

# Identities in the Margins

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An Ethnographic Study of Migrant Agency  
Workers

By

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of Philosophy of Cardiff University*

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## Abstract

Migrant workers have long constituted a fundamental part of the hospitality sector in the UK. Taking up jobs such as housekeeping, kitchen portering and plate waiting, these workers have formed an essential yet undervalued role in the service economy. Typically insecure and low paid; such work is normally secured through a third party agency presenting a complex employment relationship between the worker, agency and organisational setting. It is this relationship that forms the focus of this PhD research, which aims to understand the daily experiences of migrant workers focusing on the dynamic relationship between power, discourse, subjectivity and work processes and the performing of identities in specific socio-cultural settings. The study draws on data gathered from a twelve-month full-participant ethnography in a hospitality employment agency to provide insights into the ways through which agencies seek to control workers remotely to craft migrant agency workers as compliant subjects. The research considers how contracting organisations use both regulatory and disciplinary practices to construct migrant agency as organisational non-members in order to sustain transactional impersonal relationships with them. Finally, the study explores the ways in which migrant agency workers negotiate their identities, drawing on a range of national, cultural, religious and moralistic discourses to craft acceptable versions of the self. The study suggests that the subject positions crafted from the discourses of the employment agency, contracting organisations as well as migrant workers own identity discourses often work in tandem to sustain and reproduce agency work and agency workers. This thesis offers three contributions which provide greater insights to the current understandings of identities, migrant labour and temporary employment. Firstly through taking an identities lens, the thesis has provided new insights into the control and regulation of migrant agency workers. Secondly, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced depiction of migrant agency workers' identity work. Thirdly, the thesis sheds new light on how experiences of stigma and liminality are constituted and contested at the level of identity.

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# 1. Migrant Workers in the UK: The Missing Middle

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## 1.1. The Picture in the UK

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2004, 23 lifeless bodies were dragged out of the sea in Morecambe Bay. As the story unfolded it was discovered that these were the bodies of illegal Chinese migrants who had been illegally employed as cockle pickers. As the evening tide rose, the workers had become stuck in quick sand, and unable to escape, many of them drowned after being overcome by hypothermia. This tragedy drew stark attention to the dangerous and substandard conditions that migrant workers are subjected to. More recently on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 three factories were raided in Rochdale, Greater Manchester, after it was discovered that a large number of illegal workers had been brought from Africa and Eastern Europe under the false promise of being able to earn decent wages and to build a new life in the UK. Police had found that the workers had been forced to work and live in abysmal conditions, working 80 hour weeks for just £25. Sadly these stories are not isolated but form a small part of a wider portrait of migrant marginalization, subordination and victimisation in the UK.

Despite these tragic stories the British sentiment towards migrant workers in the UK is far more complex. Contemporary media and political manifestos convey migrants in rather dualistic terms - not only as victims of these extreme cases of abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation but also as villainous scroungers, either stealing British jobs in a period of austerity or wrongfully exhausting the benefit systems. The British Social Attitudes survey conducted in 2013 suggested that attitudes towards migrants were less than positive, with almost a quarter of those surveyed believing that migrants arrived in the

UK with the sole intention of exploiting the welfare system. This is hardly surprising after the United Kingdom Independence Party's (UKIP) local and European election success in 2014 indicated that public attitude towards migrant workers was growing ever more critical. The media has certainly fuelled this negative portrayal, with headlines in newspapers such as 'We want a BIGGER house! Romanian family of 17 on £55k in benefits demand more' (Sheldrick, 2014) or migrants quoted as likening the benefits system to 'finding a sack full of cash left on the road' (Reid, 2014). Migrant workers have formed a convenient scapegoat for the austere conditions experienced by many Britons today, so much so that the Conservative Party have pledged that they will ensure tighter controls on benefit migration, a declaration seen as a vote winner in the 2015 election.

The mainstream picture of migration presented through media, public debate and government policy therefore presents these two extremes. However, in between there is a forgotten middle, that more often than not evades public opinion. This missing middle is made up of migrants that are neither victims nor villains but are the workers that form a fundamental role in the British service sector. May et al (2007) describe these migrants as the cogs that have kept the UK's service sector working. These are the night workers that ensure that office buildings, hotels, public areas and streets are clean for when we wake up. They are the toilet attendants that facilitate alcohol fuelled evenings, or the cleaners that clean the remnants of these drunken events. They are the chefs and kitchen porters that ensure breakfasts are ready for when hotel guests rise; and the cheap labourers that allow construction companies to continue their building projects. And they are the nurses that care for the sick, the elderly and the disabled, the porters that ensure the hospitals are clean and well maintained; as well as the beauticians, baristas, and waitresses that work for the minimum wage and make up a significant part of the British service sector. It is

this missing middle that so often escapes public attention yet constitutes such an important part of the service economy that this thesis seeks to gain greater understandings.

## 1.2. Migrant Labour, an Identity Issue?

Migrant workers are faced with multiple tensions in the UK. First and foremost there is (as mentioned above) the contested and emotive portrayal of migrants in the UK. Being constructed as either villains or victims, the legitimacy of migrants' stay in the UK is often subject to public debate and sour feeling. This tension produces unsettling circumstances for migrant workers who are faced with daily experiences of social stigma. As Wadsworth (2015) suggest one of the largest impacts migration has had in the UK has not been on jobs or the economy but on overall negative public perception. Secondly the kinds of work migrant workers are often employed in is in the low-wage, low skill economy. As the Labour Force Survey (2013) indicates, migrant workers undertake over 30% of all housekeeping, cleaning and hospitality work in the UK. These kinds of jobs have been described in the literature as 'dirty work', considered to be servile, and characterised as being poorly paid, offering substandard conditions and very few benefits, again feeding into a negative identity (May et al, 2007; McDowell et al, 2009). Thus, the position that many migrant workers are faced with is one that poses a significant threat to positive self-understandings and induces migrant workers to negotiate the meanings attached to their work (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; McIllwaine et al, 2006; Tufts, 2006).

For migrant workers their national, racial and gendered identities are considered to have an effect of their subjective experiences of work, where these identities are relevant to the

way in which the labour market is organised. Thus the colour of migrant workers' skin, their religion, native tongue or accent influences the jobs they do, the money they earn and thus the lifestyles they are able to lead (Matthew and Ruhs, 2007; McDowell et al, 2007; Watts, 2007). Given that migrants are significantly over represented in the low-skill, low-wage economies (Wadsworth, 2015), it is clear that identity becomes intertwined with their life trajectory in the UK.

A considerable number of migrants searching for work in the UK access the labour market through employment agencies (McDowell et al., 2007). The complex contractual relations symptomatic of third party contracting agencies are also seen to pose a threat to an individual's self-understanding. This is because there is a lack of sustainable relationships and little scope to pin the self to career trajectories (Sennett, 1998). However, temporary forms of employment are also considered to present an opportunity for greater personal freedom and choice in identity constitution, being free of organisational constraints (Giddens, 1991). Despite the growth of agency work and the associated temporary working practices, little is known about how workers experience these multiple uncertainties. In particular, for migrants in agency work, who simultaneously grapple with constructing a legitimate sense of self as members of wider society as well as workers, many questions are yet to be answered.

This study therefore seeks to address these gaps through drawing on more nuanced concepts of identity in order to understand the daily experiences of migrant workers in the context of agency work, focusing on the dynamic relationship between power, discourse, subjectivity and work processes and the performing of identities in specific socio-cultural settings. By focusing on identities, the study aims to understand not only how migrant

agency workers negotiate and navigate their experiences with their self-understandings but also to gain a greater understanding of how organisational practices work to craft these workers identities.

### 1.3. Methodology & Aims of the Research

This study draws on a poststructuralist reading of identity informed by Foucauldian concepts of power, discourse and subjectivity in order to explore the ways in which migrant workers formulate their identities in the context of their work. The thesis has three interrelated aims: to understand ways in which migrant agency workers constitute their identities in the context of work, through considering the discourses they draw upon in constituting the self; critically explore how employment agencies and contracting organisations are able to harness workers as compliant subjects, considering the ways through which these organisations attempt to influence identity formation; and examine how migrant agency workers construct salient and legitimate understandings of their selves.

In order to explore these aims this thesis draws on a twelve-month full participant ethnography in a hospitality employment agency named 'Staff Solutions' through which I was employed. This means that I am able to talk in depth about my own experiences of work. Documented within this thesis are my understandings of my own situated experiences of the processes, systems, interactions and encounters within agency work. This also enables me to provide a unique and nuanced account not only of migrants in the context of their work but also of their everyday experiences of flexible working. Taking a critical interpretive approach to the empirical data, this study teases out the ways in which

work is experienced by migrants and how this has implications for these workers' self-understandings. To gain a nuanced insight three key sources of data are drawn upon in order to weave a detailed, reflexive account of the organization and migrant workers' experiences of agency work. The first of these are observational accounts of interactions with Staff Solutions, work within contracting organisations, and interactions between the agency workers and myself. The second data source is drawn from semi-structured and informal interviews conducted with migrant agency workers, which give greater insight into the ways through which migrant workers narrate their identities through their work and personal migration experiences. Finally, extracts from my reflexive diary are used in order to explore how work and interactions induced my own identity negotiations.

#### 1.4. Key Contributions

This thesis provides contributions to the literatures on identities, migrant workers and temporary labour. Drawing on ethnographic methods the data offers a rich and nuanced contextualized account of migrant workers in agency work. Furthermore through merging the empirical context with theoretical underpinnings new insights provide an in-depth understanding of how work and socio-cultural context have implications on workers self-understandings. More specifically this thesis makes the following three contributions.

This thesis offers three contributions which, through the novel empirical account, extend understandings of identities in the migrant labour and temporary employment literatures. Firstly through taking an identities lens, the thesis has provided new insights into the control and regulation of migrant agency workers. Secondly, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced depiction of migrant agency workers' identity work. Thirdly, the thesis

sheds new light on how experiences of stigma and liminality are constituted and contested at the level of identity.

## 1.5. A Map of the Thesis

*Chapter two* explores the literature on identities, providing an exploration of the various theoretical positions on identity and a clear rationale as to why this thesis adopts a critical reading of identity. Themes of identity regulation and identity work are explored in some depth with reference to the organisation studies and critical management studies literatures. This chapter draws out how subjectivity, power and agency are implicated in the processes of identification and the limits to the current understandings within the literature.

*Chapter three* explores the literature on migrant workers, considering in-detail issues associated with migrant identities. This literature provides insights into the processes of identification that migrant workers are faced with, as well as the social stigmas and identity struggles that constitute migrant workers' self-understandings. The chapter then goes on to consider agency work. Given that identity has seldom been explored in this context the specific focus lies around issues associated with power and regulation. This chapter concludes with a conceptual framework derived from the identities, migrant worker and agency work literatures, from which the study is structured.

*Chapter four* provides a reflexive overview of the research design and methods used within this thesis. This chapter commences by providing an insight in the political, practical and pragmatic rationales behind the choice of field of study. Following this, the ontological and epistemological assumptions taken in the study are discussed. The choice

of methods, location of study, access and ethical considerations are also elucidated, together with an account of my own experiences in the field, and the ways in which I engaged in my own identity work during the study.

*Chapter five* is the first of three data chapters. This chapter draws details of the relationship between the agency workers and Staff Solutions in order to depict the mechanisms through which agency workers' subjectivities are crafted. It is through the intricate understandings of the inner workings of Staff Solutions, i.e. the recruitment process, shift allocation, and feedback processes that provide insight into how Staff Solutions is able to craft compliance despite the remote third party relationship they have with workers. The chapter draws out details of how Staff Solutions promotes qualities of 'enterprise', 'competition' and 'independence' as ideal subjectivities and how migrant agency workers craft their identities around this.

*Chapter six* develops the story further through exploring the relationship between the contracting organisations and agency workers. The chapter provides rich details of how contracting organisations use disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms to craft compliance and how this has implications on migrant agency workers' identities. The data show how contracting organisations limit agency workers' identification with the organisation, constructing them as organisational 'non-members'. Agency workers are seen to negotiate this subjectivity, understanding their positions within the organisation as transactional, transient and instrumental.

*Chapter seven* draws on the individual discourses of the migrant agency workers in order to understand better how they negotiate their identities in the context of work. The

chapter explores how the identity work among agency work fortifies the insular, fragmented and individualistic nature of agency workers – something that is promoted by both ‘Staff Solutions’ and the various contracting organisations. Through considering resistance, the chapter shows how this is self-serving, distancing workers from their agency counterparts, and reinforcing enterprising identities.

*Chapter eight* discusses the findings in relation to the literature. This chapter develops three contributions specifically considering the identity regulation of migrant agency workers; identity work and resistance; and how the study provides a more nuanced account of migrant agency workers’ experiences. The discussion provides new contributions to the literatures on identities and agency work, and considers the wider implications for the future of the temporary migrant workforce. The conclusion provides an overview of the key contributions, suggests recommendations for policy and practice, discusses avenues for future research, considers the limitations of the current project, and concludes with a reflexive note on the execution of the study.

## 2. Identities in the Organisation

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### 2.1. Introduction

This study explores the experiences of migrant agency workers in relation to their work and socio-cultural context taking a specific interest in how these experiences are informed by and inform their self-understandings, or identities. The study of migrant agency workers' identities provides an interesting way through which the experience of multiple uncertainties associated with agency work and socio-cultural context can be explored and understood. Through exploring migrant workers' identities, the study provides insights into how the work they undertake and organisations where this work takes place impacts on the workers' self-understandings as well as how these workers are implicated in the processes of identity construction, simultaneously negotiating their own identities and the identities of others.

The study takes a critical approach to identities considering the ways in which power and discourse are implicated in the process of identification and how individuals are able to negotiate their identities. Utilising a Foucauldian approach to power, discourse and subjectivity (Foucault, 1977; 1980; 1982), this thesis aims to gain a greater understanding of how migrant agency workers craft their identities in the workplace. The analysis takes into account the complex, political nature of identity construction, and in doing so, acknowledges how identity constitution is a process that bridges the social, organisational and individual levels. Through drawing on a Foucauldian framework, therefore, the study acknowledges the role of resistance and agency in identity construction.

The aim of this chapter is to set out the literature on identities and how identity has been analysed in organisational settings. The chapter begins with an overview of the main

approaches to identity in organisation studies. Following this, the chapter examines in more depth Foucauldian identity studies in organisations, in particular, those studies concerned with identity regulation. Following on from this, the workings of an individuals agency will be discussed, drawing on the literature on identity work and resistant identities. The final section of the chapter considers the specific focus of this study. Here, studies concerned with exploring the identities of low-wage, low skill and low status work are considered.

## 2.2. Identity in Organisations

Identity is not just a concept of self-reference and self-understanding, it also informs and is informed by our interactions with the world (Cerulo, 1997). Our identities shape not only how we perceive, act and interact with the other but are also the basis through which we are shaped by the other. Identity can therefore be understood as the intersection between self-understanding and our connection with the social world (Ybema et al., 2008). Thus identity can form ‘a prism through which topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined’ (Bauman, 2001: 1). This means that identity is an effective bridging mechanism in understanding the relationship between the individual, the organisation, institutions, and wider culture and society.

Identity is a concept of interest to many academic disciplines, ranging from psychology, sociology, journalism and human geography through to management and organisation studies (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Conceptually, identity spans a wide range of ontological assumptions, from rigid essentialist understandings, where identity is viewed as fixed, unchanging and inherent (Ashforth, 1998; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Gioia, Schulz and Corley, 2000; Haslam, 2004) through to strongly constructionist approaches that emphasise the authoring of identities on an on-going basis (Cerulo, 1997; Alvesson et al., 2008; Thomas,

2009). Such a range of approaches is evident in the treatment of identity within organisation studies.

Essentialist approaches to identity have been concerned with how the individual relates to work and their organisations, for example, Social Identity Theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Such approaches view personal identities as fixed and are concerned with how individuals identify perceptions of their self with specific groups.

At the other end of the spectrum of ways of conceptualising identity, strong constructionist approaches view identities as an on-going construction or achievement that is a product of complex negotiations with work, organisations and societies (Bauman, 2006). This approach embraces the political and fragile nature of identity, shying away from essentialist accounts of predetermined identity (Willmott, 1994) and incorporating analysis of how structure (or deep seated discourses) and agency play out in various organisational and social contexts (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Barker, 1993; Casey, 1995; Deetz, 1992; duGay, 1996; Kunda, 1992).

Some proponents of constructionist approaches note the increasing uncertainty of contemporary capitalist societies, meaning that identities have become increasingly fragile (Sennett, 1998). In a turbulent world individuals are in search of 'coherent, distinct and positively valued identities' (Alvesson et al., 2008: 15), typically drawing on their work and organisation, religious institutions, family and culture in order to achieve this (Brown, 2015; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Yet as temporary forms of employment increase and work forces become more geographically mobile, the stability of the organisation, culture and

family as a source of identity comes into question (Sennett, 1998; Lair, Sullivan and Cheney, 2005)

Regardless of the approach taken on identity, there is no doubt that identity as a concept has become extremely popular in understanding of a wide variety of organisational phenomena (Thomas, 2009), seen to provide new insights to ‘worn out notions such as culture, roles, attitudes, beliefs and values’ (Alvesson et al., 2008: 7). It has been widely accepted as a sophisticated tool in the analysis of organisations and individuals within organisations to the point that the study of identities has been considered to be important in explaining almost everything that happens in and around organisational life (Brown, 2015). Not only have identities been seen to be crucial in understanding how organisations are constructed (Brown, 2001; Ybema et al., 2009), but also in considering how individuals creatively form identities in a range of different contexts and settings (Alvesson et al., 2008; Kondo, 1990; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2008). As Davis suggests, the study of identity ‘neither imprisons nor detaches persons from their social and symbolic universe’ (Davis, 1991: 105); thus analysis can appreciate the dynamics of self and social situation in organisational settings.

The following section gives an overview of the various approaches to identity, functionalist, interpretivist and critical. Although this study is informed by a poststructuralist approach to identity, something which will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter, insights from functionalist and interpretivist approaches are first presented. The section highlights how these two approaches have contributed to our understanding of identities in organisations but also outlines how, for the purposes of this study, both are seen to be lacking. Through considering the limitations of functionalism and interpretivism a clear rationale will be delineated as to why critical approaches to identity will offer the best insights for this thesis.

## 2.3. Functionalist Approaches

The mainstream functionalist approach to identity, typified in the more managerial oriented research and taking a ‘technicist’ cognitive interest (Alvesson et al, 2008), is built on the assumptions of essentialism, seeing identity as something that is inherent and enduring. Functionalist writers assume that an individual’s personal identification with an organisation can be used to engender high levels of commitment, loyalty and motivation amongst their workers (Ashforth and Mael, 1988; Elsbach, 1999; Haslam, 2004; Kahn, 1990). The main contributors in the field have either concerned themselves with concepts of self and how well this fits with the organisation (Elsbach, 1999; Kahn, 1990) or Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Functionalist scholars often seek to inform the managerialist literature, considering identity issues and how these have causal relations to various managerial outcomes (Alvesson et al., 2008). The interest in identity draws from Tajfel and Turner’s (1985) Social Identity Theory (SIT), however it was brought to use in the management literature by Ashforth and Mael (1989). SIT is made up of three proponents: first that social identification is the perception of oneness with a group or persons; second that each group or category is based on the distinctiveness and prestige of a group; and finally that an individual will produce activities that are congruent with that identity. This theory is based on an understanding of identity as a dichotomy between the individual or unique self (which is stable and unchanging) and the social or group self. Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggest that behaviours and organisational commitment are antecedents and consequences of the individual’s level of identifications with the organisation (Brown, 1969; Hall, Schneider and Nygren, 1970; Lee, 1971; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Patchen, 1970; Rotond, 1970). Thus the greater the individual’s identification with the organisation, the greater is the likelihood of an individual internalising

the organisational values (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994) and increasing their engaged performance in job roles (Dutton, Durkerich and Harquail, 1994; Elsbach, 1999, Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001; Kahn, 1990).

