



LONDON'S MIGRANT DIVISION OF LABOUR



Jane Wills, Jon May, Kavita Datta, Yara Evans, Joanna Herbert and Cathy McIlwaine

Queen Mary, University of London, UK

Abstract

This article is located in the maelstrom of debate about immigration and employment in the contemporary economy. The article presents original analysis of data from the Labour Force Survey and a workplace case-study in the cleaning sector to highlight growing employer dependence on a very diverse pool of foreign-born labour. The article explains such dependency by drawing on interview material collected from employers, employers' associations, community organizations and policymakers. In sum, we argue that London's Migrant Division of Labour (MDL) is a product of the semi-autonomous actions taken by employers, workers and government in the particular context of London. Understanding the MDL thus needs to encompass

employer demand, migrants' 'dual frame of reference' and limited access to benefits, as well as employers' preference for foreign-born workers over 'native' labour supply. The state is also argued to play a critical role in this employment, determining the nature and terms of immigration, the accessibility and levels of benefits, and employment regulation. London's MDL is shown to intersect with, and in some cases overturn, existing patterns of labour market segmentation on the basis of human capital (class), ethnicity and gender.

KEY WORDS ★ global city labour markets ★ hiring queue ★ immigration ★ London ★ low-paid work ★ migrant division of labour ★ migrant labour

Introduction

Migrant workers are caught in the cross-fire of contemporary capitalism. On the one hand, advanced capitalist economies can't live without devouring the rich resources of cheap labour located in, and coming from, the poorer parts of the world. On the other hand, (so called) advanced capitalist polities find it hard to deal with the consequences of living with strangers. Politically at least, foreigners are best and most easily exploited abroad.

This poses acute political-economic dilemmas for government in countries like the UK. At a time when the global economy depends on the competitive advantage that results from supplies of both skilled and low-waged labour, it is impossible to promote economic success without the planned and unplanned movement of people. Indeed, immigrant workers are essential for prosperity by providing knowledge, skills, an anti-inflationary labour supply and new job creation; but such people also have needs, they acquire rights and they can upset the

sense of entitlement and belonging of those who already reside. As a result, immigration – and low-waged non-European immigration in particular – can all too easily create a moral panic (Hiebert and Ley, 2006; Hollifield, 1992; 2004; Zolberg, 1999). There is now increased public concern about immigration across Europe, and parties and issues that were once at the 'fringe' of debate are becoming mainstream (Balibar, 2002).

In the UK, immigration has shot up the list of voter concerns. In February 2008, an opinion poll indicated that over 40 percent of the British electorate felt that race relations and immigration were their top concern (IPSOS MORI, 2008). Following such pronouncements, the British government has executed new measures to exclude, control and expel those immigrants who are perceived to be the real threat – the non-European, the non-white and those who arrive without the papers to work. The British government is squaring the circle of immigration policy by simultaneously opening the nation's borders to white Europeans

from the east of the continent while slamming them shut to those who are classed as unskilled from anywhere beyond the European Union (EU). At a time when there is no lessening of employer thirst for foreign-born labour, the government has chosen to source the low-cost labour that is required from closer to home.

London is likely to feel the strains of this new immigration regime more than other parts of the country. London has always had a healthy appetite for migrants – be they domestic or foreign-born. In recent years, its economic success has been increasingly dependent on the labour of those born abroad and this article outlines the extent of that dependency in lower-paid jobs. Moreover, given this dependency, it is likely that the emerging immigration regime will threaten the economic sustainability of London and the livelihoods of some of its poorest communities.

In this article we further develop the concept we have earlier called the Migrant Division of Labour (MDL) (May et al., 2007) to better understand London's reliance on foreign-born workers and the implications this has for the labour markets that develop in the context of the new immigration regime. In what follows we start by reviewing the existing literature to develop a stronger framework for understanding London's MDL, incorporating the semi-autonomous roles played by employers, migrants and the state. In the rest of the article we then use this framework in relation to new research data that documents London's changing MDL.

Migrant divisions of labour

Established theoretical analyses of the intersections between immigration and the labour market in the UK were largely developed in the context of rising postwar immigration. Labour shortages after the Second World War meant that countries like Britain needed to attract workers, and in tandem with the development of guest worker schemes in many European nations, the British government endorsed limited recruitment from beyond the UK (Winder, 2004). While 'natives' were able to secure better forms of employment, immigrants arrived to fill the 'bottom-end' jobs as demonstrated by the concentration of African-Caribbean workers in the

National Health Service and London Transport, and Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers in manufacturing jobs (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Hollifield, 2004; Jackson, 1992; Miles, 1982; Ryan, 2005).

This situation prompted scholars to focus on employer demand as a key determinant of immigration. At a time when Marxist ideas were widely adopted in the social sciences, scholars argued that immigration was functional to capitalism, that it was driven by employer demand for cheap and pliable labour, and dependent upon surplus populations or 'reserve armies' in the ex-colonial world. In addition, the extent to which the state opened its borders was itself argued to be dependent upon the nature of the class compromise between capital and labour within any particular state. While a well-organized 'native' working class might be able to defend its terms and conditions of work by keeping immigrants out, a weak working class could do little to influence state-level change and reform (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Hjarnö, 2003; Miles 1988; Miles and Brown, 1989).

