to other problems: ‘hard to fill vacancies’ (especially with regard to certain occupations such as managers and chefs), skills shortages, and more specifically a lack of the required skills such as ‘customers handling’ and ‘oral communication’ skills.

The difficulty of filling vacancies is in turn attributed to the overall high levels of turnover in the hospitality industry (31% in the sector overall, with large employers reporting double or treble that figure). Interestingly though, the report claims that ‘only 17% of the employers feel that their labour turnover is too high’ (ibid. 2). According to the TUC report on agency work, turnover figures in 2007 were higher still with 51% of all workers in hospitality having been with their current employer for just 12 months (TUC 2007: 22). Indeed, under certain conditions, for instance with high level of labour flows and guarantees of substitutability for the employers (increased by

⁷⁷ As categorized by People 1st ‘leisure travel and tourism’ includes: 14 industries from hotels to restaurants, through to events, gambling and travel services, which altogether employ around two million people, of which 29% are concentrated in restaurants and bars and another 13% in hotels).

the entry of 'A8 migrants' after accession), employers do *not* consider turnover a problem. According to the 'Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's website:

There is no set level of employee turnover that determines at what point turnover starts to have a negative impact on an organisation's performance. Everything depends on the type of labour markets in which you compete. Where it is relatively easy to find and train new employees quickly and at relatively little cost (that is where the labour market is loose), it is possible to sustain high quality levels of service provision despite having a high turnover rate. By contrast, where skills are relatively scarce, where recruitment is costly or where it takes several weeks to fill a vacancy, turnover is likely to be problematic for the organisation. This is especially true of situations in which you are losing staff to direct competitors or where customers have developed relationships with individual employees (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2010).⁷⁸

The Caterer, the most diffused publication in the industry, also emphasises how staff turnover costs companies loads of pounds every year including:

Advertising for replacement staff, Commission fees to agencies, Management time in interviewing, inducting and training new staff, Lost sales or business opportunities caused by inexperienced staff, Interruptions to the flow of work in a department. Low morale and low productivity' (The Caterer and Hotelkeeper 2006)

Taking into account management's perception of turnover highlights how the problem of *retention* and *continuous provision* of labour, the overall lack of loyalty and low levels of productivity constitute tensions in the industry. The intrinsic ambiguity of turnover lies in the fact that, while there are managerial and profit-driven reasons for the increased employment of temporary and non-standard work (thereby cutting the labour cost, securing a more flexible supply of labour, externalising HRM costs), the *actual effects of turnover* can have negative economic implications that challenge management strategies. Therefore, as opposed to the view of turnover as merely employer-induced or completely managed through the contracting-out of recruitment (LC

⁷⁸ The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) is Europe's largest HRM and development professional body (see <http://www.cipd.co.uk>)

and Unite 2009), it is possible to identify another possible understanding of turnover as a site of conflict between management strategies and employees' practices.

Past and more recent literature (Edwards and Scullion 1982, Smith 2006) within the tradition of labour process theory argues that turnover and 'quitting' can legitimately be considered expressions of a conflict over control between capital and labour, despite different 'levels' of *intentionality* and *awareness* being apparent among the workers. Slichter's ground-breaking work on 'The turnover of Factory Labor' (Slichter 1919), whilst also considering the costs of turnover for the employees and overall social costs for the public, demonstrated how the *retention of labour* has been historically perceived a problem from the point of view of management whereas the necessity of 'handling manpower' and turnover were at the very origins of HRM.

It is not by chance Slichter's work came at a point in US history (what Montgomery calls the 'historical discovery of labour turnover', cit. in Smith 2006: 397) when employers (against the backdrop of the growth of the large firm and the 'direct employment relationship'), realised that it was economically damaging to them when workers (not contractors or gang bosses) started to move because of their own mobility choices.⁷⁹ Edwards and Scullion (1982) were among the first in the tradition of labour process theory to affirm the possibility that turnover became a 'rational' and 'collective' expression of conflict, for example when quitting was used as a response to *shared problems* and reflected previous shared 'pride in collective control'.

However, also in instances of 'indirect' or 'implicit conflict' whereby workers' quitting practices did not reflect any collective sense of control, these authors placed central emphasis on the struggle for control and on the *frontier of control* as shaped by the interaction between the strategies

⁷⁹ Slichter's study of turnover in 1912–1915, recorded rates of between 40 and 348 percent, with nearly half of his survey companies having rates in excess of 100 percent annual labour turnover (Slichter 1919: 343). Such figures were a clear expression of workforce dissatisfaction.

followed by both employers and workers in specific circumstances. 'If we take control in simple or more or less terms quitting is likely to be an important form of escape in situation where managerial control is relatively intense'. Even when 'quitting was unable to resolve collective grievances, and it was therefore not necessarily a strategy that furthered workers' interests as a whole (...) it did of course permit *individual workers to escape to a preferred job*' (Edwards and Scullion 1982: 92, my emphasis).

More recently Smith (2006) provided an important analysis of the potential for conflict entailed in the practice of quitting and labour turnover. Smith's research exposes this potential, rehabilitating a historically-overlooked dimension of the labour power, which he defines in terms of 'mobility power' as the 'internal expression of high labour turnover' (Smith 2006: 391). Drawing from labour process theory (Edwards 1979, Kelly 1985, Friedman 1977, Thompson 1989), Smith understands labour power as intrinsically *indeterminate*⁸⁰, yet he adds: 'Control strategies are not only about production indeterminacy of labour but also mobility indeterminacy: the withdrawal of individuals may increase pressures on the effort of those who stay, but may also reduce effort, as intensification practices, such as continuous improvement or TQM [Total Quality Management] cannot be enacted due to the shortage of trained staff (Elger and Smith 2005, cit. in Smith 2006: 399). In other words Smith distinguishes between 'mobility-effort bargaining' or the 'application of workers' power over *where to sell their labour services* as opposed to the concept of 'work-effort bargaining' (or 'effort power'), that the author defines as 'a combination of workers' effort and management effort applied to ensuring workers' endeavour during the working day is maximized within customary rules of fairness' (2006: 391).

Smith contends that quitting remains a significant expression of conflict within capital-labour relations and claims that research has not sufficiently considered the *disruptive and*

⁸⁰ According to Smith (2006) indeterminacy means that: '...contract to sell labour power is open-ended and subject to the direction of employers (or supervisory labour) to enforce or create through *consent* a definitive measure of output from workers over a definitive period of time' (ibid. 390).

destabilising impact of mobility power on the labour process and the interrelations between effort bargaining and exiting behaviour (Smith 2006: 393). Indeed, historically capital has always had an interest in tightening labour to a certain *place*, especially when workers became officially ‘free’ waged labourers (ibid. 394).

The various forms of ‘entrapment’ and systems of dependency highlighted in the recent literature on migration regulation and labour market policies in Britain (Anderson 2000, 2007; Anderson et al. 2006) can be interpreted in this vein, as the literature on the ‘autonomy of migration’ has already illustrated in the case of the history of immigration and migrant workers’ struggles in other European countries (Bojadžijev et al. 2004, Mezzadra 2004, Mouliere Boutang 1998). As Matthews and Ruhs (2007) concluded in their exploration of recruitment strategies in the hospitality sector in the UK, migrants are *less able to move between jobs* because the work permit established by the government’s migration regulation and other strategies used by employers *tie them to a particular job*. In this sense it can be argued that the employment of migrant agency labour is meant to simultaneously function as a *mechanism for the flexibilisation* of the labour market *and* also re-assure a certain *control of labour mobility*.

The important contribution made by Smith in this context lies in his consideration of the problems of labour *retention* faced by employers, representing a crucial facet of workers’ ‘mobility struggles’ (Smith 2006: 391). However, the author’s primary intention is to emphasise workers’ use of mobility as a *threat* in dispute resolution *within the workplace*. Workers’ mobility power is characterised in direct relation to management strategies deliberately aimed at obtaining particular improvements in the workplace, including for instance ‘the resources used at work for planning job moves’ and the ‘use of mobility threats to create strategic rewards’ for the workers (ibid.). In this sense mobility choices are not seen *as acts in themselves, that is*, with purposes that may also *transcend work*.

In contrast, this ethnographic study shows how migrants make use of their ‘mobility power’ for reasons beyond the actual conditions of employment in a certain workplace, for example in order to flee a difficult situation, to move between different jobs or engage in further migration. By highlighting the *material tensions* that quitting, withdrawal from work and other mobility practices of temp migrant workers create *vis-à-vis* management, it is also possible to illustrate the *relative autonomous character of temporary work*. This is in contrast to the victimising view of agency workers often subscribed to by trade unions and other civil society actors. The ‘power’ of mobility

is observed as relevant beyond a narrow workplace-focused perspective: migrants' moving from one job to another and their different ways of valuing the flexibility of temporary work cannot indeed be fully understood except in relation to their wider *geographical mobility* strategies.

5.1.8 Temporary migration and career plans: dreaming occupational, spatial and social mobility

The issue of the *strategic use of flexibility* appeared in the accounts of some of the migrant women interviewed, who emphasised their *instrumental* approach to temporary work in relation to other mobility plans. Their intention was to terminate employment as soon as other opportunities appeared on the horizon, either on the basis of *occupational mobility plans* or because of *migration to another country*. Their availability to engage in temporary jobs, which often did not match their skills or were perceived as demeaning to them, sometimes appeared to be led by the urgent need to accumulate financial resources, either to support themselves and their families back home, or else to sustain future migratory projects.

A clear strategic plan at the intersection of upward mobility in the labour market and further migration plans was apparent in the case of the part-time worker employed in the restaurant of a luxury hotel in East London. As earlier discussed, despite being *relatively settled* in the capital, Cinzia expressed the idea of making the most of her work experience in the hospitality sector by *investing the skills* she acquired as a hotel employee to establish her own activity. This social mobility plan corresponded with the idea of (re-)migrating to her husband's country (Jamaica), thus realising the 'double dream' of social mobility through professional development and that of a successful 'return migration'.

The Lithuanian worker met through one of the agencies considered temp work in hospitality to be only an *initial step* in her migration plan, whereas her true objective was to find secretarial work (her 'real job' back in her own country). In this woman's plans, this step forward would only be possible once her English skills had improved sufficiently. In Diana's as in other cases, *language proficiencies* rather than technical skills are perceived as the most important means to reach *upward social and occupational mobility through migration*. This expresses the migrants' *awareness* of the importance of social or 'soft' skills (rather than technical or sector-based ones) as the most effective instruments to accumulate social capital within the current context of labour market

competitiveness. Diana, differently from her colleagues from outside the EU, could at least continue to develop her strategies of ‘capitalisation of citizenship’ (Rose 1999)⁸¹ by cultivating her cultural and social capital on the basis of the acquired freedom of movement in the UK.

A certain degree of flexibility, detachment from work and considering quitting the hotel job in order to ‘move forward’ does not only characterise the young women coming from the new Accession countries. Some of the long-term hotel workers and relatively settled migrants also shared a *strong determination* to climb the career ladder or even change job:

Three years ago I went to study to become a *child carer* so now I am just waiting to finish. I already got my NVQ 3...It is better than hotels, because of money *increments*... I think *I am good to switch*. By next year I will be working with children. Just for me *to finish* with the hotel (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

As emerged from the interview, this over-50-year-old Nigerian woman’s career prospects are flourishing after long years of hard work and struggles in a hotel in central London. Care work is something *more rewarding, better paid* and possibly *more fulfilling* for Priscilla. She engaged in evening courses for four years in order to obtain the required qualification and find a *way out* of her current job. Child-care also represents a job that may better reflect her *personal interests* or even a *vocation*, which crucially corresponds with what she considers her major *social role*: being a mother. Ironically, she desires this role in the face of *legal constraints on her freedom of movement*, which have impeded her from seeing her children back in Nigeria for many years. The testimony of the Nigerian housekeeper is meaningful in that it shows how strategies of *quitting* also occur in the case of more settled migrants and among workers with relatively secure and permanent contract but who are unsatisfied with their current working conditions. This may confirm an *intrinsic sense of transiency* in low-paid hospitality jobs. The desire for occupational mobility emerges across different subjective experiences, reflecting various degrees and persisting forms of self-realisation *through work and affective life*.

