

Work and survival strategies among low-paid migrants in London

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Introduction

There have been profound changes in Britain's economy, employment structures and labour markets in the past 50 years. Now identified as a post-industrial economy, Britain's economic landscape is typified by free trade, the rolling back of state regulations and welfare provisions, the promotion of flexibility at work and antipathy to trade union organisation. Such transformations have profoundly reconfigured the labour market where there has been a shift in the kinds of jobs that are available, a change in the sensibility of work, the characteristics of the workforce, and in the politics of employment. Nowhere are these changes more apparent than in London. Not only was the city and its institutions, like the Offices of Whitehall and the House of Commons, the driving force behind neo-liberal policy in the 1980s, London has also become an important node in the movement of capital, goods and information. The 'positive' spin-offs of this have been the emergence of a global city, home to many of the major banks, international markets and trans-national corporations that manage the processes of globalisation with growing numbers of highly skilled and elite professional workers.

Yet, London as a global city is also implicated in the processes of globalisation which have led to a growing disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor, both within and between countries (Sassen, 1991). In London, polarisation is evidenced by a growing inequality between the growing numbers of professional workers at the top of the labour market hierarchy, those left behind at the bottom and a falling out in the middle (*ibid.*; but also Hamnett, 1994 for a critique). As such, work itself remains very unevenly and unfairly distributed with unskilled workers and those facing particular discrimination having specific problems in securing 'decent' employment. Inequality has increased between those in work, and between households with employed workers and those without.¹

Perhaps most critical in this context is the fact that the labour market in London is characterised by the growth of not only well-paid 'top-end' jobs but also poorly paid employment with rising levels of inequality between skilled and semi/unskilled workers and the emergence of the 'working poor' (Goos and Manning, 2003; May *et al.*, 2006). While we know relatively little about this 'bottom-end' of the labour market, emerging evidence suggests that it is dominated by migrant workers from the Global South and from the post-socialist countries. Furthermore, there is also clear evidence that these workers are critical to the everyday functioning of London given their predominance in the public reproductive and services sector (such as cleaning, caring and hospitality) which literally keeps London 'working' (Evans *et al.*, 2005). Also significant is that many of these workers are not concentrated in informal economic activities, but rather are integrated into the formal labour market, albeit in unequal ways (supporting Samers, 2002 claim that challenges Sassen, 1991). However, in spite of the vital economic contributions migrants

make, little attention has been afforded to their experiences of working and living in global cities such as London. Migrants continue to be marginalised in public discourse and policy such that they are not accommodated into the labour market or indeed society on equal terms.

It is in this context that we argue that there is an urgent need to focus on low-paid migrant workers in London but from a *holistic* perspective. As such, we argue that we must not only examine how migrants are inserted into the London labour market in relation to the nature and conditions of their work (for which see Evans *et al.*, 2005; May *et al.*, 2006), but also on work-home connections and migrants' household situations. A conceptual framework that enables us to make these connections is that of coping strategies which has been developed largely in research on the Global South and, to a lesser extent, in post-Socialist countries. We would contend that it is through an examination of the coping strategies that migrants develop at a number of different scales that we are better able to understand the ways in which people make a living and a life in an expensive global city like London.

Drawing upon original survey and interview data, this paper outlines individual, household and community level coping strategies that workers create in order to survive. These include both individual and collective income-maximising and expenditure-minimising mechanisms, as well the use of ethnic-based networks that operate at a community level. The paper concludes by highlighting how migrants workers are not passive victims in the functioning of a global city such as London, but rather as agents capable of creating several short- and long-term coping strategies to manage and in some cases improve their lives in the future.

Migration, work and survival: key debates

It is estimated that by the year 2000, around 175 million people resided outside their country of birth meaning that one out of every 35 people in the world was an international migrant (IOM, 2005: 379). Just over half of these migrants were economically active, with the majority residing in industrialised nations, mainly in USA, Canada, the UK, Italy, France and Germany (ILO, 2004). These migration flows comprised mainly of people moving from countries in the Global South, together with an increasing movement from Central and Eastern European countries to Northern Europe, particularly from the new European Union Member States (A8) following EU enlargement in 2004 (Portes and French, 2005). Thus, while migrant workers have been characteristic of the functioning of the global economy for many centuries, they are a growing presence, especially in the economies of the industrialised North.

The underlying causes of migration in general are manifold and highly complex ranging from individual, household to macro-structural factors. Indeed, the search for conceptual frameworks to

explain migration has been a major preoccupation of migration researchers for decades. These have variously emphasised the agency of migrants in the face of economic conditions (the neo-classical approach), the structural conditions of local and global labour markets (the Marxist political economy approach), or a combination of both (the structuration approach) (Castles and Miller, 2003; Skeldon, 1997). More recent frameworks have tried to highlight the role of both personal and local factors alongside meso- and macro-level conditions for migration movements. These include a household strategies approach that emphasises the role of families as well as gender (Chant and Radcliffe, 1992), and a social networks approach which focuses on how migration is facilitated by family, kin and community networks (Hagan, 1998; Massey *et al.*, 1993). The most recent, and perhaps most contested in terms of definition, has been a focus on transnationalism and transmigration. This approach stresses the interconnections and networks developed among migrant groups between source and destinations areas and how social, cultural and economic fields often become transnational in nature (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Kivisto, 2001; Portes, 2003; Vertovec, 2004).

In practice, people move for a host of specific reasons such as political conflict, repression, famine, poverty, the search for economic and/or educational betterment, and family obligations. Repeatedly, however, empirical studies have found that economic factors, in various guises, are often major considerations for migrants, albeit that these concerns intersect with gender, race and class as migrants negotiate their identities in the context in which they decide whether to move (Olwig and Sørensen, 2002; Silvey and Lawson, 1999; Pessar, 2005). Therefore, whether by design or not, many migrants end up as migrant *workers* in the country they have moved to. Perhaps not surprisingly then, much research has focused on the labour market experiences of migrants after they have decided to leave.

Arriving in global cities such as London, migrants have been inserted into an economy which has been radically restructured. Classified variously as the 'new economy', the 'post-industrial' era, 'post-Fordism' or 'neo-Fordism', these changes can be attributed to the workings of neo-liberalism and the re-shaping of economies along the principles of 'free market' economics involving intense competition and growing individualism (McDowell, 2004). In Britain, these policies have contributed to, and developed alongside, the decline in manufacturing and a dramatic expansion of the service sector. The service sector has tended to provide a growing number of jobs at both the 'top' and 'bottom' ends of the labour market. There has been an increase in the demand for those with professional qualifications alongside a strong demand for those willing to do routinised, semi-skilled and poorly-paid work (Sassen, 1991, 1996; McDowell, 2004; Goos and Manning, 2003). The use of subcontracting, agency staffing and temporary employment contracts have all made such 'bottom end' jobs less secure. Added to this, legislative changes and the associated decline in

trade union power have made it much harder for workers to organise collectively to improve their conditions of work (for examples from the public sector and of the home care and the hospitality industries in particular, see Wills, 2001; 2003; 2005).