The functionalist perspective suggests management can enhance the levels of identification of its employees through, increasing the distinctiveness of the group (Mael, 1988), increasing the prestige associated with the group and the salience of out-groups (Allen et al., 1983). Ashforth and Mael (1989) note that individuals seek to secure positive identities in an organisation that will enhance individual personal identity, they also note that individuals may not always act in congruence with this – identification is predominantly psychological, thus individuals can selectively choose what they identify with and how much they chose to engage with this group identity.

It is through an individual's beliefs and inferences about an organisation, coupled with their prior knowledge and experience that they arrive at an overall evaluation of the organisation's identity and decide whether this is in line with their personal identities (Dutton et al., 1994; Scott and Lane, 2000). This is understood as a strategy of self-preservation in which individuals are able to draw positive self-understandings from identification with their respective organisations. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) consider that dis-identification may also be a strategy of self-preservation where individuals who perceive a distance between the self and the organisation or a negative relational categorisation seek to distance themselves from the organisation. Kahn (1990) takes a more nuanced understanding of identification; he considers how individuals are able to protect an essential self through the ways in which they perform their work. Kahn considers that engagement and disengagement

in roles is associated with how far individuals are able to identify with their respective organisation.

Although the functionalist studies on identity in organisations are useful in providing an insight into how an individual's self-understanding is implicated in how they engage with their work and their organisation, there are a number of problems associated with the assumptions upon which this work is based. First it assumes that personal identities are solid, essential and unchanging. Relatedly, it is also assumed that identification is a linear process, leading to internalisation of organisational identities, greater commitment and improved performance. However, this is perhaps a rather naïve assumption. Such an approach fails to take into account wider power relations and the variety of other targets to which we might identify (both organisation and non-organisation related), and the fact that organisations might be experienced differently by different people at different times (therefore essentialising the organisation). In fact, power is not conceived or talked about within the analysis of identification, implying that the individual has an unfettered choice in identifying or dis-identifying with facets of the organisation.

## 2.4. Interpretivist Approaches

Unlike the functionalist approaches which assume identity determines experience, interpretivist approaches see identity as being constructed from experience (Kenny, Whittle and Willmott, 2011). Interpretivist writers are therefore more concerned how individuals relate or react to the multiple meanings of organisational life and how they understand their selves through these experiences. Identities are constituted from experience with the social context and in relation to 'the other' (Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism has been a key

in this conceptualisation of identity, concerned with how individuals generate and modify meanings through interaction.

Two key theorists influencing this approach to identities are Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959). Mead (1934) suggests that our identities are constructed from an internalisation of the understandings and expectations from the generalised other. For Mead (1934) identities can be understood as both the 'Me' and the 'I', 'I' being the facet of identity that undertakes the interpretive process of internalisation and 'Me' being the outcome of this process or the way in which we are perceived by the other. Thus, identity is a process through which the other is implicated (Cooley, 1902). Goffman (1959) expands upon this idea seeing identities as more of a conscious construction, where individuals manage impressions through performance to generate a stable 'favourable impression'.

Narrative analysts (Brown, 2006; Mallett and Wapshott, 2011; Rhodes and Brown, 2005) have also taken a similar approach to the understanding of identities considering the ways in which individuals arrange events through 'story telling' to being telling of one's identity (Czarniawska, 1998) or as Edwards (2006) suggests, 'it is through storytelling that people's lives are experienced and made meaningful and their identities constructed (Edwards, 2006: 56).' For these writers, identity is a construction, evolutionary, and open to change. These concepts have been widely drawn upon in the organisation studies literature in order to understand better how individuals deal with their complex and often ambiguous and contradictory experiences at work (Alvesson et al., 2008).

The concept of 'identity work' as a continuation of these theorists' ideas is a popular metaphor for understanding and analysing how individuals craft their identities in an

organisational context (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Identity work is ‘the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of the self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued’ (Alvesson et al., 2008: 15). Identities therefore are crafted through our interactions with our context and the other are always in a state of becoming, or under-construction.

Conveyed within the interpretivist approach to identities is the understanding that individuals are able to perpetually recreate their identities as fluctuations in networks in relationships and expectations (Gergen, 1991). The metaphor of identity work has both been seen as a way in which interactions with others can be sustained in the long run but also a mechanism for coping with difficult situations (Albert et al., 2000), in an organisational setting this has been seen as a tool to repair fractured identities (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) and create more valued or positive self-understandings (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Organisation scholars writing in this tradition have concerned themselves with understanding the dialogical processes through which identities are rendered meaningful to others (Beech, 2008), how the looseness of discourse can be exploited to create preferred selves (and what makes certain identities more appealing) (Carroll and Levy, 2008), how social influences are implicated in the process of identity work (Watson, 2008) or the ways through which self-understanding is crafted through reflexively organised self-narratives (Storey et al., 2005: 1050).

The interpretivist understanding offers a more nuanced approach to identities than that of the functionalist approaches acknowledging that identities are not essential, rather are contingent and constructed. Although this approach has made significant contributions to the ways in which identities have been understood in organisations (Alvesson et al., 2008) the interpretivist approach also brings with it specific criticisms. Interpretivist approaches have

been considered to focus upon micro-interactions that are abstracted from wider context. This means that this approach may not be useful in considering how meta-discourses such as race, class or gender and the wider socio-political economy are implicated in the process of identification (Kenny et al., 2011). As with functionalist approaches, interpretivist analyses of identities fail to question the wider power relations, providing therefore an inadequate means by which to appreciate how identities are constructed and contested in situ, and the struggles involved in this on-going process (Collinson, 2003; Thomas and Davies, 2005).

## 2.5. Critical Approaches

### 2.5.1. Foucault: Discourse, Power and Identity

The influence of Foucault on identity studies in organisation studies has been profound. A Foucauldian conception of discourse and subjectivity is a widely used theoretical framework among critical approaches to identity, providing a rich set of studies which explore the complex processes through which identities are formed. For Foucauldian scholars the term subjectivity is adopted as opposed to identity as it emphasises the constructed, anti-essentialist nature of the concept, drawing attention to the complex power relations to which we are the subject of and subjected to (Kenny, Whittle and Willmott, 2011)<sup>1</sup>.

For Foucault, identities are created through the struggle within and between discourses (Foucault, 1982). The concept of discourse is important to understanding how identities are constituted. Discourses are a set of interrelated texts and practices that ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discursive regimes not only operate to provide meanings and possibilities for identity but also constrain the field of understandings and therefore the possibilities for identification (Mills, 2003, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Although many Foucauldian studies use the term subjectivity, this thesis will use the more widely understood term of identity while taking a Foucauldian approach to the concept.

Discourses become dominant through material and discursive practices ‘which keep them in circulation and other practices which try to fence them off from others, thus keeping other alternative, competing discourses out of circulation’ (Mills, 2003: 54). More dominant discourses may be seen as systems of thought that derive considerable power from their entrenchment within discursive fields such as the legal system, religion and the family. They define what is taboo or acceptable, normal or deviant, true or false (Foucault, 1980: 131) in different contexts (Davies, 1989; Merilainen et al., 2004).

A discursive approach to identity brings power relations into sharp relief. Power lies at the heart of forming, sustaining and constraining understandings of who we are and who we might be (McNay, 2000), with different discourses offering possibilities for sustaining as well as constraining our identities (Kondo, 1990). Power relations are thus fundamental to understanding identity, seen to circulate through discourse operating dynamically at a given time in a more or less coordinated set of relations (Foucault, 1980: 199).

Discourses constrain the construction of identities through their normalising effects on individuals, marking out the range of possibilities for sustainable and legitimate selves. Identities (subject positions) are inscribed within dominant discourses, which are seen to offer possibilities and also constrain the ways in which people think about themselves (Deetz, 1992). This approach to identity conceives that the subject occupies certain subject positions within or becomes positioned by discourse that enables and constrains us by structuring our sense of self and our relationship to the world (Kenny, Whittle and Willmott, 2011).

Discourses can be disciplinary of subjects as they establish what is considered normal and what is deviant, which constrain or limit the way in which individuals are able to think about

themselves (Foucault, 1991; Yates and Hites, 2010). However, discourses can never fully constrain or determine identities as there is always indeterminacy within any individual discourse and individuals occupy multiple discursive fields where different discursive elements come into play. As Foucault (1979) suggests, power seeps into every grain of the individual, however power is relational, diffuse and discursive rather than coercive (Gaventa, 2003:1; Rabinow, 1991):

...as soon as there's a relation of power there's a possibility of resistance. We're never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions following a precise strategy. (Foucault, 1980: 13)

Discourse is seen as both an effect of power and a hindrance because 'discourse not only transmits power but also undermines it and exposes it, rendering it fragile and possible to thwart' (Foucault, 1978; 101). The fragility of discourse can be seen in its incompleteness and shifting nature which means that identities constituted through discourse are always open to resistance and change (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). This conception of identity therefore opens the possibility of agency, for individuals to be seen as agents of their own identities whilst being constrained by the discursive fields of power. The following section discusses how these concepts have been used in the organisation studies literature.

### 2.5.2. Foucauldian Studies on Identities in Organisations

Critical approaches to identity have been developed in the field of organisation studies. These studies have drawn insights from Foucault to show how individuals construct their identities in the context of the organisation and how management attempts to regulate workers through discourse (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Hardy and Thomas, 2014).

A notable focus of studies on identities in organisations from critical management studies has been to understand how organisations seek employee compliance. This analysis is seen as a follow on from critical culture studies which sought to understand how cultural management strategies could be seen as a form of insidious control (Casey, 1995; Kunda, 1992; van Maanen, 1991; Willmott, 1993). The literature on culture seeks to answer questions on how organisations seek employee 'buy-in' to the values and objectives of the organisation through strategies such as corporate rhetoric, uniform, incentives or corporate ethos. For example, in Casey's (1995) study on Hephaetus, the seductive rhetoric of empowerment delivered through cultural management strategies was seen to captivate employees rendering them compliant to corporate change. This approach was further developed placing greater emphasis on the implications such forms of control have on the workers self-understandings.

Critical studies on identities have drawn on Foucault's ideas to understand how organisations seek to co-opt and align employees' identities with corporate goals (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This is not to discount the culture literature but to conceive how culture or other forms of control within an organisation have more profound effects on the way in which an employee understands the self and subsequently acts and interacts. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) consider identity regulation as the more or less intentional practices by organisations that seek to influence employees' processes of identity construction and reconstruction. Their concern is with how practices of control are incorporated within the individual's quest of self-definition, coherence and meaning (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 621). This is achieved through management's use of various techniques such as, defining a person directly or defining through others, explicating morals and values, group categorisation or affiliation, hierarchical location, and establishing norms of behaviour (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Empirical work in this field has explored how strategies of control have more pervasive effects on the ‘insides’ of their employees. For example corporate strategy has been considered a discourse and mechanism of power (Hardy and Thomas, 2014) as it is seen to transform an individual into ‘a specific kind of subject who secures their sense of well-being through participation in strategic practices’ (Knights and Morgan, 1991:1). Thus through the concept of discourse and subjectivity an understanding of how managerial practices have an effect on the individual’s sense of self are developed.

Following the Foucauldian approach, a number of studies have sought to analyse identity control focusing on how job role formulates idealised subjectivities (Ashcraft, 2007; Brown and Lewis, 2011; Merilainen et al., 2004), feedback systems (Ibarra, 1999), mentoring (Corvaleski et al., 1998), institutional logics (Lok, 2010) and teamworking (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Knights and McCabe, 2003; Handley et al., 2006). Peer surveillance has been discussed in the literature as a mechanism through which compliance is sought and a technique through which employees are encouraged to internalise organisational norms (Sewell, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). Drawing on Foucauldian concepts of panoptic control, Sewell (1998) suggests that modern team-working practices packaged in discourses of autonomy form more innocuous forms of control through peer surveillance. Looking at the circulation of wider societal level discourses, studies have been concerned with how the enterprise discourse feeds into workers’ identities (Doolin, 2002; du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1989, Storey et al., 2005; Vallas and Cummins, 2015). For du Gay (1996, 1997) this is seen to transform workers into self-managing and competitive ‘entrepreneurial selves’, although others have considered this as a discursive resource open to negotiation (Storey et al., 2005; Vallas and Cummins, 2015).

Despite the strong influence of organisation studies, Foucauldian approaches are not without their critiques. First critics have pointed to an over-emphasis of on the fragility of the self and its vulnerability to discourse, suggesting that individual agency is poorly developed (Newton, 1998). For example, analyses such as that of du Gay's (1996) 'enterprising selves' has been viewed as totalising, leaving little consideration of how discourse is multiple, fragmented and can be negotiated or resisted by the individual (Fournier and Grey, 1999). Secondly, and relatedly, those studies that adopt an overly deterministic reading of discourse can be accused of neglecting resistance and the way individuals manoeuvre around and between various discourses (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). Furthermore, Foucauldian studies have been seen to have a tendency to reify discourse, not illustrating empirically how discourses operate to constrain individuals (Speer, 1999). This fails to incorporate the ways in which individuals actively interpret (Clegg, 1989) or resist and rewrite (Thomas and Davies, 2005) discourses, or for that matter negotiate the multiple and often conflicting subjectivities available through individuals working lives (Kondo, 1990).

These critiques are however limited to studies that have taken an overly deterministic view of discourse. Much of the literature developed in organisation and critical management studies takes heed of these criticisms incorporating an analysis that considers both how individuals are both regulated by and agential in negotiating discourse. The following section will turn to consider how agency has been conceived in the critical literature as a reaction to the critiques of overly deterministic readings of Foucault, discussing how identity has been considered multiple within the empirical literature drawing on identity work.

### 2.5.3. Agency and Identity Work

The identities literature has provided insights into a long standing tension between organisational structure and individual agency (Ybema et al., 2009). The poststructuralist approach moves away from conceiving this tension in dualistic terms, rather seeing discourse and agency operating in tandem to produce subjects (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). As well as the literature on identity control which has focused on discourses inspired by management and the elites within organisations to engender identification with the corporate goals, the critical literature on identity work has also been concerned with understanding how individuals craft a sense of self, focusing on the dynamics between power, discourse and agency in this crafting process (Brown, 2015).

A post structuralist reading of identity refers to how subjective meanings and individual experience inform how individuals understand 'who they are' and thus 'how they should act' (Alvesson et al., 2008). It is through the experience and the discourses emergent from a multitude of organisations, institutions and social interactions that individuals reflexively craft a more or less coherent narrative of the self (Thomas, 2009). Following this understanding of identity, essentialism is rejected; rather identity is viewed as a discursive construction, maintained, resisted and modified through on-going, day-to-day interactions. Identity is not only relevant to individuals but also organisations. The literature also highlights the role of collective identities (e.g. Albert and Whetten, 1985; Brown, 2006; Pratt, 2003). These can be understood as 'a discursive (rather than, for example, psychological) construct that 'resides' in the collective identity stories that, for example, people tell to each other in their conversations, write into corporate histories, and encode on websites' (Brown, 2006: 733). Brown suggests that organizational identities 'are constituted by the totality of

collective identity-relevant narratives authored by participants' (Brown, 2006: 735), through both talk and text (Coupland and Brown, 2004). This means that collective identities are complex, and although they have aspects of coherence and shared constructs, they also have elements of contradictions (Brown, 2006).

Given that both individual and collective identities are considered to emerge from multiple discursive sources, within work and wider society, identity work for critical scholars involves the negotiation with multiple and often conflicting discourses as they vie for attention (Kondo, 1990). Identity work has become a popular metaphor for understanding this crafting/controlling tension in the on-going formation of a sense of self, for instance when identities became threatened (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Collinson, 2003; Thomas and Linstead, 2003), where there are perhaps other possibilities for identification (Clarke et al, 2009; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Kondo, 1990), where individuals are stigmatised (Ospal, 2011; Ospal, 2012; Toyoki and Brown, 2014) and in resisting organisational attempts to control identities (Brown and Lewis, 2001; Costas and Fleming, 2009; Ezzamel et al., 2001). In such conditions the individual reflexively creates, repairs and discards her identity in a continuing effort to repair self-esteem (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Research on identity has viewed the process of identity work in a number of ways such as; through dialogue and the ways in which meaning is negotiated between the self and others (Beech, 2008); through narratives and in how individuals craft meaning around events through story telling (Brown and Humphreys, 2006); through discursive antagonisms where conflicting notions allow new meanings and identities to be sought (Clarke et al., 2009; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996), through the looseness or surplus of meanings in discourse allowing room for different identity projects (Kondo, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) or through

everyday talk and activities of actors engaged in subtle identity politics (Ashcraft, 2005; Storey et al., 2005; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Identity work may also be considered a form of resistance given that employees in reformulating identities may resist those sanctioned by the organisation (Mumby, 2005).

Emergent from the concept of identity work has been the understanding that individuals may engage in processes of identification and dis-identification. Identification is a process which implies an individual's 'self-perception and an active positive connection between self-understanding and the understanding of the organization' (Humphreys and Brown, 2002: 425). In order for individuals to achieve a coherent positive self-understanding they may identify with discourses that either support or reinforce their sense of authenticity.

In the same way that an individual, through identification, crafts a more coherent self, dis-identification also aims at protecting this coherent or authentic identity. Dis-identification is seen as a defensive process whereby individuals protect aspects of their personhood from the regulatory reach of discourse (Brown, 2006; Mumby, 2005; Trethewey, 1997). This is where an individual seeks to distance their selves from discourses that may support a 'bogus' or inauthentic identity, whether this be through cynicism, ambivalence, skepticism, irony or humour (Costas and Fleming, 2009) (this is discussed in greater detail in the following section).

Both identification and dis-identification as concepts imply that an individual has an essential authentic identity in which an individual negotiates discourse in order protect or reinforce their authentic self. However, authentic identities are best understood as a discursively constructed understanding of an individuals' personhood (Tracy and Trethewey, 2005) or as

Roberts (2005) suggests, the imaginary, which is a workable fantasy of the coherent self. Thus an authentic identity is constructed of social scripts and discourses (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000) which enable individuals to answer the question 'who I really am?' (Costas and Fleming, 2009).

#### 2.5.4. Resistant Identities

For identity scholars, resistance is not only a material act but also is seen to have wider implications for the identities of workers. Resistance here is a complex, contradictory and socially situated attempt to construct oppositional meaning and identity (Mumby, 2005). It may be enacted by individuals seeking to dis-identify with certain subject positions promoted through discourse (Deetz, 1992; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Kondo, 1991; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Resistance can therefore be seen as a form of identity work as this arises in the intersection between the subject position in discourse and an individual's understanding of their preferred self (Thomas and Davies, 2005). Resistance at the level of identities has been discussed in the literature through the concept of dis-identification, focusing on how individuals seek to secure a sense of an authentic self and, in doing so, resisting organisational discourses (Kunda, 1992; Sturdy, 1998; Whittle, 2005).