In one of the most sophisticated and well-known development of the arguments from this period, Piore (1979) posited that there was an inherent role for immigrant labour in advanced capitalist economies. He argued that labour-dependent employers in tight labour markets with limited margins could not simply increase wage levels to attract natives into the work. Raising wages at the bottom would mean demand for wage rises elsewhere, potentially leading to structural inflation, and although this is somewhat questionable after the experience of implementing minimum wage legislation in the UK (see Wills, 2004), there is never a strong appetite for increasing wages for these kinds of jobs.

In addition, however, Piore argued that employers needed to find workers with the motivation to work. Immigrants fitted this bill as they often arrived with poor language skills, low levels of education with few alternative sources of work. Immigrants were recruited in the wake of the 'natives' who were moving out of such jobs. Moreover, immigrants were argued to be then further confined by racism and wider socio-economic disadvantage to remain in 'bottom-end' jobs. Such analyses were later extended by the notion of the segmented labour market in which a

combination of personal characteristics and employer discrimination corralled individuals into particular kinds of employment – producing gender and ethnic divisions of labour (Edwards et al., 1975; Leontaridi, 1998; Peck, 1996).

Thus in London, the labour market can be read as a particular product of the historical geography of the city's political-economy and its people. As has been widely documented, London has experienced dramatic economic restructuring over the past 30 years. In tandem with neo-liberal policy developments that have facilitated globalization, privatization and contracting-out, London's labour market has become increasingly polarized with a rapidly growing professional class at the top, a smaller increase in 'bottom-end' service employment and a shake-out of the jobs in the middle (see Buck and Gordon, 2000; Kaplanis, 2007; May et al., 2007; Sassen, 2001). There has been strong demand for labour at both ends of the labour market, and – as we will show in relation to the 'bottom end' later on in this article – foreign-born workers have been disproportionately recruited into both sets of jobs.

Migrant workers have been attracted into low-waged employment in cities like London because the wages appear much better than they do back 'home' and because immigration controls often restrict their access to any alternative state-provided support. In what Waldinger and Lichter (2003) refer to as the 'dual frame of reference', migrants feel better paid than their counterparts back 'home' while also being unentitled to the benefits available to citizens. In the context of the welfare state, migrants become particularly valuable to employers as they are more willing to work in low-paid employment (see also Dench et al., 2006). In addition, however, some employers may prefer to employ foreigners as a way to 'distance' themselves from the moral economy of the labour being done. Whereas they might have balked at employing 'their own kind' to do dirty, dangerous and difficult work for very low rates of pay, it can be easier to employ those who are coded as 'other' (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003: 40). With respect to the employment of au pairs in private households, Anderson (2007) identified a particular moral economy in which parents were able to feel better about themselves by recoding the work as charity as well as employment.

Such findings suggest that employers employ migrants *because* they are migrants, with different qualities to the 'native' labour supply. Thus in

London, despite high levels of unemployment over the past 20 years, a clear MDL has developed. London has the lowest rate of economic activity among the working-age population of any region in the UK and, clearly, many potential workers are not attracted into work and/or are unsuited for the jobs that exist (HM Treasury, 2007). Moreover, official estimates suggest that there are as many as three low-skilled workers for each low-skilled job in London (HM Treasury, 2007: 52/3) and given such conditions of potential oversupply, employers can exercise considerable choice over whom they employ.

Employer discretion over their preferred employees is associated with the adoption of a nationality-based 'shorthand' over whom to employ. This 'hiring queue' means that employers tend to adopt national and racialized stereotypes to determine the reliability of potential recruits. In her multivariate data analysis of trends in London, New York and Toronto, Model (2002: 132) found a 'relatively stable cross-national hierarchy of discrimination' which reflected established prejudices and stereotypes as well as the impact of employers' ethnicity and different streams of labour supply. Given the opportunity, employers' preferences in all three cities were for foreign-born whites, followed by East African Asians. These workers were found to fare at least as well as native-born whites (especially men) in each geographic location. In contrast, however, employers would choose to employ Africans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis only in the absence of the more highly ranked groups. And in the US, African-American men were found to be the least favoured group, selected only when there were no migrants left in the queue.

As employers compete for the most desirable workers, those with the least desirable jobs are likely to have less choice over whom to employ. Hence in London, we would expect that the employers with the poorest paying and least desirable jobs would be dependent upon the 'least desirable' workers who have the fewest alternative sources of income and work. However, the volumes of potential workers looking for work will also play a big part in the changing MDL. In London, as elsewhere, changes in government policy and the wider immigration regime have reconfigured the balance between different streams of labour supply. In our case, changes in the regulation of irregular migration and the decision to open the national borders to the wider EU have been particularly significant.