In this context, it is perhaps no surprise that there have been changes in the characteristics of those doing these jobs. Although long associated with women's work, these 'bottom end' service jobs are also drawing increasing numbers of black and minority ethnic and migrant workers into employment (Holgate, 2004; May *et al.*, 2006; McDowell, 2004). Of course, the British reliance on migrant labour is nothing new (Dustman *et al.* 2003, Hamnett 2003; McDowell, 2004). While each 'wave' of migration has been distinctive, what is apparent is that migrants are becoming increasingly important to the functioning of global cities such as London, arguably constituting a 'reserve army of labour', and creating a 'migrant division of labour' (May *et al.*, 2006). Male and female migrants, especially those from the Global South, have become an indispensable workforce in the low-paid service sectors of the economy both in London and elsewhere (Ehrenreich and Hochschild [ed], 2002; Sassen, 1991, 1996).

This new migrant division of labour is being slowly and geographically unevenly reflected in academic research and debate. There is now a significant body of research into the situation in the USA, especially regarding Latin American migrants (Gilbertson, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Kyle 1999; Portes *et al.*, 2002), with some focused on Europe (Corkhill, 2001; Reyneri, 2004; Solé and Parella, 2003). However, research has been more limited in the UK. This said, the last decade has witnessed an increasing recognition of the importance of migrant experiences by policy makers and the government in Britain (Glover *et al.*, 2001; Portes and French, 2005; TUC, 2003), and there has been a considerable body of work exploring the role played by policy and legislation in encouraging or limiting migration (Flynn, 2004; 2005; Lewis and Neil, 2005, Sales, 2005 on the 2002 White Paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*). This research focus reflects the way in which the British government has begun to develop a system of 'managed migration' into the UK over the last few years. In distinction to previous policy goals that sought to minimise immigration, the government has sought to restrict unplanned migration by refugees and asylum seekers in favour of planned migration by those looking for work (see Flynn, 2003; 2005; Morris, 2004; May *et al.*, 2006). There are now a plethora of schemes, each having different rights to stay, access to benefits and prospects for residency in the long term.ⁱⁱ

In addition to this research into new systems of 'managed migration' other bodies of work have explored the ways in which migrants access the labour market in relation to educational attainment (Dale *et al.*, 2002), how they use social networks (Poros, 2001), the issue of deskilling through movement (Bloch, 2006) and the failure of the British system to recognise foreign qualifications

(Buck *et al* 2002; Glover *et al* 2001; Lagnado, 2004; McIlwaine, 2005). There is also a growing body of research that has focused on the concentration of migrants in poorly paid work with the almost complete absence of a social wage, and high levels of exploitation and abuse (Haque *et al.*, 2002; Anderson and Rogaly, 2005; Pai, 2004). Not surprisingly perhaps, London has been the focus of some of this research (Anderson 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Ardill and Cross, 1987; Cox and Watt, 2002; Evans *et al.*, 2006; Jordan and Duvell, 2002).

Yet, while the survival of migrant workers is implicit in much research on migration and employment, most studies have tended to focus on the specific working conditions of migrants in the labour market as well as on migrants as individuals rather than as members of households, families or communities. As such, there has been little consideration of their wider social and economic experiences (Glover *et al.*, 2001). Although there has been some work on coping strategies among immigrant communities in the USA (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Menjívar, 2000; Mueller, 1994; Schmalzbauer, 2002), and to a lesser extent in Europe (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2003), there remains little corresponding research amongst migrants the UK. This is perhaps surprising given the long history of research on household coping strategies in the Global South. Rooted in a recognition of the importance of informal economies in the Global South (Castells and Portes, 1989; Roberts, 1994), work on survival or coping strategies burgeoned in the 1980s and 1990s as developing world economies underwent dramatic economic restructuring mainly as a result of the implementation of the neo-liberal inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Influenced heavily by the work of feminist researchers (Sparr [ed], 1994), research considered how poor people, and especially poor women, managed to cope in the face of widespread economic exigency that resulted from the implementation of SAPs (Elson, 1992).

Drawing on a range of empirical settings, two main types of strategies were conceptualised; first, 'expenditure-minimising' (Benería and Roldán, 1987) or 'negative' strategies (González de la Rocha, 1991) that involved curtailing consumption such as changes in diet, cutbacks in use of utilities and so on; and second, 'income-maximising' (Benería and Roldán, 1987) or 'positive' strategies (González de la Rocha, 1991) that entailed generating additional sources of earnings, such as working extra hours or more household members entering the labour market (Chant, 1996). It was also recognised that not only did women bear the brunt of increased poverty disproportionately, but they were also more likely to have ultimate responsibility for household survival (Elson, 1992). In turn, strategies were recognised as operating at individual, household and community levels, to be a combination of reactive response and proactive design, and to vary according to structural exogenous factors and those associated with the life course (Rakodi, 1991; Moen and Wethington, 1992). More recently, Rakodi (1999: 320) has consolidated this early work with that on re-conceptualisations of poverty to identify four main types of strategies: strategies to

increase resources, strategies to change the quantity of human capital, strategies involving drawing on stocks of social capital, and strategies to mitigate or limit a decline in consumption (also Moser, 1998).

This research from the Global South has also influenced more recent work on what are often termed 'alternative economic practices' under post-Socialism that involve market and non-market practices such as self-provisioning and reciprocity networks (Clarke, 2002; Smith and Stenning, 2006). The conceptual elements of this research also elide with that on the Global South in terms of providing further critique of the voluntarism that is often implied by the use of the term strategies and the way in which household- and community-based mechanisms do not necessarily entail consensus especially on grounds of gender and age (*ibid.*, Wallace, 2002). Despite the fact that there has been a considerable body of research to explore the work-life balance and how the labour market and home intersect in countries like Britain (for example, Hyman, Scholarios and Baldry 2005; Jarvis, 1999, McDowell *et al.*, 2005; see also Mueller, 1994; Pratt and Hanson, 1991 on the US), there has been no research into the ways in which poor migrant workers survive in the UK.

Building upon various elements of the research discussed here, this paper focuses on the coping strategies developed by migrants in the workplace and beyond, at individual, household, and community scales. We argue that these strategies involve both the operation of structural conditions and the agency of migrants in their design.ⁱⁱⁱ

Work and migration in London

While there has been little in-depth research into the lives of migrant workers in London, and especially in the low-paying reaches of the London economy, some recent work has provided interesting insights into the functioning of the labour market primarily from a quantitative perspective. As illustrated above, the profound economic changes which have taken place at a national level have been replicated or intensified in London. In the last two decades there has been an expansion of jobs for white-collar qualified service workers employed in the banking, finance and creative industries, and a contraction in work in manufacturing (Hamnett, 2003: 31). In turn, there has also been an increase in the low-paid, low skill end of the labour market (despite some argument over the specific character of these shifts (Goos and Manning, 2003; Hamnett, 1994, 1996; Samers, 2002)).

The extent of growing inequality in the London labour market is evidenced by recent GLA figures that show that 1 in 7 workers in London earn less than what they call a 'poverty threshold wage' of £5.80 an hour and as many as 1 in 5 earn less than a 'living wage' of £6.70 an hour (GLA, 2005).^{iv}

More than half a million workers in London (400,000 full-time and 300,000 part-time workers) are estimated to earn less than this living wage, and the cost of such low wages puts added strain on families, communities and public service provision. In turn, over the last thirty years, income polarisation has increased in London with professional workers at the top-end of the occupational hierarchy not only commanding higher salaries but also experiencing much faster rates of wage growth. The gap between the richest and poorest households has also increased (Buck *et al.*, 2002).