Dis-identification is enacted in a number of ways. For example, Thomas and Davies (2011) found that new bureaucratic regimes in the public social services were resisted by social workers. These workers highlighted the tensions between the new discourse of bureaucracy and efficiency and the professional ethics of social work. Holmer-Nadesan's (1996) study of female service workers in a public university suggests that workers who were subjectivised through patriarchal, bureaucratic and capitalist articulations were able to subvert their

marginalised positions through a negotiation of discourse. For example the patriarchal discourses positioned the female campus cleaners in a maternal subject position, however this was simultaneously empowering and subordinating - 'mother figures' the women were both marginal but indispensable to the organisation. Similar findings were discussed by Kondo (1990) in her study on a confectionary factory in Japan. The part-time women workers in the factory were considered as marginal yet the women in the factory drew on a maternal discourse to secure a more important position amongst the young apprentices in the factory. However, in doing so, they also marginalised themselves due to the undervalued labour of women. These studies draw attention to the complex negotiations around identities, where dis-identification can be seen as productive of new subjectivities and opportunities for identity on the one hand while also reinforcing and embedding other aspects of identity.

In resisting organisational discourses and the associated subject positions, individuals are seen to protect a constructed authentic version of self (Brown, 2015; Costas and Fleming, 2009; Tracy and Trethewey, 2005; Ybema et al., 2009). Regulatory discourses are therefore seen to incite reflexive thinking by the subject who may resist, reshape or renegotiate these discourses in order to achieve this more authentic self (Ibarra, 1999; Roberts, 2005). Resistance at the level of identity is not necessarily manifested through overt practices but also through subtle practices such as cynicism (Fleming, 2005; Fleming and Spicer, 2003), irony or scepticism (Casey, 1995; Sturdy, 1998) in order to construct an anti-management rhetoric or perhaps 'breathing space' from organisational discourse (Fleming and Spicer, 2005).

The use of humour by employees has been conceptualised as resistance to managerialist discourse and capable of constituting alternative identities such as more valorised masculine

identities (Collinson, 1988) or is seen as capable of creating discursive distances between the self and the other (Gabriel, 1999). It is also suggested that the use of humour is also seen as a way in which meanings within managerial discourse can be shifted and reconstituted (Gabriel, 1999).

The identities literature this far has provided a broad understanding of how identities are constituted, regulated and maintained in the context of work. However, much of this literature is focused on either professional workers or more conventional organisation types. The following section turns to consider studies on identities in low-wage employment, again drawing on a Foucauldian theoretical framework as a basis of analysis.

## 2.6. Low-wage Work and Identity

Since the majority of empirical studies on identities in organisations has been concerned with skilled and professional workers, insights into the dynamics of identity regulation and resistance among low paid/low skill workers remains under explored. Although there have been some explorations of low-wage shopfloor work (see, for example, Ezzamel et al. (2001) and Zanoni (2010)), these studies focus more on the organisational settings to explore questions of change, control and resistance, rather than on the experiences of low paid workers specifically.

Taking hospitality work as an example of low-paid service sector work, a number of characteristics can be identified that constitute it as a low-status and often stigmatised form of employment. For example hospitality work is notorious for its long working hours, low-wages, lack of benefits and extremely hard work (Duncan et al., 2013; Self, 2000; Wildes, 2000). Furthermore studies suggest that there is a perception of servitude associated with

service work (McDowell, 2009; Wildes, 2004) and is often only regarded as a ‘stop gap’ between jobs (Wildes, 1992; 2000) until something better can be found.

Hospitality work thus may carry a sense of stigma for those involved. Stigma has been understood as a perceived physical, social or personal quality that leads a social group to regard those characterised by it as having inferior, tainted, pejorative or discredited identities (Goffman, 1963). A stigma may emerge from multiple facets of one’s identity i.e. mental health conditions, job role, migration status, ethnicity, gender and religion and is seen to have an impact on the ways in which individuals understand the self (Markowitz, 2005; Toyoki and Brown, 2014). The construction and experiences of stigma are not essential; research in this field has demonstrated that stigma is constituted differently across different settings and contexts and can shift over time through interaction with various discourses (Link and Phelan, 2001; Markowitz, 2005; Toyoki and Brown, 2014). Thus an individual securing a more positive identity may engage in stigma management to re-draw or subvert meanings attached to stigma (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Breakwell, 1993; Gabriel et al., 2010; Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012). In crafting more positive versions of the self, individuals engage in a complex process whereby they embrace, reject, modify or adapt to stigma through reflexive responses (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). Stigma management can therefore be seen as an extension of the theories of identity work (Brown, 2015).

The literature on stigmatized identities suggests an individual can draw on multiple strategies in order to craft more acceptable versions of the self in the context of work. This might involve dis-identification, where stigmatised identities are rejected in favour of more positive understandings. For example Toyoki and Brown’s (2014) study of prisoners suggested that

the men in their study preferred to attach their identities to more socially valued roles such as being a father or a friend.

Those in stigmatised subject positions have also been found to constitute oppositional identities in order to construct their identities in relation to the 'more stigmatised' other. Marvin and Grandy (2013) explore this in the context of exotic dancing, suggesting that the women construct the 'other' - an identity of a bad girl who participates in exotic dancing for enjoyment rather than necessity and who offers morally reprehensible services. This 'bad girl' identity is drawn upon by the women, who suggest that their own identities are constructed in antithetical ways. Similar strategies are undertaken by Zimbabwean care workers in McGregor's (2007) study who construct their identities in relation to 'British workers' who are characterised as not caring for their elderly. For fast food restaurant workers, positive identities were sought in relation to the 'lazy and unemployed' (Newman, 1991). These studies demonstrate how stigma feeds into workers' senses of self and how they respond in various ways to try to reconstitute their identities in more positive ways.

Positive identities are also sought through subverting meanings or reconstituting meanings in discourse. Stacey (2005) suggests that in the care industry workers draw on the dirtier tasks such as bathing the elderly in evidencing their physical strength and bravery. Toyoki and Brown (2014) also note that prisoner subverted meanings of prison life, emphasising the moral codes and camaraderie developed between them as a source of positive self-understandings. Rather than reject or distance their selves from these identities the individual seeks to reconstitute the meanings associated with them.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) suggest that for dirty workers, identity work has the potential to limit the negative aspects of work through emphasising more positive attachments derived from work (Ouellett, 1994; Petrillo, 1989). Others however have seen these negotiations around the negative meanings of work as merely a coping strategy that only provide some relief for self-understanding (Costas and Fleming, 2009; Dovidio et al., 2000).

The literature on stigma provides insights into how individuals in low-wage/ low-skilled service positions may engage in identity work to craft more positive self-understandings. However, the concept of stigma in an organisational context remains undeveloped and although there are insights into how stigmas influence identity work (Toyoki and Brown, 2014) the complex constitution of stigmas through discourses have yet to be explored in depth.

## 2.7. Concluding Comments

This chapter sets out how identities have been conceptualised and analysed in organisation studies. The chapter outlined the contrasting ways in which identities are conceptualised within the organisational literature, ranging from socio-psychological influenced approaches that work with an essential identity through to poststructuralist approaches that emphasise the crafted, contested and productive dynamics of power, agency and subjectivities. It is this latter approach that is adopted in this study, seen to offer a power sensitive understanding of identity that can accommodate the situated and contingent nature of self-understandings and the way individuals are located in webs of power and meaning. Foucault was discussed in detail, recognised as having a great influence on theorising on identities within critical organisation studies. The chapter thus set out the core concepts to a Foucauldian approach, explaining the dynamics of discourse, power and identity. The critical identity studies

literature gave insight into how identities are crafted within managerial discourse and how reflexive individuals negotiate their self-understandings within the constraints of discourse. Finally, the limited empirical literature on identities in low-wage employment were discussed, looking more closely at the concept of stigma as an identity that arises from such work and how identity work can be drawn upon to recraft positions.

In light of the literature on identities -specifically the concepts of identity regulation and identity work and how this is understood amongst low-paid marginalised workers, the following chapter considers the research on migrant workers and agency work and the implications that low-wage work and migration has their self-understandings.

# 3. Migrant Workers, Flexible Labour and Identities

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## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature on migrant workers and agency work, making reference to the research concerned with the formation and negotiation of identities within these contexts. The previous chapter developed some insights into how individuals manage their identities in the context of low-wage work; these ideas are reflected within this chapter considering how migrant workers position on the labour market – which is often marginalized- is experienced and understood at the level of identity. At present there is a lack of research that examines the day-to-day experiences of migrant workers at an organisational level. This means that the literature offers only limited insights into the dynamics of self and social situation in relation to migrant workers' work experiences. This chapter provides a critical overview of the current literature on the subjective experiences of migrant workers and temporary workers. This provides an understanding of the current issues and considers how critical approaches to identity might advance our understandings. The chapter begins by providing contextual information on migrant workers in the UK. Following this, the existing research considering migrant identities is discussed and the ways these are negotiated by individuals. The chapter then reviews how migrant identities have been seen to have implications for migrants' material experiences of work. Finally, the literature on agency work is reviewed, considering workers' subjective experiences in temporary employment relationships.

### 3.2. Migrant Workers in the UK: Context

The experience for migrant workers is inevitably different in different socio-cultural contexts. Each country has specific migration patterns, economic conditions, political contexts and social situations, thus antecedents of migrant experiences are complexly located between spaces and eras (McCall, 2005). This study takes the context of the UK as a focus, thus specifics of the UK, which include the composition of migration, the types of work on offer and the socio-political climate become relevant to understanding migrant experience. This section maps out the general context of the UK concerning migration patterns and the labour market trends.

The composition of migrants in the UK has changed markedly in recent years. For the most part, the early migrant communities were predominantly Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME) arriving from the Indian sub-continent, Africa and the Caribbean. For these migrants, the racialised nature of migration was considered to determine their position on the labour market (Conner et al., 1996: 135), with migrant workers being positioned in low-skilled/ low-wage jobs regardless of their skills or capabilities (Allen et al., 1998; Bloch, 1999).

Post-colonial migrants were often employed in manufacturing industries, textile factories, transportation (driving buses), and retail (running corner shops and post-offices). Although the more recent arrivals to the UK have changed in terms of racial representation (arriving predominantly from other EU countries), the kinds of work they engage is still by and large in the low-wage/ low-skill economies (Anderson et al., 2006; Evans et al., 2005; May et al., 2007). Therefore regardless of the 'whiter' racial composition of recent migrants, foreign born workers still remain over represented in relatively low skilled occupations (Rienzo, 2014).

A recent census by The Migratory Observatory (2014) suggested that the ‘top-five’ jobs most highly represented by migrant workers were in, elementary process plant<sup>2</sup>, cleaning and house-keeping, food preparation, elementary cleaning, and process operatives, and this is regardless of workers’ qualifications (Aldin et al., 2010). Although there is some evidence of high-skilled migration in the UK (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007), this is far outweighed by those in the lower echelons of the labour market (Datta et al., 2006(a); May et al., 2006; McIlwaine et al., 2006).

The migrant worker thus tends to be associated with low-wage sectors, in industries that are considered ‘dirty’, and performing work that is often seen as stigmatised (Anderson, 2000; Duffy, 2007; Theil, 2007). A key industry that has seen a vast influx of migrants is the hospitality industry. Migrants represent around 26% of all hospitality workers in the UK; however this figure rises to 70% in London (Labour Force Survey, 2013). The hospitality industry often uses migrant workers as a ‘cheap, docile source of labour’ (McDowell et al., 2007:2) to fill jobs typically undesired by local workers (Lucas and Mansfield, 2008; Migrant Advisory Committee 2014). Migrants have been seen as an efficient resource within the hospitality sector as their perceived subservience and compliance means that they adhere to the intense demands of the dynamic and constantly shifting industry (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007). Migrants’ transient status has also meant that they have been considered as more flexible and temporary, thus more readily matching the ebbs and flows of demand (McDowell et al., 2008).

Furthermore, this industry is considered to have among the lowest pay and poorest working conditions (May et al., 2007), which is often accepted by migrants due to their relatively low

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<sup>2</sup> Factory packing, bottlers, canners

social capital in the labour market (Evans et al., 2005; Janta et al., 2011). Recent migrants often have poor language skills and qualifications that are not internationally recognised which means that migrants have little choice in participating in such work (Datta et al., 2007). Nonetheless, migrant workers see hospitality work as a way to increase their social capital through their language skills (Janta, 2011) and providing them with esteemed life experiences (Duncan et al., 2010).

Migrant workers in the UK therefore assume marginal positions on the labour market, being disproportionately represented in some of the lowest paid jobs. The following section considers the research on migrant workers identities, considering how the migratory experiences impact on self-understandings.

### 3.3. Migrant Workers and Identities

The literature discussing migrant workers, taking a more intent focus on migrant identities has emerged primarily from the sociological and critical human geography literature; the subject of migrant workers has been far less a concern in the organisation studies literature (Essers and Benschop, 2007 being an exception to this). These literatures have explored migrant workers' experiences and the impact this has on workers' self-understandings, particularly concerned with how time and space produces identities (McCall, 2005; McDowell, 2008).

Migration for these scholars has been considered a catalyst for reflexive thinking around identities (Gilmartin, 2008; Lesser, 1999; Staeheli and Nagel, 2006). The new meanings emergent from new geographic locations and new forms of employment are seen to offer new

possibilities for subjectivity and thus can be seen as a stimulus for identity work (Rogaly, 1998).

The relocation to a new context brings about new opportunities and new boundaries for their identities. For migrant workers certain aspects of identity become more salient on migration (Koffman et al., 2000; Silvey, 2006; Willis and Yeoh, 2000). The literature argues that gendered, racial, caste, sexual, class and national identities become contested between spaces, making previously stable identities open to negotiation (Silvey, 2006). These negotiations around identity are considered to be drawn from both home and host countries simultaneously (Alicea, 1997; Boyle, 2002; Mills, 1997). Yet the discourses located within multiple national contexts often conflict, inducing identity struggles for migrant workers (Yeoh and Huang, 2008). This has been noted around the struggles for gendered meanings, where workers have been seen to craft acceptable versions of feminism, negotiated between meanings emerging from home and host countries (Alicea, 1997; Mills, 1997).

Negotiating between discourses emerging from different socio-cultural contexts are not always reconcilable, many studies have suggested that the construction of identities in new contexts can often result in an awkward tension between home and host nations, resulting in an individual's self-understanding that is produced in dualistic terms (Boyle, 2002; Lan, 2003). Lan (2003) suggests that for female migrant domestic workers, shifts in gendered and class based identities within their new context as 'maternal maids' was translated into identities as masculine 'breadwinners' in home countries. This resulted in challenges for the women who were unable to reconcile these counter-posed identities.

Other scholars have suggested migrant identities are transnational accomplishments that are the product of negotiations between different spaces (d'Alsera, 2004; Espiritu, 2003; Staeheli and Nagel, 2006; Yeoh et al., 2006). The transnational identities literature acknowledges the constructed nature of identity suggesting that migrants build their identities rooted in both home and host countries, creating new meanings between spaces (Colic-Peisker, 2008; Wodak, 2004). Yet the multiple identities that emerge are not unproblematic, but often involve a complex negotiation between multiple axes of identity (Crenshaw, 1991; McDowell, 2008; Valentine, 2007).

The literature has discussed this in terms of boundary work, suggesting that migrants negotiate a multitude of identities that become salient, relevant or contested through migration (Holvino, 2008; Munro, 2001; Nkomo and Cox, 2002; Parrenas, 2002). The complexities of migrants' identities means that individuals may need to engage in boundary work negotiating between the intersections between multiple identity markers (Essers and Benschop, 2007; McDowell, 2008; Nagel, 2002). For migrants, creating acceptable self-understandings in a new context often means negotiating the boundaries between the intersections of identity (Essers and Benschop, 2007). The research suggests that this involves migrants abandoning, downplaying or emphasising certain aspects of identities, for example racial (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Vives-Gonzalez, 2011), religious (Nagel, 2002) or gendered (Wright, 2006) in order to create acceptable versions of self in new spaces (Staeheli and Nagel, 2006).

The literature on migrant identities thus indicates that migration induces reflexive thinking around identity given that the spatial contingent nature of migrants (McCall, 2005) brings with it new meanings and new possibilities for subjectivity. This process is however

complex, migrants often struggle to formulate a stable sense of self between spatial contexts and are often set the task of manoeuvring between multiple facets of identity to complexly negotiate acceptable self-understandings. The following section explores how migrant workers' racial, national and gendered identities become relevant to shaping experiences in the workplace.

### 3.3.1. Migrant Identities at Work

While there are few studies that focus on migrant worker identities in an organisational context, those that do exist have been concerned with the intersections of racial, national and gendered identities to produce specific labour market experiences (Cox and Watts, 2002; Holvino, 2008; McDowell, 2008; Zanoni, 2010). Studies have shown how the stereotypes attached to specific identities determines migrant workers' labour market positions and thus their material circumstances (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007; May et al., 2007; McIllwaine et al., 2005) in, for example, cleaning (McIllwaine et al., 2005; Wills, 2003), care work (Church and Frost, 2004; Datta et al., 2006 (b)), domestic labour (Hondagnau-Sotelo, 2001; Romero, 1992), construction work (McIllwaine et al., 2006) and hospitality (Evans et al., 2005; McDowell, 2008).

Other authors have also considered the ways in which employers predicate migrant workers' attributes and suitability for particular jobs based on stereotypical constructions of nationality, race and gender (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007). This has been studied amongst Polish migrants who were considered to be hardworking and compliant and therefore often employed in the hospitality industry (Janta, 2011; Janta et al., 2011) and Zimbabwean workers in the care industry (McGregor, 2007). However, race, nationality and gender are seen to be complexly intersected to locate migrants in employment (Cox and Watts, 2002),

this has been researched in Mexican busboys (Gumborg-Munoz, 2008), Mexican women factory workers (Salzinger, 2003), Latina women nannies (de la Luz Ibarra, 2000; Romero, 1992) and Phillipina women nannies (Hondagnau-Sotelo, 2001; Parrenas, 2000).

Migrant workers' national and racial identities have also been considered to intersect with professional identities having the effect of shifting meanings associated with these professional identities. This has been studied amongst Filipino women nannies (Anderson, 2001), Asian and European women child care professionals in Canada (Pratt, 2002) and Latino nannies in the US (de la Luz Ibarra, 2000). The effects that national stereotypes had on occupational identities manifested at the material level in the forms of pay and the tasks these women had to perform (Anderson, 2001; de la Luz Ibarra, 2000; Hondagnau-Sotelo, 2001; Pratt, 2002).

The hospitality industry is emblematic of such stereotypical assumptions, not only attracting a high concentration of migrant workers to the industry (Datta et al., 2006 (a); Ruhs et al., 2010) but also drawing on assumptions attached to racial, gendered and national identities to position the workforce. The intersections of racial, national and gendered identities are seen to influence how management in hospitality organisations assign roles and tasks (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Dyers et al., 2010; Wright, 2007). McDowell et al (2007) suggest that this structuring of the workforce in hospitality is complexly constituted in the intersections between employee identity, managerial ideals and customer desires. These ideals are often based on dominant conceptions of attractiveness associated with race and gender within a particular socio-cultural context (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; McDowell et al., 2007).

Studies have also shown that migrant workers themselves draw on these identity attributions (Gumborg-Munoz, 2010; McDowell et al., 2007) in their self-constitution and in negotiating more acceptable or ideal versions of self. For example McDowell et al., (2007) suggests that this is a complex process whereby individuals internalise the identities idealised by management and customers. This means that often workers craft their identities through the stereotypes that constrain them such as; Mexican men pinning their identities to hard-work (Gumborg-Munoz, 2008) or Filipino women exhibiting caring and maternal qualities (Anderson et al., 2006).