As outlined at the start of the article, the British government, in tandem with many other governments across Europe, North America and Australasia, is pursuing an aggressive strategy of stratification in relation to its immigration regimes (Collins, 2006; Legrain, 2007). Emboldened by new biometric technologies, governments are engaging in an international 'war for talent' at the same time as implementing an increasingly draconian 'war on the poor'. States are seeking to develop semi-permeable borders that will draw in the talented and wealthy and exclude most of the poor. As Hyndman (2005) and Sparke (2006) argue in relation to North America, and Balibar (2002; see also Bojadžijev and Saint-Saëns, 2006; Mezzadra, 2005; van Houtum and van Narsen, 2002) demonstrates in relation to Europe, borders are becoming an important site of class struggle and conflict.

Through successive pieces of new legislation, Britain is becoming more illiberal in regard to humanitarian assistance and immigration control covering those from the poorest parts of the world. It is becoming harder to cross borders and those illegal or irregular populations that are already present are being subjected to destitution, detention and deportation at the hands of the state. In the UK, new legislation has reduced access to the asylum system (see Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Phillimore and Goodson, 2006) and stopped all 'unskilled' immigration from outside the EU. The Home Office is now implementing biometric identity cards – from November 2008 – to better control foreign nationals, and is simultaneously stepping up workplace enforcement (Migrant Rights Network, 2008). In this context, individuals without secure legal status will be forced to obtain false papers or find themselves confined to the informal economy to survive (see also Black et al., 2005; Herbert et al., 2008).

As elsewhere, the British government has sought to 'manage migration' in the interests of the economy with 'borders that are open to those who bring skills, talent, business and creativity that boost our economy, yet closed to those who might cause us harm or seek to enter illegally' (Home Office and Commonwealth Office, 2007: 2). In a new points-based system that is similar to that already operating in Australia (see Table 1), only workers at the top of this hierarchy who arrive as highly skilled migrants (in Tier 1) have full rights to the labour market and

the benefit system. Those granted access to work for a particular employer in an identified shortage sector (in effect, relatively skilled occupations) with a requisite level of English (in Tier 2) have no rights to social benefits although they may apply for citizenship after five years in the UK. At the same time, the government (along with those of Ireland and Sweden) has opened the national economy to labour migrants from *within* the EU. From May 2004 potential workers from the 10 EU member states of Cyprus, Malta, Estonia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (the latter eight known as the Accession 8 or A8) have been able to live and work in the UK. After 12 months' registration on the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) these workers are also able to access state benefits and have provided an important supply of low-waged, low-status workers to the UK (see Anderson et al., 2006; Blanchflower et al., 2007; Gilpin et al., 2006; Portes and French, 2005; Ruhs, 2006; Stenning and Dawley, 2009, this issue). Data from the WRS indicate that more than half a million workers have registered since 2004 and although there is no requirement to deregister when leaving the country, some commentators estimate that there are now more than 1m Eastern Europeans living and working in the UK (Anderson et al., 2006).

Although many scholars argue that immigration policy is a catalogue of failure, characterized only by incompetence and unintended consequences (see Castles, 2004; Cornelius, 2005), the nature of the immigration regime clearly has a profound impact on labour supply. Whereas a relatively weak immigration and asylum system allowed significant numbers of people to arrive in London from poorer parts of the world during the 1980s and early 1990s, often working illegally, the new immigration regime is limiting this supply and making it more difficult for existing irregular migrants. Moreover, given the new labour supply from Eastern Europe and revised state controls, employers can reconfigure their hiring queues. It is likely that employers will opt for the unambiguously legal arrivals from Eastern Europe over those from Africa and Latin America who have less obvious entitlement to work in the UK. As demonstrated below, the non-white migrants who have kept London working for the past 20 years are likely to be displaced by those from much closer to home. London's MDL will be subject to change.

Table 1 The UK's points-based system

	Description	Terms of entry
Tier 1	Highly skilled individuals to contribute to growth and productivity.	Based on qualifications, previous earnings, age and other criteria. Granted unrestricted access to the labour market and benefits for 2 years with dependants. Extension and settlement can follow reassessment.
Tier 2	Skilled workers with a job offer to fill gaps in the UK labour force.	Job offer in shortage area or where not displacing a UK/EU worker. Job must be at NVQ3 or above and have been advertised. Employers act as sponsor. The recruit has to meet English language requirements and can only change employer if they reapply for a new permit. If they meet the points demanded by Tier 1, they can subsequently bring dependants and secure unrestricted access to the labour market and benefit system. It is possible to apply for settlement after 5 years in the UK.
Tier 3	Limited numbers of low-skilled workers needed to fill specific temporary labour shortages.	Quota-based, operator-led, time-limited schemes will run subject to review involving countries with which the UK has a robust returns arrangement. Expected to include only migrants from the A2 (Bulgaria and Romania).
Tier 4	Students.	Dependent upon sponsorship and granted only for the period of the course. Tighter controls over the institutions able to sponsor students. Can work 20 hours a week and full time in holidays.
Tier 5	Youth mobility and temporary workers: people allowed to work in the UK for a limited period of time to satisfy primarily non-economic objectives.	Includes Commonwealth Working Holiday Makers scheme and Au Pairs. For 18–30-year-olds for up to 24 months. Can work for 12 of the 24 months. No rights for dependants, no right to switch to a different Tier. Sponsorship required from national governments with agreed returns policy and reciprocal relationships with the UK. Limited additional options for temporary workers in the creative and sporting sectors, for voluntary work, religious activities, international exchange and agreements.