⁸¹ By ‘capitalisation of citizenship’ Rose meant that process of strategic and selective investment by migrants within a regime of re-stratification of humanity in which neoliberal economic and social reform involve the access to the right to circulate according is accorded on the basis of the personal ownership of certain assets or capitals (Rose 1999).

Similarly to Priscilla, the middle-aged Brazilian maid from the hotel in West London also identified 'care work' or domestic service as a possible advance from her current occupation. But in her case any further *strategic move* in the labour market remains within the framework of a *temporary migration plan*:

I think I will change job after vacation, I am thinking to do something like 'housekeeper-nanny', it is *convenient* and I can work with families in residence. So it is good for *improving my English* and it is a quieter job... Anyway, it will be something *for a short time*, I am thinking about moving to Spain' (Cecilia, female, white other, Brazil, 9 months in London, casual, chambermaid).

For this Brazilian woman, the possibility of working as a care or domestic worker in the private sector is perceived as an improvement in various regards: financial rewards, the supposedly higher quality of the relationship with the employer and, not least, the possibility for her to *acquire language skills*. However, as she reveals, her intention to move to another job is also conceived of as a short-term solution. While Cecilia assumes that the work in a private residence will be less hard than her current one in the hotel, emphasising only the advantages of a more 'personal' and supposedly 'humane' relationship with the employer in the domestic space of the home, her imaginary of a better job sustains her determination to escape the difficult situation in her current work. However, following subsequent encounters with Cecilia I saw that after a year she was still employed in the same hotel, occupying the same low-paid and difficult work position, and her language skills did not really improve. *Gender constraints* as well as different access to *spatial* and *occupational mobility* were inter-related factors shaping the differences between her story and that of her colleague, another Brazilian migrant, yet *male* and *younger*, who used to work in the same hotel but relatively quickly managed to find another job as a driver for a wine company (Ethnographic diary, informal interviews with Cecilia and Corrado, cafe, central London). The fact that Cecilia was forced to go through exploitative practices of informal recruitment in the initial phase of immigration in London and to accept highly precarious housing arrangements because of her *uncertain migration status* must have profoundly impacted on her ongoing sense of vulnerability, which in turn induced her to 'remain stuck' in the same poorly treated and paid job.

On the one hand therefore mobility can be interpreted as a powerful instrument in the hands of temporary workers by triggering the contradictions of turnover and jeopardising employers'

reliance on a supposedly endless labour supply, and more generally challenging the assumption about migrants' availability to hard and unpredictable work. On the other hand though, the *very access to mobility* for migrant workers appears highly *stratified*. Differences in the *effectiveness* and *sustainability* of the strategic use of flexibility depended on a series of elements, including a relative financial stability, the existence of work and family's support in the country of origin, and the relative facility in *accessing spatial and occupational mobility*, including future migratory plans and their feasibility. The latter can indeed involve not only the migrants directly in question but also members of their 'transnational families'. Here is where a further resource of transnational mobility may emerge. For instance, the dialogue with another housekeeper who has worked for many years in a hotel in West London and who is one of the most active members of the trade union branch, underlined how her migration to London and her long lasting job enabled her to maintain four children back in Nigeria:

-And how often have you gone back to your children? I haven't seen them for 16 years! Because I haven't got a definitive leave... I am still waiting! I talk with them on the phone. I can stay, I can work *but not move*. I cannot go to Paris, I cannot go to Holland...neither to Italy! (Priscilla, female, black, Nigeria, 17 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

The transnational practices of the housemaid from Nigeria are a powerful example of how global 'chains of care' (Hochschild 2000) in particular function across national borders despite the woman's inability to see her children for a long period of time. Indeed, Priscilla, after fleeing her country, has not yet been 'conceded' the 'indefinite leave to remain' from the Government and her mobility outside the UK appears highly *constrained*. Immobility in the country of immigration becomes the other side of her transnational status, and the 'condition' for gaining the right to work in London. Thus, while adding an important gender dimension to the definition of being transnational, by highlighting the *demanding practices* of 'transnational mothering' (Erel 2009) spanning large geographical distances, the informant also discloses the multiple paradoxes involved in the 'transnational status' of women workers. Far from implying a capacity to move between countries or necessarily a status of mobility, the relationships emerging from this story constitute a 'virtual' transnational space where concrete economic transactions actually take place and the tasks of social reproduction are accomplished. Furthermore, her transnational practices are not determined only through mere economic relationships (i.e. through remittances) but involve the active and affective participation of Priscilla in the planning of her children's future. The main sense of *realisation at work* for this woman is based on the fact that she can support her children's *occupational mobility* in the country of origin (e.g. paying the university fees for her son to become

a doctor). It is of note, however, that current practices of transnational support will in turn engender *new paths of mobility planning* for Priscilla's children:

-Are your children looking for a job in Nigeria?

The doctor is thinking to move to the US or Canada...When they'll start to work there I'll feel relieved

Women's migration not only appears fundamental to support the reproduction costs of a whole family back home, but also to stimulate and sustain the upward social mobility (through the reproduction of their status of migrants) of its young members. The ways in which recently arrived migrants relate to their temporary settlement and work in turn profoundly shape their transnational ties and desires for mobility. Apart from the sphere of family support, the gender specificities of the working experiences and fantasies around movement by these transient and precarious workers appear to have significant implications of their mobility for hindering/stimulating their workplace, civic and political engagement.

5.1.9 The different experiences of temporariness and mobility

It is therefore important to highlight the differences in migrants' perceptions and their actual experience of temporariness. In other words, rather than simply 'celebrating' mobility power and the 'counter-use' that migrants can make of labour market flexibility and temporary employment, gender specificities and other axes of differentiation contribute to shaping some migrants' relatively 'successful' use of flexibility. Some of the women in particular, although initially emphasising the temporary nature of their work and migration as the result of a strategic choice, often lamented having eventually 'got stuck' in the same job situation for longer than they expected. While initially stressing the advantages of agency work, the young Lithuanian woman working for agencies in the catering sector expressed clear awareness of the bad conditions of employment in temporary jobs and how eventually the initial advantages proved disappointing. Despite having a clear career plan, linked to her migration project, and notwithstanding her relatively privileged migration status as a A8 migrant able to move freely and work legally in the UK, she appeared to be overwhelmingly frustrated by the constraints of temp work, by the way she was treated by the agencies, the process of skills degradation she was subject to and the degrading forms of 'de-personalisation' still involved in these forms of temp work. When I met Diana after several months, she was still in

employment as an agency worker, although this had been interrupted by relatively long periods of unemployment. Her fear that ‘these temp jobs can indeed become permanent’ seemed to have materialised. Nonetheless, registering in different agencies was a strategy for Diana to be able to escape particularly harsh employment conditions insofar as she could quit jobs where she faced ‘disrespect’ (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Diana, female, white other, Lithuania, agency worker, catering shift at ‘the River Hospital’).

Another case of ‘occupational immobility’ was reported by the Polish organiser of the hotel campaign. The community organiser was impressed by the story of a Romanian woman who worked in a hotel as a maid and encountered various barriers to progress:

Sometimes she had to do 12 days in a row as part of the upgrading test and *she is still casual!* After three years in the same hotel! (...) *She thinks this is the way*, she does not get the idea that if she really wants to make money ... she should not stay in a job where you earn £6 an hour!... looking for another job, speaking good English... You know, some are just *lacking the skills of moving forward* and trying to pursue a career’ (Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign)

The respondent not only provides a powerful example of the poor career structures of the hotel sector and the way in which ‘privileged’ migrants from Eastern Europe can remain *trapped* in precarious jobs. The campaign organiser, herself a relatively recent migrant from the Accession countries, seemed to imply that the woman *was not capable* (‘lacking the skills’) of leaving behind the exploitative at her work and ‘moving forward’. To the assumed naïve or lazy attitude of the Romanian woman, the young organiser counterposes her own story of immigration in London, to show how *self-improvement* and *ambition* are key elements in achieving professional and social advancement:

I came here when I was only 20, just finished my degree. I came *to improve* my English, travelling, *to get an experience*, meeting people... *to explore*. *I never thought about saving money*. It is really difficult to save... unless you completely renounce having a *social life*, but then you can’t take advantages of all the things going on in London...but this is what migrants do: they stick together that is why they say ‘no I do not like London so much, work it is too hard’ Well... London is such an amazing place! If you like *you can enjoy yourself all the time* (...) It is about *your expectations*...If you have *the plan*, something more than earning money, you can work for the catering, but meanwhile making some courses, *improve yourself*’ (Agnieska, female, white other, Poland, 9 years in London, community organiser, hotel workers campaign)

Agnieska's testimony highlights a series of aspects that challenge the stereotype of the 'migrant worker' from Eastern Europe as merely economically oriented or as disposable to work under exploitative conditions on the basis of strict saving plans. At the same time her understanding of personal realisation, as part of the migration plan, is overwhelmingly *voluntaristic*, imbued with the ideology of the 'enterprising self' (du Gay 1996). The opportunity for career making and self-improvement is made dependent exclusively on the *will* and *determination* of the individual, the 'neo-liberal individual' continuously re-inventing herself in order to remain *employable*. This image of the subject resembles a strongly calculating, self-centred and self-aware competitive subject.⁸² Yet, once again, the project of 'self-improvement' is not confined to the sphere of work and productivity, nor does productivity seem to completely overlap with consumption⁸³. Not only working hard to accumulate savings, but rather *cultivating a social life*, appears in itself as a valuable resource which at the same time reflects the desire for other kinds of personal enrichment and self-development through education, human encounters and new experiences.

5.1.10 From mobility power to mobility practices

This understanding of 'mobility practices' as partly *transcending financial concerns* has been highlighted in recent research on the lives of 'Antipodean transnationals' in London (Conradson and Latham 2005b). In Conradson and Latham's account describing a group of New Zealanders in London, their everyday lives and their relationship *to work*, the balance between 'material' and 'experiential gain', between family and the self, is shown to be 'rather differently weighted - as was the fidelity with which they nurtured an attachment to a single original 'home'

⁸² The notion of the deployment of techniques of power which *produce* 'the self as governance' have most importantly been developed by Rose (1989) and by du Gay (1996). According to these authors, the subject becomes 'enterprising' in the sense of acquiring *cultural capital* in order to gain employment while the responsibility to find employment is ultimately left with the individual (cit. in Skeggs 2004a: 78).

⁸³ Although the idea of 'enjoying your self all the time' drawing from the apparently infinite resources that London offers, points to the centrality of consumerism as key in some migrants' understanding of social mobility.

(300). Their mobility is described as ‘intimately bound up with practices of self-realisation and self-fashioning’ (ibid.), which are still somewhat related to the economic sphere but transcend direct financial concerns. More broadly, the literature in migration studies and transnationalism offers a very different understanding from that of labour process and industrial relations with regard to the *practices of mobility* of contemporary trans-migrants. Their attitudes toward space and work are to be understood amidst the emergence of ‘de-traditionalised’ ways of living following patterns of ‘individualisation’⁸⁴, as part of the increasingly ‘complex, fluid and reflexive project of forging a self’ (Conradson and Latham 2005b: 292). These authors wish to demonstrate the importance of ‘the plurality of ways through which such mobile forms of dwelling are configured’, positioning themselves in the tradition of research on migration such as those by Nikos Papastergiadis (2000), Michael Peter Smith (2001) and Aiwaha Ong (1999). These authors highlighted how social relations ordered through mobility have their own specificity as compared to those structured around ‘emplacement or relative stasis’ (Conradson and Latham 2005b: 300).