However, other studies have suggested that work is often a source of negative identity for migrants, who engage in identity work to negate work-based identities. Migrants in low-wage employment often draw on personal attributes such as their ability to work hard (Anderson et al., 2006; Gumborg-Munoz, 2008) or discourses beyond the sphere of work (Tufts, 2006), such as race or gender, in order to craft a more valued version of the self. This has been shown through migrants drawing on ethnic and gendered (McIlwaine et al., 2006) identities as a source of positive identification. This has been observed amongst Puerto Rican migrants in America (Alicia, 1997), Bosnian migrants in Australia (Colic-Peisker, 2005), Colombian male migrants in London (McIlwaine, 2005) and Argentinian migrants in Spain (Vives-Gonzalez, 2011) to distance themselves from pejorative identities associated with work (Adib and Guerrier, 2003). Thus these studies indicate how discourses of ideal workers are taken as resources for migrant workers' identity constructions; however these are complexly located between gendered and national identities.

The above literature has highlighted some salient issues associated with migration and identity. The literature provides an understanding of the ways in which migration and work is

capable of shifting meanings that reconstitute how migrants understand their gendered, national and racial identities. Identity for migrants was also found to be incremental to their constructions and position on the labour market, where meanings associated with national or racial identities assumed workers' suitability for certain roles. The literature introduces the way in which migrants manage their identities in work or through migration, finding ways to draw positive meanings from stigmatised work or pejorative subject positions.

In general the literature takes an interpretivist approach to migrant identities, which means that there is some paucity in understanding how power, discourse and agency operate to create identities. At present the literature has yet to consider migrant working lives at an organisational level and how the experiences of work and the organisation are constitutive of identities. Therefore, the literature progresses only limited understandings of the operation of power within an organisation and how this is subjectively experienced and negotiated by migrant workers. The richness of observing the subjective impacts that process, practice, talk and interaction have on a migrant worker have not yet been conceived in the literature.

The following section introduces the research on agency work and temporary employment. The literature in this field has not specifically explored the experience of migrant workers in this context, therefore the wider literature on agency work will be considered, paying specific attention to the studies that draw on identity. Firstly, the context of agency work and key issues will be explored addressing how flexible employment is increasingly a migrant issue. Secondly, the subjective effects of uncertainty and insecurity associated with temporary and flexible employment are considered, focusing on how these are constructed as both dominating and liberating for workers identities.

### 3.4. Agency Work: Context and Issues

Agency work refers to a plethora of atypical employment arrangements but all involving a third party that negotiates contractual arrangements between the employer and employee (Feldman, 1990). Agency workers are a form of flexible labour (Atkinson, 1984), situated in the margins of the organisation, often engaging in activities that are peripheral compared with those undertaken by the organisation's core workers (ibid). Rubin (1995) suggests, however, that the trend towards impermanence for employees is becoming a permanent feature of organisations (Rubin, 1995), with organisations increasingly drawing on contingent labour as a way of 'doing business' (Smith, 1998; Ward et al, 2000). Thus agency work is becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly so in the hospitality industry, where the uncertainty in demand requires a workforce that is numerically flexible (Walsh, 1990). Here, peripheral workers are fast superseding the core, with almost half of all hospitality workers in the UK being on zero hour contracts (Office of National Statistics, 2014).

Although agency work in the UK is fast becoming a ubiquitous route to employment in labour intensive sectors, the workforce is disproportionately represented by the marginalised and disadvantaged in the labour market i.e. women, migrant workers and BME workers (Boyce et al, 2007). Agency work is a relatively straightforward route through which migrants gain employment. Agency work and migration are therefore interconnected issues (Anderson, 2010), encapsulated in Gorz's (1989) vivid descriptor of the 'South-Africanisation' of the firm. This description can be illustrated by McGregor's (2005) research on Zimbabwean workers in the UK care industry, where deep racial divisions were seen to exist between temporary and permanent workers, with all of the agency staff being African while most of the permanent staff were white.

Despite the high density of migrant workers in temporary forms of employment, studies are yet to explore the experiences of migrant workers in temporary forms of employment. There are however studies that explore the key issues in temporary employment and how these issues shape how the workers experience their work. The following section will explore how uncertainty and insecurity, as features specific to agency work, impacts upon workers' subjective experiences.

### 3.4.1. Insecurity and Uncertainty in Temporary Employment

As well as the insecure and uncertain contractual relations between agency workers and their agencies, the studies also point to how organisations instil and reinforce a sense of transience in temporary workers (Gossett, 2002). Gosset (2002) suggests that this is exercised by management limiting agency workers' material entitlements within contracting organisations, for example, denying access to email, entry pass codes, and staff areas. However, this has not always been considered the case, some organisations give agency workers greater autonomy, which mediates the insecurity experienced (Smith, 1997).

The insecurity of temporary employment is considered to have multiple effects over the agency workers' subjective experiences of work. Some researchers have suggested that this uncertainty is liberating, providing individuals with space between organisations to craft preferred versions of the self (Casey and Alach, 2004; Gossett, 2006). However, far more studies have noted that the insecurity and uncertainty associated with agency work is constraining, operating as an insidious regulatory mechanism (Gottfried, 1999; Smith, 1998; Ward et al., 2001). For agency workers their experiences of insecurity have been seen as capable of constraining their free choice around selecting work through threatening workers with undesirable work (Smith, 1998), creating compliance whilst on shift (Gottfried, 1999),

or as a way through which workers can be influenced to constantly monitor their actions, appearance and competencies (Garsten, 1999).

Agency work has also been found to have other disciplinary effects over workers' subjective understandings. Drawing on the concept of the ideal or appropriate worker (Acker, 1990; 1992; Tienari et al., 2002) as a technique of discipline, Findlay et al (2012) argue that agencies and gang masters in Latvia drew on the discourse of ideal workers to create compliant subjects. This was found to be instrumental in shaping the embodied and attitudinal identity of migrants where the agencies or gang masters actively promoted the image of a suitable worker as subordinate, obedient and submissive, which was internalised by agency workers. The study highlights the way in which migrant workers' identities were regulated according to the disciplinary discourse, although consideration of workers' agency and the extent to which workers resisted such attempts is not mentioned.

In contrast, Henson and Rogers (2001) considered how male agency workers cope with undertaking feminised temping roles. The authors highlight the ways in which the men actively engage in identity work in order to subvert these denigrated positions, through distancing themselves from the organisation and job role, redrawing the activities in which they engage and through resisting the need to show deference to the organisation. The extent to which these workers were able to challenge this feminised identity was seen to be limited and could only be enacted subtly and covertly.

Although Agency workers are tightly regulated through uncertainty, researchers have also noted the liberating effects of agency work for workers who are seen to evade systems of organisational control due to their transient status (Gossett, 2006). Garsten (1999) suggests

that the liminality experienced by agency workers is seen as a seedbed for cultural creativity where agency workers find the opportunity to create new subjectivities. Casey and Alach's (2004) study on temporary women workers suggests that their detachment from the organisations and the flexibility of the work gave the women the possibility to forge their identities from alternative life-style choices. Thus for some agency workers, the insecure conditions associated with flexible forms of employment are considered to have positive impacts on their subjective experience of work.

In summary, agency work brings with it specific issues associated with uncertainty and insecurity of employment, considered to be a powerful mechanism in both crafting compliance and limiting the resistance of agency workers. The research at present only offers a limited understanding of resistance and identity work by agency workers, seeing workers as largely submissive due to the tenuous employment conditions. Moreover, there is little insight into how insecurity and uncertainty of work is experienced at the level of identity and how this is negotiated by workers through everyday practice. The contingent and fragile nature of these identities has not been fully explored through considering the everyday lives of agency workers in organisational settings.

### 3.5. Studying Migrant Agency Workers Identities

The literature on identities discussed in chapter two provided an account of the critical discursive approach to identities that will be adopted in this study. A Foucauldian discursive approach, utilising the concepts of power, knowledge, identity and discourse was outlined, providing a more in-depth understanding of the fluid and constructed nature of identities. Using this framework, the literature on low-wage/low skilled work was discussed to gain an understanding of how workers' identities are formed in the context of their work. Through

this discussion the notion of stigma and identity work were seen to be particularly useful in developing an understanding of how workers crafted identities around their work.

This chapter draws insights from the identities literature to consider the few studies that consider migrant identities in work. The literature takes an interpretivist approach to identities which provides details of how migration not only influences identity negotiations but also provides workers the opportunity for new subjectivities. The intersection of migrant workers' identities were seen to produce migrants' labour market experiences and created identity expectations that were internalised by workers. Although this literature provides insights into the constructed and complex nature of migrant workers' identities, it underplays the dynamic relations between power, discourse and identity. The literature exploring the experiences of agency or temporary workers shows some appreciation of how workers respond to the normalising mechanisms designed to induce compliance and subservience.

However, there is a lack of detailed insights into the dynamics of identity regulation and resistance in specific organisational settings. This study aims to gain an understanding of how migrant workers' everyday experiences of agency work have impacts on self-understandings. The insights drawn from chapter two offer a promising approach to understanding migrant agency workers' identities, utilising a Foucauldian reading of identity, to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of how migrant workers' identities are constructed, resisted and negotiated within the context of work. The study draws on the critical concepts of power, discourse, identity and agency to explore the ways in which migrant agency workers constitute their identities on a day-to-day basis. Through this analysis, the discursive effects of organisational life and beyond will be considered, and the way in which migrant agency workers' identity work may destabilise, resist or reinforce organisational discourses.

In short the thesis considers the everyday regulation, discipline and resistance of migrant agency workers and how this is both a product and antecedent of their identity construction. In doing so this thesis will, through the use of a Foucauldian analytical approach, extend the identities literature through exploring identity issues in low-wage non-standard work and further, develop our understanding of the experiences of migrant and temporary work. This approach gives scope to explore how organisational and wider social discourses are understood and negotiated by migrant agency workers, thus bridging individual, organisational and socio-cultural levels of analysis.

In summary this thesis has three interrelated aims. Firstly, the research explores how migrant agency workers construct their self-identities in temporary agency work. Secondly, the research seeks to understand how employment agencies and contracting organisations harness workers' compliance through identity regulation, taking into account the complex dynamics between discourse, power and identity. Finally, this thesis explores how migrant agency workers' own identity discourses may reinforce, destabilise or conflict with identities offered through their work.

### 3.6. Concluding Comments

Drawing on the concepts discussed in chapter two, this chapter has provided an overview of the literature on migrant worker identities and agency work. The chapter set out the general context for migrant workers in the UK. The literature on migrant worker identities revealed insights into the identity challenges faced by migrant workers and how national identities play out in the context of work. Following this, studies on temporary work were considered, throwing light on the regulatory effects that temporary work has on workers' self-

conceptions. These studies, however, provide little insight into the dynamics of identity regulation and resistance in specific organisational settings nor do they provide an understanding of migrant workers' agency. This study aims to address this gap, providing a detailed critical analysis of the experiences of migrant agency workers. Proceeding from the development of the theoretical background and specific aims of this thesis, the following chapter sets out the research design and methodology from which this study is built.

# 4. Researching Migrant Agency Workers

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## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter will outline the research design and methods employed in this thesis, starting from the conception of the research idea through to the writing up of the project. The chapter will provide a reflexive account of the deeply political, value ridden nature of conducting research and writing a PhD. Through this chapter I will explore my personal investments in the research and how these have shaped my choice to conduct an ethnographic study of migrant agency workers.

It has now become widely accepted that most qualitative research requires an exercise of disciplined reflexivity (Weick, 1999: 803) in order to provide more discriminating, discerning account of research (Foley, 2002). Reflexivity refers to research that turns back and takes account of itself (Clegg and Hardy, 1996) or as Babcock (1980) suggests reflexivity is the capacity of language and thought to bend back on itself and regard itself as other. Reflexivity is important in exposing assumptions of the researcher (Keenoy, 1999; Willmott, 1993) and avoiding giving superiority to the researcher's final account (Rorty, 1989). This is particularly important for ethnographic research which is considered to be profoundly interlaced with the researcher's assumptions, values, and preferences from the initial conception of ideas to the final stages of writing (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In particular for subjective research, reflexivity is important in ensuring that in writing, the voices of the participants are not lost. This follows the idea that facts or knowledge cannot exist without theoretical positioning or some interpretation by the researcher (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

Therefore within this chapter I will attempt to provide a transparent account of the multiple factors that informed the construction of my research objectives, the choice of methods, the strategy of data collection, the dynamics within the field, the analysis and writing of my research, exposing how the interaction between my own values and subjective understandings and my experiences within the field have come together in the production of my thesis.

The chapter begins by setting out the reasons why this field of research was chosen, reflecting on my own background and personal experiences that informed my interest in the topic. The theoretical underpinnings of the research are then considered, discussing the ontological and epistemological orientation taken and how this forms the foundation of my research design. Following this, the choice of methods employed is considered, discussing the rigour and validity, site of research, my experiences within the field, and the impact that my time in the field had on my own identity work. The final section of the chapter presents a reflection on the analysis and writing process, considering how the choices of literature, the accounts drawn on, and the construction of themes are all subjective and a reflection of my own underlying assumptions.

## 4.2. Antecedents of the Study: Values, Interests and Pragmatism

One afternoon in the spring of 2011 I had faced a dilemma – I wanted to change my thesis topic. I had attended a section lecture by a member of the academic faculty who had talked vividly about her research in factories in India. Her accounts depicted the awful conditions in which women in these factories faced on a daily basis, the research seemed real, alive and more than anything - important. I sat back after the lecture with mixed emotions, inspired yet envious. Inspired by the realisation that research could be something other than statistics, correlations and managerialist rhetoric, and envious because this was all that my current

project was not, I began to reflect on what was important enough to me to inspire my interest over the next four years and equally what would be important to others.

My interest in migrant workers stems from no single marked event, rather a number of small incremental occurrences that have shaped and constructed my value system. The first of these is my own family background. My story is that of mixed heritage, growing up for the most part in the UK, I have enjoyed all the privileges of being British, but my long summers spent in Lebanon immersed me in Lebanese culture and traditions, Arabic language, and the religion of Islam that became a key facet of my identity. Lebanon for my family has become a ‘merkaz’ or central meeting point where the diaspora stretching through South America, North America, Europe and Africa meet with a wealth of stories about the struggles of being Arab in a world that is becoming increasingly unfriendly to our people.

These summers also schooled me in a family narrative that lucidly paints the migratory experiences of Lebanese migrants as blighted with hardship yet simultaneously, a heroic venture. From an early age I had been well versed in family anecdotes of how my Jiddu (Grandfather) arrived to Canada in -30 degree temperatures with nothing to his name but leather shoes and slacks. How he had slaved in manual labour, living frugally until he had saved enough money to purchase a small piece of land and a couple of mink to breed for their fur. From this he was able to craft a viable life, sending remittances back to Lebanon and eventually managing to ship the entire family to Canada. These tales instilled in me a sense of empathy for the struggles of those who are brave enough to migrate to unknown territories but also inspired a greater interest in multiculturalism and the trajectories of migrant workers.

When I was around 19 I had found summer work in a local Italian restaurant. Undeniably this work was hard, not only because of the physical labour and low wages involved but also because of the split shifts running from 11am-3pm and then again from 6pm until midnight, making the day long and tedious. Although I had often found the work demeaning and exhausting I had rationalised that soon I would leave to start my law degree - this was only a temporary job to earn a bit of socialising money.

That summer I had worked alongside Sveta, a woman from Slovakia. We became close friends during the summer months; united through our exhaustion we enjoyed passing the time complaining, joking and poking fun at the manager. I had told Sveta about my aspirations to become a lawyer and how excited I was to be studying in University. Sveta had told me that she too was a lawyer in Slovakia; she had studied in a prestigious law school in Bratislava and had excelled in her field. She explained to me that there was no money in Slovakia even in professional jobs which is why she came to the UK. She had given up her profession, a job that she loved, to come to the UK and engage in work she detested.

I reflected on how I assumed that becoming educated was a means to rising out of poorly paid work, yet for migrant workers this is not necessarily the case. While I left my part-time job embarking on the hope of better opportunities, Sveta's aspirations for professional career waned. Although she said that she would one day like to save to study the UK law conversion course, the expensive fees made this near impossible. Sveta had made a choice to move to the UK for better economic prospects but in turn forfeited her professional career with little hope of ever getting it back.

These stories are integral to my motivation and approach taken in thesis. Through my experiences I have not only developed an awareness and an interest in the struggles that migrant workers face on a day-to-day basis, but also how these experiences are implicated with race, religion, nationality and gender. My limited and very personal exposure has been one that has contradicted the media depictions of migrant workers as victims or villains. The tumultuous tales portrayed in mainstream media publications (chapter one) de-humanises and distances us from the real people behind the statistics and the ideology. People like Sveta or my Jiddu, who engage in low-wage work and persevere in daily struggles in order to survive, are seldom recognised in this picture.

From these reflections I decided that I would write about these people, trying to gain a greater understanding of daily lives of migrant workers and their experiences in specific organisational settings. The research sets out to gain greater insight into the realities of daily struggles of migrants' working lives, thus give voice to workers that are so often stereotyped in negative ways or simply ignored in the mainstream media. This thesis also seeks to craft a more nuanced understanding of migrant workers' experiences through understanding how the wider societal discourses of migrant work are experienced and negotiated by individuals in their daily settings.

### 4.3. Theoretical Underpinnings: Ontology, Epistemology and the Politics of Knowing

I had figured what I wanted to research – yet I was still some way into conceiving how I was going to undertake this study. I was aware that I definitely was not a quantitative researcher. I had no intentions in attempting to draw broad generalisations from my research. Rather I wanted to understand the intricacies of different migrant workers' organisational experiences.

I was also aware that decisions around fundamental theoretical approaches were not capable of bringing me any closer to finding the truth of migrant workers experiences. As Hammersley suggests:

It is false to believe that researchers have direct access to the truth, even the truth about their own perceptions and feelings, what we see is always a product of physiology and culture as well as what is there.  
Hammersley (1992: 192)

Although Hammersley acknowledges that researchers are unable to grasp the truth of reality through methods of knowing he also implies that there is a truth or reality in a more or less stable form. The ideas in which I build my thesis are informed by Foucauldian ideas, which critique the notion that there is an enduring and pristine truth 'out there'.

#### 4.3.1. Ontological Considerations

A Foucauldian approach involves a critical appraisal of the dynamics of discourse, power and identity, and how these are capable of forming identities (Hardy and Thomas, 2014). As expressed in chapter two, a Foucauldian approach allows a critical analysis of power and discourse coupled with a nuanced incorporation of the workings of individual agency. This allows for an analysis that bridges discourses that emerges from the individual, organisation and societal levels to understand how identities are created, negotiated and resisted. This approach to analysis is based on assumptions about the world which will shape the ways in which this thesis is designed.

Drawing on Foucault questions the idea that there is a unified, stable reality or underlying structures that coalesce to create individual experience (Foucault, 1978). As mentioned above, for Foucauldian scholars, rather than being stable and enduring, reality is produced, reproduced, transformed and represented through discourse (Willmott, 2005: 751). The concept of discourse has been criticised by for creating dualisms between the material and

discursive worlds and thus revealing a lack of interest in the material world (Neimark, 1991). However these critiques are based on a partial understanding of discourse as being only discursive. The approach to discourse drawn on in this study sees discursive and material as inextricably linked and both constituting discourse. Discourse is therefore considered to give meaning to subjects and objects and because the knowable world does not exist outside of the world of meaning, reality (both material and discursive) can be seen to be constituted entirely of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Willmott, 2005).