Many of those in the lower echelons of the labour market are migrants. Indeed, London receives around one-third of all migrants to the UK and it is estimated that between 1975 and 2000, some 450,000 migrants migrated to London (Hamnett, 2003). Furthermore, many of these migrants were recent arrivals. Drawing on the latest Labour Survey Force (2002/2003) and the 2001 UK Census, Spence (2005) notes that out of the 2 million Londoners born outside of the UK, 23% arrived in this country before 1970, and 45% arrived after 1990. The ethnic profile of migrants is also diverse with Whites constituting the largest group (40%), followed by Asians (27%) and Blacks (20%). Also significant is that the majority of London's migrants come from the Global South (70%), with India, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan and Kenya providing the largest groups. Migrants now account for 35% of the working age population and 29% of the total population in the capital (*ibid*). Furthermore, these figures do not account for informal workers, including undocumented migrants, so that the true size of the economically active migrant workforce is likely to be higher than that reported officially (Samers, 2002).

Such quantitative analyses also highlight inequalities in the performance of migrant workers in the London economy (Glover *et al*, 2001; Buck *et al*, 2002; Dustmann *et al*, 2003). Thus, for instance, London migrants have much lower employment rates (65%) than Londoners born in the UK (78%), although migrants from developing countries show lower employment rates (61%) than those from developed economies (75%); the latter are more likely to work in professional and managerial occupations, while the former are concentrated in services and especially the hotel and restaurant sectors. Moreover, migrants constitute 46% of all workers in typically low-paid 'elementary' occupations, such as labourers, postal workers, porters, catering staff and cleaners. People from Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Asia often find it especially hard to secure well-paid work, even if arriving in the UK with good skills and high level qualifications. For example, a significant proportion of migrant workers born in Ghana (50.3%), Ecuador (59.5%), Serbia and Montenegro (45.6%) and Bangladesh (45.2) work in the lowest paid occupational groupings in London (Spence, 2005).

There is also discrepancy in terms of gender, with migrant women exhibiting much lower rates of employment (56%) than migrant men (75%) which results principally from women shouldering

childcare responsibilities (Spence 2005). Ethnicity also emerges as significant with migrants from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) groups displaying lower employment rates (61%) than migrants from white groups (73%), with unemployment being especially high amongst Bangladeshis, black Africans, and black Caribbeans (GLA, 2002: 27). These groups also receive the lowest wages (*ibid.*; Buck *et al.*, 2003:117) and pay rates are polarised by sector being highest for migrants employed in finance and lowest for migrants working in the hotel and restaurant sector (Spence, 2005).^v

As noted above, a range of factors have been identified as contributing to this concentration of migrant workers in the bottom rungs of the labour market. Perhaps the most important of these is discrimination in the labour force on the basis of race giving rise to a racial division of labour, although more recently, we have argued that a ‘migrant division of labour’ has also emerged that is not just determined by race or ethnicity (May *et al.*, 2006). Many migrant groups experience difficulties communicating in English, suffer from a lack of skills and low qualification levels which also result in occupational inequality. Yet, even when qualifications are taken into account, BME and migrant workers are still more likely to be in a lower level occupation than their White counterparts (Mason, 2000: 55).

While this provides an important overview of the patterns of how migrant workers are inserted into the London labour market drawing on the Labour Force Survey and the Census, it fails to capture the experiences of migrant workers, and in particular how they organise their daily survival.

Migrant workers and survival in London

Methodological issues

This paper draws on a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews conducted with workers in low paid sectors of the London economy. Our broad aim was to explore who was working, and under what conditions, at the bottom end of the labour market. To this end, the questionnaire survey (for which we worked with London’s Citizens and a team of eleven researchers)^{vi} sought to investigate the pay, working conditions, household circumstances and migration histories of workers in four key sectors of London’s economy (for further details see Evans *et al.*, 2005; May *et al.*, 2006). These were contracted cleaning staff working on London Underground; general office cleaning; hospitality workers, particularly focused on luxury hotels in the City centre; and home care employment. In addition, a number of workers in the food processing industry were included in the research.

A number of strategies were employed in order to access low-paid workers who represent a ‘hard to reach’ population. Access to workers was arranged through existing contacts with trade union

representatives, through snowballing and also via a random cold-calling process. While contact with some workers was made at or near the workplace or in work agencies (for example, respondents working for London Underground were either approached in over 40 stations or at one line depot in North London), other interviews took place in cafes outside of working hours. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face in a range of languages including Polish, Portuguese, Spanish and French. In total, 341 low paid workers were interviewed of which 307 were migrants, and it is the latter data set that this paper draws upon. The migrants came from 56 different countries with significant numbers from sub-Saharan Africa (55%) (especially Ghana and Nigeria), Latin America and the Caribbean (15%) (especially Brazil, Colombia and Jamaica), Eastern Europe (10%) (especially Poland), and Asia and South East Asia (7%). They included a range of documented and undocumented migrants.

In-depth interviews have followed on from the questionnaire survey and have been conducted by the authors. In the main, access to respondents has been facilitated by following up on people who participated in the questionnaire survey and expressed an interest in being interviewed while other workers have been accessed via snowballing. These interviews have both explored some of the issues raised in the questionnaire in greater detail while also examining some new areas. As such, the interviews have gathered information on migration histories, settlement experiences in the UK, attitudes and feelings towards employment, household circumstances, coping strategies, together with issues surrounding community identity and linkages with home countries. We are still in the process of interviewing and this paper draws upon 24 interviews that were available at the time of writing. As such, while we cannot claim the data is representative of all low paid employment in the city, our survey and in-depth interviews have covered a large number of workers and companies.

Migrant workers' coping strategies in London

“Everybody is struggling to survive here. It’s a rich country but if you can’t work, nobody will survive in this country, it’s too hard and too tough, but in my country it’s so easy, so easy. But in this country, it’s too hard, I can’t imagine it, it’s too hard. If you don’t do work for one week, you’ll get spoiled, no way to survive isn’t it? It’s a tough place.” (Ahmed, carer from Bangladesh).

Given the precariousness of their work as well as poor wages and conditions, migrant workers have to develop a range of coping strategies which enable them to survive in London. Here, we examine the main types of coping strategies, namely income-maximising and consumption-minimising strategies (Benería and Roldán, 1987; also Chant, 1996; Gonzáles de la Rocha, 1991). In turn, we discuss the operation of these types of strategies across a variety of scales ranging from individuals to households to communities (Smith and Stenning, 2006), as well as within the workplace, the

household and the community in terms of context. Where relevant we also highlight the wider social and political consequences of some of these mechanisms.

Individual income-maximising strategies in the workplace

Dealing first with individual coping mechanisms, it is clear that the most practices relate to income-maximising within the workplace. While work and perceived opportunities to earn an income was the single most important reason why people had migrated to London and/or the UK in the first place (in over a quarter of cases in the survey) (see Evans *et al.*, 2005), it was also the main coping strategy developed by migrants in London. Even though migrants were concentrated in low-paid service sectors characterised by precarious working conditions, they still managed to negotiate their labour market position in terms of the types and number of jobs they engaged in, and making the most from the jobs they had managed to secure through various types of intensification.