Other research recently drew from Conradson and Latham’s notion of ‘middling transnationals’ to identify the ‘transnational lifestyle’ of a group of migrants who, while coming from wealthy families and well-educated, develop a new kind of relationship with their own *middle class identity* and *social mobility* through their *experience of migration*. In the study of McDowell et al. (2008b) concerning Indian men working in hospitality in London, their need to compensate for the *incongruence* between their *occupational expectations* and their current jobs in the country of immigration, leads them to *augment* other aspects of their gender and class identity as a way to being more socially mobile. In this particular case they focused on the outcomes and *consumables of work* rather than on its content, and on maintaining their *class* and *masculinity* back in India through the opportunity for independence offered by having financial savings in the UK. This research’s acknowledgement of the impossibility of reducing migrants’ mobilities to mere economic drives is particularly insightful for the present study as it also highlights the existing constraints to

⁸⁴ ‘As understood by Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, ‘individualisation’ does not mean a process in which individuals have somehow become decoupled from social institutions, but rather it is intended to highlight how the state and other institutions increasingly assume an active and self-responsible individual as the central organising unit of society (Conradson and Latham 2005a: 292).

migrants' mobility. Migrants' economic and class background, and its intersection with gender and other aspects of their social status, appeared indeed to be of great importance in defining *their spatial strategies*. For instance, the new Points Based System, by requiring a higher level of education as a condition to enter the UK, makes it much more difficult for women to obtain work visas in the hotel sector, given the overall lower educational opportunities for women in India (McDowell et al. 2008b). This creates a further 'gendered filter' to select those who are entitled to live and work in the UK.

It becomes apparent that a limit of some of the literature on migrants' transnational practices of mobility lies in that it goes so far as to assume the infinite adaptability and flexibility of migrants, while at the same time reproducing an uncritical view of the British immigration and employment regime, for instance when migrants in London are described as 'freely exploiting the opportunities offered by de-regulated and permissive employment laws' (Conradson and Latham 2005: 300a). In the study of New Zealanders in London, the analysis of their mobility practices therefore appears to be biased by the unspoken class identity of these same subjects. Their adaptability, their freedom of movement and their *capacity to return* to their country may rather be explained precisely on the basis of their status as '*middling* transnationals' (ibid.). Their *middle-class background* can in fact be considered a key factor determining their attitudes toward work, precarity and mobility. Their *transiency* appears to be particularly forged by a desire to acquiring experiential and educational benefits, *rather than simply material gains*.

At the same time it seems more and more difficult to distinguish between the sphere of non-economic interests and that of necessity. The embodied stories and desires of the recently arrived transnational migrants identify a sense of precarity that cuts across and *complexifies strict definitions of class*. In any cases, unlike their relatively long-term and settled colleagues, the attitudes towards work expressed in the cynicism and detachment of the young Brazilians and Eastern European migrants encountered in the agencies signal a straightforward strategy of *appropriating the space of temporary labour*. This highlights the 'positive aspects of turnover' for these migrants beyond the workplace and their control over the labour process.

Other strategies of resistance arose among the participants in the study apart from the terrain of 'mobility power', criss-crossing the various categories of 'new' and 'old', established and temporary migrant workers.

5.2 The social character of hospitality and temporary work: relationality and diversity as sources of resistance

It is apparent how both labour studies on mobility power and transnational migration literature on migrants' mobility practices tend to *individualise* these practices, ultimately downplaying their impact in terms of social transformation. While this reflects a certain understanding of politics and political action, in order to unpack the possibilities arising from the new social composition of the service industry it is necessary to explore the forms of sociality and collective resistance that appear *despite* the high turnover, fragmentation and the individualisation of working lives in this sector. Besides the individual's attitude towards work, what other resources are employed by low-paid migrants in order to 'sustain' their temporariness? How is *collectivity* perceived and re-configured in these highly stratified and individualised workplaces? How do migrants respond to the precariousness of their working lives *in relation to others*, considering the particular and multifarious character of 'hospitality work'?

5.2.1 Bodies and affectivity in hospitality work

It has been considered how 'hospitality work' in itself includes a wide range of tasks involving both *manual* activities and more *intangible* forms of labour, which can be termed 'aesthetic' (Witz et al. 2003) or 'affective labour' (Hardt and Negri 2001). It has been considered how 'aesthetic labour' has the advantage of recognising the impossibility to separate the mental and bodily skills involved in interactive service work (Chapter 1).

In contrast the strand of literature exploring directly the implications for resistance of major changes in the nature and organisation of work described 'affective labour' as that which 'involves the production and manipulation of affects and requires (virtual or actual) human contact, labour in the bodily mode' (Hardt and Negri 2001: 292). These authors insisted that 'the labour is immaterial even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion' (ibid.). This definition of affective and immaterial labour has been criticised especially for its assumption that these forms of work were paradigmatic of a new process of production which, relying on workers' supposedly *enhanced subjectivity and autonomy*, would naturally 'liberate' resources for cooperation and collective resistance to capital (Dowling et al. 2007: 3). Critics put into question the claim that affective labour entailed some sort

of 'in-built tendency to communism' (ibid.), arguing that the autonomy that new managerial strategies in the service sector may aim to valorise does *not necessarily* produce subversive forms of resistance.

Authors such as Carls, researching practices of resistance of 'affective workers' in the retail industry, illustrated the *ambivalent nature* of the effects that the new managerial strategies valorising affective and immaterial work tend to have on workers' subjectivities. *Mixed* forms of Taylorist and participatory management strategies appear to be dominant in certain sections of the service industries, with managers' control and workers' coping strategies interacting in ways that ultimately *both limit and produce autonomy* and/or a *sense of collectivity* among employees (Carls 2007). As emerged in the case of the labour process involved in waiting shifts in the large hotel's restaurant in central London, *hybrid forms* of management are indeed apparent in hospitality work.

Tracing the historical development of Taylorism and Fordist production, Braverman (1974) (whose book initiated interest in Labour Process Theory), remained himself trapped within and replicated the *body/mind separation* by which he argued the new management techniques subtracted autonomy from the workers over the direction of the labour process. Braverman himself ended up casting the body as a less relevant aspect of workplace resistance and thus could not predict how management techniques would have increasingly tended to 'harness and commodify bodily capacity and features, including the face, bodily comportment, dress and voice of workers' (Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2100: 228). In this regard recent research in sociology of work has illuminated how, exactly when intangible forms of work become increasingly central to capitalist valorisation in the service sector, *embodied labour* becomes also more visible and more central within the labour process (Wolkowitz 2006, Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010).

A second important critique of the immaterial labour thesis countered Negri and Hardt's claim of the 'immeasurability' of work under the 'post-Fordist regime' drawing from her experiences as a waitress (Dowling 2007). Emma Dowling refers to the work of Caffentiz (2007) to highlight the relevance of physical and embodied labour in the overall 'production of value'. In this regard, the present research also puts into question the interpretation of the affective work involved in the hospitality sector as a type of 'immaterial labour'. Indeed the different forms of work performed even within a single hotel (whether involving explicit 'affective' and emotional aspects as in direct interaction with customers, or highly embodied work as in the case of traditionally 'manual' jobs such as cleaning, or making beds), entail a diverse range of 'skills' that *blur the*

boundaries between material and immaterial work. Similarly, their ‘products’ are not strictly definable in either term.

Still, the affective work involved in service industries entails a more expressive and *social kind* of labour than that of the assembly line, and this does engender changes in workers’ subjectivities and the possibility of resistance. But it is necessary to discern these developments from the details of ‘day to day labouring practices’ (Dowling et al. 2007: 2), within the interstices of the process of de- and re-composition of difference within the workforce. These *critical approaches to affective labour* appear to share with the original thesis the idea that a major shift has effectively occurred in patterns of employment and work organisation, and that these reverberate in terms of workers’ practices of resistance, thus *reconfiguring* the forms of their political organisation. Ultimately, the increased ‘reliance’ of capital on the subjectivity and autonomy of living labour can only intensify the *constitutive tension* between them. Labour *always* produces an ‘excess’ in the process of reproducing capitalist relations, thus threatening capital itself as well as capital’s tendency to recuperate this excess (Dowling et al. 2007: 6).

As regards the identification of the practices and possibilities of resistance for hospitality workers, it became clear how it is the *social dimension* of the work performed in this sector that engenders particular acts of informal resistance. Therefore, rather than exploring the potential for resistance *of emotional labour* understood primarily as a ‘front-desk’, *interactive* occupation involving a direct rapport with guests, the notions of ‘affective labour’ and ‘affective resistance’ may instead be employed to explore the different *relations* at play in highly exploitative service work environments, and especially those *between workers*. How do low-paid migrant hospitality workers make use of the social relationalities involved in their work, their affects and emotionality, to cope, resist and transform exploitative conditions and forms of individualisation within and outside the labour process?

5.2.2 *Emotional demands or affective resistance?*

The idea of a *strategic use of emotions* has recently been used to interpret the ways in which workers can respond to adversarial and difficult situations in service occupations (Hughes 2005, Karczynski 2003, McDowell et al. 2007). Hughes (2005) developed the notion of ‘emotional demand’ to suggest that workers, once encouraged to bring their emotions into their work, are able

to use 'emotional intelligence' to draw management's attention to their negative experiences with other colleagues. The Jamaican hotel maid that I met at the union branch tried to resolve an issue of discrimination against her by a fellow worker through establishing a *direct emotional relation* with the manager, asking for support against her colleague's racist behaviour. McDowell et al. (2007), in their analysis of the segmented workers' subjectivities in London hotels, draw from Hughes' argument to describe how the *demands on* and *expectations* of 'emotional workers' introduce disruptive elements to the rationality of the model of organisational effectiveness. This also challenges traditional forms of oppression with emotional underpinnings such as sexism, racism, lack of compassion and exploitation (Hughes 2005: 616).

While the example of the Jamaican woman seems to fit well with this interpretation, showing how emotions can be invoked and *strategically mobilised* by workers in a context of a racially stratified and socially 'tense' workplace, the chambermaid's action does not necessarily correspond with that of the 'emotional worker'. The overall managerial discourse shaping the labour process in the hotels did appear to be characterised by the mobilisation of workers' emotional engagement in the delivery of a 'high quality service', (including that of workers in 'back of house' jobs such as housekeeping). However, the aforementioned understanding of emotional demands reproduces the idea of resistance as merely *reflecting* management strategies. While employees are 'potentially more able to exercise agency' once invited to bring their emotions to work, they also do so by subscribing to the very same managerial rationality to which they are subject (Hughes 2005: 617). While this approach highlights the *internalisation* of managerial strategies on the part of the workers and their preference for *individualised forms of negotiation* with superiors, in the research it was apparent how the use of 'emotionality' and 'affectivity' *exceeds* managerial strategies involved in the control of service workers by assuming a *relational form*.