Source: Home Office (2006).

London's Migrant Division of Labour

Immigrant labour in low-paid work: the big picture

The size and significance of London's foreign-born population has increased dramatically over the last 20 years. In 1986, 18 percent of Londoners were born overseas (approximately 1.17m people), and three-quarters of them came from the former colonies. By 2006, as many as 31 percent of London's population (2.23 million people) were immigrants, with just over half of them having their

origins in the Commonwealth (LSE, 2007). While the number of immigrants has thus sharply increased during the past 20 years, there has also been a marked diversification in the geographical origins of new migrants in London (see also Kyambi, 2005). The Greater London Authority identifies people from 179 different countries with up to 300 different languages spoken (Mackintosh, 2005), reflecting a profound shift in patterns towards what Vertovec (2007) calls 'superdiversity'. Such diversification has occurred in the geography of migration flows, the channels through which migrants flow, skill levels, the longevity of relocation

Table 2 The distribution of migrant employment across higher and low-paid job types in London (2005–06)

Origin	Years in the UK	Bottom quintile (<£9 hr)	2nd quintile (£9–£11.50 hr)	3rd quintile (£11.50–£15.80 hr)	4th quintile (£15.80–£20.80 hr)	Top quintile (>£20.80 hr)
Non-migrants	n/a	21%	20%	21%	19%	20%
High wage	0–3	18%	14%	12%	21%	35%
	>3	19%	15%	16%	22%	28%
Asylum	0–3	31%	24%	14%	13%	18%
	>3	23%	20%	14%	21%	22%
Other low-wage	0–3	46%	20%	10%	14%	11%
	>3	25%	19%	16%	17%	22%

Note: The LSE researchers divide migrant workers into those from: ‘high-wage’ countries, by which they mean the EU15, the Old Commonwealth, the US, Japan and Korea; ‘asylum’ countries, by which they mean Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Macedonia, Romania, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and two ‘other Yugoslavia’ and ‘other Middle East’ groups; and ‘other low-wage’ countries, which includes the rest of the world.

Source: LSE (2007: 51).

and local impact. These trends are in marked contrast to the flows of people who migrated to the UK in the postwar period, who tended to take up relatively unskilled employment and had their origins in the ex-colonial world.

These increasingly diverse sources of migrants have had divergent fortunes in London’s labour market and are overrepresented at both ends of the employment spectrum. As indicated in Table 2, migrants from rich countries are overrepresented in the top echelons of employment, and those from poor (non-asylum countries) are overrepresented in the poorest-quality jobs (LSE, 2007). Indeed, almost half of all the migrants from poorer parts of the world who arrive outside the asylum system end up in the bottom quintile of the labour market during their first three years within the UK. These longitudinal data generated by researchers at the LSE (2007) indicate quite rapid mobility for this group once they have been resident for some time, although data for the mid-2000s show that as many as 44 percent of migrants from poor countries who have been in London for more than three years are still located in the bottom 40 percent of the labour market.

Such data as well as anecdotal observation indicate that migrants from poorer parts of the world are making a significant contribution to London’s low-wage economy. Official data sources for 2001 indicate that as many as 46 percent of those doing elementary jobs such as domestic work, cleaning, caretaking, refuse collecting and labouring

were born overseas and the vast majority of these came from poorer parts of the world (Spence, 2005). Official data also show that the hospitality sector is most dependent on foreign-born staff, with rates well over 50 percent (Church and Frost, 2004; Evans et al., 2007a; Matthews and Ruhs, 2007).

Our own analysis of the Labour Force Survey similarly indicates high and growing numbers of foreign-born workers in low-paid occupations in London. Whereas the foreign-born proportion of total employment in the UK increased from just 7 percent in 1993/94 to 10 percent in 2004/05, rates in London for the same period increased from 25 percent to 34 percent. Furthermore, particular occupations in London had much greater – and increasing – dependence on foreign-born labour over this period (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