One major strategy to maximise income developed among individual migrants was to accept jobs that did not match their educational and skills levels. This was due to variety of reasons including the fact that migrants' skills and qualifications were not recognised in Britain, they needed to work in order to survive and the only opportunities open to them were in low-paid public reproductive and service sector jobs. Furthermore, even though migrants were poorly paid in these jobs (earning on average £5-40 per hour (with the National Minimum Wage at the time of the survey being £4-85)), these wages were almost always higher than what they would have earned in their own countries. Our research shows that many of the migrants were very well-educated. One half of all the migrant workers interviewed had attended primary or secondary school, and 48% had acquired tertiary level qualifications. Just under half (47%) held an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, while just over half (53%) held vocational or professional qualifications. Many migrants working as cleaners and carers in London previously worked in professional occupations including as an architectural technician, a doctor, several as primary school teachers, a chemical engineer and various types of managers (in either family businesses or in one case as a procurement manager for Unilever). This process and acceptance of de-skilling was often the only way in which migrants could enter the UK labour market and ensure their survival (see also Bloch, 2006). Chris, a former architectural technician from Ghana attempted to explain why he was working as a cleaner on the London Underground earning £5.05 an hour.

“To change environment, how do you call it? To change environment is not easy at all. So from class A to class C, let me put it that way, it's not easy so I have to cope with the situation. There's nothing I can do. In my life I have never steal or do something like that. I always try to work, do something that's of benefit to me. So when that happened to me that leads me to say I can't go to the street, do some pickpockets, do something like that, I have to work. Whether the work is cleaning job or washing cars, I have to do it to survive.”

Although de-skilling was a common strategy, it also entailed a loss of dignity with many migrant workers expressing their frustration at being unable to secure jobs that utilised their skills (see also McIlwaine, 2005). For example, Ahmed, a doctor from Bangladesh who worked as a carer in London, was clearly disappointed by his labour market performance even though he earned a 'decent' wage, particularly if this wage was converted to Bangladeshi *taka*. He said, "I am not a doctor here, this is my main obstacle isn't it? I am doing odd job, if my carer ask me, in which country are you from? In your country what did you do? Oh I did nothing in my country, I don't tell it to everybody." This affront to his dignity through de-skilling also had negative repercussions on his relationship with his wife:

"Sometimes I quarrel with her very severely, and God bless us, God is blessing both of us, that is why we are in together, otherwise, sometimes, where the friction is, it's a big friction between husband and wife, because, you know, I say, now I am in my country, I can do that, then I can come here ... That is why, and we are settled in both sides now, but what can I do, because now I have a child, you know, so I just compromise with my wife everything, nothing to do, but I'm trying."

A similar feeling of regret was expressed by Barbara, who had been a primary school teacher in her native St Lucia, but worked as a care worker in London. She said: "If I was at home I'd be a qualified teacher by now ... really I don't know what I'm going to do because care is survival, care is almost survival and you have to buy everything, you don't get anything free". She went on to speak about, "opportunities and things that I wanted to do, I couldn't do it, I think I have wasted a lot of time here and I don't want that to be repeated. I wasted too much time."

A particularly frequent coping strategy to maximise earnings once workers had secured a job was to work longer hours. This intensification mechanism was often the only way that migrants could make ends meet because they earned such low wages. Barbara, a care worker from St Lucia complained: "My wages are rubbish compared to other sectors, all the businesses, it's rubbish because as a supervisor, I'm being paid only £6.50 an hour whereas other agencies pay more than that." Thus, often the only option to ensure survival was to work overtime. Although people worked an average of 36 hours a week, 42% worked overtime. This was usually up to an extra 8 hours a week, although nearly one third worked up to a maximum of 16 hours overtime. Significantly, only a minority of these workers (27%) received a higher rate of pay for this overtime; and of these, half received between £5 and £7 per hour. Ahmed, for instance, estimated that he normally worked between 40 to 50 hours as a carer but he sometimes exceeded this when he covered for a colleague. Vijay, a carer from Mauritius said that, "in this sector, a real problem is of hours of work because many people work sometimes seven days a week. Sometimes seven times 12 hours a day". Similarly, Ellen who had worked as a carer in Ghana and was now working as an agency nurse in London, said:

“Because sometimes they book me for a shift, say 8 to 8, and that’s a long day. Eight in the morning till 8 in the evening and ... most of the shift in the City [hospitals] ... this is very far from Thamesmead so even if I start the shift at 8 o’clock in the morning I have to leave my house by half 6.”

Working long hours obviously had negative ramifications as many migrants noted that they only had time for work and therefore had little leisure time to spend with their families or socialise with their friends. Ahmed spoke about this at length:

“..in our country, during this holy days, we go to our friends’ houses, relatives’ houses, everywhere, but here ... I didn’t go to anyone’s house, and anyone ... they don’t come to my house, everybody think it’s because honestly I am doing my work so how can I go to my friend’s house? My friend is doing work so how can he ... because everybody is struggling to survive here ... I don’t get any spare time. On Sunday, sometimes I have spare time, but sometimes, when they give me cover job, I went for the cover job, so there is no time for recreation.”

This was reiterated by Barbara, the care worker from St Lucia who said, “That’s what I tell you, the care work, you know, you do a lot of commitment and there’s not much time at all. The only thing I do outside work is my course work and that’s all.”

Not only did long working hours have an adverse social impact, Vijay argued that long working hours also contributed to negligence at work as the agencies only cared about delivering a service, irrespective of the quality of the service or whether workers slept on their jobs. Furthermore, in working long hours, some migrants were contravening their visa requirements. Thus, Vijay who was on a student visa admitted that he was working longer than 20 hours in order to survive in London and claimed that many other students also did the same. Similarly, Jaime, from Venezuela, whose main job was in Starbucks (where he worked 25 hours per week), also worked for 2 hours every evening as a contract cleaner in offices (10 hours), while also studying for 5 hours a day learning English.

Like Jaime, taking on more than one job was another important income-maximising mechanism developed by 18% of migrants allowing them to diversify their sources of income.^{vii} This was more common among male migrants as women often had household responsibilities that prevented them from putting in extra hours, such as looking after young children. Portia, for example, had cut her working hours as she had a 16 year old son who was studying for his GCSEs and she wanted to make sure that she was at home in the afternoons when he returned from school.

The vast majority of migrant workers in London took additional jobs in cleaning (57%) either in the early morning or evening, with 17% taking up extra work in hotel or catering, often in a café or

fast-food outlet. A further 9% found extra work in caring or hospitals, or in shops (9%). More than half of these workers engaged in these additional jobs for between 8 and 16 hours per week (52%), with a further quarter working over 16 hours per week. The experience of having more than one job is encapsulated by Janet, a migrant from Jamaica, who worked both as a care worker and at a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) fast food restaurant. She explained why she had two jobs:

“2 jobs – because of low pay - I know, it’s not enough money to live on [£5 an hour and 5-15 in evening]. Like I want to be running around doing other jobs.”