Rather than conceiving of the world to be formulated of stable structures such as government, institutions or organisations, it is suggested that these are considered master signifiers or dominant and powerful discourses (Willmott, 2005: 751). Discourse however is not interchangeable with structure; there is an appreciation that discourses, unlike structures, are incomplete, inherently subject to contestation and thus containing elements of fluidity (Holmer-Nadssan, 1997; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Willmott, 2005).

For Foucault, fundamental to understanding discourse is its relationship with power. Challenging structuralist readings of power as sovereign, episodic or something that can be wielded by a group or an individual, Foucault considers power to be everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1977; Rabinow 1991). Thus in understanding the world it is essential to understand the core concept of power and how it operates to marginalise or elevate certain meanings or discourses. Following Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) argument, deep-seated or dominant discourses are sustained through power thus power creates an 'imaginary totality' of subjects and objects or regimes of truth which have regulatory effects over individuals:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of

truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.  
(Foucault, 1977: 131)

Thus the effects of power and discourse create truths which discipline not only the way individuals behave but also the possibilities for subjectivity. Critics of this approach accuse Foucault of idealism and relativism, suggesting that understanding a world of discourse means that there is no absolute truth or meaning, rather these are merely constructed. However, Foucault was not concerned with epistemology - whether knowledge is truth - but *how* knowledge comes into being and how this knowledge shapes the ways in which people relate to themselves and others (Mills, 2011). The consequences for this understanding of reality means that this thesis takes specific interest in power and discourse and understanding how these operate in order to bring subjects into being (see chapter two). Identity therefore becomes of central interest given that power and discourse are considered to operate in order to position individuals within discourse and therefore give them meaning, purpose and their sense of self (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Drawing on a Foucauldian approach not only allows for a more fluid consideration of how subjects come into being, taking into account the complex negotiations between power and agency, but is also arguably fitting with the research context of migrant agency workers. Creswell (1997) suggests that a Foucauldian/ post-structuralist account of reality interrogates what are the prevailing and dominant discourses and questions the ways in which particular groups and individuals have been subordinated. A Foucauldian approach thus pays attention to the slippages between dominant meanings (Lather, 1991) or as Bannet puts it, ‘an interest in the gaps, discontinuities and suspensions of dictated meanings in which difference,

plurality, multiplicity and the coexistence of opposites are allowed to play free' (1989: 5). Such an approach seems appropriate for an in-depth consideration of the marginalised voices of migrant workers and how their voice may contest dominant meanings.

#### 4.3.2. Epistemological Considerations

Adopting this ontological approach has implications for how knowledge is understood. Rather than conceiving of the knowledge produced from this thesis as a pristine account of reality, the political nature of research makes knowledge contingent and a co-creation of the researcher's political interests:

The political nature of research is the recognition that social research like other things people do, is a human construction, framed and prescribed within a certain set of discourses, and conducted in a social context with certain sorts of social arrangements involving funding, cognitive autonomy and power.

(Punch, 2006: 135)

Research in the social sciences is inevitably political, emergent from the researcher's own values and assumptions, as well as the social context in which the research is positioned. This means that the desire to uncover the truth even through careful research design becomes questionable, if not impossible (Richardson, 1994: 517-18). Rather, research is considered to constitute an enactment of power relations, reflecting the available discourses and the possibility of meanings attached to this (Punch, 2006). Given that the researcher is implicated in deciding what the research field is, how to collect the data, what the data means and what the outcomes and implications of the research are, the study becomes a creation of the researcher making concepts such as validity, reliability and replicability problematic (Usher et al., 1997: 207). As Apple suggests:

The problem of making everything knowable through the supposedly impersonal norms and procedures of science has been radically questioned. The hope of constructing a grand narrative, either intellectual or political, that will give us an ultimate truth and lead us to freedom has been shattered in many ways.

(Apple, 1991:vii, in Lather 1991)

This project is framed around my own values and assumptions as well as those generated from a wider context, including values and ideas inherited by my supervisors and the wider research community as well as the public discourses. This thesis and the research conducted in creating this thesis is, in Foucauldian terms, another discourse attached to the dominant concept of academic knowledge.

In the following section I will discuss how I came to the decision to conduct ethnographic research.

#### 4.4. Research Design

*I was unsure about what methods to select, my decision came about for a number of reasons – I'd like to claim all of these were entirely reasoned and underlined by a clear and defensible rationale, yet this would be inaccurate. There were of course sound theoretical reasons behind conducting an ethnography but there were also very persuasive pragmatic and emotive reasons too. Admittedly a part of me fanaticized about producing an engaging anthropological study like that of Sudhir Venkatesh (2008) where he constructed a compelling account of gangs in Chicago, or perhaps emulating the inspiring texts of Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) and Polly Toynebee (2003) which divulge rich accounts of their experiences of low-wage work. What was clear from these texts was that the rich, thick descriptions that kept me eagerly turning pages were achievable only through in-depth immersion in the field. I'd need to do an ethnography. I probably won't get access.*

*Reflexive Diary*

##### 4.4.1. Choosing Methods: Literature, Theoretical Reasoning and Personal Desire

The contested and often marginal position of migrants in the UK, as well as the uncertain, low-wage, low-skilled work that these workers are often employed in makes identity a salient issue for migrant agency workers. Not only are migrant identities considered to be fundamental to their experiences in the labour market (McDowell et al., 2007; McDowell, 2008) but the uncertainty associated with temporary work also has implications for the ways in which workers internalise organisational discourse. Through taking an interest in migrant

agency workers' identities this thesis aims to provide insights into how the work these workers undertake and organisations where this work takes place impacts on the workers' self-understandings, as well as how workers are implicated in the processes of identity construction, simultaneously negotiating their own identities and the identities of others.

An in-depth understanding of the organisations migrant agency workers come into contact with, the kinds of work they perform, and their interaction with others would provide insights into how migrant agency workers identities are impacted upon by their work, and with what effects. In order to get this richness of understanding, ethnographic methods came as a natural choice. Ethnographic research design is described as:

A family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience.

Willis and Trondman, (2000:5)

Put simply ethnography is the immersion of a researcher in a specific socio-cultural context, participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions either informally or formally (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This research design is usually open ended (Maxwell, 2004), seeking to understand how people regard the situations they face, how they view one another and how they see themselves (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This allows migrant agency workers to be understood in the context of their work, gathering whatever data best throws light on the issue of identities.

Ethnography is however a contested terrain. Some consider ethnography to be capable of understanding a way of life from the perspective of the participants studied (Felman, 1989; Neuman, 1994) or able to simultaneously understand the culture from within and describe it

as external to the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:10). However, others suggest that 'seeing the world from the perspective of those studied' is implausible given that a researcher's own experiences, values and underlying assumptions imprint upon the perceptions and the data. Thus rather than claim my ethnographic accounts describe the world in a distanced, dispassionate way, I follow Tedlock's understanding of ethnography as 'located somewhere between the interiority of autobiography and the exteriority of cultural analysis' (2000: 455).

The appeals of ethnographic methods are aligned to gaining greater understandings of individuals in the context of their organisational settings. As Van Maanen (1989) suggests, ethnography is capable of constructing a convincing on-going account of organisation life based on first-hand information:

I have always believed, whether I have liked it or not, that we cannot really learn a lot about what 'actually happens' or about 'how things work' in an organisation without doing the intensive type of close observational or participative research that is central to ethnographic endeavour.

Van Maanen (1989: 31)

Thus ethnographic observation provides insights into mundane cultural practices within organisations which are integral to understanding how migrant agency workers experience their work. Furthermore, ethnography has been increasingly considered an appropriate research method in the study of identity. Watson (2011) suggests that in order to talk about someone's identity it requires to a reasonable extent that the researcher gets to know the participant and the context in which they live and work. In order to appreciate the self in social situations, it is necessary to appreciate not only what people say but also what they do.

Ethnography allows both discursive and embodied aspects of work to be captured, gaining contextual richness that would not be achievable through interviews alone. This was evidenced in Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001) lucid accounts of the arduous work involved in her experiences of contract cleaning, scrubbing floors the old fashioned way on hand and knee, or perhaps Polly Toynbee's (2003) experiences of the difficulties of carrying heavy trays of wobbly custard slices in a job that paid some workers only £3.95/hour. The experience and doing of the work is as relevant and telling as what workers say about their experiences.

Watson (2011) also outlines the more general virtues of ethnographic research which include bringing to bare the complex nuances of organisational and social life as well as being able to situate data in the wider context in which they came into being. Ethnographic research is therefore considered to remedy some of the problems associated with relying on interview data such as the dislocated utterances and individuals upholding social roles in the context of the interview. Heyl (2001) suggests that the duration and quality of contact between the researcher and the researched is what distinguishes ethnographic interviews from other forms – it presents a forum where the subject feels confident to challenge the researcher so the interviews are not based on the researcher's preconceptions. This form of interviewing is also considered to negate the power inequalities that exist between researchers and participants (Elwood and Martin, 2000), this may be particularly problematic when interviewing migrant workers often constituted as marginal (Anderson, 2002; Wills et al., 2009). Therefore, evaluating the overarching research objectives and underlying ontological assumptions of this thesis, ethnography is a well suited method.

#### 4.4.2. Credibility in Ethnographic Methods

Rhetoric such as validity, reliability, generalisability and replicability become increasingly complex when conducting ethnographic research (Creswell and Miller, 2000). This is mainly because the subjective nature of such research means that these terms become inapplicable. Ethnographic researchers instead need to demonstrate that their research is credible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998). This refers to how accurately the account represents participants' realities of social phenomena and whether these accounts are credible to them (Schwandt, 1997). This refers not to the data collected, but to the inferences drawn from the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Taking an approach to research that is more closely aligned with constructionism acknowledges that the research is pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended and contextualised. Thus in writing this thesis the account and analysis reflects the researcher's situated and subjective understanding of the context. In order to construct credible research Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that it is important that the researcher acknowledges their situatedness and uncovers the hidden assumptions of their accounts, declaring their biases. This has been labelled the reflexive turn in the social science, whereby the researcher declares how they had got to where they got to through the careful consideration of the linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements that constitute knowledge (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Calas and Smircich, 1992). Throughout this chapter details into how the various choices with regards to context, theory, and methods, were researched through a complex negotiation between academic rationality, personal history and political intent. This approach will also be drawn on throughout the data collection and analysis process. I have also collated a reflexive research diary that elaborated accounts of how I felt about certain issues in the field. Where possible, I have interwoven these reflexive accounts throughout this thesis.

The long period of immersion in the field (totalling 12 months) is also considered a way through which qualitative, subjective methods can be made more credible (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Working alongside people day in, day out for long periods of time is considered to give ethnographic research its ‘validity and vitality’ (Fetterman, 1989: 46). This prolonged immersion means that the problems associated with researcher’s hunches about the way things are in a field are resolved. Furthermore, thick descriptions, dense, detailed accounts of contextualised people and sites also make subjective forms of research more convincing to the reader (Denzin, 1989). Throughout chapters five, six and seven I provide a detailed account of the context and, where possible, background information on the research participants’ lives, so that the reader is provided with a more credible account of the context.

#### 4.4.3. Gaining Accessing

*I initially grappled with the idea of ethnography. It wasn’t that I was in anyway adverse to it, I found the richness of ethnographic accounts in other studies I had come across formidable. The reason I was undecided was more to do with my awareness that conducting an ethnography is an immense commitment. I wasn’t sure whether I was able to devote the time and effort to getting a data set when others downloaded theirs from online data bases. At the end of it I had to make a decision as to what kind of PhD I wanted. If I am to write for migrant workers then accessing the field via management was never going to be an option. I had to think more creatively and a full-participant ethnography seemed to be the solution.*

##### *Reflexive Diary*

Access was another factor in my decision to conduct ethnographic research. I had initially intended to attempt to gain access to hotels and other catering organisations which employed a disproportionately high level of migrant workers, however this proved unsuccessful. After a few months of no replies or unequivocal refusals I went back to the drawing board. I realised that hotel managers were unwilling, for whatever reason, to let researchers in to closely examine their employment of agency workers. May makes the point that:

Given that power is not evenly distributed – different methods of social research are required if the powerful prevent access – it may be easier to gain access to a social group who cannot easily mobilise their resources to prevent access control.

May (2011:52)

For me the powerful group was management and I needed to think of creative ways around getting access. I wanted to conduct my research in an organisational context, so finding random migrant groups (as I had done for my M.Sc. research) would not fit the bill. However, the experience of constant rejections and management guardedness over research may be interesting in itself; Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that the discovery of obstacles to access can be incremental in helping to understand the social organisation of the setting. In this case, management were guarded over research and this may have stemmed from the conceivably exploitative nature of the work.

Moreover, accessing the field via management would have changed the shape and nature of my research. Walsh (2012) suggests that gatekeepers can be facilitative of the relations you form and negotiate within the field – this may be productive yet may also fetter the opportunity to gain alternative knowledge of the field. If I had accessed the field through management this may have fostered distrust amongst workers who may have been disinclined to divulge information uninformed by management discourse. This issue has also been highlighted in covert ethnographies on doormen (Calvey, 2000; Winlow, 2001) and on football hooliganism (Pearson, 1987) where it was suggested that gaining access via management would have drastically changed their research focus. Oliver and Eales (2008) suggest that being an insider facilitates seeing the hostilities in an organisation, where individuals are unhappy with an organisation they are unlikely to reveal this to a researcher.

Therefore, accessing the field through covert means not only mediates the need to gain consent but furthermore means that the data gained is not contrived by the wariness of employees of towards an outsider. Access issues therefore presented me with a dilemma, the only conceivable way to study what I wanted to study would be through entering the field covertly, becoming an agency worker and conducting a full-participant ethnography.

#### 4.4.4. Selecting a Site

The literature and my own experiences of restaurant work had indicated that a disproportionately high level of migrant workers are employed in the hospitality and catering industry, many of which are employed via agencies (e.g. Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Anderson, 2001; McDowell, 2008; Wills et al., 2007). I therefore decided to access the catering and hospitality industry through an employment agency ‘Staff Solutions<sup>3</sup>’. Fetterman notes that ethnographers have to be ‘savvy’ taking full advantages of the natural opportunities; luck and convenience that may play a part in helping a researcher select an appropriate site (1989: 43), and these elements came into play when selecting an organisation. I had chosen this agency for a number of reasons. First it was among the largest in the local area in the catering and hospitality industry and therefore was more likely to draw in a lot of workers. Second it regularly placed recruitment adverts on local job websites and was therefore always looking to recruit (I stood a good chance of getting a job!). Thirdly I had interviewed migrant workers for my M.Sc. dissertation and they had informed me that most recently arrived migrants had gained work through Staff Solutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym used for the organisation

## 4.5. Ethics

Accessing the field covertly raised a multitude of ethical considerations that needed to be fully thought through. However, covert access and non-disclosure to the organisation, although novel is by no means unique. A fellow Cardiff University PhD student, Gabriella Alberti, had faced similar issues in accessing the hospitality industry and had also conducted her ethnographic research covertly. Alberti (2010) had followed a similar route, engaging in low-wage work, her thesis was not only well accepted but presented important insights unavailable through other approaches. Her case provided evidence that access through unconventional routes was both necessary and fruitful. It was also a useful case to draw on in applying for ethical approval as Cardiff University had set a clear precedent.

In building a case for my ethical clearance, I also drew on other researchers who had accessed through covert means (e.g. Calvey, 2000; Pearson, 2009) and the virtues of this mode of access were also associated with the quality of data and the accounts that were produced in the field. These researchers expressed that their concerns with overt forms of access, associated with the presence of the researcher (Holdaway, 1983; Van Maanen, 1979) and the participants sanitising their behaviours and accounts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). My issues were less to do with the effects that my presence would have in the field as I would fully disclose my status as a researcher amongst the agency workers but more to do with how accessing the organisation via management would have created distrust amongst the intended research population.

The core rationale behind my non-disclosure to the organisation is that access to the field would either be severely compromised or completely barred; this urges the question of why organisations such as hotels are so unhelpful when it comes to participating in research?

Diamond (1992) suggests in his own covert research on nursing homes, studies in organisational settings which are likely to uncover exploitative or discriminatory practices, can be swathed with management protectionism which makes access or useful research near impossible. Thus, on some occasions, informed consent can be seen as counterproductive to the aims of the research (Lechman and Young, 1974).

This signifies an irreconcilable conflict of interests between the organisations and the social sciences (Becker, 1964). The irresolvable nature of this conflict necessitates what may be considered as ethically tenable advances into the field in order to pursue this line of enquiry. Douglas (1976) suggests that researchers need to balance interests: ‘deceptive methods are necessary to do good social sciences because the social world is characterised by evasiveness, deceitfulness, secrecy and fundamental social conflicts.’ Considering this principle I try to maintain a heightened awareness of protecting the interests of those researched including Adrian the employment agency consultant, the workers, the agency and the contracting organisations. In order to negate potential harm either to reputation, character or interests, I make great efforts to anonymise all of the organisations and their staff through the use of pseudonyms. This is to ensure that organisations are unidentifiable and that individuals within the organisations are indistinguishable.

After accessing the field, I came into contact with various agency workers. To these individuals I fully disclosed my full intentions to undertake research. I had waited around a month before I disclosed my status to agency workers, initially telling Mercie, Mihaela and Steve who I had worked with on quite a few occasions, to test the waters. I had explained to

them that I was doing a Ph.D.<sup>4</sup> , that I was interested in migrant workers' experiences of agency work, and that I wanted to know more about them and how the work they engage in makes them feel about themselves. Each of them were eager to be interviewed and thought that the project was interesting and that people like them rarely had the chance to impart their side of the story.

For the most part the workers in Staff Solutions were receptive to my research and were willing to aid me with my 'project'. There were of course a few exceptions, for example Cecilia a Zimbabwean agency worker had agreed to an interview but was very tentative on being interviewed. The attitude she demonstrated while working with me on shift did not match to the scripted and deferential answers she gave in interview. I later interviewed another of the Zimbabwean women Silvia and had a similar experience. I spoke to Cynthia a Ugandan agency worker about this experience. She laughed and explained that this was to be expected with African women who are often deferential to authority figures.

Apart from these two women the other agency workers on learning of my intention to undertake the research, provided me with informal interviews and would often divulge information regarding their interactions with Staff Solutions. I would ask to write things they had said down on napkins or record it verbatim in my phone - which was never objected to. On two occasions I even sent papers I had written to agency workers who were intrigued to read my research<sup>5</sup>. On the other end of the scale from Cynthia and Silvia were John, Mikhael and Naser. These workers seemed to have narcissistic tendencies and had thought that my

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<sup>4</sup> Mihaela didn't know what this was so I explained that it was a piece of research that would help me with my university studies.

<sup>5</sup> This happened twice, Steve and Cynthia (who will be introduced in the following chapter) took interest my study. They were both university educated and had both expressed that they had enjoyed reading my papers which had been prepared for a conference. Steve said he thought it was a very fair portrayal of the way things were in Staff Solutions.

Ph.D. was a biography of their lives. On one occasion John had prepared a folder with his CV and details of all the counties he had worked in so that I could put in my 'little project'. Although these workers often yielded lots of interesting information, it was often difficult to get them to talk about their work, often preferring to divulge inappropriate details about their past sexual conquests or drug use.

Although I was open with the agency workers regarding my status as a researcher, I had to remain guarded to Staff Solutions and the contracting organisations. To them I was a university student doing a bit of extra work in my free time. Keeping my intentions to research a secret from Staff Solutions was not as difficult as I had initially imagined. Although many of the workers were highly competitive over gaining more shifts in Staff Solutions (see chapter five) my status as a researcher meant that I was not a threat or would not impinge on their position within the organisation. This meant that agency workers helped to keep my status as a researcher concealed from the agency.