For instance, when I worked as a 'temp' in the restaurant of a luxury hotel in central London, just before the beginning of the shift two Eastern European girls supported each other through their 'emotionality' and 'fragility', strategically using an argument about lacking the 'proper skills' in order to *withdraw from work*. The two young women, realising that they were not able to carry out the assignment, eventually managed *to leave the workplace* by appealing to the understanding of the maître. Thus they *reversed* the rhetoric about being a 'real, experienced waiter' previously employed by the management to terrify the agency workers and make them more

submissive and *productive*, instead using it to their own advantage. In this case both the agency and the restaurant manager failed to ensure productivity, by pushing the workers to perform *as if* they were professionals. The manager was unable to stand up to the reasons given for their refusal to work and blamed the job agency's mistake in the process of recruitment. The management's assumption of 'maximum disposability' on the part of agency workers proved to be wrong, and the whole work process was damaged by the sudden withdrawal of two members of the waiting staff.

Going beyond an understanding of the use of the body as a mere survival strategy in a particular occupation, affective labour and affective resistance may be re-thought drawing from those perspectives in sociology of work that, by focusing on the 'reflexive relations through which the body is constructed' (Wolkowitz 2006: 173) do not consider it in isolation but as positioned within 'changes in employment relations, labour processes and the experiences of individual workers' (ibid. 174).

There were other instances of informal affective resistance by temp workers in the hotel restaurant which did not directly jeopardise the labour process or the delivery of the service, but primarily provided tactics for *coping with the humiliating and demanding* treatment by the maître. These tactics were forged *through the social interactions* involved in waiting work, where the delivery of the service is carried out in *team*, as well as in the context of *work breaks between the courses*. The numerous and relatively long breaks in the 'back-door spaces' of the hotel restaurant during the shift, as well as the time spent together bidding for work in the agency 'hiring halls', offered important *spaces* for the workers to develop forms of cooperation and *sociability*. In these spaces they could complain about the behaviour of the managers and find ways to *support* each other and share information and 'tips' to *get through* the shift and have it renewed.

This case also demonstrates how the *intermediation* of the staffing agency at the core of the subcontracted employment relationship, instead of merely fragmenting the workforce by strengthening individualisation, can also favour *solidarity* among workers. Besides *weakening loyalty* toward the employer, the existence of the third party agency may expand the spaces for the workers to express 'off-stage' their anger, fear and frustration in the presence of 'a willing audience of colleagues', all elements that have been highlighted in other contexts (Sturdy and Fineman 2001: 146).

Furthermore, when I was dispatched by an agency to work for a catering company at the Business Centre in central London, the *relational dimension* and the *tacit mutual support* between co-workers represented crucial channels for *slowing down* the intensive patterns of work and finding a certain degree of *pleasure* in the work done despite mistreatment by management. Again, opportunities to socialise in ‘off-stage areas’ appeared a crucial terrain for building *a sense of commonality* and developing *collective strategies* against the managers’ harassing practices and the burdens of the work. For instance my co-workers often used ‘affective strategies’ to escape specific tasks and refused to follow certain orders by playing one manager off against another, or else the instructions of managers against those of the customers. These tactics sometimes had the effect of slowing down the work process and, for the individual workers, *extending the periods of rest* (essential in an eight hour-long shift, during which the staff was required to stand and which included only one *unpaid* lunch break). It is worth highlighting that the overall organisation of work was more de-centralised in the case of this catering service when confronted with the highly automated and measured, ‘assembly line-style’ of the hotel restaurant. While spaces for sociability were common to both, the very patterns of the labour process allowed the workers more independence and control over the direction of work in the second case, potentially giving the workers more opportunities for *collective strategising*. In this regard, the research of Korczynski (2003) on workers in the hospitality, call centre and nursing sectors emphasised the emergence of ‘communities of coping’, describing them in terms of ‘collective emotional labour’ to identify the ways in which workers turn to each other *to deal with the pain* occasioned by abusive customers and employers.

5.2.3 Cynicism, irony, dis-affection...and a strange sense of equality

Similarly to Korczynski’s research on call centres (2003), ‘communities of coping’ made workplace relations less amenable to direct managerial control in the case of the hotel restaurant, especially in that the workers *shared a culture of cynicism* toward the customers and managers. My Brazilian workmates warned me about the fact that the boss was ‘very loud’: ‘he shouts at people, treats people badly and sometimes even beats them...’(Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Felix, non white other, Brazil, 2 years in London, casual worker, shift at the hotel restaurant ‘Lush Cafe’).

But my co-workers ultimately *laughed about it*. They developed forms of *resistance through distance* and ‘subjective distancing’ (Fleming and Spicer 2003), responding with *cynicism and irony* to the humiliating, intimidating and at times explicitly violent behaviour of the manager. While workers’ cynical distance described in Korczynski’s (2003) study on call centres challenged some specific practices by managers (for example their attempts to introduce a culture of individual competitiveness and service), in the case of the waitresses and waiters at the London hotel restaurant cynicism seemed to represent an *overall approach towards work* for the whole group. It served as a means of *mitigating or getting by* the harsh and exploitative conditions at work, without even attempting to change any organisational or disciplinary aspect of the job imposed by the management.

Korczynski acknowledges how strategies of emotional support can paradoxically help to *maintain* the ‘fragile social order’ of the service workplace, by providing the service workers means of *surviving* the tensions between managers, customers and co-workers. Furthermore, understanding resistance in terms of mutual ‘emotional support’ between co-workers (Bolton and Boyd 2003) risks reproducing an understanding of ‘coping strategies’ as an alternative, yet *supposedly less efficient* and merely *defensive*, form of resistance. Other research exploring the dynamics at play ‘at the level of affects’ amongst shop assistants in large retail companies (Carls 2007), has also emphasised how ‘reference to affective relations’ can eventually *favour managerial control* as it results in

‘a channelling of conflicts, entailing a disguise of structural power positions and contradictions (...) Reliance on restricted friendship-based collective support networks turns out to represent more a means of survival in the face of individualising management strategies than a sign of new perspectives of autonomous and spontaneous cooperation among affective workers.’ (Carls 2007: 56)

However, in the case of the agency workers in the luxury restaurant, their affective relations at work were more powerful, involving larger networks than those already existing among friends or migrants of the same nationality. These were shaped through their *everyday experiences at work (and in the agency)*, partly on the basis of the workers’ *common ‘migrant status’*. Furthermore, and paradoxically, the very *anonymity*, the relative de-personalisation of recruitment practices and the homologation produced by the rationalisation of the labour process seemed to produce a sense of unity and equality among the workers:

...here *we are all the same*. That is also why it looks closer to a factory or a camp...the central logic seems to be the exploitation of labour through the levelling of differences, the obliteration of personalities... crucial here as part of the strategies of blackmail and humiliation. Maybe some will be treated worse *but nobody can be treated better*. (Ethnographic diary, shift at hotel restaurant 'Lush Cafe')

It is therefore apparent how *this strange sense of equality* among agency workers is embedded and made valuable by the very logic of management in the exploitation of subcontracted and unorganised work. The ways in which temps in the hotel restaurant employed relationality to build forms of mutual support may show how even highly *fragmented* and *automated* labour processes under 'neo-Taylorist' reorganisation retain significant aspects of sociability and a sense of collectivism. Based on a *shared sense* of cynical distance, this can help achieve *practical improvements* (either by facing particularly harsh conditions, mitigating intense patterns of work or resisting verbal and physical mistreatment by the management), which are *no* 'less effective' than supposedly 'stronger' versions of resistance. Rather than a direct means of resistance to management control in the form of collective emotional labour, for recent young migrants these forms of sociability and relationality seem to represent both a strategy to *get through* difficult conditions at work *and* a resource for *building networks*, which may be of value *outside the workplace*. In this way, social experiences at work become sites for the accumulation of 'social capital' *and further mobility*, which are not necessarily re-invested in the search for new jobs.

Although temporary and other subcontracted forms of labour in the hospitality sector undeniably have a tendency to produce individualisation and contribute to the weakening and fragmentation of workers' subjectivities (Krasas Rogers 2000), service work, however temporary, may also offer new spaces of sociability and relationality between co-workers. This happens beyond the immediate valorisation of their labour, configuring a different understanding of the process of 'creating subjectivities' starting from their embodiment and materiality (Blackman et al. 2008).

In order to unpack the development of migrant workers' forms of sociability and affective resistance, the *embodied nature of hospitality work* needs to be considered in greater depth.

5.2.4 *Embodied relationality as a source of resistance*

Feminist scholars have criticised the disembodied notion of ‘emotional labour’ and the forms of resistance derived from it because they neglect the dimension of the body, making it *invisible* or *separated* from the emotional dimensions that service work involves. While Hochschild’s (1983) original definition of ‘emotional labour’ already acknowledged the embodied dimension of workers’ affects and display exploited by employers in customer services, the literature that followed tended rather to highlight aspects of emotional labour related to intelligence and cognition. In contrast the research of Wolkowitz (2006) bringing together sociology of work and sociology of the body importantly highlighted the *interplay* of emotional and embodied experiences of workers employed in interactive customer service, whereas one can witness the ‘increasing mindfulness of physical activities and the physical exhaustion that ‘mental’ and ‘emotional’ labour can entail’ (Wolkowitz 2006: 177). The assumed distinction between bodily and immaterial aspects of interactive and emotional work, especially if saturated with racism, can contribute to obscuring the aspects of affective work involved in many of those jobs traditionally considered as merely manual. It is apparent that, in jobs as varied as waiting and cleaning within the hospitality industry, the nature of work cuts across the boundaries between manual and affective, material and immaterial labour. Thus, as against the tendency to attribute an ‘excessive’ capacity of socialising exclusively to the so called ‘creative class’ of precarious professionals, this capacity can also be found in those jobs normally undervalued because they are considered manual or ‘low skilled’ (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). The deployment of elements of embodied affectivity and sociability does not necessarily entail awareness, collective or ‘hard’ forms of resistance. Rather, affective elements are part of forms of ‘unintended subjectivities’, which create changes through people’s everyday constitutive ‘acts’ (Isin 2008), including their everyday acts at work.

Again, the bodily and sociable nature of waiting work was particularly clear in the dynamics at work in the hotel’s restaurant. *Physical proximity* among workers, both during the long hours of recruitment in the agency’s office and in the performance of the work itself, seemed to facilitate informal communication and knowledge sharing among them. This engendered a feeling of ‘complicity’ and ‘closeness’ which sometimes led to small gestures of solidarity towards the ‘newly arrived’ to help them get through the shift. The attention to the body in its aesthetics, its hygiene, its performativity, although an instrument of managerial disciplinary practices, ultimately favours a sense of closeness and commonality among workers and a clear demarcation of their ‘space’ of

proximity as opposed to the distance and detachment expressed towards the managers. In the Business Centre the conditions for 'collective strategising' to survive the shift drew on a series of bodily and affective gestures, glimpses and codes circulating between costumers and workers, workers and supervisors and especially among the workers themselves. Also in the restaurant of the luxury hotel where I worked as an agency worker, the fact that servicing the table had to be done in team, certainly contributed to enhance a sense of *bodily closeness* and various opportunities of cooperation between the relatively un-expert waiters and waiters employed for the shift. These forms of cooperation and resistance to the exploitative patterns of the work happen despite the almost Tayloristic and strictly controlled arrangement of the labour process. An account of emotional resistance that does not explicitly acknowledge the dimension of the body may overlook what bodies *do* in terms of creating affections and possibilities to experiment various tactics of resistance and informal networks of solidarity.