Again, not only was this problematic in that the working day and week of migrant workers was increased with a resultant loss of leisure time, it also led to exposure to jobs and work environments which the migrants found to be stressful and demoralising. While Janet was quite happy as a care worker, this was not the case with her work at KFC:

“You know, like sometime the KFC job, people come in and they’re horrible, you know, they don’t have no manners, and you find it once in a blue moon, which when you do in a care job you just go in and it runs smooth because you don’t upset nobody, nobody will upset you, you know what I mean? But with the catering job you don’t know what’s going to turn out to be because somebody probably in a bad mood, and you give them a bad piece of chicken and they probably take it and throw it back at you.”

Another diversification strategy was to move between jobs trying to find the optimum working conditions. This was reflected in very high labour turnover rates with two-thirds of workers having been with their employer for less than 2 years, and most having been in their current job for less than a year. Many migrants reported how they were always on the look-out for better paid jobs with better conditions, constantly asking around friend and colleague networks as a strategy for improving their working conditions and pay. Jaime from Venezuela reported how he had left his previous employment, also in a café, because was offered 50p above the minimum wage per hour in Starbucks (compared with 5p above in the previous café). He also said that the work in Starbucks was easier in that he didn’t have to carry heavy food deliveries and deal with the rubbish disposal (which he did in the old one). He found the Starbucks job through a former café colleague who had also moved there and recommended him (see also below).

Non-work based individual income-maximising strategies

In order to maximise their incomes, migrant workers also deployed a range of non-work based income-maximising strategies. One way to try and deal with low wages and to counter the de-skilling process beyond the workplace itself was through gaining British qualifications with one fifth of migrant workers (22%) registered as students. However, most of these were non-English speakers who were learning English, with only a minority studying content-based courses. Even when people wanted to study for diplomas or degrees in the UK, either their English was not up to

an appropriate standard or it was too expensive for them. Ahmed, a doctor from Bangladesh complained that he could not afford to enrol on a postgraduate medical course (which would enable him to work as a doctor in this country):

“In this country, if you want to do post-graduation, it costs a lot of money and I have intention to do the diploma in cardiology, and the other subject is in respiratory medicine. It cost, in case of cardiology, it cost 18,000 pounds and in respiratory medicine, 17,000 pounds so I can't afford it, that is why I forfeit the subjects. Last of all, I choose it, gastro-enterology, that is, because it cost all around 10,000 pounds.”

The receipt of remittances was another income-maximising coping strategy called upon by a small minority of individual migrants. Research has repeatedly reported how remittances can contribute to the survival of family members and households in the countries where migrant workers come from (Kothari, 2002). The current study corroborates the importance of remittances for home countries in that 72% of migrant workers *sent* money home, with 40% having dependants outside the UK.^{viii} However, we also found evidence in a small number of cases, especially among students and younger migrant workers, of remittances flowing in the opposite direction when people found themselves in really dire straits. Joshua, a carer from Ghana and part-time student, for example, noted that his uncles who lived in the USA had sent him money to London to help him out to pay his university tuition fees. Carlos, a cleaner from Honduras, similarly noted that when he was between jobs his relatively wealthy parents had to send him money to tide him over (£400).

Claiming means tested benefits emerges as a common non-work based survival mechanism used by British working classes living in poverty (Berthoud, 1998), yet very few migrant workers actually claimed benefits to help supplement their income. This was despite their very low wages and the fact that the vast majority paid tax and National Insurance (see Evans *et al.*, 2005 for details). Indeed, only a very small minority of workers or their partners (15%) claimed any form of state benefits. This very low uptake of benefits may be attributed to legislation which currently makes it very difficult for migrant workers to claim these benefits. For example, respondents may not have been eligible for Working Tax Credits if their Leave to Remain was subject to the condition that they must not have recourse to public funds. Ellen, who was from Ghana and worked as a carer while also studying, was quite clear about this: “Not even on a working visa, you don't get benefit, no. You know when they stamp your passport? No recourse of public funds, you can't get no benefit like child support so if I had a child I would be in trouble because I'm not going to get no child support because if a student came here to study, you don't have baby.” Claimants must also prove that they are ‘habitually resident’ and ‘ordinarily resident’ in the UK.^{ix} Also, while our information here is only anecdotal, some of the migrants were undocumented, or alternatively,

were working longer hours than they were allowed to by law (see above for students), which obviously meant that they would not apply for benefits.

Even when migrants were eligible to receive benefits, few were interested in doing so as a point of dignity and a reluctance to feel beholden to the British state (see also McIlwaine, 2005). Christina, a care worker from Nigeria, said that, “we don’t [claim], everybody work because whoever came from my country we believe in working, nobody depended, you don’t have to depend on anybody.” In much the same way, Rita, a cleaner from Chile pointed out that although she felt that her work was “dead-end” and certainly not what she dreamed of, it allowed her be independent and live her life more or less as she pleases (within economic strictures) without having to depend on anyone.^x

Therefore, individual coping strategies created by migrants were primarily work-based and income-maximising in nature. We now turn to household-based coping strategies which were equally important as they bolstered both individual income-generating but some also minimised consumption and expenditure.

Household-based coping strategies

Our identification of household-based coping mechanisms is significant in that migration research has tended to depict migrants as single lone men who leave their families behind. In contrast, the migrants in the current study did not survive as stereotypical lone workers with only 23% living alone. Instead, the majority of our respondents (77%) shared their home or their accommodation with others. This was both family and non-family based in that almost half lived with a partner, with just over a third residing with other family members or friends. Coping strategies developed within the arena of the household were crucial in the survival of migrant workers and their families and/or other household members.

While most of these focused on consumption-minimising, an important income-maximising strategy at this level was to have multi-earner households whereby additional member(s) of a household, usually a spouse/partner, also worked as well as the main breadwinner or earner. Again, following patterns detected in the Global South where households maximise their collective income by ensuring as many people as possible are in the labour market (Elson, 1992; Moser, 1998), around half of the households in which migrant workers resided in London had more than one worker. In almost two-thirds of cases (65%), the additional worker was a partner, with other family working in almost one-fifth of households (18%). Most of these occupations were in cleaning (28%) or in other service jobs such as security guards or shop assistants (28%). Others worked in hotel and hospitality work (10%) and in care and hospital jobs (11%). The vast majority of these other workers were employed full-time, working at least 35 hours per week (68%). As

such, it is important to recognise that household members were also largely employed in low-paid work. Despite this, multi-earning was an important strategy as it enabled households to pool crucial additional income. For instance, Ahmed's wife worked part-time two days a week in Sainsbury's earning about £300 pounds a month.