Ethical justification was more challenging. The ethics committee permitted the research provided that pseudonyms and distinctive facets of the organisation had been concealed. Furthermore, given that my interest was in the workers and their experiences and constructions of the organisations for which they worked, my accounts reflect their experiences.

Around three months into my research I started to conduct interviews with the agency workers. The participants had provided me with fully-informed consent on the premise that I fully-anonymised their identities (although some of them said that they would be happy to be named and detailed in my thesis but I chose to maintain anonymity for all). During the full-

participant observation phase of my research I faced many ethical dilemmas as there were occasions wherein highly sensitive information was provided which may have compromised an individual's job within the agency. In protecting workers I ensured that I censored details that made workers specifically identifiable. Moreover, I employed a principle of ethical reflexivity throughout my fieldwork (Ferdinand et al., 2007) and scholarship (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). This refers to a process of self-regulation and sensitivity to the field, whereby the researcher is able to judge subjectively what is morally acceptable and reprehensible. Thus, for example, where workers divulged highly personal information, even where relevant to my research I avoided writing about such details.

#### 4.6. Identity Work in the Field

I was surprised to discover that signing on with Staff Solutions was a relatively easy process. It required little more than an interview that was used to check my eligibility to work in the UK and signing of a few documents that release the agency from liability should there be any accidents at work. However, entering the field really began after my recruitment with Staff Solutions. It was when I started to pick up work with the agency and be placed on shifts that I realised that the isolated nature of the work and the composition of the workforce were likely to be a barrier to gaining access to migrant workers detailed accounts.

Agency work is sporadic and often uncertain in nature; different compositions of workers are sent on shifts, many of the workers are transient moving in and out of agency work which made it challenging to develop relationships and rapport with workers. Coupled with this was the distrust agency workers often felt towards their peers (discussed in chapter five) as well as the seemingly impenetrable national enclaves that served as a barrier. In building effective rapport with my agency peers I became acutely aware of my own identity and how I was

perceived by the workers. In order to gain rapport with these groups a reflexive engagement with the self is required so as to be viewed as a trusted outsider (Funder, 2005; Reeves, 2010). This meant that I often found myself engaging in my own identity work in order to craft a more accepted version of myself. Migrants in Staff Solutions were often dubious of British workers, because of their favoured status in the agency. I found that down by playing my 'Britishness' and drawing on my own ethnic identity through using the Arabic language I was able to gain the trust from migrant agency workers.

I also found that I became increasingly diligent in performing my work. Aware that many of the migrant workers viewed British workers as lazy, I made sure that my performance on shift meant that workers viewed me as a peer rather than imposter. However, my status as a university student, the fact I had access to a vehicle, and my non-reliance on the agency for economic sustenance also set me apart from many of the agency workers. In order to mediate these material differences I became increasingly reflexive over my appearance and forms of interaction.

Dress and management of appearance is important to gaining participants' trust (Gurney, 1991; Reeves, 2010). When I had initially started to work with Staff Solutions I followed the manual which listed a number of rules and regulations with regard to uniform and appearance. These included; shirt tucked in and buttoned to the top, no jewellery, minimal make-up, no perfume, no nail varnish or long nails, black socks, no visible tattoos, hair tied back and no chewing gum or smoking on shift. I followed these rules down to the letter but soon started to realise that this signified an alliance with Staff Solutions rather than with the agency workers. On one shift Mihaela a Romanian agency worker suggested, 'you are like the nerdy kid in school, you want the teacher to love you and give you a gold star [laughter]'

(Field notes; 12.03.2012). In light of the idea that obedience to the rules signified that I was seeking approval from Staff Solutions, I started to flout the rules leaving my collar unbuttoned, rolling up my sleeves and wearing make-up and perfume on shift. These kinds of minor misbehaviours and rule infringements were common amongst agency workers and were often used to draw a distance between the self and the identity of agency workers (see chapter seven). Through breaking these rules it signified that I too did not identify with Staff Solutions.

One event that induced my reflexive thinking over my self-presentation was when I was meeting a group of agency workers outside a venue 15 minutes prior to the start of the shift:

*I was in a huge rush to get to the shift after being in the university all day. I had come dressed in my own clothes with my uniform stored in a large (embarrassingly expensive) designer bag. On my way to the shift I had stopped at a Starbucks to grab a coffee, waning already from the long day I had. When I hurriedly arrived I was greeted by around seven agency workers. On approaching the group Christina looking bemused said, 'my goodness a Starbucks, that's expensive coffee, that one cup costs me a half an hour of my time.' Overhearing our conversation Steve turned and said, 'yes but did you see her bag, a rich girl like that doesn't need to worry about spending three quid on coffee.' All at once I felt humiliated, selfish, spoilt and embarrassed – why was I so stupid to come to an agency shift flaunting signs of material wealth? A Starbucks coffee seemed so mundane yet in this context it constructed me as frivolous. I decided tomorrow I would buy a backpack.*

*Field notes; 27.04.12*

Working with Staff Solutions meant that I became increasingly receptive to the subtle material distinctions between others and myself. I began to pay reflexive awareness of the clothes I wore, the ways in which I presented myself to which regulated to 'fit-in' more. However, it should be noted that my identity as a researcher was also a factor that facilitated my trusted status in and amongst Staff Solutions workers. The competitive nature of the work meant that many agency workers were distrustful of one another (see chapter five), however when I revealed my intention to research this placed many workers at greater ease and

actually made them more forthcoming. I was no longer perceived as a risk or competitor but someone who was interested in their lives and listening to their voice. The literature often highlights concerns surrounding the power differentials that exist between researchers and participants (Oakley, 1997), yet my prolonged exposure in the field and my youthful appearance seemed to iron out any feeling of distrust that may have fettered my research.

*Sometimes I feel like they (participants) see me as a silly child. Mario asked me today how my 'little project' is going. I felt undermined and stupid, like I'm some kind of amateur posing as a researcher. I suppose it's not all bad, people feel at ease with me, they feel open to talk, it's only my own ego that is damaged - not my research.*

*Reflexive Diary*

My identity was therefore a complexly constructed intersection between being an agency worker, a spoilt child, a migrant, a British national and a researcher. Engaging in identity work allowed me to foster closer relationships of mutual trust with agency workers (Reeves, 2010). Funder (2005) suggests that the establishment of rapport is a necessarily disingenuous act in order to achieve the researcher's purpose. However it could equally be argued that all individuals engage in identity work in order to form some sort of social cohesion, whether this is an employee entering into a new unfamiliar organisation or a researcher entering into a new research setting.

#### 4.7. Data Collection: Interviews, Field Notes and Everything in Between

Once I had entered the field I began to write. I constructed field notes that painstakingly elaborated on intricate details that arose during shifts. I had come to the field having already done some reading around the topics of migration and temporary work and the concept of identity. I was aware that this may have meant that my observations were guided or in some

way blinkered by the kinds of things I had already familiarised myself with. Gergen and Gergen (2000) suggest that choices of literature and personal investments in ideas mean that the analytic process has already begun in the field.

My initial panic over missing something important soon subsided – I acknowledged that I was unable to rid myself from my own preconceptions and therefore cannot attempt to provide a pure unbridled account of what happened. After around two months of lengthy field notes, I started to refine my focus to themes that seemed to emerge or themes that I found interesting or unexplained by theory. The themes I developed emerged from observations that seemed salient but also those which surprised me and which I found unusual. Developing themes helped me to reduce the amount of notes I was taking at the end of shifts and look more in-depth at issues of interest.

Taking field notes was a taxing duty, for the most part I was unable to take notes on shift<sup>6</sup>, so had to rely on my memory. The arduous work involved in agency work also meant that I was often too exhausted to write straight after work. In order to overcome this challenge I would take voice recordings noting the salient occurrences straight after shifts which I would write up in full later on.

I also found it particularly challenging to temper my emotions when compiling my notes – quite often my accounts depicted my daily frustrations with work and individuals. Although ethnography is considered to be inextricably linked with the researchers own assumptions and values (Tedlock, 2000) this does not mean to say that the research should be entirely self-indulgent. Within my field notes, I make specific effort to be more receptive to the discourses

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<sup>6</sup> Where I could I would write things down on napkins – key words or quotes on napkins. However, this was not always possible because of the surveillance on shift.

of the participants and to unpicking the taken-for-granted practices in agency work. In order to do this I structured observations to ensure that I took into account what occurred around me. I did this through firstly taking note of practices and systems within the organisation, secondly observing participants' interactions with the organisation, management and other agency workers, and thirdly making a compilation of notes of my own experiences and reflections in a separate diary. Delamont (2009) makes clear that reflexive diaries and field notes should be kept separate through recording in different places in order to avoid the narcissistic tendencies of auto-ethnography.

My fieldwork stretched for a period of 12 months, the length of this period was somewhat unplanned. I had decided to stay in the field until the context and environment became familiar and when nothing new seemed to occur (Bryman and Bell, 2007). However, this did take a little longer than anticipated given that the nature of agency work meant that I was exposed to many different organisations and thus needed to build up my experience in order to understand practices and systems that emerged between organisations. Prolonged exposure in the field is considered to distinguish ethnography from other forms of qualitative research (Heyl, 2001; Watson, 2011). The length of my time in the field enhanced my observations and field notes in a number of ways. As mentioned previously I was able to foster relationships of trust where workers were willing to divulge information in the knowledge that this would not be used in an improper way and effectively diminished power differentials where agency workers considered me as one of their peers.

This continued exposure and interaction with participants meant that I was able to negotiate meanings with them, exploring ideas through shared experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). I was also able to situate and contextualise my participants' narratives (Atkinson and

Delamont, 2006; Watson, 2009) embedding their accounts within the interactional and organisational context in which they emerged (Czarniawska, 2002).

#### 4.7.1. Interviews and Conversations

After around three months of field work observations I began to conduct interviews with the workers. Interviews enabled more in-depth discussions around certain themes. Moreover as Caswell (2005) suggests an interview is a context where the participant and researcher are placed in a situation where they must take account of their own behaviour by drawing on a range of available discourses. An interview can therefore be seen as a setting whereby the participant and interviewer are doing their own identity work and a forum where this identity work can be observed and more deeply understood.

I had waited for some time to start conducting interviews for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to gain a clear understanding of the field and the context of work so that I could design questions that were relevant to the themes that developed. Secondly, working alongside the participants enabled me to gain a rapport with them prior to the interviews; this gave me an understanding of their backgrounds. I obtained consent to interview around 30 agency workers, however actually finding time to conduct the interviews proved difficult. Most of the workers were transient which meant that they often moved in and out of agency work – this made it difficult to keep in contact with them. I also found that the uncertain shift patterns posed many issues to scheduling interviews at mutually convenient times. In total I managed to conduct 20 interviews with migrant agency workers, most of which were conducted in coffee shops. The interview venues were selected by the workers themselves apart from one occasion where one male participant, John insisted that we conduct the interview in his house. I felt uncomfortable with this situation given that John had often made

comments regarding my physical appearance and was on several occasions a little too tactile. On this occasion I politely declined and suggested that we conduct the interview in a public venue, where we could get coffee and cake. He agreed to this.

I had developed the interviews questions based on themes that appeared to have risen during my participation in agency work. These questions broadly explored agency workers' understandings of their experiences of work and migration. The questions were however open ended and flexible (Bryman and Bell, 2007), allowing the participants space to express their own feelings, direct the interview according to issues they felt were relevant as well as permitting me to follow up any interesting lines of enquiry (May, 1997; Rapley, 2001).

Most of the interviews lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours with the exception of two that were far shorter<sup>7</sup> (around 30 minutes). With fully informed consent from the participants the interviews were all recorded using a mobile phone in order to mediate some of the participants may feel around using a more unfamiliar device (Blaxer et al., 1996). Given that my ontological epistemological assumptions are aligned with constructionism, I considered the interviews to be a forum for co-construction and negotiation of meaning (Denzin, 2001; Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Symon et al., 2000: 460).

This process of co-constitution of meaning was greatly facilitated by my familiarity with the context of work. The participants and I were able draw on anecdotes and stories from the field in order illustrate meaning and understandings and contextualise their accounts. The relationships I had developed with the participants whilst working in Staff Solutions meant

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<sup>7</sup> These interviews were with Zimbabwean workers Silvia and Cecilia mentioned in section 4.5 – the interviewees were not forthcoming and seem to be deferential to the organisation (although this conflicted with their general attitude on shift) answering questions in a scripted way.

that I was able to collect far richer data. I found that after the interviews the participants would reflect on the questions and provide more information regarding some relevant issues at a later date. For example, Zalia one of the participants approached me two weeks after I had conducted her interview and said:

I had something happen to me the other day and I want you to put it in your project. I think it's useful. Remember when you asked me whether being from Portugal is ever relevant to my work? Well when I was working in the Radley the other night and the manager was asking me where I am from. I told him I'm Portuguese and he said, 'I don't know why you're working here, Portugal should be cheap now after the recession and the weather is good, doesn't make sense to be here doing work like this.' I didn't like that, I feel like he was saying go back home or something. Maybe I'm being sensitive but that's how I took it.

*Field notes 07.06.12*

I had many occasions where the participant would attempt to fill in their accounts given in interviews and provide me with greater detail. I reflected on how I may have imposed my own objectives on the participants; however the inter-subjective nature of ethnography makes this unavoidable. The informal interview stage of my field work lasted throughout my time in the field. This consisted of notes that I had gathered from questions I had specifically asked of the participants within the research context. Given that my presence as full participant meant I was able to talk informally with the participants and gather information I found this to be particularly useful way of understandings workers constructions and views in certain work scenarios. I also used my own resources as a way to gain greater depth of information. I found that offering workers lifts to and from shifts was particularly useful as my car was considered a safe space where workers could express their frustrations or elaborate on their experiences of work. These informal interviews were contextualised and contemporaneous with particular occurrences on shift. They provided a forum where the co-construction of meanings took place between the workers and me.

## 4.8. Analysing Text and Writing the Thesis

After I had collected a wealth of data, I was faced with the task of reducing and structuring this in order to answer my research questions. Inevitably, these questions had shifted markedly from when I had first started my fieldwork. For example, the concept of identity regulation became increasingly relevant to understanding how agency work operates. This flexibility is perhaps one of the virtues of qualitative research. Researchers are able to focus on the most salient emerging features of the field rather than being restricted to a set of questions (Bryman, 1988). The task of refining my data, streamlining the things I would talk about was both iterative and reflexive. Although Silverman (1993) suggests that analysis is the act of getting rid of data, I wanted to ensure that the integrity of my account was still intact.

I considered whether the themes I had developed in my analysis allowed the reader to gain a greater understanding of the daily lives of migrant agency workers. This meant I would often reflect on my accounts to ensure that a narrative flow was maintained whilst speaking back to theory. Structuring my data in order to ‘tell a story’, I devised loose themes that seemed to resonate throughout my data. These themes emerged out of the wider theoretical concepts of identity regulation and identity work. Using these constructs as a lens through which I could read and understand my data I developed sub-themes such as enterprise, stigma, nationality, space etc., which were resonant in the data and the literature. The categories devised were neither broad and encompassing, nor intricately detailed – this was in order to maintain manageable structure whilst ensuring the analysis is nuanced.

The physical process of coding my data was by no means technically advanced. I had chosen not to use coding programmes such as ENVIVO or NUDIST given that my analysis was

more concerned with interpretive meanings rather than literal understandings literature (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Morgan 1997). I found this was particularly relevant for studying migrant workers, given that their limited command of English meant that quite often interpretations with regard to the wider context in which things were uttered was necessary. Furthermore, my familiarity with the data made this task seem unnecessary. I chose to manually code the data; using highlighters and post-it notes to colour code all of my field notes, interviews and reflexive diaries.

In order to construct the data three chapters presented later in the thesis, I drew on two key conceptual, or 'macro themes' understandings. These were identity regulation and identity work. These macro themes provided me with an over-arching structure through which my data could be organised. Within these themes it was then easier to see where the smaller sub-themes, emergent from my empirical work, best fitted. For example, chapter five focuses specifically on the ways Staff Solutions, the employment agency, seeks to regulate workers. Sub-themes emergent from my data i.e. competitiveness and insecurity were used to discuss the wider conceptual frameworks. The subthemes took some time to emerge, and although I had some idea of what seemed important in my data, it was often difficult to narrow down my focus on a few themes in order to narrate an important story. This is where the macro-theoretical concepts of identity regulation and identity work came into play, helping to structure my data and realise which themes would make a relevant contribution to a body of literature. Moreover, the data chapters develop an analysis within specific contexts or analysing specific relationships; chapter five looks at the relationship between the Agency and its workers, chapter six the contacting organisations and agency workers and chapter seven explores the relationships between agency workers. These contexts helped to organise the data to form a more coherent narrative located in the space from which they emerged.

The themes that I had devised emerged somewhere between the literature and the data. I was well aware that I could be in danger of ‘shoe-horning’ the data into neatly packaged theories in order to ‘make it fit’, which may lose the intricacies of the ethnographic accounts. I therefore ensured that I constantly reflected upon the data ensuring that my analysis conveyed a convincing account of agency work (Potter and Wetherall, 1994). It is important to note that in analysing data, compromises were made in terms of what to include and what theories will be drawn upon. My thesis could have taken a number of shapes and directions, however my main concern was that the theoretical position I had adopted best explained and was explained by my data. The supervisor’s role as a detached reviewer has been acknowledged as incremental to the crafting of a convincing analysis (Hughes, 1994). As a detached reviewer my supervisor encouraged reflexivity at times when I was caught up in the field, advising me to take a step back and to think about alternative readings or other perspectives, such as that of the agency or the contracting organisations.

Writing was equally incremental to the analysis of the data, this is particularly so in ethnographic studies where the authenticity of the text is largely contingent on skilful scholarship (Watson, 2005). In writing the text I drew on experiential, contextual information drawn from the field as well as the narrative accounts of both the participants and my own reflexive diary. Narratives are considered a way in which we organise our thoughts and make sense of the world (Geertz, 1975; Van Maanen, 1979), thus can be seen as an interesting way of understanding an individual’s worldview. The text interweaves the narrative accounts within the normative descriptions of the organisation given that narratives are considered to occur within a specific context, which gives them meaning (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006). There are however, some warnings about the uncritical way in which narratives are often drawn upon within text. Delamont and Atkinson (2006) suggest that narratives are often

considered uncritically as a direct window to an individual's identity. However, I take narratives to merely constitute a discursive practice through which identities are enacted, constructed and negotiated (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002; Alvesson and Willmott, 2004). Thus, narratives are drawn on to understand how individuals make sense of situations and negotiate their identities rather than a reflection of the world. In order to achieve this, I draw on both interview and observation data in order to provide more in-depth, richer, situated accounts.

In writing the thesis I was faced with a number of decisions, such as the deliberation of whether to write in first or third person and confusion over whether to separate the data from the literature. The data sections of this thesis are written in first person, this decision was made given that I was immersed in the entire process thus removing myself from the account my present a false impression of distance or disengagement (Cauley, 2008). The typical conventions within ethnographic research render this style of writing possible, acknowledging the influence of the author over the data in order to provide a fully reflexive account (Seale, 1998).

Authorship was a deeply reflexive process given that ethnography largely relies on the skill of the researcher to craft a convincing narrative (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002). Van Maanen suggests:

The narrative and rhetorical conventions assumed also shape ethnography. Personal expression, choice of metaphor, figurative allusions, semantics, decorative phrasing, plain speaking, textual organisation and so on all work to structure a cultural portrait in a particular way.