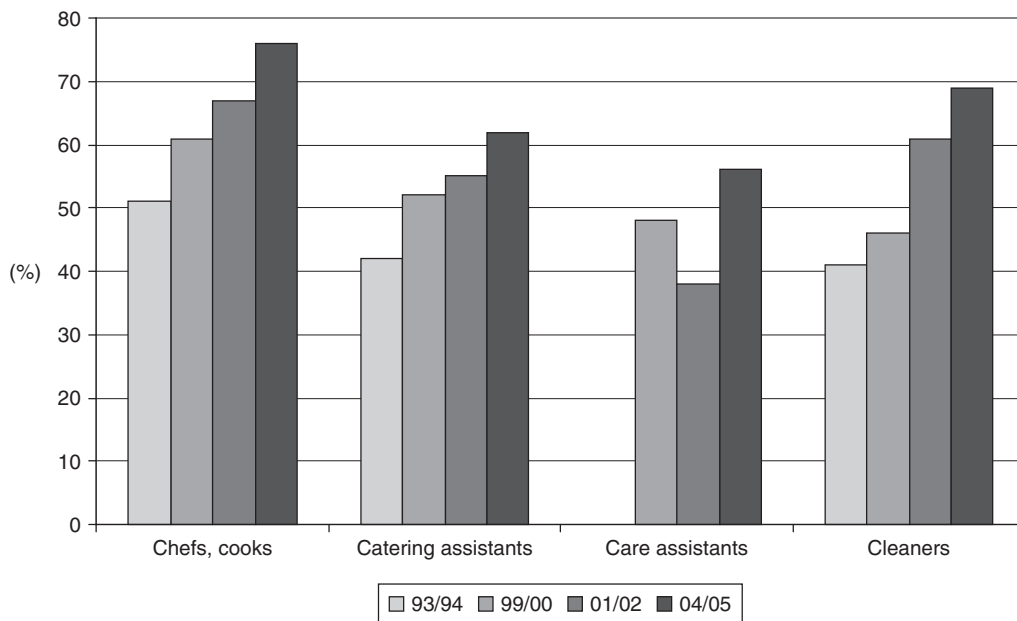
To further explore the evolving MDL in London’s low-paid economy, we conducted our own questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews (reported elsewhere in May et al., 2007; and see also Datta et al., 2007; 2008; Herbert et al., 2008), and also explored the view from a specific workplace – studying a cleaning contract at Canary Wharf. This case-study was designed to explore the reasons why migrants were employed in such numbers, their routes into employment and their experiences of work at ‘home’ and in the UK. The research also explored the employment histories of the small number of British-born workers employed at the site as a further way to understand changes in this type of employment.

Table 3 Total employment and the proportion of foreign-born labour, by occupation, London (1993/94, 1999/00, 2001/02, 2004/05)

Occupation	1993/94 (000s)	% FB	1999/00 (000s)	% FB	2001/02 (000s)	% FB	2004/05 (000s)	% FB
Chefs, cooks	29	51	34	61	31	67	38	76
Catering assistants	27	42	25	52	38	55	39	62
Care assistants	22	n/a	41	48	36	38	35	56
Cleaners	64	41	55	46	52	61	51	69
All London	2,894	25	3,262	27	3,349	30	3,375	34
UK	24,449	7	26,687	8	27,114	9	27,599	10

Note: FB is foreign-born. The reclassification of occupational categories in 2000 means that the data for the two periods are not directly comparable.

Source: Original analysis of the Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey.

**Figure 1** Proportion of foreign-born employees in London by occupation (1993/94–2004/05)

Note: The reclassification of occupational categories in 2000 means that the data for the two periods are not directly comparable.

Source: Original analysis of the Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey.

The world in a workforce: contract cleaning at Canary Wharf

The cleaning contract identified for this research project involved 105 cleaners together with a small number of managers and administrative staff. The research was conducted between September and

December 2006 and involved three different kinds of enquiry. First, we conducted in-depth interviews (recorded and transcribed) lasting about an hour with four of the managers to get an overview of employment trends, their experiences of recruitment and management issues, and their prognosis for the long term. Second, we were given mediated access

to anonymized official company records in order to establish the country of birth and immigration status of the 105 cleaners employed. Third, we used a questionnaire as the basis for voluntary face-to-face interviews with workers during work time. These interviews lasted for anything between 30 and 70 minutes and were an opportunity to discuss workers' experiences, their previous work histories, their migration stories and their hopes and plans for the future. Having agreed not to record these encounters, detailed notes were taken in order to document the things that were said. While most of the interviews were conducted in English, despite the difficulties that this posed for a number of staff (particularly those from Eastern Europe), most of the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking staff were interviewed in their own language and notes were taken in English.

Participation was voluntary and although we stressed the independence of the research from the company, the client and the state, a considerable number of those working at night declined to take part. It is likely that previous experiences with immigration officials and/or fear about their own immigration status and right to remain in the country were the reasons why people declined. In total, 54 interviews were conducted, covering 22 of the day staff (from 26) and almost half of the night staff (32 from 79). Contrary to expectations, almost half these workers were men. At the time of interviewing, almost all workers were paid £6.20 an hour with a 30p attendance bonus if they were present every day for two weeks. This was almost a pound above the National Minimum Wage (£5.35 an hour) but considerably less than the official London Living Wage (£7.05 an hour; see GLA, 2006). Supervisors were paid slightly more but there was no premium for working at night, no company sick pay, no company pension scheme and just minimal holiday entitlement of 20 paid days a year.

While this workplace and its workers were more closely regulated than many others in the contract cleaning sector, particularly as the client was very security conscious, insisting on double-checking the applications and paperwork of all the cleaners employed, we would argue that the research highlights trends that are pertinent across the low-paid service sector in London. In relation to understanding London's migrant divisions of labour, the research findings here paralleled those

collated from interviews with employers and employer representatives in other low-paid jobs in London (see also May et al., 2007; Sokol et al., 2006; Wills et al., forthcoming).