Also very significant were parallel strategies that curtailed consumption and expenditure in relation to household budgeting. These could be performed by migrant workers living alone or by family-based or friend-based households. Again, echoing patterns in the Global South (see Rakodi, 1999), these included tight management of shopping and spending patterns, taking care not to overspend, eliminating luxury items from the weekly shop, and/or searching for bargains wherever possible. To this end, Gladys, a Ghanaian who worked as a carer said that she had learnt to manage her money and to save her pennies unlike in Ghana where she did not care about giving change away. The vast majority of migrants also noted that they usually wrote down how much they had to spend each week and allocated it accordingly. Gwen, who was also a carer and from Ghana, for instance, worked out her weekly budget and distributed it according to her bus pass, her bills and rent. The search for bargains and 'shopping around' was widely reiterated. Pius, another carer who had migrated from Ghana, for example, noted how he had switched his shopping from Sainsbury's to Lidl as the former was too expensive, while Jaime, from Venezuela, noted how he always searched for the 'two-for the price of one' bargains at the supermarkets. Careful budget-management applied to clothes as well with Jenny, who was from Poland and worked as a carer, only buying clothes at the sales and even then from discount stores such as TK Maxx. Similarly, Mary, another carer from Ghana noted:

“It depends, it depends on what I want to buy. If it's shoes, which I buy very occasionally [laughs], I go along the shops to see which one is the cheapest, but of relatively good quality, I don't just go there with open bags, and I know what I want, and I buy most the ones when it's time for the sales, just to save some money.

Migrants were also acutely aware of how much they earned in that Gladys, for example, noted how she evaluated whether she truly needed something by thinking about how many hours she would have to work to pay for it. Although men discussed various consumption-minimising strategies, this was mainly restricted to those living alone. Usually it was women who took the responsibility for these strategies (see Kanji, 1995 on Zimbabwe).

Another important consumption-minimising strategy at the household level was to share housing with other families so as to lower the cost of rent and bills. Portia, who had migrated from Zimbabwe with her husband and her son, lived with her mother on arrival in London and then moved into a house that her family shared with two other Zimbabwean women. When the landlord

raised the rent, they all moved to another house. Other migrants lived in single rooms such as Ahmed who lived with his wife and eight month old son in one room in a shared rented house. It is also clear that migrants sought to minimise their utility bills, only using heating when really necessary. Vijay spoke about this when he said: "... sometimes people, if you live together some people don't pay so sometimes it is a lot of money ... you don't have the money so you have to live in the cold and that is very different." Again, there are interesting parallels with research elsewhere where the absorption of other friends or family members into a household is used to pool resources from maximising the number of earners in a household who can then contribute more to the household budget (Chant, 1996; Moser, 1989; Rakodi, 1999). Occasionally, as in the case of Portia and Jenny's case, family or friends who were hard-up were incorporated into an existing household until they could establish themselves independently (see Kanji, 1995).

Household-based coping strategies were therefore crucial in augmenting the strategies which individuals were able to put in place through their engagement in the labour market, and which collectively ensured survival. Indeed, it is the collective level which we now turn our attention to through exploring community based coping strategies.

Community-based coping strategies

Research in the Global South and in the post-socialist countries has shown how strategies for coping are often developed at a community level involving developing networks of reciprocity and exchange, sometimes referred to as mobilising 'social capital'^{xi} (Moser, 1998; Roberts, 1994; Smith and Stenning, 2006).

A very significant community-based strategy was the use of networks to share information about accessing work. Our data shows clear evidence of the utilisation of such networks in that as many as 65% of our respondents used personal contacts to secure their positions resulting in the clustering of specific ethnic groups in different sectors of London's economy (see Evans *et al.*, 2005; May *et al.*, 2006). Indeed, migrants noted that the role of supervisors and managers was critical in determining the ethnic character of particular workforces as they were responsible for the recruiting process. Carlos, a cleaner from Honduras, reported how his supervisor was Bolivian and he only employed other Latin Americans (although not necessarily from Bolivia, but from a range of countries). Evidence of this type of process was echoed among all the different ethnic and nationality groups. Barbara, a care worker from St Lucia, noted for example that her Ghanaian manager was more friendly with the other Ghanaian workers, and was more likely to employ other Ghanaians as well as give them extra shifts.

Information-sharing ethnic networks were especially important among migrant communities in light of widespread de-skilling, a lack of recognition of the educational skills that people have acquired in their home countries as well as ethnic and gender-based discrimination in the workplace. This is reflected in the words of Sally, a Nigerian cleaner working on the London Underground, who commented that “as a black person...it’s really really hard ... the most job offer the black person [can get] is a cleaner job.” Indeed, even when people have managed to secure British qualifications, this was no guarantee of a professional job. Joshua, for example, from Ghana, who combined his work as a carer with studying, already had two masters degrees from a British university (one on transport management and another in business administration) yet still complained that he couldn’t get a job. In his view, this was because of ethnic and racial discrimination: “because of my accent and the colour of my skin.”

Beyond work, ethnic networks were also important in operating consumption-minimising strategies such as reducing the cost of housing (Bloch, 2006; McIlwaine, 2005). While many of the migrants like Portia shared housing with their immediate family on arrival in London, they then used ethnic networks to find subsequent housing. Ahmed and his wife had located their single room in a shared house through a friend of an aunt, for example. The use of such networks was also apparent in the reduction of shopping costs as illustrated in the case of Mary from Ghana who followed the advice of her friend by buying her meat from a butcher in the local market who sold ‘good cheap cuts’:

“Well, for example, until maybe two months ago, I didn’t know there was a meat market in Woolwich, I didn’t know. So I go to the shops to buy my meat and a friend has told me, you know, this part of Woolwich, when you go there, there are people who sell the meat in the shops there, they go there to buy their meat to sell in the shops, so it’s cheaper over there, so I go there and buy my meat now, so that is cheaper”.

Mobilising community networks and social capital as a survival strategy

Social capital networks at the community level also related to the development of trust and friendship networks. An important tangible support strategy identified in several cases was the creation of savings networks among migrants whereby they save regularly on an informal basis and people from the group can draw on it during times of need. For example, Jasmine, a care worker from Kenya, spoke about a group to which she belonged which she felt was like a family whereby they all put in £50 a month to help each other out at times of need. In a similar way, Ethel from Kenya, observed that a group of Ugandans in her neighbourhood in Thamesmead had had set up an informal system whereby they sent goods and money back to East Africa for people from home and that it was a lot cheaper than Western Union.

From a more intangible perspective, migrants discussed the formation of friendship networks that were used mainly as support mechanisms in providing psychological assistance as well as for more functional reasons. However, while these were very important in people's lives, repeatedly, people noted that their friendship networks were small in that they had few friends, partly linked with lack of leisure time (see above). Joshua, the carer from Ghana noted how he rarely socialised with other people, especially compared with his life in Ghana where there were always parties and funerals (the latter were important social occasions), a point also made by Portia, the cleaner from Zimbabwe. Similarly, Carlos, from Honduras, reported that together with his girlfriend, he had two friends: "Myself, César and Pablo and my girlfriend, you know, I'm very select with whom I can consider as my friends, or rather I only have a few people whom I consider to be my true friends, very few, very few, the rest are acquaintances". Also significant is that people tended to build their friendship networks from within their own ethnic group or nationality group and it was rare for people to have any white British friends for example. Even then, there was also a degree of mistrust within ethnic and nationality groups as well. Carlos, for example, said that he often found other Latin Americans to be 'problematic' and it was safer not to get involved with them (see McIlwaine, 2005 amongst Colombians in London).