(Van Maanen, 2011: 5)

Thus in writing my accounts of fieldwork I was reflexive on the composition and prose of the text. I found that feedback from my supervisors helped to provide a more distanced account;

this helped me to become aware that simple expressions and metaphors were loaded, fraught with my personal assumptions. At times my supervisor suggested that my constructions of certain people and organisations were perhaps lacking reflexive distance, thus a thorough editing process was drawn upon in order to ensure that my personal feelings (and often grudges) did not over-shadow the voices of the participants.

#### 4.9. Concluding Comments

This chapter has provided details of the rationale behind the conception, choices and production of my research. The account has not only set out the underlying theoretical assumptions but also provides a reflexive account for these theoretical choices. In doing so, I aim to render this thesis more transparent, providing the reader with an understanding of the antecedents of what is inherently subjective. The following chapter presents that first of the findings chapters. The chapter sets the scene of the research context and continues to explore the relationship between agency workers and Staff Solutions. A particular focus is placed on how Staff Solutions seeks to regulate workers at the level of identities, and how this is subjectively understood by migrant agency workers.

# 5. Crafting Compliance: Regulation and Discipline in Staff Solutions

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## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to shed light on the regulatory systems that are used within Staff Solutions. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings discussed in chapters two and three, the chapter explores the practices adopted by Staff Solutions in their attempt to regulate worker subjectivities, and how migrant agency workers' understood these practices. The first section of the chapter provides contextual background to the ethnography, detailing my experiences of joining Staff Solutions. The section also introduces the key actors in the study: Adrian (pseudonym), the head recruitment consultant and the migrant agency workers who I worked with during my time with Staff Solutions. The second section explores how working with Staff Solutions engenders feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, and how this feeds into worker subjectivities. Finally, the way in which Staff Solutions allocates work is critically examined as a tool of discipline and regulation in producing the ideal agency worker.

## 5.2. Setting the Scene

I joined the Staff Solutions in February 2012. It was a very quick and easy process. I initially assumed that this speed was largely facilitated by my extensive experience in catering work, yet I was later to find out that this was not the case. I had emailed the agency my CV in response to an advert I saw posted on 'Gumtree'<sup>8</sup> and received a telephone response within 24 hours. The initial point of contact was Adrian, a recruitment consultant working in the Cardiff branch. Staff Solutions is a national organisation with recruitment offices in most

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<sup>8</sup> Gumtree is a local advertisement website that lists details on job vacancies in the users local area.

major UK cities. It has a number of divisions, including office work, skilled work, and manual labour. Its largest division (at least in Cardiff) was catering and hospitality. I applied for the catering division, because I knew that this division was likely to attract the most migrant workers. In the telephone conversation with Adrian, he asked me what kind of work I was interested in, what I was doing at the moment, what my availability was, and then asked me to 'drop by' for an interview the following day.

Calling what took place an interview was perhaps a somewhat grandiose title: the term implies that the candidate is being evaluated and considered for their suitability or compatibility with the job role. In Staff Solutions, this interview was merely a formality – a mechanism through which prospective workers' papers could be checked for their eligibility to work in the UK. Provided a candidate had a National Insurance number and an employment visa then they would be successfully signed up. Enrolment with Staff Solutions, however, was still a long way from actually undertaking paid work. Signing up with Staff Solutions can be best described as being permitted to enter into a smaller job market, one in which employment contracts are terminated within days, if not hours, and where experience and skill sets are irrelevant. Actually obtaining work is by no means a given in this system, rather it is the outcome of a system of regulation and politics, that dictate the ways in which work is allocated.

### 5.2.1. Introducing Adrian

Adrian's role within Staff Solutions was multifaceted. He was in charge of the catering and hospitality division and his activities span all of the functions associated with this. Not only does he recruit people to work with Staff Solutions, he also contacts hotels, restaurants, catering companies, cleaning companies and various other catering organisations/

departments (these may be as random as schools, universities, offices, supermarkets or even hospitals) to see if he can source any work from them. He then connects the workers he has recruited with the jobs that he has sourced. His responsibilities also span to payroll activities, providing time-sheets to staff, collecting them every Monday to ensure workers get paid, processing wages and following up invoices sent out to customers. Adrian's job is undeniably stressful given the vast number of activities he performs and the short-term targets to which he is accountable. Adrian works under James, 'the big boss' who oversees all of his work, and ensures that all of his targets are being met. Despite being stressful, Adrian has commented that he very much enjoys his work. Having worked in catering and hospitality since the age of 18, he was fortunate enough to have always held managerial roles, which protected him from a lot of the 'donkey work' associated with hospitality work. Adrian commented that he liked the catering and hospitality industry so when he found the job in Staff Solutions it presented a happy medium:

It's great; I mean I can't say that I don't miss the buzz of hospitality work but I certainly don't miss the irregular hours or the heavy duty work. This job is like still keeping a foot in the industry without being fully committed to it.

*Adrian, Recruitment Consultant*

Adrian had mentioned on several occasions that hospitality and catering work was not conducive to family life, so finding something more office based was perfect given that he now has two young children.

Adrian's role in Staff Solutions was integral to the functioning of the organisation. Given that Staff Solutions is remotely located, the workers would seldom formulate relationships with the other workers or have attachments to the location, practices or routines within the offices. Therefore the workers' relationship with the agency was a remote and transactional, one which is defined by the assignment of shifts in exchange for payment and in which the

channels of communication (usually telephone or email) are short, instrumental and purposeful. The remoteness of this relationship between Staff Solutions and its workers means that Adrian is the only point of contact. It was Adrian's name at the bottom of e-mails and his voice on the end of the phone. For most agency workers, Adrian was integral to getting work but also the scapegoat for when things go wrong.

In this context, Adrian can perhaps be described as the personification or human face of the Staff Solutions given that he is the only aspect of the organisation with which the workers interact. The implications of this mean that agency workers take out their frustrations with their work situation on Adrian. Through my discussions within this chapter Adrian may be depicted in negative and uncomplimentary ways, however it should be noted that such depictions represent a wider critique of Staffing Solutions of which Adrian was representative.

### 5.2.2. Agency Workers and the Differing Experiences of Flexibility

Staff Solutions is in the business of flexibility. The premium charged to organisations was not for supplying a workforce (which an organisation can find themselves rather more cheaply) rather it is for supplying flexibility, a feature highly desirable for organisations with uncertain demand. The operations within Staff Solutions is to recruit workers, which are held on their books and then to supply these workers to different catering and hospitality venues on a pre-agreed temporary basis. The length of temporary positions are variable – more often than not organisations use workers on a shift by shift basis, although on some rare occasions workers are contracted for longer terms which may extend to weeks, months or even years (although I have only come across one organisation that was regularly using an agency worker, Vicky, for a period that had run up to 18 months by the time I left).

Staff Solution provides a kind of a middle-link liaison service between workers 'on their books' and organisations requiring temporary workers. It is through this transaction that profit is generated. Staff Solutions pays all of their workers at a minimum wage rate, yet charges contracting organisations anywhere up to £18/hour for the use of its workers. This amount is a conditional one, depending on the relationship Staff Solutions has with the organisation, the distance the agency worker will have to travel to get to the shift or whether the shift is on a bank holiday or at anti-social hours (between 12am and 6am). Regardless of the fee Staff Solutions takes from the contracting organisations, agency workers never receive above the minimum wage. As Staff Solutions charge a premium for the flexibility of its workers, each hour signed off on a timesheet means greater profits for Staff Solutions.

For contracting organisations, the willingness to pay this premium for workers is justified as staff are at their disposal on the basis of their fluctuating demand. The need for flexibility is particularly acute in the catering and hospitality industry given that demand is often uncertain and unpredictable. Temporary workers are used to dealing with the peaks and troughs in demand. Therefore using Staff Solution is seen as a way of both increasing organisational efficiency by only paying for productive hours and also removing the responsibility to the organisation to provide training and benefits such as, holiday pay, maternity leave or any additional perks.

There are some minimal standards required through legislation that serve to protect the agency workers' interests. For example, the Agency Worker Regulations 2010 stipulate that where workers are posted for a period that extends beyond 12 uninterrupted weeks within a single organisation, agency workers are entitled to equal treatment to that of the regular

employee. However, Staff Solutions workers rarely enjoy this entitlement. Most organisations avoid using workers on a continuous basis for an extended period as this conflicts with the notion of temporary work. Furthermore the legislation requires that workers are in continuous employment with a single organisation for 12 weeks, therefore where workers take shifts in other venues during the period of continuous employment they forfeit their right to equal treatment.

Vicky, a worker who was contracted by the Welsh Paper Office, working in the staff canteen for a period of 18 months, had not yet achieved the regulatory entitlements to 'equal treatment.' She explained to me:

This place and Adrian are smart - the way they play it, he calls me and pressures me to take on weekend shifts in other venues and tells me that you're alright jack just because I have a regular posting. I'm guilted into doing weekend which means that I never actually reach the 12 weeks period to get my benefits. It's so annoying – I tell myself that I'm not going to accept other work but then I get Adrian basically telling me he might relocate me which would completely fuck things up for me.

*Vicky, UK*

Workers signed up to the Staff Solutions thus face an uncertain and ambiguous employment status, in return for the minimum wage and very few benefits. Reflecting on my experiences of agency work it is apparent that all of the parties involved, apart from the workers themselves, seem to benefit from this contractual relationship.

All recruits joining Staff Solutions are required to sign a zero hour contract. This means that while they have no guaranteed hours of work, neither are they committed to work certain hours. As mentioned earlier, many of Staff Solutions' clients draw upon the services offered by them as a direct response in shifts in demand. This means that hotels with an unexpectedly large room occupation rate or a catering company with a couple of staff off sick will call Staff Solutions as little as an hour in advance to book workers. Agency workers may be

called as at any point of time during the morning, afternoon or evening and offered a shift. For many agency workers the uncertainty of shifts means that during their free (non-work) time they are constantly anticipating the possibility of being called up for a shift. Mercie, one of the longest serving workers in Staff Solutions, had commented to me that on her days off she would often carry a pair of black trousers, a white and a black shirt and black shoes just in case a last minute shift became available (*Field notes 16.03.12*). Moreover, once a worker has received confirmation of a posting to an organisation, this shift can be cancelled at any point up to an hour prior to when the shift is due to start. This means a worker cannot rely on hours until they have been signed off on their time sheet.

The uncertainty of work was experienced differently by different workers, on the basis of their own situation. Not surprisingly, for those workers completely dependent on Staff Solutions as their only source of income the effects of uncertainty were felt most deeply. Most agency workers had a ‘make hay while the sun shines,’ attitude to work. Curtis a 22 year old for whom Staff Solutions is his only form of employment, commented to me:

I worked 60 hours this week and 58 the last, but you never know when you’re going to get work again, you’d be wise to take whatever comes to you.

*Curtis, UK<sup>9</sup>*

For those workers who only rely on Staff Solutions for part-time work the flexibility associated with agency work was experienced more favourably. A small portion of the workers had other sources of income. This included the self-employed such as Laura, who has her own upholstering business and works her shifts around her bookings, or Fiora, who is a self-employed massage therapist, dancer and a fitness instructor. There are also students like James, Holly, Jessica, Cynthia and DJ. Although many of the international students relied on the income generated from the agency to support their studies, their hours were

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<sup>9</sup> Denotes the workers country of origin but not ethnicity – to see race or ethnicity refer to the appendix b

limited 20 a week given visa stipulations. Most of the British students used agency income as additional drinking funds. There are those who have other forms of employment like Anita who worked in the accounts department of a hotel, Samjeeta who was a day-time legal executive or Tibs who had regular hours in a large chain hotel and worked part-time through Staff Solutions in order to 'put a bit by' (See appendix A for more details).

Therefore, the flexibility associated with agency work is not always a negative issue for workers. In some instances agency work enabled individuals to juggle familial duties and other jobs whilst being able to access the labour market flexibly via Staff Solutions. However, this was problematic as will be suggested in following sections. Regulation and discipline used within Staff Solutions meant that for many of these non-reliant workers the benefits of flexible working were rarely experienced. Staff Solutions offered a variety of different kinds of work to its workers, however not all of these shifts are considered of equal quality and preference. The following section will discuss the workers informal understandings of the work. These understandings have implications for how agency workers understand their position in Staff Solutions.

### 5.2.3. Categorising Work

A shift is not merely a shift in Staff Solutions. Regardless of the fact that all jobs are remunerated at minimum wage, not all shifts are of equal status. The work in Staff Solutions can be divided two broad categories: front of house work which involves plate waiting, bar tending, room service, canteen service and the occasional cashier work; and back of house work included kitchen portering, housekeeping, cleaning and kitchen assistant work. Back of house duties were usually considered as sub-standard work. Any shift that involved cleaning or considered servile was termed 'shit work' by fellow workers. However, even within front

of house duties there were different categories of work. Regular consistent work, no matter what it involved, was always preferred. These regular postings were rare in Staff Solutions, yet where available they were coveted. Workers would take the length of the shift into consideration – the longer the better. Following this, location was also important. Shifts located far away meant additional travel time and costs, so the closer the better. Finally, there was the nature of the work, reputation of the organisation and the employees of the organisation to consider. Knowledge of the reputation of the organisation also has particular relevance to agency workers and this was usually gained through experience with the organisation or perhaps through hearsay from other agency workers. For example, Radley Hotel had a reputation for working agency staff hard and providing no breaks, or TJ caterers who were renowned for not providing meals to agency workers.

The evaluation of the nature of the work was based the value attached not only related to material factors such as location, how ‘dirty’ or menial it was and the length of the shift but also the status or prestige of the venue. For example, a shift in a supermarket staff canteen would be constructed as degrading whereas working in a high quality hotel or restaurant was considered as decent.

In addition, agency workers would evaluate an organisation on the basis of their regular staff. Lazy staff would mean more work for agency workers so these places were to be avoided. In some organisations there was friction between agency workers and regular workers. For example, Christina a Romanian agency worker told me that she had to refuse shifts in a nursing home because she had had a ‘run in’ with one of the regular employees who made her life hell when she went there (*Field notes: 07.10.12*). It was quite often the case that regular workers felt threatened by the presence of agency workers and this resulted

antagonisms whilst on shift. On the rare occasions that agency workers are able to choose their shifts, these factors all influence where they select to work. However, given that workers were rarely given a choice, this informal hierarchy of work was much more relevant to Adrian's allocation of work which was considered to be used as mechanism of control and discipline to regulate workers (in section 5.4.2).

The following section introduces the discourses of insecurity and uncertainty in Staff Solutions, considering how this discourse is crafted and reinforced by Staff Solutions and the effects this has on workers' self-understandings.

### 5.3. Constructing Uncertainty in Staff Solutions

The uncertainty and insecurity experienced by agency worker is often considered to be part and parcel of the flexibilisation of the workforce. This section explores the ways in which Staff Solutions reinforces and encourages feelings of insecurity so as to elicit certain behaviours from the workers. This is achieved through a number of different techniques, the first being in relation to recruitment.

#### 5.3.1. Surplus Recruitment

When recruited by Staff Solutions workers were held like inventory on the agency's books until they were booked out on a shift. However, unlike material inventory, human inventory needs no storage facilities or maintenance costs which mean that surplus recruitment is of no financial consequence<sup>10</sup> to the agency. For Staff Solutions, the strategy of continuous recruitment that they followed made clear that they wanted as many workers on their books as possible. They would regularly post adverts on the Gumtree website in order to ensure a

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<sup>10</sup> Apart from maybe a small cost of recruitment – the time involved filling out the paper work in recruiting workers.

constant trickle of fresh recruits. The doors to recruitment were never closed; applicants were always called in for interview and provided their papers were in order were signed up.

At first I rationalised this strategy as Staff Solution's means of generating income. Given that any hours worked by agency workers meant greater potential income for Staff Solutions it seemed practical to have a large inventory of workers that were readily available to work any shifts that came up. For huge events like international rugby games or concerts that required a considerable number of staff on a single day, Staff Solutions would need to have a large inventory on its books to ensure they maximised the total number of hours workers were out on the job. Yet, such agency 'sell out days' were rare. There was only one occasion in the twelve months I worked with Staff Solutions that Adrian had boasted all of his staff were out on jobs.

After a short time working in Staff Solutions it became apparent to me that the workers were aggrieved by the constant influx of new recruits. This was because the more staff recruited resulted in a scarcity of work and this was particularly problematic for those reliant on Staff Solutions for full-time work. Work had to be distributed between a large number of workers, which meant that more often than not workers were disappointed with their cumulative hours and wages at the end of the week. Given that work was in scarce supply and workers in abundance the results were inevitable – quite often there would be droughts of work, which would impact hardest on those dependent on Staff Solutions for full-time work. Kevin, who worked part-time as a recruitment consultant in the Staff Solutions office and part-time on the front line as an agency worker, had confirmed this to me one day. Kevin had mentioned that Adrian had recently been on a recruitment drive for a forthcoming music concert. Staff Solutions had recruited around 50 new staff in order to 'get as many staff out as possible'.

Yet the requirements for workers were very much speculative which meant that recruitment was merely a precautionary measure to ensure that Staff Solutions could fully maximise its earning potential. On this occasion the demand for workers had been greatly over estimated, which meant that Staff Solutions was left with a swollen inventory of workers and very meagre (if any) shifts to offer. Kevin went on to suggest:

I'll be glad when my time is up in the office... it's so difficult when people, who worked with the agency for years see these new faces nicking all the shifts, call you up and ask you explain what the hell's going on. They ask why you carry on recruiting when there is not enough work to go around. I've got to work alongside them the next day – it's ever so awkward

*Kevin, UK*

Kevin was in a difficult position given that he straddled the boundaries between office and frontline work. He was confronted with agency workers' frustrations yet these workers were also aware that Kevin had a direct link to Adrian, so anything said on shift was censored for fear that it would be relayed back to the office.

Surplus recruitment stimulated feelings of uncertainty and insecurity for workers, yet, the effect this had differed amongst workers. Some workers saw themselves as transient in the context of the uncertain conditions. In December, for example the surplus recruitment was perhaps most severely experienced. December is usually Staff Solutions busiest month, yet there had been a complete famine on work as a result of a November recruitment drive. Mario a Portuguese agency worker spoke to me candidly about his annoyance with the shift situation:

I can handle a quiet January or August, those we know it's the quiet month so we know that OK save for that time, but quiet December, now me and Adrian going to have issues, I rely on December and the Summer weddings to get me through the down periods.

*Mario, Portugal*

December was the end of the 'agency career' for Staff Solutions' longest serving workers Mario and Mercie – unable to find permanent work in the local area, they had each decided to move to different cities in a bid to find more regular work. Mercie commented:

The work just isn't here. I go where the work is. It's the reason I'm in the UK in the first place. I've always seen myself as a bit of a Bedouin anyway (laughs) and that's how I've got to see myself now.

*Mercie, Zambia*

For these workers, the uncertainty of work with Staff Solutions emphasised their transient state. Yet this was not always the sentiment held amongst agency workers. Many workers felt compelled to search for security through regulating their actions in the hope that they would get more secure postings.

### 5.3.2. Insecurities in Insecure Work

As discussed in section 5.2.3, there were certain venues that required agency workers on a more or less regular basis and others that made more sporadic use of Staff Solution's services. The more regular work provides greater security and certainty to the individuals who managed to get these postings. However, Staff Solutions still worked to maintain a level of insecurity, constructing workers as dispensable within these seemingly secure roles. Contractually, agency workers signed zero hour contracts, which meant that they had very few statutory rights and no guarantee of minimum hours. However, the insecure nature of the work was also exacerbated through other methods employed by the agency and contracting organisations.