As indicated in Table 4, our analysis of company records indicated that as many as 80 percent of the workforce were born overseas. Given that this contract is in the top tier of cleaning contracts in London, both in terms of pay and conditions, it is likely that this figure is replicated – and exceeded – elsewhere. Furthermore, while 20 percent of the workers were born in the UK, these individuals tended to be much older than the migrant workforce. Our interview data indicated that as many as a quarter of the foreign-born workers were aged between 18 and 34, and another third (35 percent or 14 people) were aged over 45. In contrast, only 2 of those born within the UK fell into the younger cohort and almost half of the British-born workers (6, or 46 percent of the British-born population) were aged over 45.

The research revealed a remarkable geographical diversity among this workforce (see Table 4). Despite expectations that employer preferences and the role of social networks might favour particular national groups, official company records indicated that workers came from as many as 28 countries outside the UK. West Africa was particularly important with a considerable number of cleaners coming from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone; but as many as 14 cleaners were the sole representative of their national group. Individuals from countries as diverse as Algeria, Ecuador, Estonia and Uganda had found their way into this work.

This geographical diversity was overlaid by great complexity in patterns of citizenship and immigration status. As shown in Table 5, the workforce was divided between those born in the UK and/or the European Union, thus having full rights to live and work in the UK; those born in the countries of an enlarged Europe who have the right to live and work in the UK subject to complying with the Worker Registration Scheme; and those born outside Europe. Of this latter group, a considerable number had become British citizens or had secured citizenship in another European Union country before coming to live and work within the UK. However, the others were subject to a variety of different immigration controls. This group included those who had claimed asylum and been granted

Table 4 Cleaners' countries of birth

Country	Numbers	Country	Numbers
Algeria	1	Latvia	1
Angola	5	Lithuania	7
Bangladesh	5	Nigeria	10
Brazil	2	Philippines	1
Cameroon	2	Poland	1
Colombia	4	Portugal	3
Congo	3	Russia	1
Ecuador	1	Sierra Leone	4
Equatorial Guinea	1	Spain	5
Estonia	1	Tanzania	1
France	1	Tunisia	1
Gambia	1	Uganda	1
Ghana	14	UK	20
Ivory Coast	1	Zaire	2
Jamaica	2		

Source: 105 anonymized records. Place of birth was not recorded for three members of staff.

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), those married to students, those coming to join family members, and one person on a working holiday visa. The research interviews further illuminated the complexity of the immigration system by reporting changes in people's immigration status through marriage, the asylum system and/or having children in the UK.

Such data indicate that this company – like many others – is now reliant on foreign-born labour, from a diversity of countries, who take a variety of routes into the UK. Those at the 'bottom end' of the labour market are particularly likely to be confined by their immigration status and/or circumstances which, when coupled with language difficulties and racial discrimination, helps to explain the relatively high numbers of migrants from outside the EU, many of them from Africa and Latin America. Moreover, the significant numbers of workers from Spain may also include some Latin Americans who are using Spanish passports to live and work illegally in the UK.

During our interviews we explored how and why workers came to be employed in these jobs. A small group, many of whom were approaching retirement age, had been employed for a long time and/or felt they were too old to find other work, reporting that they were resigned to remain there for the future. This included most of the British-born interviewees and particularly the men who had ended up in cleaning in their last years of employment after

Table 5 Cleaners' citizenship and immigration status

Place of birth	Visa/citizenship	No. of staff
Britain	N/A	20
Born in the EU	Estonia (1), France (1), Latvia (1), Lithuania (7), Poland (1), Portugal (3), Spain (5)	19
Outside the EU	Obtained EU passport Angola – Portugal (3), Brazil – Portugal (1), Equatorial Guinea – Spain (1), Nigeria – Netherlands (1), Sierra Leone – Netherlands (1), Gambia – Sweden (1), Tunisia – Sweden (1)	9
Outside the EU	British	23
	Family visa to join spouse	2
	Indefinite Leave to Remain	19
	Limited Leave to Remain	1
	Residence permit	4
	Right of residence	4
	Settlement visa	1
	Students' Dependant visa	2
	Working holiday visa	1
Total		105

Source: Analysis of 105 anonymized company records.

being displaced from manufacturing and skilled trades in London (see also Buck and Gordon, 2000). However, this group also included a surprising number of longer-term migrants, many of whom had become British citizens with adult children living in the UK. Indeed, as many as 52 percent of the foreign-born respondents we interviewed had already been in the UK for between 5 and 15 years, and we encountered a further eight workers who had been in the UK for more than 15 years. Although two of these had arrived as children, having travelled with their parents from the Caribbean, the other six were in their 50s. These British citizens had been in the UK for most of their lives and while previously they had worked in other areas of the economy, they felt they had few alternative sources of work and, despite entitlement, no appetite for the benefit system. The group included two women from Ghana who had arrived in the 1980s and were now in their 50s, one woman from Sierra Leone who had arrived to join her husband in 1969, a woman from Tanzania who arrived to visit her sister in 1987,

a Somalian refugee who was now in his 50s, and a Colombian man who arrived on a work permit in 1979. In many ways, this group reflects wider patterns of ethnic segmentation that are experienced by many black and minority Britons, and such workers are already overrepresented in low-paid services and manufacturing work across the UK (Modood et al., 1997). However, the relatively high numbers of men is more unusual and highlights the extent to which immigration can alter employers' hiring queues. Without alternatives, men have applied for and been given cleaning, care and catering jobs (see Datta et al., 2007; 2008).