5.2.5 The pleasure of sociable work, or the social aspects of precariousness

One of Carls' arguments is that affects not only provide a further tool of management control, but that they are part of a process of 'disaffection' and a clear 'boundary-drawing' between work and life on the part of the workers (Carls 2007). By distinguishing between work and leisure time, workers shield themselves from management intrusions into their emotional attachments. These practices can engender a withdrawal of responsibility and non-compliance with certain management orders. In this sense subscribing to a 'rather traditional work ethic' of service integrity to fulfil one's own duties, and upholding the idea of a 'fair exchange between employee and employer' does not imply the internalisation of the company culture or workers' identification with it. Rather, these can be interpreted as expressions of the workers' own interest in 'doing a good job' with regard to customer service. The 'pleasure in the work done well' can therefore cohabit with an overall sense of dis-identification from the company, as illustrated by the case of Cinzia. As reported in the interview with this *part-time worker*, her complacency through subscription to a general principle of hospitality and deference towards the guest did not involve a particular sense of loyalty towards the hotel company that employed her. On the contrary she tended to place herself at a distance from the corporate landscape and expressed her will to withdraw her work at any time when the opportunity to quit (and leave London) would have arisen.

Furthermore, the aforementioned example of the Portuguese agency worker, the ‘hyper-active temp’, and his understanding of ‘being a professional’ may be particularly emblematic of the ways in which both the *sociable* and the *temporary nature* of hospitality work appear intertwined and engender possibilities for resistance and escape, both in mobility and ‘effort power’ modes (Smith 2006). The social facets of the flexible nature of the work allow him to meet different people across different workplaces and thus open up contradictory spaces for *self-realisation* and *fulfilment*. These in turn seem to be located *outside rather than within the job*: although work itself provides valuable resources for building a full social life, this ‘long term-agency worker’ highlighted how important it was for him to *separate* work from leisure time. However, distance from a particular employer or company through this ‘boundary-drawing’ exercise can eventually have the paradoxical effect of favouring the continuation of poor working conditions, for example when it appears more as a ‘mental opting out’ rather than a real disengagement from work (Carls 2007: 55; see also Fleming and Spicer 2003).

In any case, in the example of temporary workers, *disaffection from work* seems to assume a particular connotation. This paradoxically operates in tandem with the *social aspects of work*, which, in this case, are not particular to the nature of hospitality or service work involving interaction with customers. The ‘power of sociability’ derives, rather, from the relationships developed *between workers* and can be reinforced *across a multiplicity of workplaces* with significant proportions of other migrant, mobile and temporary workers experiencing similar conditions. Again the experience of agency working in the ‘Lush Cafe’ provided important insights.

My workmates relatively new to the world of hospitality seemed to use the new relationships built within the workplace and extended beyond it, in various ways. These included the *sharing* of useful *knowledge* related to the actual performance of the work, possibilities to find other jobs or register with agencies ensuring better working conditions or *change industrial sector* all together. Indeed most of the young migrants encountered in the agencies had a range of different skills to adapt to jobs other than those in hotels and catering or eventually wished to return to some form of training or start anew academic and specialising courses. At the same time proper moments of sociability such as home parties, common dinners and events of *informal conviviality* across the temporary accommodations of my co-workers provided them with a safe space to share and express their frustration, to recover from the pain of their multiple work shifts, and share *material and affective resources* in spaces outside the workplace (Ethnographic diary, the ‘Brazilian party’ in

Kilburn). As some authors suggest, this element of sociality created at the intersection of intermittent work and social life also contributes to identifying instances of ‘excessive sociability’ whenever practices of exploitation under ‘embodied capitalism’ attempt to dissect the ‘continuous experience’ of subjects under contemporary precarious regimes of work and life (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

5.2.6 *‘Isolated labour’ and the different experience of relationality and diversity*

While forms of resistant *embodied relationality* are sharply apparent in catering and waiting work (where *teamwork* is predominant), possibilities for affective resistance also arise among those usually considered the ‘lowest skilled’ in menial, degrading and *isolated* jobs in hospitality such as cleaning. The different experiences of a hotel maid and a housekeeper I encountered during the hotel workers campaign significantly demonstrated how and to what extent sociability can be a source of empowerment for these women in resisting their difficult working conditions together with others.

The Caribbean maid from the West London hotel was stuck in a contradiction between her belief in the ‘autonomy of response’ (‘be aware and stand up for your rights!’), the principle she considered vital to countering discrimination and exploitation at work) and her individualised *appeal to management* to overcome a particular problem at work. Whilst the strategic and emotional use of her personal relationship with the general manager constituted the immediate terrain of solving the issue of discrimination by her colleague, later she would express the need to join the union. The branch is ‘a place to socialise’, as opposed to the housekeeping department she works in, where she is ‘the only black person’ and probably the only worker who is a member of a union (Ethnographic diary, informal interview with Stella female, black, Jamaica, 6 years in London, in-house, chambermaid). Stella’s sense of loneliness in her workplace does not seem to mechanically reflect her position in the hierarchy of the hotel, nor the specific occupation she is assigned. The ‘social character’ of ‘hospitality work’ is not the crucial factor here, but rather the racial tensions among the workforce in Stella’s hotel, her positionality as ‘ethnic minority’ and her *fear of exposing* her union membership to other workers. Indeed, the conditions of employment and *the relational dynamics in the workplace*, in turn shaped by the hierarchies that govern the ranking of different occupations, gender and racialised relationships, are determinant of the subjective perceptions of work and the possibilities of enacting more or less straightforward acts of resistance.

There was a very different experience in the case of Arianna. The housekeeping department of the hotel where she worked for 28 years became something ‘like a family’ for the Portuguese woman.

Over the years she was able to develop close personal relationships and share the experience of maternity with other co-workers. Arianna’s sense of *attachment* to her workplace is *not only* the result of the *length* of her employment or her economic dependence on the job as a single parent. Rather, it is clear that this woman’s perception of her work as sociable and her affection towards it are directly related to the *enjoyment* of one particular aspect of it, namely the ‘diversity’ of her workplace. ‘*Diversity*’ becomes a further dimension in the making of embodied relationality, a means of increasing sociability between workers. Similarly to affective labour, it can be captured and valorised by managerial strategies⁸⁵, but it can also exceed these boundaries and help develop alternative patterns of resistance in the workplace. By highlighting the diversity of her workplace and the pleasure she draws from it, Arianna is actually emphasising other aspects of her work that are not related to the functioning of the labour process. When I asked her whether there were new tensions at work because of increased diversity and new streams of immigration she answered:

Well, it depends on *how you came* to this country and your conditions but *I get on easy with people*, I integrate easily...maybe because of my father, he was a diplomat he would *mix with everyone*, going into *any class* (...) I can even *dance* or do whatever to make you understand what I am trying to say... sometimes you have to demonstrate *physically* what you want to say, you know, there is the language barrier but *I like people* and watching them for me it is easy to *go beyond that barrier*...(Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

Arianna’s experience here highlights how, despite the multiple axes of division and segregation at play in the hotel (especially the differences in language and the barrier to basic

⁸⁵ As emerges for instance from human relations management sources: ‘Managing diversity involves leveraging and using the *cultural differences* in people’s skills, ideas and creativity to contribute to a common goal, and doing it in a way that gives the organisation a competitive edge (Deresky 1994, Fernandez 1993, Morrison 1992, cit. in D’Netto and Sohal, 1999: 535). Specifically on the impact of recent immigration in the UK on ‘cultural diversity in hospitality work’ see Baum et al. (2007).

communication and socialisation), *inter-cultural corporeal relations* constitute a powerful everyday reality in these workplaces. The interview with the Portuguese housekeeper highlights some aspects of the social relationships developed in highly diverse work environments such as hotels. These display interesting *parallels* with findings from research conducted in other transnational ‘occupational cultures’ and working communities (Hannerz 1990, Sampson 2003). Similarly to the hotel workers in the present study, research about Filipino seafarers working aboard multinational ships emphasised how workers *value* multinational working environments precisely because of the possibility of meeting people from different countries, learning different languages, cultures, values and habits (Sampson 2003: 274). Another positive aspect highlighted by seafarers also found among hotel workers was contact with other cultures and traditions as a means of developing ‘self-confidence’ (ibid.). Again, in the case of Arianna, working with people from different national, cultural and also social backgrounds provided her with an opportunity not only to develop self-esteem, but also to *attribute a greater social value* to her work:

If I see that someone is in a most *disfavoured level*, I always tend to go that level... so that people *feel comfortable* with me. (...) Maybe there are things *that I could do better* than if I were a housekeeper... but sometimes I think: *I am here for a reason*... maybe I am just being silly but there are many things I could have been good at, may be even studying for counselling like my father! (...) Listen to people, giving advices...but after all *in any work* there is a *human aspect*...(Arianna, female, white other, Portugal-Angola, 28 years in London, in-house, housekeeper)

In a moment of major crisis (as the management attempted to level down the contractual conditions of Churchill workers to the level of those of the less secure workers who arrived more recently), the diversity of the woman’s work environment represents an *incentive* for her to mix with people and help those in the most difficult conditions as a means of *re-gaining motivation* at work. Here elements of personal realisation and career plans intertwine with persisting forms of segregation among the workforce and occupational aspirations. This is despite the fact that the respondent is aware that she could have chosen a different path in her life, implying that she had the educational background necessary to accessing higher-skilled and better-paid jobs. Nonetheless she has still found a reason to remain in this *apparently demeaning* job. In Arianna’s experience the ‘human aspect’ of hotel work is enriched by the multicultural composition of its labour force. Similarly to other transnational or global communities of workers in relatively *transient workplaces*, despite various factors militating against the formation of relationships between different national groups of workers (including *hierarchies* in the organisation of work, *turnover*

and *short-term relationships among workers*), these relationships ‘exist nonetheless’ (Sampson 2003: 274).

In the case of the housekeeper, her ‘relational skills’ will be crucial to becoming a ‘point of reference’ for other workers and sustaining the process of unionisation in the Churchill, even if without visible success. The distinction from the transnational ‘communities’ emerging in the case of the shipping industry may lie in the fact that, for the seafarers, the sharing of a relatively strong ‘occupational culture’ and the use of ‘Global English’ ultimately diminishes the ‘social distance’ between the various national groups and unites the contract workers *despite the short duration* of their work relationships. A clear difference with the ‘transnational’ workforce in London hotels and catering thus lies in the fact that the latter’s sense of *occupational identity is far weaker* alongside that of a ‘core workforce’ of relatively long-term and settled postcolonial migrant workers. In contrast, here a sense of commonality emerged through the very experience of diversity and the social aspects of precariousness and temporariness of a group of migrants moving across hospitality jobs.

Therefore, it appears that migrants in the hospitality industry make a creative use of their spatial and occupational mobility, as well as their social relationships and networks in and across their transient workplaces. They develop various forms of resistance through these relationships independently of the actual duration of their employment or the degree of identification with their occupation. What do the embodied experiences of this highly diverse group of migrants tell us more broadly about the relationship between transnational mobility and political subjectivation?

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions:

Transient labour, migration and challenges to political organisation

Bringing together the theoretical perspective of labour studies and transnationalism in the analysis of migrants' experiences at work and their forms of resistance made possible to disclose a new perspective of their everyday struggles. A focus on the irreducible subjective dimensions of migration, allows us to move beyond the 'point of production' as the privileged site of conflict between capital and the subjectivity of labour. Understanding migrants' acts of resistance beside a narrow labour process analysis means that their objectives lay outside the improvement of their immediate working conditions but are differently used to develop their social lives, expand their possibilities to move and improve in fact their material social conditions. However, recognising the 'power of mobility' does not exclude that inequality persists in the possibilities that different subjects have in their very *access to mobility*. This in turn has significant implications for their *opportunities to develop forms of workplace resistance and political engagement* as well as for the organisations of the labour movement and the civil society involved in the struggle to improve migrants' precarious working lives.