Thus, while ethnic identity and ethnic networks are important resources from which to build community-based coping strategies they can also act against solidarity between migrants, acting as a barrier to the formation and mobilisation of social capital across ethnic and national barriers. Thus, ethnic networks by their very nature can also be exclusionary and may work in contravention to individual or household based coping mechanisms.^{xii} Ahmed perhaps expressed this most graphically when he said: "There is no community. There are lots of communities but that don't mix with each other, every life is a robot life over here." Migrant workers also often held quite pejorative views about other ethnic groups. For example, Paula, a hospitality worker from Portugal said: "You know, London is very—how do we call it, immigrant, we call like this it's a lot of immigrant people, very different, the first time I come to Britain I say my God, we are in Africa. Yes, because more black people than white sometimes". Similarly, Rita, the cleaner from Chile, noted that while she expected London to be full of white English people, and especially the stereotype of the English man with the bowler hat, she was surprised to find so many migrants living and working in the city, and especially so many black Africans. Echoing this, Enrique, a chef from Colombia, noted, "When I arrived I thought I was in Africa."

Ethnic differences also led to divisions and isolation in the workplace, and the creation of ethnic and nationality-based discrimination. For some this amounted to not being spoken to in an equally friendly manner as reported by Malani, a Mauritian, who was employed as a care worker. She said that most of her colleagues would not talk to her and she said, "maybe because I am Indian...most

of the carers, they are African. They don't talk. Even to say hello, sometimes they will answer, sometimes they just ignore you...true." Similarly, Barbara, from St Lucia identified a lack of support from her Ghanaian manager, yet when asked why she did not complain, she said: "In a way I can't you see, because the reason is because his nationality and most of those who work with him is the same nationality as him...He's a Ghanaian. So ...they won't talk about it, you see, they won't complain. So I can't really talk to them about it, I can't, it's not that way at all."

Linked with this, ethnic stereotyping was also widespread as was evidenced by Christina's (a Nigerian care worker) account. Not only did she feel that as a Nigerian she was not scared to speak out against poor working conditions, but she felt that her Asian colleagues were too scared to complain. These stereotypes were particularly pervasive in relation to Eastern European migrants who were consistently identified as increasing competition for low-paid jobs, often by undercutting wages. Portia from Zimbabwe, noted the ethnic shift in the London Underground station at which she worked which had gone from being predominantly African to Eastern European. In turn, she attributed this to the fact that "Bulgarians....and the Polish, even if they are told we are giving you this money, they will just say yes." When we asked what they would say if they were given lower wages, she noted that "they will not say anything." Also, Jaime, from Venezuela noted: "There are so many Polish since last year; they need to give a chance to other people. In Starbucks where I work there used to be two Polish, now there are six". Paula made a similar comment in relation to the hotel sector: "Before there was a lot of Mongolians but now they want those from Poland because they say yes all the time [to lower wages]."

The existence of such exclusion on ethnic based grounds and the existence of fractured or 'perverse' social capital potentially undermines the creation of community-based coping strategies on class-based grounds. Portia, from Zimbabwe, for instance, said that she had "no Africans behind her" which meant that she was much less willing to speak out against any exploitative work practices.

Civil society organising

Despite a level of fragmentation among migrants as a group along nationality and ethnic lines, there was also evidence of civil society organising. Extremely significant, for example, was that 43% of migrant workers in our survey were actively involved in faith-based organisations. These included Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh organisations. However, again these organisations were divided along ethnic and nationality lines. For example, Brazilians congregate in St Ann's Catholic Church in the East End every Sunday, where they hear mass in Portuguese, Colombians meet at St Ignatius church in Seven Sisters where they hear mass in Spanish, while many Ghanaians were involved with their local Evangelical churches (one in Lambeth near the Elephant

and Castle and another in Greenwich). Indeed, in some cases, there were specific churches for people from particular regions of a country. Mary, a carer from Ghana, for example, noted:

“you go to your various churches and then the one for people from my home town, they will actually know, once you come here, they know you are here and they will let you know that they have this group and that they have these meetings and they will inform you we are meeting at this time and that is from my home town and the people will speak my dialect, my language ... it comprises people from the Volta region, we have one language, one is for people from my town and one is for people from my region, but because of the language, you have this core language ... they’ll tell you they have it, you decide to go be part of them or not, it’s all the same community”

Several migrants pointed out the importance of these groups in their lives, providing not only mental and spiritual sustenance, but also material help especially for those who have recently arrived in London. While Mary noted that her church helped recent migrants, Christina, also Ghanaian really enjoyed attending her Pentecostal church:

“you enjoy it, it’s like everybody from my country goes to church, you see people, so you don’t get lonely, you see people on Sunday from your country ... you go on your dialect ... everything’s like ... you don’t really get bored ... because you just go to church and you see people ... but I enjoyed it, everybody around you ... where you see people from your own country, you talk in your own language and it’s fun, I enjoy it”

Similarly, Gladys, also Ghanaian noted: “we have church where we go, Ghanaian church, there you feel happy because it’s your people. The church that we go to we are appreciated.” This also implies that migrants not only feel at home in churches comprising their own people, language and customs, but also they provide a buttress from the exclusion they feel in wider society.

Other types of civil society organising also emerged as important in the survival mechanisms of migrants. Again, these included nationality-based organisations that were oriented towards the welfare and the provision of advice for migrants, as well as providing friendship and support as in the case of ‘secondary school organisations’. For example, Mary noted that Ghanaians met up with people that they had attended school with. This was primarily social, but could extend to material support and information sharing. She herself met up with her school friends from Ghana once a year and had a dinner dance. She also noted that there are school groups based on the town you were from and the dialect you speak. Emma also discussed her local Ghanaian Association that was linked with the church and where her father was the president. While the daily activities focus on the church, the Association organises a party twice a year as a social event (see also Henry and Mohan, 2003 on the Ghanaian community).

Some people and some nationalities were more likely to organise than others. As outlined, above, for example, the Ghanaians appeared to be particularly well-organised, especially around the

church which were the main form of civil society organising for all migrants. Other migrants were less keen to get involved with civil society organisations. Rita, from Chile, for example, noted that she didn't get involved with Latin American groups because they were dominated by Colombians, and as a Chilean she felt excluded.

However, despite these divisions, from an organisational point of view, it appears that faith-based organisations are potentially the most appropriate fora through which trade unions and migrant groups can organise to address and overcome the exploitative conditions of work in global cities like London (see Wills, 2004, 2005).

Strategising for change?

In light of the preceding discussion, it is easy to assume that migrant workers are victims in the functioning of the global capitalist system in cities such as London. However, it is equally important to recognise the agency of migrants, albeit within the context of the appalling conditions in which they often work. In turn, migrants' agency is apparent in the innovative and resourceful strategies that they develop at the individual, household and community levels in order to survive in London. While our discussion above has tended to focus on what may be termed short-term and essentially reactive strategies, it is also apparent that some of the migrant workers were attempting to construct more long-term coping strategies which would improve their lives beyond the immediate receipt of wages and daily survival. Such strategies were more proactive and illustrate migrants' agency to a greater extent. A good example was provided by migrant workers who were attempting to utilise transnational and diasporic connections to establish and build up businesses. Mary, for example, was in the process of building up a small business which she ran with her husband, who lived in Ghana, and which relied on her making catalogue purchases in London which were then sent back and sold in her home town. Similarly, Chris, also Ghanaian, discussed his plans to set-up an architectural technician practice that would serve the Ghanaian diaspora in London by providing plans for houses that migrants wished to construct in Ghana with the money that they sent back home. In turn, Carlos had plans to develop a cut-flower business, importing flowers from Latin America, together with one of his cousins in Colombia, and supplying florists in London. Furthermore, while some of these longer-term strategies were built around a desire to remain in London, others involved a return back home.