As was more expected, our research also showed that cleaning provides a 'gateway' into work for new arrivals to the UK. In this regard, about half of the foreign-born staff interviewed in our research were relatively new to the UK. As many as a third of the those we interviewed had been in the UK for fewer than 5 years, and cleaning was argued to be a relatively easy sector in which to find work not least because of personal contacts. The respondents for whom this was not their first job also tended to report that they preferred cleaning to other work they had done. A number of migrant cleaners had previously worked in bread and sandwich making which they reported to be more difficult and very poorly paid. A number of others had also worked in hospitality and all of these respondents said that they preferred cleaning.

London's MDL crucially depends upon the rate of socio-economic mobility for migrants as well as the flow and characteristics of any new arrivals to London. Although cleaning is often seen as a 'gateway' job that provides a foothold for migrants to get started in the labour market in a new country, the managers we interviewed reported that very few workers left to take up higher-status employment elsewhere. Moreover, as we have seen, many of the workers we interviewed had been in this kind of work for a very long time and few had any confidence that they would be able to 'move up' in their employment. Even though some of the foreign-born workers were reasonably well qualified, this experience was not recognized within the UK. A number of respondents had degrees – one in International Relations (Angola), another in Computer Science (Nigeria) and another in Political Economy (Somalia) – and as many as 24 percent of the foreign-born respondents had some form of postsecondary education.

In addition, however, the research also revealed growing numbers of workers from Eastern Europe who had arrived in the past four or five years. This population was very different to those who had arrived from Africa or Latin America and who had travelled to Europe in search of employment, often claiming asylum or working illegally before regularizing themselves. Given the arrival of new workers from Eastern Europe and the increased penalties for employing those without the right papers to work, it is likely that the population from the global South will not be replaced on the same scale in future. While British-born workers are unlikely to increase their contribution to low-paid work in the capital, state policy is increasing the opportunity for new arrivals from Eastern Europe as opposed to those from the global South.

In the final stage of our research, we sought to explore this changing MDL from the point of view of employers, community organizations, policymakers and political groups. Research interviews were conducted with four employers' associations – in the construction, cleaning, domiciliary care and hospitality industries – and seven employers in these sectors as well as food processing. In addition, we conducted interviews with representatives from seven migrant community groups including Brazilians, Congolese, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Poles and Latin Americans as well as 13 interviews with policymakers and political organizations. In what follows we draw on this material to further outline the characteristics of London's changing MDL and draw some broader conclusions about the likely impact of these trends in the future.

Making and remaking London's Migrant Division of Labour

During interviews, employers and their representatives argued that migrant workers provided a critical source of labour supply. In every case, employers felt that they would be unable to provide an acceptable level of service without migrant workers. A number of employers also had a clear sense of what was referred to earlier as a 'hiring queue'. Employers in the cleaning sector in particular had a strong preference for particular

nationalities of workers, and Portuguese and Eastern Europeans were mentioned positively a number of times. As this respondent put it: 'I'd die for a Portuguese. You hang on to them, you ask for their sisters, their mothers, their brothers, marvellous! Filipinos fantastic! Poles very good!' (Interview, 3.5.06).

In contrast, a number of respondents were less enthusiastic about employing black Africans, not least because there was some ambiguity about their legal status. Faced with the new supply of white workers arriving from Eastern Europe, it was clear that employers were able to exercise increased discrimination against those perceived to be less legitimate and/or less suitable for employment. As this respondent in the cleaning sector explained:

The good thing about the East Europeans they're all very briefed on what they've got to bring with them, all the correct paperwork, they're on the ball. We still have problems with Africans, Nigerians, Jamaicans coming over and they haven't got their paperwork. (Interview, 28.9.06)

More generally, however, employers argued that they preferred to employ migrants because they were better than the 'native' labour supply (see also Labrianidis and Sykas, 2009, this issue; Stenning and Dawley, 2009, this issue). As this respondent explained in relation to construction: 'The major reason we use immigrant workers is because they are better than the people who are available locally' (Interview, 11.7.07). Likewise, the Human Resources manager at a food processing factory said that the migrant workers they employed, who were largely from Eastern Europe, were more disciplined than the 'native' labour supply. Some employers further expanded on this by contrasting the commitment of migrant workers to the 'work-shy' 'natives' whom they found to be unwilling to work. As one manager in the cleaning industry put it, the role of the benefit system meant that those who were entitled – and especially those with young children at home – would be better off staying at home:

Let's look at it this way. The English are used to a social security system ... they're used to having that whereas the immigrants don't have that in their country. We've always had something to fall back on so those English that are not educated, that, you know, didn't go out and get themselves great jobs could come out and do cleaning

but they won't do it for a lower wage because they might as well sit indoors and get paid to look after the kids ... to motivate them you'd need ten pounds an hour, definitely. (Interview, 4.12.06)

Given that many of the migrant workers we encountered were not entitled to claim benefits due to their immigration status, they were more willing to work than the 'native' supply.