6.1 Beyond a labour process perspective on mobility power

How do migrants employed in the hospitality sector in London become politically engaged and resist their precarious conditions despite and through their highly mobile, temporary and 'vulnerable' status? In order to respond to the 'challenge of temporariness', that is, understanding the political implications of the precarious, temporary and mobile composition and 'self-constitution' of embodied migrant work, without falling either into a victimising nor a celebrating view of migrants' mobility, it is crucial to go beyond the methodological individualism residual to both labour and transnationalism studies. Moreover, against a derivative understanding of workers' subjectivity as maintained within studies of the workplace and mainstream reading of migrants' transnationalism, and rather detecting the new 'alternative forms of sociability' that subjectivity

puts in motion (Blackman et al. 2008) offers a move away from self-enclosing approaches to resistance and political subjectivation at work.

Given the focus on transient labour, the thesis develops a critique of approaches to labour mobility within industrial relations and 'labour process theory'. This has helped to promote alternative views on migrants' resistance and their forms of political engagement in a sector with high turnover such as hospitality. What does it mean to bring further the approach of critical labour studies on workers' mobility? To be sure, the research of Smith (2006, 2010) revives 'mobility power' as a crucial dimension of labour power vis-à-vis managerial control as he moves forward from the traditional vision of industrial sociology which mainly restricts workers' resistance to the moment of 'effort bargaining' or 'effort power' (Edwards, 1979, Friedman, 1977, Kelly, 1985). Smith's perspective within labour process theory also helps understanding how mobility power in the form of labour turnover needs to be related to the new conditions of regulation of the labour market internationally. In this context agency work can be described as the emblem of 'the contemporary social organisation of turnover' (Smith 2006: 399), the strategic tool for the 'handling of men' (Slichter 1919), what may be called the normalisation of temporariness.

Yet, also this part of labour studies, by focusing on the internal effects of quitting on the labour process (that is, on 'mobility-effort bargaining' or the 'application of workers' power over where to sell their labour services') (Smith 2006: 391), implicitly downplays the importance of workers' mobility strategies in that they allow them to improve their life conditions beyond their conditions in the workplace. Under the scope of 'rescuing' workers' exit strategies from neglect as merely individualised or opportunistic, the risk is to restrict attention back to the point of production. More broadly, the perspective of labour process theorists does not offer any particular tool to connect the practices of exit from the workplace with the specific conditions of the subjects of these practices, that is, the migrants employed in low-paid jobs in the context of their highly mobile lives. That is why it is crucial to add the point of view of transnationality to the study of migrant labour, as to reveal the subjective and unpredictable nature of migrants' mobility across the borders as irreducible to mere structural or economic factors, and their relative autonomy.

More recently the working conditions and lives of migrants seem to have finally been assigned some place in industrial relations and recognised as inescapable elements to understand the new dimension of conflicts occurring in and outside the workplace in the context of its 'decentralisation' (Smith and Thompson 2010). However, taking 'mobility power' seriously means not

only to go beyond the focus on effort power, but also to consider *exit* as an effective form of resistance, even in the cases in which it does not increase workers' control over the labour process.

The present ethnographic research in a sector with a high level of migrant employment pointed to the need to consider *the effects* of migrant mobility power *beside a narrow focus on the labour* process. This study revealed how there are indeed some *tensions* brought about by migrant temp workers' mobility in the management of labour. These were exemplified in the fact that even temporary staffing agencies needed to develop their own techniques of 'human resource management' and establish new forms of employer-employee dependency. This in turn reflects the attempt to control ungovernable patterns which appeared intrinsic to the new setting of labour control in the 'regime of subcontracting', as illustrated by the 'paradox of organised flexibility': relatively recent or settled migrant 'flexible workers' claim a certain degree of predictability of employment patterns to organise their messy precarious lives, something that contrasts with the assumption of their endless availability to work (Chapter 5). As a consequence they often withdraw their labour and *escape* capital's attempt to exploit their temporariness.

However, the *internal* effects of turnover in creating conflict and impacting on management control are not always evident from the case study. Despite this, practices of mobility appear crucial to migrants if they are to *achieve* a series of objectives that remain very important to them: from the acquisition of skills, through the maintenance or reproduction of their mobility in the labour market and that of their families abroad, to gaining or 'freeing' time for other activities. Wondering about the conflictual potential of turnover today means to ask whether the figure of the 'hyper-flexible' temporary migrant worker is completely subsumed in the regime of temporary labour or if the current system can be considered as a *continuous negotiation* of mobility needs and possibilities for escape and life improvement by working people, whose *composition, desires and life styles* have become irreducible to old parameters of job satisfaction, stability, career making and realisation through work. Thus, on the one hand the management of migrant labour through temporary agencies and the need to maintain *a certain degree of control over labour turnover* can be understood as a central *strategy of co-ordination* of capitals' needs to *access labour* (Harvey 2006). On the other hand, an *excess* is produced in the everyday practices of migrants escaping exploitative conditions: by *quitting* and *moving on*, they create other life possibilities for themselves (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

However, the acknowledgment of the ‘power’ of temporariness as a moment of *subjectivation*, means not to fall into the opposite risk of romanticising the mobility of migrants as intrinsically revolutionary or as the avant-garde force escaping capital (Hardt and Negri 2000). For sure valuing ‘social mobility’ remains contradictory as far as it remains within the assumptions of labour market ideologies in neo-liberal democracies. But, as some of the interviews with the migrant women in this study showed, it is remarkable that by sustaining one's own or others’ further mobility plans *through migration*, it is possible in fact to reproduce life itself (as in the case of Priscilla’s children). Still mobility as such should not be simply celebrated, since the possibility to become mobile appeared strikingly unequal across the different migrants, women and men, younger or older, EU and non-EU citizens, encountered during the fieldwork. *What are the possibilities for migrants in developing forms of resistance and political engagement in the sector?*

6.1.1 The material differentiation of mobility

Feminist geography has convincingly established that gender and class are crucial in determining the differential resources of mobility available to certain groups and individuals, shaping and constraining their perceptions and capacities of self-realisation through movement (McDowell et al. 2008, Smith and Winders 2008). In building on this it is important to expose the existing constraints to access education, social networks and social mobility for different migrants both in the country of origin and destination. Skeggs (2004) research on the actual spatial, territorial limitation of working class women has demonstrated how *access to mobility* rather than simply mobility as such, is critical and has a substantial impact on differentiating people assets and ‘capitals’.

Here in particular, *gender and generational differences* emerged sharply as some of the *relatively settled* migrant women workers, who appeared less keen to use strategic quitting, seemed to be ‘bearing the costs’ of turnover. Long-term women workers often appeared *trapped* in their low-paid and hard jobs as it was difficult for them to progress in the occupational ladder and change work for reasons as diverse as family responsibilities and attachment to their workplaces.

A different understanding of their own mobility and temporariness as strategic resources appeared in the case of some of the young ‘new migrants’ from Brazil and EEA countries, and partly independently from their migration status. Rather, their greater opportunities and confidence

about 'moving forward' seemed to reflect their *middle class background* and the endorsement of new 'unpredictable' and eccentric life styles. These cases showed how, amidst its irreversible complication, class still matters (hooks 2000). At the same time the *experience of precarity* as embodied especially in the stories of the young temp transnationals 'messes up' rigid notions of class as they create a new kind of relationship with their own *middle class identity* and *social mobility* within their *experience of migration* (Chapter 5).

Against the temptation to essentialising their class and gender differences and disrupting rigid distinctions between settled and recent migrants in relation to their capacity and *desire for mobility*, even relatively long-term workers appeared to maintain the idea that these kinds of low paid, low-satisfying jobs in hospitality often *cannot be but transient*. This was evident in the case of long-term employees actively cultivating their dream of occupational mobility (e.g. Priscilla, the employee member of the union who studies to become a care worker). This may also point to the fact that in these sections of the economy, regardless of the specificities of the migration status and other social characteristics of the workers, there seems to be an overall tendency whereby 'all the labour becomes migrant', that is, a pattern according to which work and employment become increasingly precarious, insecure, discontinuous, and transient for both migrant and 'indigenous' workers.

Returning to the strategic use of temporary employment, opposite 'exceptions' were apparent among the particular group of EEA migrants recently arrived in London. Although Eastern European 'A-8' migrants have been described in the literature as privileged as compared to their non-EU co-workers, some of them also encounter significant barriers to their social mobility, even in the cases when they were granted full freedom of movement, had a high level of language skills and educational qualifications. For the young Lithuanian woman interviewed, the simple facts of being a 'new migrant' and *socially isolated* in the metropolis contributed to her turning the 'strategic flexibility' of temporary work into a longer term prison suffocating her dreams of professional advancement. Still, free mobility granted her at least a basis to fight the widespread process of *skills degradation* common to both of EU and non-EU workers, through strategies of 'citizenship capitalisation' (Rose 1999).

Overall the migrants' stories point to the interlinked processes of *re-stratification* of 'class' and 'temporariness'. If low-paid jobs cannot but be refused or 'made transient' by workers themselves, at the same time the liberating aspects of their strategic use cannot be exaggerated in

that they involve highly exploitative conditions, poor pay and hard work. Romanticising flexible work in this sector is simply impossible for the fact that, however temporary employed, migrant workers are subject to wage deductions, long working hours and humiliation, whether related to management practices, aggravated by the intermediation of the agencies or because of the degrading socially attached to jobs such as cleaning (Chapter 3). Attention to the *embodied dimension of work* and the *hardship* involved in the different jobs across the hospitality sector helped uncovering this impossibility.

Furthermore, racial stereotypes did impinge on the various categories of workers, establishing differential rights and access to social advancement according to constructed degrees of 'whiteness' and 'blackness', confirming the powerful persistence of processes of *racialisation*. They act as further elements of control and division of the precarious migrant service workforce in London. *Gender differentiation* also had a critical impact on migrants' actual possibilities for social improvement, as showed in the case of the different destinies of the two Brazilians employed in the same hotel in the West End. Generational differences, language skills and the support of friendship networks to access other occupations *together with gender stereotypes*, contributed to shape their initial conditions of immigration in London. The combination of these elements probably triggered the sense of vulnerability for the woman seeking protection by remaining in the same workplace.

Is it then possible to identify a *prevalent logic* of 'intersectional discrimination' at play in the case of migrant labour in the hospitality industry? Migrants' accounts of their everyday experiences at work importantly disclosed the power relations and the new dependencies created among workers especially of the same national group, *reinforced* by the current regime of migration regulation. The latter, in combination with a certain use of ethnic networks, appeared not only as a way of smoothing and *securing recruitment* but also to extend and '*externalise*' the management (and disciplining) of labour in the workplace to the internal power dynamics existing among migrants, mainly on the basis of their '*mobility differentials*'. In other words, it is their relatively more *precarious migration status and their restricted mobility* that provides the basis of form of *intra-ethnic exploitation* in the workplace.

Beside migrants' access to mobility, does 'intersectionality' directly affect the ways in which they are involved in politics? In what ways did also the forms of political engagement of migrant women during the hotel workers campaign appear intersected and stratified? *And how do*

migrants' different and subjective experiences of politicisation challenge relatively rooted notions of 'political engagement' as maintained within the recent experiments of union and 'community organising'?

6.2 Re-thinking migrants' 'political engagement': the power of contingent affective relationalities

Although the 'gender dimension' did *not* appear to have a clear-cut impact *between migrant women and men* with regard to their relationship to politics, it did shape migrants' forms of resistance and their possibilities to develop 'power sociability' within their workplace. This happened not in terms of the women being intrinsically less able to engage in politics, nor in the sense that they encountered straightforward gender discrimination in the union. Rather, it is the *very conception of union's politics* that appeared deeply imbued with gendered values.