Also reflecting the potentially life-changing effects of migration from a more positive perspective as well as the agency of women migrants in particular, was some evidence of re-negotiating gender ideologies. Here again we found that gender roles and relations had changed significantly which was partly attributable to migration and labour market participation (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999;

Pessar, 1995). Women migrants, in particular, commented on the positive changes that they had experienced in London. For instance, Ellen from Ghana spoke about how she was:

“Independent, fully, that’s the word I was trying to [find], fully independent here. And here like once ... back home you can’t move and go and live on your own until you are married or maybe like you are above some age but here when you are 18 and you are working, get money and you can do for yourself you can move somewhere, that kind of independence, back home it’s not like that

Similarly, Paula pointed out:

“I make a lot of changes in my life, yes. I am independent person, I can do whatever I want, I know now I can do something and I am proud of myself for my kids.”

While these changes were most notable amongst women, some men also said that they had had to change their attitudes and behaviour on arriving in London and having to survive, often on their own. Carlos, for instance, commented that at first he found it difficult to survive without what he jokingly referred to as “mama hotel” (his mother), and having to learn how to look after himself. Yet, although he also said that he had helped his mother, he found the independence of cooking and cleaning a positive experience: “Here, I’ve learnt a bit as well. It’s hard but it’s good because you are educating yourself as a person. Here, I’ve learnt how to cook and clean and to be much more tidy, no, I’m grateful for that.”

Finally, we would like to return to the point of migrants’ participation in civil society organisations as a possible mechanism by which they proactively engender long-term changes. The evidence we have gathered to date is somewhat contradictory. Although migrants’ individual participation in such organisations appears to be for predominantly social, cultural and religious reasons, some of these organisations are involved in wider alliances with trade unions and other faith and migrant groups in movements like the Living Wage Campaign. As such, migrants are being drawn into wider alliances which are tackling issues such as low wages and poor working conditions and which may ultimately hold the potential of creating new allegiances between migrant workers of different ethnic, class and gender backgrounds.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the changing nature and conditions of work in global cities such as London from the perspective of migrant workers where, as elsewhere, migrants form a large proportion of workers located in poorly paid jobs. In examining work-home connections, we have argued that it is appropriate to use conceptual frameworks focusing on coping strategies which have been developed largely in the context of the Global South, and to a lesser extent in transitional economies, to examine the ways in which migrants survive in London, beyond just their insertion

in the labour market. The paper has illustrated how such strategies operate through income-maximising and consumption-minimising mechanisms and across three distinct scales: individual, household and community. While not mutually exclusive, community based strategies in particular draw upon ethnic networks in order to facilitate access to work, as well as root individuals and households in specific communities which give their lives social and cultural meaning. Yet, it is important to recognise that while such networks can foster social capital and act in advantageous ways, they are also exclusionary in nature. Perhaps most problematic is the fact that ethnic differences between migrants are prohibiting the development of class-based or migrant-based strategies which may be most useful in challenging the poor working conditions in which many of these migrants find themselves.

The utilisation of coping strategies is also useful because it also enables us to highlight migrant workers agency. It is important to recognise that many migrant workers in this study created a range of resourceful strategies not just to ensure their short-term survival but also to consolidate their long-term ambitions, such as establishing small businesses. In turn, several also stressed that migration brought unexpected benefits such as freedom and changes in gender roles and ideologies. Migrants also acknowledged that they could earn significantly more in London than in their home countries (especially when their salaries are converted into other currencies). Yet, we have to be cautious in celebrating such agency. Ultimately, although migrant workers may be agents in their own right, this does not deny the fact that they are still working in London for low wages and in poor conditions in jobs which many British people no longer want. We would reiterate the argument that it is crucially important to have both a global *and* local sense of responsibility (Massey, 2004) for what is effectively a global process of exploitation which is affecting workers from the Global South and post-socialist countries who are working in cities such as London.

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ⁱ The New Labour government elected to office in 1997 has been particularly keen to get people back to work on the grounds that employment is both a source of financial support as well as an indicator of social esteem, respect and self-worth. It has tried to achieve this both by employing new labour-market policies as well as reforming the benefits systems (McDowell, 2004).

ⁱⁱ Prominent amongst managed migration schemes are the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, the Sector-Based Scheme for the hospitality and food processing industries, and the Worker Registration Scheme for nationals from the eight countries from Central and Eastern Europe which joined the European Union in May 2004. The aim is to attract both high-skilled and low-skilled workers to help

fill the estimated 600,000 vacancies that have remained unfilled in the UK labour market for the last five years.

ⁱⁱⁱ We will mainly use the term strategy rather than mechanism or practice bearing in mind the problems outlined above.

^{iv} It is important to note that this figure assumes that the tax credits and benefits to which workers are entitled are claimed. However, take up is known to be low amongst the most disadvantaged workers, and is likely to be particularly so amongst low paid migrant workers in London. Without benefits and tax credits, the living wage for London is calculated to be £8.10 an hour in 2005.

^v Despite patterns of continuing disadvantage, there has been a shift in perspective to focus on the complexity and different economic and social trajectories of minority ethnic groups in Britain and to highlight successes rather than failures. For instance, East African Asians have transformed from one of the poorest minority ethnic groups in Britain to one of the richest.

^{vi} The team of 11 researchers were recruited and managed by London Citizens, the research was directed by our team at Queen Mary and the work was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Greater London Authority (GLA), Oxfam, Queen Mary, University of London and UNISON. The researchers were also undertaking training in organising techniques with London Citizens as part of their Summer Academy and the research has been used to support the living wage campaign in London (for more information, see Evans *et al.*, 2005; Wills, 2004).

^{vii} This corroborates evidence from the Global South on how people cope with poverty and adverse circumstances (Chant, 1996).

^{viii} It is important to note that this can often severely compromise the lives of migrant workers in the UK. This occurs when their obligations are so strong to their home families/relatives that their ability to survive in the UK is undermined (McIlwaine, 2005).

^{ix} ‘Ordinarily resident’ means a person is here voluntarily and intends to settle. This is based on factors such as whether they intend to stay in the UK for the next 3 years, whether they have children in the UK, and how long they have lived in the UK. The habitual residence test is a complicated investigation that looks into where the normal place of living is considered to be.

^x Also significant is that most migrants were from countries where a welfare regime was absent or limited and so they had no experience or expectations of claiming benefits from the state.

^{xi} This study used the working definition for social capital as “rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and societies’ institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives” (Narayan, 1997:50 cited in McIlwaine and Moser, 2001: 966).

^{xii} Just as social capital can be ‘perverse’ and operate only for the benefit of those included within a particular social grouping (McIlwaine and Moser, 2001).

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