In this regard, a number of refugee community respondents made related arguments highlighting the fact that irregular migrants were more likely to work than regular ones. When migrants had failed in their claims for asylum and/or were trying to regularize themselves in the country, they had no recourse to benefits and had little choice but to work and tended to find themselves in low-paying, low-status jobs at the 'bottom end' of the labour market. A number of interviewees from community organizations then highlighted the paradox that once such individuals secured leave to remain and/or became British citizens, they were less likely to take up employment. Once they were able to claim benefits, and particularly housing benefit, there was less financial incentive to work in low-paid jobs and, in many respects, migrants started to behave more like those who were born or already naturalized within the UK (see also Legrain, 2007; Piore, 1979; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). As this respondent from the Congolese community explained:

Once you are authorized to remain in the country, you have the same right as British people, but the issue is low-paid employment which cannot allow [people] to pay into their own house and ... [if] they decide they want to remain legal ... the only way is not to be employed. (Interview, 9.5.07)

Calling housing a 'huge barrier for employment', this respondent went on to suggest that there was little incentive for migrant-citizens to work unless they could find well-paid and secure employment in London. Without proven experience of professional work in the UK, and in the context of real and perceived racial discrimination, such migrants were likely to get trapped. When irregular, they were trapped in low-paid employment and after regularization they were trapped in unemployment. In tandem with 'natives' without qualifications or prospects for career development, this group of workers were condemned to low-paid work or

benefits, neither of which allowed them full access to the wider society in London and the UK. Furthermore, at the time of writing, these individuals were under greater pressure to take up employment, securing benefits only on the basis that they were looking for work.

From the point of view of low-paying employers, our research suggests that the most willing employees would be those without the legal status to work or those who are unable to claim benefits or those from Eastern Europe during their first 12 months in the UK. As the government has increased surveillance and control over illegal labour supplies, those without papers are likely to be forced into more marginal and exploitative employment. In this situation, Eastern European workers are increasingly likely to be filling the gaps, and representatives of migrants originating in the global South argued that their communities would lose out when compared to the Eastern European arrivals. As this Latin American respondent put it: 'Polish competition. Yes. They're whiter and better educated and all of them, even if they speak little English, they always speak more English than a Latin American' (Interview, 3.4.07). Likewise, this Nigerian respondent argued that his community was bound to lose out 'once an employer has an alternative' that 'doesn't expose them to risk' (Interview, 15.5.07). Given the unprecedented arrival of Eastern Europeans, employers of low-paid labour have greater choice about whom to employ and hiring queues are reflecting this increase in choice.

As a result, the kind of workers who quietly arrived during the 1980s and 1990s and filled the gaps in London's low-paid economy are being squeezed out by new arrivals and by the added weight of the law. For many of those representing these 'unacknowledged' communities of workers in London, this reflects the 'false morality' of the British. As a Brazilian community leader put it: 'the [British] excess of tolerance only works ... when it is convenient to them' (Interview 8.5.07). While they were needed, workers from the global South were employed but not fully acknowledged. Now their labour is no longer needed, these communities are being very publicly rejected. As this respondent from a Ghanaian community organization explained: 'They've taken your train ticket, they've looked after your sick family member but you haven't really seen them or noticed that they're there' (Interview,

18.6.07). The new immigration regime is now acting to send many such workers back home.

In sum, our research highlights that the intersecting decisions of government, employers and workers constantly remake the labour market, increasing opportunities for some while eroding them for others. London's MDL has a 'rotating membership' (Castles and Kosack: 1973: 463) that is in constant change. Such dynamism has costs for those who find themselves being pushed down the hiring queue. It may also have costs for employers and consumers if labour demand is not met. While our research has highlighted the increasing role of those from Eastern Europe, there are strong indications that as the economy moves into recession and other countries open up their labour markets to these migrant flows, the UK is becoming less attractive and some of these migrants are moving back 'home'. Moreover, in relation to London, our research has exposed how changes in the MDL mean that low-skilled migrants from the global South, particularly those without the papers to work, are increasingly vulnerable. These groups too may be less available for legitimate work in the future. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that there have been calls to turn 'strangers into citizens' and legislate for an earned amnesty for those workers from outside the EU who have served the city without recognition for the past 20 years (London Citizens, 2008; see also Evans et al., 2007b; Flynn and Williams, 2007). London's MDL raises issues of (in)justice for the migrants who find themselves in low-paid jobs, for those in London and the rest of the world who depend on these individuals, and for those Londoners (many of them settled migrants or second-generation citizens) who are priced out of employment. Recognizing the scale and impact of London's MDL might be a first step on the road to righting these wrongs.

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Correspondence to:

Jane Wills, Department of Geography and The City Centre, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, UK. [email: j.wills@qmul.ac.uk]