The developments of the hotel workers campaign, with its experiment of combining union and community organising, showed how its model is still based on a 'strong' understanding of political engagement, whereas only those 'courageous enough' and ready to be exposed can successfully participate in 'bottom-up', activist-led processes of unionisation. While this model risks leaving out workers who, for multiple reasons cannot (or reasonably decide not to) *be exposed* (e.g. because they feel that the union is not investing in their sector), it also means that the emotional and relational aspects of the process of unionisation for the workers are often ignored by labour leaders or 'externalised' to women activists and community organisers. In this way they also reproduce a 'gender division of political labour', based on an essentialised vision of 'true politics' as a rational and male matter and of community organising as a feminine and more dialogical process of engaging with workers 'one to one' and on the basis of their 'cultural' affiliations.

Thus, beside the material impediments related to the persisting capitalist and patriarchal division of reproductive labour (Brah 1994) (often leaving women workers practically less time for politics than men), union organising strategies appeared influenced by a *masculine understanding of politics*. This seems to be still quite strong in the British trade union culture, persisting in the form of 'virile organising', and partly translating into that of the actors of the civil society organisation (Chapter 4). Furthermore, workers' organising models appear to be still based on notions that fundamentally bound engagement with *long lasting commitment*, the latter in turn

implying a strong attachment to one *particular workplace* as the necessary condition to develop forms of *shared occupational identity* and gain 'industrial strength'.

Against these persisting masculine models of union organising and political engagement, which oppose concrete barriers to the involvement of migrant women workers, the spread of agency and subcontracted work with its characteristics of *transiency*, *lack of attachment* and *dis-identification* from work, demands the development of alternative forms of organising and coalition-making, able to promote migrants' active participation, alongside a radical change of perspective toward these workers' 'intrinsically unreliable' subjectivities. Yet, before answering the issue of more sustainable and radical forms of migrants' organising, it is necessary to assert the key elements that constitute an alternative understanding of migrants' political engagement and resistance at work.

How else do migrants, despite increasing diversification and fragmentation in the composition of the hospitality labour force, draw from their everyday relationships at work to oppose their poor working conditions and support their uncertain lives?

From the fieldwork it emerged how, while unions and CSOs already and increasingly acknowledge the power of personalised contacts and informality to bring together and organise migrants, *excessive forms of sociality* take place in the everyday realities of precarious hospitality workers. Their implications may be understood as 'political', independently from migrants' involvement in trade unions and other organisations (Chapter 5). While through *their struggles of mobility* migrants do achieve important objectives such as acquiring skills, gaining time and renewing mobility itself, their acts and everyday relations showed how, despite their transiency and temporariness, they do build *a sense of commonality* which may sustain their escape from or change power dynamics *in their workplaces*. This element points to the fact that 'disaffection towards work' does not necessarily exclude affects, solidarity and cooperation between workers to emerge in resistant forms. In this sense, despite the increasing decline of workplace engagement and union membership, even for extremely insecure and highly mobile migrants, the *physical space of work* still constitutes a strategic one for the development of material support and for knowledge-share needed to sustain migrants' complicate lives. Rather than being employed directly to resist management control in the form of 'collective emotional labour', for recent young migrants these forms of sociability and relationality seem to be employed both as tactics to face (and get by) hard

conditions at work, and as resources to build networks which may be helpful again *outside the workplace*.

The social experiences at work become sites for accumulation of ‘social capital’, which is not necessarily re-invested in the search for new jobs. Paradoxically, a ‘shared sense of detachment’ from work and ‘cynical disaffection’ such as those of my co-workers doing waiting shifts in the hotel’s restaurant, represented a field of cooperation, mutual support and cultivation of a sense of the common. A second field included the practices of *affective resistance* and *emotional strategising* to oppose the daily harassment by management. Forms of affective resistance appeared powerful tools to alleviate the harsh working conditions of the women employed in-house and as temps in the luxury hotels targeted during the union campaign. Across different cases of work with a relatively manual or more ‘immaterial’ character, whether the sociability built through *physical proximity* in team waiting work or the affective chain of support developed between hotel maids, emerged as crucial factors strengthening workers’ sense of collectivity and sometimes feeding their oppositional culture towards the management. These forms of *affective resistance* and *embodied relationality* appear to develop relatively independently from the contractual status of the workers, or whether they were on relatively long-term contracts or newly arrived.

In summary, the workers applied selective and *strategic uses of affects* to resist their hard working conditions, to challenge management’s attempts to increase productivity as well as to support their precarious lives for purposes *beyond the sphere of work*. The strategic use of the ‘social aspects’ of hospitality work (whether it involved developing skills to change job and/or re-accessing education or simply filling in the leisure time with mundane activities as a compensation for the hard work among the youth ‘precarious cosmopolitans’), appears directly related to its *temporary nature*, the considered mobility strategies employed by temps and the ways in which migrants *deal* with their overall experience of precariousness in London. All these affective practices may be minimised as lacking a ‘truly resistant’ nature and as eventually sustaining the very regime of labour exploitation to which precarious service workers are subject to, as argued in other examples of ‘communities of copying’ (Korczynski 2003). Still, they cannot be dismissed as merely reactive to or conservative of control regimes already in place because they do generate conflicts in the labour process, create moments of excessive sociability and constitute important chains of mutualism to nourish migrants’ everyday lives.

6.3 What directions for migrants' organising?

In what ways do migrants' every day forms of resistance and mobility practices accelerate the crisis of traditional forms of trade unionism? What does it mean for the trade unions and other civil society actors to 'take seriously' the constitution of the contingent, gendered and mobile subjectivities of migrants to organise in a sector such as hospitality?

Firstly, to answer those questions, one needs to look at how prevailing understandings of agency work and subcontracting had direct political implications for the ways in which the union and the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) carried out forms of 'community organising' 'for' migrant workers. The trade union involved in the campaign seemed to maintain a relatively traditional vision of political engagement according to which in-house 'committed' workers were considered keener to be unionised and were therefore addressed as the main target of the organising efforts. Agency workers, while sporadically participating in the campaign, were essentially deemed as 'un-organisable', mainly because of their lack of sustained commitment, high *mobility and vulnerability*.

At the same time London Citizens mainly endorsed a vision underlying the very model of community organising whereas, 'involving the larger community of citizens' is grounded on the assumption that hospitality workers, because of the subcontracting and high turnover in the industry, are *too vulnerable* to develop the struggle by themselves. Actually, some changes occurred in the way in which some of the leaders' of both organisations' understood the composition of the workforce in the sector. The community organiser towards the end of the campaign explicitly recognised that agency workers could be successfully organised (as in the case of the Hilton). Nevertheless the official strategy of the campaign did not change and eventually it embraced an even more extreme form of 'subcontracted organising'. By reducing the trust that workers could be more actively involved on the ground, both the organisations rather subscribed to a 'politics of incentive' lobbying powerful stakeholders (e.g. prizing those 'good employers' paying the Living Wage) as opposed to taking direct action against the hotel's reputation. A 'stakeholderism model' of community organising thus appears to be preferred to the exploration of new formats able to strengthen the direct bargaining position of migrants and support their active involvement.

On the contrary, even enhancing some of the protocols and tactics already experimented in the campaign would rather offer alternative routes to move forward. For instance, building solidarity between workplaces may be a useful strategy to guarantee a certain level of protection for those employees who do not want to be exposed, as they fear the risk of management's retaliation. More specifically this entails organising campaigns involving other migrant low-paid workers *across different cleaning services* (from hotels, to universities and banks) thus going beyond a strict understanding of the 'borders of the industry'. *Cross-workplace organising* would still allow the involvement of workers on the ground, reinforcing solidarity on the basis of *common issues* at the occupational and industry levels, but also *beyond problems strictly related to work* (i.e. including migration issues, social and health-care, gender specific issues for the hotel women workers, etc.).

6.3.1 Strategic scales, sites and affiliations: the political richness of intersectionality

What are then the strategic 'sites' and 'scales' where union and civic organisations can engage in coalitions to offer institutional laboratories where migrants' articulate their claims, express their subjectivity and find powerful resources to improve their precarious working lives?

The industry-based strategy endorsed by the hotel workers campaign revealed indeed its limits. Focusing on the *city scale*, to which direct organising efforts as a critical economic and political 'hub' to negotiate work standards can offer a series of advantages for unions to expand their influence over precisely those 'weaker spheres' of union organisation such as urban services with high numbers of migrant workers (Anderson et al. 2010). However, if the negotiation is circumscribed to institutional *and industry-based actors*, the risk is to fail exactly the direct involvement of those members of the 'transnational workforce' that 'geographical unionism' in global cities strives to intercept (Anderson et al. 2010, Herod et al. 2003). While in the initial period of the campaign the union reached a positive match between the *local* and the *global alliances*, a major limit of the *local strategy* might have lied in that the CSO did not appear to actively involve in the campaign the grass roots migrant communities, faith groups, NGOs and other members of its umbrella organisation but rather their 'representatives'.

Eventually the 'expansion' of the campaign to 'the community' was even restricted to institutional partners from the local administration and the industry, whilst a series of other social actors from

the urban movements around migrants' rights in London were not pulled in the campaign to increase the pressure on employers and political representatives. The London case here examined appears therefore quite different from both experiments of 'social movement unionism' (Turner and Cornfield 2007) and community-based 'workers centres' (Fine 2006) in the US, where the larger alliances forged by unions with associations of migrants and advocacy groups manage to trigger forms of community unionism more rooted in migrants' social realities and engage in campaign about both *work and non-work*-related issues.

Expanding the 'agenda' together with the spectrum of political affiliations in London around the rights of low- paid migrant workers is another crucial factor to promote the substantial broadening of the coalition. For instance supporting the setting up of alternative *educational and social spaces* for migrant workers (such as 'critical ESOL classes' where they can improve their language skills while developing awareness of their rights at work, as already happened in some of the initiatives promoted by the Latin American Workers Association in London) can be very useful to increase the opportunities for them to share information and experiences, develop forms of self-help and self-organisation. There appear the need to expand both the organising structures and the informal spaces for migrants to meet *and socialise* and where their specificity, as migrants *and* workers, and their cultural diversity are actually valorised rather than considered mere obstacles to collective struggles.

Another critical 'scale' to be re-thought in the face of the organising experiment in London hotels, regards the 'intersectional identities' through which to build stronger affiliations among the workers involved. Instead of reproducing and reinforcing the dichotomy between settled and unsettled, permanent and temporary, in-house and agency workers, organisations of the labour movements and civil society working with migrants should be able to recognise temporary labour and mobility as an *irreducible and at the same time expanding* component of the current reconfiguration of labour subjectivities, and engage with them in creative ways. Positive examples of how to re-build unity *out of increasing differentiation* among the London's migrant workforce appeared in past experiments of migrants' organising such as the recent Justice for Cleaners campaign in London. Here new forms of 'class politics' were developed that drew upon exactly those intersectional discriminations that the migrants suffered in the labour market (Wills 2008). Migrants can build strength by starting precisely from their particular position as racialised

workforce, for instance developing a specific awareness of the *process of de-skilling* that they were subject to as a consequence of UK immigration regulations.

In this sense recognising the ‘strategic richness of inter-sectionality’ means to value the *specific statuses of migrants* as grounds from which to build associational power among individuals and groups with different background but with *common issues and concerns*.

More specifically how is it possible to ‘make the most of intersectionality’ and build commonalities and political strength for migrant and precarious workers against the background of social differentiation of transnational migration in a sector such as hospitality?

6.3.2 The end of ‘occupational identities’: the blurring boundaries of the workplace and its resources

In a recent article Nash (2008) reflects on intersectionality highlighting that one of its major merits lies not only in that ‘it furnishes a tool particularly adept at capturing and theorizing *the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes*’ but also in that, by *exposing difference*, it mediates ‘the tension between assertion of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics’ (Crenshaw 1991: 1296, quoted in Nash 2008: 2). Feminist scholars’ call to explore new *methodologies* able to grasp how intersectional differences actually work, invites to take on the challenge of making intersectionality itself a powerful strategic terrain *to re-build collectives*.

More broadly, the question whether and to what extent ‘place’ and ‘community’ may remain important to build *sustainable forms of political engagement* introduces the issue of *identity* as a necessary yet problematic ingredient to political struggles (Massey 2007). Focusing on *the multiple scales and strategic sites* at which migrants can be organised rather than on the relation between place and politics as such, to build new, *however contingent*, collectives and coalitions of solidarity may be a step forward in the actual empowerment of precarious and temporary workers. In fact in certain circumstances and sectors, where transiency becomes a relatively ‘permanent’ characteristic of people’s lives, material conditions do not allow for any form of (territorially) ‘anchored identity’ or organisation to emerge.

Moreover, if ‘industrial citizenship’ (in terms of the rights attached to union membership that citizens as workers enjoy) is probably in a process of declining, the only way to deal with the

decrease of workplace-based forms of organising rather involves rethinking political engagement *across a range of sites, affiliations and resources.*

‘Occupational identity’ was an important factor at the origin of trade unionism in some part of the hospitality industry as showed by research in the US on waitress unionism (Cobble 1991) as well as emerged from the historical accounts of the London hotel branch in the present study. That principle of occupational identity and its model of unionism seem to be vanishing amidst the increasingly diverse and disenchanting labour force in London’s service sector.

The ‘hospitality industry’ as a broader category itself seems not to offer a meaningful sphere to analyse the details of the various labour processes taking place within it. Even within the same types of jobs and among the multiple tasks performed within a single hotel, one witnesses the impossibility to distinguish between ‘manual’ and ‘affective’ work. As highly *embodied* labour they incorporate in themselves both dimensions simultaneously (Wolkowitz and Warhurst 2010). As it was argued above, what counts more in organising migrants are rather their *spaces of sociability* in and outside the workplace.

Yet, to abandoning ‘occupational identity’ as a strategic terrain to build unity and strength among migrants and workers more broadly, does not mean that the workplace, however decentralised, *stretched, temporary and multiplied*, has ceased to be a critical space to develop a sense of the collective. The question is rather about the significant ‘boundaries’ of today’s workplace and their implications in terms of the possibility to create forms of refusal and contestation from within and without that sphere. From the ethnographic study it emerged that there can be still ‘pride’ for the job done well and that ‘dignity’ at work is a major issue for hospitality workers. Also the demand for the acknowledgement of the *social value of their work* still represents an important element for migrant cleaners and waitresses, independently from the relative identification with their current occupation. However, there appeared to be *no intrinsic relationship* between the specific nature of the work done and the type of resistance that may emerge accordingly. The common features that can be found in ‘the nature of work done’ are not enough to draw ‘contextually’ their ‘typical’ forms of rebellion. Rather, the specific *relationship of the women with their work*, their *perception of temporariness and their material access to mobility* appeared crucial in determining the possibilities for them to develop relatively successful and strategic forms of resistance and solidarity (Chapter 5).

In sum, migrants draw upon a range of different, more or less tangible, *resources and strategic formats* when they organise. These include ‘bottom-up’ union models encouraging workers’ activism in their workplace, but also taking ‘affective organising’ seriously as a tool of empowerment, *self-organising* and autonomous learning. In practical terms it seems possible for unions to improve their strategies to organise migrants by intervening on a series of levels such as: broadening alliances across multiple geographical scales and workplaces; making their structures more accessible; supporting a culture of solidarity where ‘hidden memberships’ become sustainable and where vulnerable workers can be protected *vis-à-vis* their employers while encouraging their active participation; building strength and creating a sense of the collective around issues not only related to the workplace (e.g. migration, welfare, gender issues) and support self-development and critical education as tools of empowerment for relatively disenfranchised migrants.

However, a deeper internal transformation of unions appears necessary if they want to intercept the new subjectivities of *ever-expanding* contingent and transnationalised work. In this regard ‘affective organising’ and ‘strategic intersectionality’, against persisting forms of ‘gendered division of political labour’, may be considered as inspirational tools to move forward from crystallised and masculine models of relatively established (and indigenous) occupational identities. This would give a louder voice to migrants and precarious workers as people struggling in search of better lives. Radical political and social transformation takes place in the everyday across multiple relationalities and affinities. They do not need a new unified nor ‘settled’ subject of change to develop. Political re-composition may be possible while remaining an ungraspable, unpredictable, ever-changing process.

The migrants encountered in the temporary sites of hospitality work in London dis-identified from the specific occupational identity of the industry in which they were employed, and shared a form of cynical distance towards managers and work more generally. They appeared not so easily manipulated or moulded to managerial ideologies. Even when they seemed to internalise some of the management discourses around work ethic, aspects of ‘self-discipline’ in interactive work or even racial stereotyping of other co-workers, what they *did* seemed in fact to be often more than what they came to ‘believe’. In other words, the disruptive potential of their ‘informal’ acts of resistance appeared to have its material effects independently from the migrants’ ‘conscious’ perceptions of social injustice at work. Their ‘intersectional identities’ as well as their attempts to escape, served to weaken management control over their subjectivities or at least introduced some

tensions in the labour process, thus disrupting the image of the supposedly, endlessly flexible and exploitable 'migrant worker'.

In turn, the hotel workers' campaign offered a relatively fluid space, where *different kinds* of migrants, permanent and agency workers, recent and settled, could participate and had their chance to develop their 'desperate', 'contingent', short-term and passionate sense of membership and political agency. We explored the challenges of 'becoming a leader' and the contradictions of being involved in a 'collective' together with some of the migrant women, independently of their degree of settlement or 'integration' into the union and in London and of their future mobility plans. The active participation of some migrants and their possibilities to improve their working lives, *despite the relative short-term engagement* with the campaign, shows how politics should be finally detached from militant and moralistic visions of 'political engagement' based on the inextricable link between identity, politics and place.

To further overcome the distinction between 'individual' copying tactics and collective conscious resistance, further research may look into migrants' informal development of *collectives outside the unions*. This would involve looking closer to their practice of mutual support, the way they organise themselves in the community, their informal system of micro-credit, migrants' forms of mutualism in fields such as housing, health, children raising and other spheres of social reproduction as well as their campaigns for social and political rights. Perhaps the relevance of latter is exemplified prominently by the fact that the major mobilisations of migrants in the USA in 2006 was not the outcome of trade unions effort to mobilise them but it was mainly a self-organised social and political protest against the increasing criminalisation and illegalisation of migrant workers. Further research may also explore sustainable formats to promote migrant women and precarious worker's empowerment in and outside organisations, as well as experimental tools to enhance migrants' self-organising through political education and radical pedagogical methods.

The challenge for this thesis has been to 'return to the workplace' in a moment in which it may appear less relevant and the politics related to it quite old-fashioned. This is certainly not the case and, as my research has shown, workplace politics appears to remain a key factor in defending workers' positions in the hospitality sector. A rich social dimension related to the workplace was indeed made apparent by this study, although workers' forms of resistance continuously exceeded what we understand as traditional union organising, blurring and multiplying the connections between workplace and the everyday social spaces outside it. The

acknowledgment of the political implications of migrants' everyday acts across those blurring boundaries will hopefully offer food for thought and paths of action to those more or less invisible people and organisations involved in the contemporary struggles of migration.

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Appendix:

Profiles of each of the twenty informants with whom I conducted in depth-semi structured interviews during the participatory study in London's hotels.

Informant *	Gender	'Race' and ethnicity**	Country of origin	Length of residence in London	Legal (migration) status	Employment status	Partnership status/caring or supporting financially children***	Involved in trade union and/civil society organisations (CSO)
Toms	male	White British	UK, Irish origin	UK born	UK citizen	Part-time officer, previously worked in the sector	-	Union officer, Hotels branch

John	male	White British	UK	UK born	UK citizen	Part-time officer	-	Union officer, Hotels branch involved in CSO
Roger	male	White British	UK	UK born	UK citizen	Full-time officer, previously worked in the sector	-	Union officer, Restaurant and Bar branch
Steven	male	White North American	US	-	US citizen	Full-time union officer	-	Officer hotel division of UNITE HERE (LA), donor of the campaign
Sheila	female	White British	UK	UK born	UK citizen	Full-time union officer	-	Regional organiser for women, race and equality

Babacar	male	Black British	UK, Caribbean origins	UK born	UK citizen	Full-time union officer	-	Trade Union Conference, race relations committee
Jim	male	White Other	Italy	6 years	EU citizen	Part-time Campaign organiser	Unmarried No children	Employed by CSO, Hotel Organising Team
Maria	female	White Other	Brazil	7 years	EU citizen Portuguese citizenship	Part-time officer, previously worked as a care worker and housekeeper	Married with children (some of them living in Brazil)	Union Officer, Restaurant and Bars branch
Agnieska	female	White Other	Poland	9 years	First business visa then re-entered the UK as EU citizen	Full-time community organiser, previously	Unmarried No children	Employed by the CSO and involved in the

					(A8)	worked sector		union
Stella	female	Black Caribbean	Jamaica	6 years	Married with UK citizen	In-house, chambermaid	Married, 2 children in London	Involved in the union
Priscilla	female	Black African	Nigeria	17 years	Refugee, still applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain	In-house, housekeeper	Married, 1 children in London , 2 in Nigeria	Involved in the union branch
Arianna	female	White Other	Portugal - Angola	28 years	EU citizen, Portuguese citizenship	In-house, housekeeper	Divorced, 1 child in London	Involved both in the union and CSO
Cinzia	female	Black African	Eritrea-Italy	8 years	EU citizen Italian citizenship	Part-time, in-house Food & Beverage	Married, 2 young children in London	Involved both in the union and CSO
Diana	female	White Other	Lithuania	1 year	EU citizens (A8)	Agency worker,	Unmarried No children	Not involved

						catering		
Cecilia	female	White Other	Brazil	9 months	EU citizens, Brazilian and Spanish citizenship	Casual, hotel chambermaid	Unmarried No children	Not involved
Corrado	female	Non- white other	Brazil	1 and a half year	EU citizen Brazilian and Italian citizenship	Casual worker, hotel room steward	Unmarried No children	Not involved
Fabio	male	white other	Brazil	3 years	Student visa	Casual worker, Food & Beverage	Unmarried No children	Not involved
Felix	male	Non- white other	Brazil	2 years	student visa	Agency worker, catering	Unmarried No children	Not involved
Bella	female	Black African	Eritrea	7 years	Preferred not to mention	Agency worker, catering	Married with children	Not involved

Violetta	female	Non-white other	Colombia	5 years	Married with UK citizen	Casual worker, catering and cleaning	Married No children	Not involved
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*Note that the following names are not real. All the informants have been granted anonymity and reported under pseudonyms.

** The following racial and ethnic classifications employ the categories used in the CENSUS 2001 in England and Wales. However with regard to the category 'non-white other' I drew from the ethnic breakdown of the hotel workforce carried out locally by the union itself during the fieldwork already cited in the thesis (p. 98). In the report of the survey the union specified that the category 'non-white other' may include Hispanic, Latino and Arab respondents. This category has been preferred because the official categories used by the Office for National Statistics and the CENSUS (i.e. 'White, Mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Chinese or Other Ethnic Groups, Non stated') did not provide any option for those informants involved in the research who self-identified as Latin Americans and Hispanics.

***In accordance with the focus of the research on migrancy and political engagement, partnership and parental status have been inquired only with regard to the migrant workers and migrant activist interviewed. It does not imply that these factors are less relevant for the UK born trade unionists and organisers.