Staff Solutions had a wide array of clients, each with varying staffing needs. Some of these clients were contract-catering units that often drew on small numbers of staff for regular use. These units tended to be in the public sector, operating on annual or bi-annual budgets and characterised by having small but regular and predictable demand because the canteen was

servicing offices with set numbers of customers. These places either used temporary staffing to cover maternity leave, illness or holiday, or perhaps they had a little extra cash in the catering budget which allowed them to take on extra temporary staff. Leanne one of the supervisors in a public office-catering unit located in Cardiff explained to me why these units preferred to hire workers via the agency rather than as permanent employees:

Well you know with all the cuts that are going on at the moment it's hard to know whether there will be enough money for extra staff next year so like it's a pain to recruit someone and lay them off. With agency we can just use them as and when is needed, when the money runs out they will be the first out.

*Field notes: 17.09.12*

This dispensability of agency workers was therefore an attribute highly regarded by contracting organisations. However, this insecurity was not always inherent to agency work, quite often Staff Solutions or contracting organisations were seen to use their power to chop and change shifts decisively in order to reinforce the insecurity of the work. One example of this was in the catering division of the Welsh Paper Office, an organisation I had been posted in for almost five months, usually working two or three shifts a week. I worked consistently with two women also sent from Staff Solutions, Cynthia and Zalia both of whom were dependent on agency work for survival. Cynthia, a 21-year-old Ugandan student, had come to study food technology in the UK funded by her family. She explained that although she had come from an affluent family in Uganda, the money her family gave her just about covered her studies and rent. Therefore, having money for food, transport, phone and electricity bills, socialising, and clothing was contingent on her ability to secure work from Staff Solutions.

Zalia, a Portuguese migrant and single mother of two, had come to seek work in the UK after losing her job during the economic crisis in Portugal. She explained to me that the average wages in Portugal are around £400/month and with high living costs almost equivalent to those in the UK. Given that she had to support two children on around £400 a month, she was

forced to give up her independence and her apartment and move back in with her Mother and Father. Even with these drastic measures, Zalia still struggled to pay for essentials such as food and bills so she decided to draw on a personal network of close friends who helped her to set up in Cardiff.

Although both Zalia and Cynthia were happy to have been placed in a more regular posting they both expressed specific concerns relating to their security in the organisation. These related to both Adrian and John, the catering manager in the contract-catering unit. John seemed to have a strong preference for female migrant workers in his kitchen. John explained that he just wanted ‘good girls that get the job done, no fuss’. Once John had figured out who were the ‘good agency girls’ or who fulfilled his very specific understanding of a good agency girl, then he hung on to them. This was seemingly beneficial for Zalia and Cynthia as they were given around three or four full days of work per week. However, the benefits of such consistency should not be exaggerated. This was something Zalia had spoken to me about when I gave her a lift back home after her shift. She explained that John had become increasingly impatient with her and seemed to have taken a personal dislike to her. She talked about how he rarely spoke to her and when he did, it was only ‘to tell her what to do’. She told that even some of the other staff in the kitchen had noticed his negative attitude towards her and she was getting increasingly anxious that she would lose this regular posting. Even consistency in work, thus cannot be interpreted as security given that workers are subject to personal preferences and fragile budgets. Cynthia expressed her anxiety over John calling in different people to work:

One morning he (John) needed me and I had a lecture, it was something I couldn’t miss because the lecturer doesn’t even put the slides on Blackboard [online electronic noticeboard]. I had to turn down a shift with John, and Adrian sent out Nidesh as my replacement. I know this sounds evil but I was just praying that day ‘please don’t like Nidesh, please don’t like her’ or for her to fuck up somehow - not because I don’t like

her – you know I love that girl - but I need that work and if John decides he likes her better, then I'm out.

*Cynthia, Uganda*

Phil, a Maltese musician had been given full-time work via Staff Solutions for the past 18 months in a contract-catering unit, yet the last time I saw him he was in complete desperation. The work that he had become so dependent upon had come to an abrupt end when he had some problems with one of the regular workers in the organisation. He was told that he was no longer wanted back which meant that he had no hours and no relationships built with other venues. Working in one venue for an extended period means that workers are unable to establish relationships, become familiar with or pick up knowledge from other organisations, which makes it more challenging to re-enter the agency job market.

Adrian regularly reminds workers of their tenuous relationship with the agency and in doing so also contributes to feelings of insecurity. Vicky, a British graduate had managed to gain regular work on a fulltime basis in an office canteen. She had been working for 6 months when I had met her, getting eight hours a day paid work, working from 7am – 3pm Monday – Friday. She expressed relief that this work had got her through what might have been a tricky transition from being a student to being unemployed. However, she was also wary of the nature of the job and Adrian's role in this. I had met Vicky on a night shift in the Radley hotel; she explained to me that she had been mildly coerced into accepting the shift out of fear that declining it may forfeit her potential to get other work:

The thing is I'm happy with my hours, my boyfriend works and I want my weekends and evenings free but Adrian is always niggling at me to do a night shift or do the odd weekend here or there. When I say no he always tells me that I've got comfy with my 'cushy' regular work and I should be more grateful for it - whatever that's supposed to mean. I just feel under pressure to say yes to him all the time. I know I'm so lucky to get this work but at the end of the day it's always in the back of your head like that the game will be up soon. Adrian can pull me off at any time.

*Field notes: 12.03.12*

Thus even in the context of more regular shifts the feelings of insecurity still went unmitigated. This was also true of the Radley hotel, which uses Staff Solutions to deal with understaffing on a regular basis as a source for its workers. The Radley relied on agency workers to support part of their core activities as a functioning hotel. As well as this core business, the hotel also hosts many events, such as corporate events, weddings, and large parties, which require additional agency workers to supplement demand. Most of the other hotels around Cardiff have core staff which are used for daily shifts with agency workers drawn on for sporadic use in the events department. Although the Radley used agency workers regularly this did little to provide a sense of security to workers. I had experienced this first hand when I had been posted at the hotel for three or four shifts a week for around two months. However, these shifts were redistributed when Adrian had informed me that I was no longer needed in the Radley and replaced me with another worker. Shifts were often shuffled and manipulated by Adrian, serving as sharp reminders of the fragile position of agency workers, even where work was seemingly consistent.

The more unpredictable work was usually based in hotels or catering companies. Quite often hotels would call Staff Solutions a few hours before staff were required. These hotels would often routinely over-book staff as the flexibility of the agency system meant that workers could be cancelled as late as an hour prior to shift, at no cost or inconvenience for themselves or Staff Solutions. This system meant that workers were left unable to guarantee their earnings for the week ahead.

One night Samjeeta, an Indian graduate working with Staff Solutions, and I had both been posted to work in the Radley for a 5pm to 3am shift. Although the Radley was perhaps one of the most hated venues, the shift was ten hours long - an easy sell to most agency workers. At

around 11pm management realised that they had overbooked staff, and agency workers were the first to be sent home. I was elated at the prospect of getting home early but I was surprised to hear Samjeeta's concerns that these few hours cut from her wage packet were the difference between being able to buy fresh food that week. She explained:

I'm fed up with Adrian telling us that shifts will end later than they do, it's happened three times this week and now I've only done 25 hours this week, not even enough to break even.

*Samjeeta, India*

Agency workers were distrustful of Adrian's motives. They often suggested that incomplete information about finish times of shifts or incorrect details regarding the work they had been sent to do was a common occurrence. Particularly problematic was the dishonesty and misinformation around the length of shifts where the venue was quite far away. Workers would accept the promise of ten hours knowing that they could earn back the transportation costs from a lengthy shift, only to be sent home after four hours and barely breaking-even. This fostered distrust and negative feelings towards Adrian and Staff Solutions:

The other week they put me down in Forest Gardens (around 20 miles out of Cardiff in a rural area, inaccessible by public transport). I didn't want the shift, it's more trouble than it's worth with the travel and all that but I said yes because it was 10 hours which means even if I get a taxi home I will have made a bit. Then after four hours they said that they don't need me to stay on. I was so angry because that means I make no money after paying the cab. I told them I'm meant to be here until 10pm and the boss man told me that the max he needed me until was 6pm – someone is lying man and I'm sure it's Adrian. He knows no one is taking that shift otherwise.

*DJ, Nigeria*

Thus through, over recruitment, inconsistency in work, changing shifts at the last minute and providing inaccurate information with regard to the nature, location or length of a shift Staff Solutions and the contracting organisations are able to strengthen and reinforce discourses of insecurity in agency work. The following section considers how the allocation of work is used to form a regulatory mechanism, serving to promote an ideal subjectivity that agency workers identify with.

## 5.4. Allocating Work and Creating Ideal Subjects

So far, this chapter has outlined the need for a flexible agency workforce as well as the various practices that Staff Solutions engages in to render workers as insecure subjects. This section focuses on the system of work allocation adopted by Adrian and demonstrating how this works to regulate agency workers' identities in particular ways rendering them flexible and compliant subjects.

### 5.4.1. Looking the Part

As mentioned in section (5.2.3) shifts could be broadly divided into front of house and back of house duties – with back of house shifts often considered more stigmatised. During my time with Staff Solutions, I had met more or less the entire workforce that had been placed on plate waiting duties. Yet I had only rarely encountered those who had been placed to work back of house. It was on the few occasions I had been called into the Staff Solutions office that I encountered these otherwise invisible faces of the agency.

Back of house workers were isolated - invisible to both customers and other members of staff. These individuals work alone, mostly on anti-social shift patterns. The work they perform can be described as dirty work, having a physical and social taint (i.e. servile relationship, performing demeaning tasks such as washing dishes, changing dirty bedlinen etc.) (Hughes, 1958). Throughout my experience with Staff Solutions I had never encountered British workers filling such duties. Back of house work was always allocated to migrant workers, mainly BME workers either afro-Portuguese, Brazilian, African, and Malaysian, or sometimes Eastern European (usually Romanian or Russian). These workers were considered to have some kind of 'impairment', either linguistically or aesthetically, which meant that Adrian had obstructed their chances of working front of house.

Female workers always filled housekeeping roles, while kitchen portering roles were allocated to men (usually African). For these workers the invisibility and isolation of the work means that workers were often unable to improve upon their English and they were unable to make connections or friends outside of their national communities. Getting out of this cycle of isolation is very difficult as Mercie, a Zambian law graduate suggests:

Housekeeping is so exhausting - you don't really understand until you do it how hard it actually is. Everything in that place is heavy, so heavy that your body just hurts from places you didn't know existed. So when that shift ends I cannot even think of going out to socialise or looking for a new job, bed is the first place on the programme.

*Mercie, Zambia*

Mercie, unusually, moved between front of house and back of house work. Her ethnicity and gender presented her as ideal for housekeeping positions, yet she was articulate, educated and extremely attractive, which also meant she was acceptable to work on front of house duties.

On one of the busier days (e.g. when an international rugby match was held in the city) I had been called into the office as one of a team of workers to be sent to the Radley Hotel to serve as plate waiters for a hospitality event. On entering the office there was a sea of unfamiliar faces who I assumed to be new recruits. I took a seat next to a petite blonde girl (I think from Russia) who sat nervously on her hands. I introduced myself asking her whether she was new to Staff Solutions as I had never seen her before. She replied in a very strong accent:

I've been in the agency for 9 months but I'm usually in housekeeping so I never really meet the other people from the agency. I keep asking for other kind of work but Adrian never gives it to me, I think it would be good to improve my English if I got to speak to some people.

*Field notes: 17.03.12*

For these workers the allocation of work to back of house work had reinforced their marginal status in UK. Their racial and national identities as well as their language skills had deemed them unfit for front of house service work.

Adrian's allocation of work according to specific racial, gendered, national identities was however mediated by social capital such as education and good language skills. In my own experiences with Staff Solutions I had never once even been offered a housekeeping or kitchen portering shift. This was despite the fact that the housekeeping and kitchen portering activities formed a larger proportion of the business than front of house catering did. This was most likely due to my appearance, education status and language skills.

Even for front of house duties, work was allocated according to stereotypical assumptions of racial and national identities, assumptions that the agency workers were very much aware of. The car journeys to and from shifts were an open forum for discussion on work allocation. One evening a group of agency workers had worked a six-hour shift in a marquee wedding just outside Cardiff. On the way back to Cardiff I was giving Mario a Portuguese agency worker, Sergio an afro-Portuguese agency worker and Sylvia a student and agency worker from Uganda a lift home. We had been silent on leaving the shift, all exhausted and disgruntled because we were not given food or a break. Sergio eventually broke the silence asking whether we had many shifts for the forthcoming week, Mario, Sylvia and I all responded that we had not yet been given any work to which Sergio muttered, 'fucking racist.' Mario smirked and let out a sharp breath, like a silent laugh. I asked them what they were talking about. Sergio went on to say, 'haven't you noticed?'. I was confused and responded, 'noticed what?'. Sergio went on to elaborate, 'Well Adrian loves British people, and if you're foreign you can forget getting shifts'. Mario explained to me, 'listen we're not

saying Adrian is racist but if he has a shift he will definitely ask a British one first, it's just like that' (*Field notes: 23.08.12*). I was unconvinced, but the workers in the car were all of migrant origins and were all in consensus<sup>11</sup>. Trying to rationalize this possible scenario, I suggested that as the British workers are more likely to be drivers and this may be the reason that they are given more shifts. Mario said, 'yeah maybe but look at me, I been with this fucking agency for the past four years and that guy Ben comes in and he's offered my regular shifts at the Amici hotel - I don't need to drive to get there'.

Later in an interview that I conducted with Steve one of Staff Solutions' longest serving workers, he conveyed his annoyance with Adrian for a similar practice. He exclaimed:

Adrian tells me I'm his favourite and the best he's got but it's all lies, when I find that he's giving my shifts to those other British guys like Dan and Paul and I realize that he's saying the same things to them, I know he's just using me. He prefers to put British on shifts; he has more confidence in them. You would think I would have proven myself by now.

*Steve, Benin*

Steve explained that he knew his job, he was more qualified than any one of these British guys, but it will always be the British worker who gets the work or the shift leader role, or holds the time sheets. This was observable through shift patterns and roles on shift. Although agency workers are considered equals in terms of pay and authority, Adrian often appoints informal leaders to have some responsibility over time-sheet signing and reporting back to Adrian after the shift. This position is created by Adrian and usually given to his most favoured member of the team or to those workers who he knows would be ready to report on others. The shift leaders were not paid any extra for these services; however, merely being asked to cover the task was significant to other workers and placed them in a relatively

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<sup>11</sup> Although I don't consider myself migrant – I am a British national. Many of the agency workers considered that my ethnicity as Arab meant that I could identify more with them than other white British agency workers. This was definitely an advantage when migrant workers would talk quite candidly about the racism and prejudice they encountered.

authoritative position. In all of my experience of working with Staff Solutions, a female had never been given these responsibilities. Furthermore, it was usually British males who were appointed to shift leader position. Where there was no British male, the timesheets were usually given to Steve (Beninese), Mikhael (Moroccan) or Mario (Portuguese).

On another occasion, I was working in the Radley on a big event, and there were around 12 agency workers on the shift, two of whom Dan and Sarah, were local to Cardiff. While Dan and Sarah laid cutlery in the ballroom, the rest of the agency workers questioned why the ‘newbies’ were getting all the work? DJ, a business graduate from Nigeria sarcastically mentioned that, ‘probably because they are British’ (*Field notes, 24.11.12*). Regardless of the accuracy of this assumption - perhaps it was some coincidence or perhaps these workers had demonstrated far greater skills and professionalism than their migrant counter-parts – the idea that preferential treatment was given to only British workers was a common view held by most agency workers.

However, it was not only Adrian’s ruling hand that guided the allocation of labour, organisations also made specific requests regarding the appearance of the workers. For example there was one conference hall that usually contracts agency workers around three or four times a week to assist in the kitchen, serve coffees and serve on the buffet. Gareth runs the kitchen at this venue, together with one directly employed kitchen assistant, Yana from Russia (who also happens to be Gareth’s partner). Agency workers sent to this venue are always women and are almost always migrants. Adrian had told me once that Gareth only likes girls on these shifts, which meant that he was restricted when he allocated the work. Specific requests such as this by contracting organisations were a common occurrence. I had spoken to Dan who indicated that he had pleaded with Adrian to get him shifts in these

venues, not only because it was regular and decent hours but also because it was in close proximity to his home. Adrian had told him that he was unable to offer him anything from this venue as there was a strong preference for female staff (*Field notes: 12.12.12*).

National identity was also sometimes a concern for clients. On a Friday afternoon, I was called at around 5pm to fill a shift on Saturday for a dinner to be held in a military establishment, being told ‘they want one of my good staff, preferably a British national’ (*Field notes, 19.01.13*). After attending the shift it was clear that there was absolutely no requirement for a specific nationality. I had witnessed a similar occurrence in The Radley where Davide, the breakfast supervisor, requested that Adrian only send Romanian girls ‘because they work harder’. Thus, clients place specific demands based on assumptions about the relationship between the workers’ gender or nationality and their work potential.

This was not the only system for allocating work. Through my experience of working in front of house, it was clear that allocating shifts formed a part of a regulatory system that had profound effects on the ways in which agency workers understood their selves and in turn regulated their own behaviours.

#### 5.4.2. Adrian’s Bitchlist

Soon after joining Staff Solutions it became apparent to me that the allocation of work was perhaps the most powerful mechanisms through which workers could be regulated. Rather being allocated on a transparent and rational basis, who received what work and where was based on an informal system of patronage, speculation and rumours over which dominated many conversations among the agency workers. It was generally agreed that the most

important determinant of where someone was sent to work was the location on Adrian's 'bitchlist'.

Adrian's bitchlist was a normatively understood ranking system in which compliant agency workers or those with favourable genders or nationalities were ranked more highly than those who resisted the behaviours and identities prescribed by Staff Solutions. The criteria that determined a worker's ranked position was speculative. For agency workers, the need to be ranked high up on the bitchlist was of critical importance as it had implications for the amount and quality (section 5.2.3) of work they received and therefore was tied to punishment and reward of workers (Foucault, 1977).

Although no one had ever seen the bitchlist – indeed it might not exist in written form - it was spoken of at length by agency workers, who would often speculate about their position on it amongst their peers. The bitchlist had self-regulatory effects; agency workers aware of Adrian's conception of the 'good worker' and associated attributes would work to exhibit these behaviours in the hope this would raise their position on the bitchlist. Workers often noted that Adrian preferred workers who were always available, keen to work and that were flexible to agency demands. This meant agency workers felt compelled to accept any shift regardless of its quality or timing.

The power of the bitchlist is its dynamic form- it shifts and changes from week to week. This means that agency workers have a very real prospect of making their way up the list and therefore are encouraged to exhibit the ideal behaviours of an agency worker. Those ranked at the top of the list would be offered the most shifts in the nicest venues. There were consistent top listers, identifiable through the types of work they perform and the consistency

of the shifts - it is these workers who perhaps feel the strongest disciplinary effects of the bitchlist. For workers solely dependent on agency work as a source of income this placed them in a difficult position. Having no other employment commitments meant that they often had freer schedules to accept shifts; however the refusal of work is of far greater detriment to these workers. Declining shifts, even where this was due to sickness, familial responsibilities or social arrangements would result in relegation down the list and the promise of less work and less attractive work. For these workers the disciplinary effects of the bitchlist were experienced with far greater impact.

Adrian had certain expectations for workers, and those who comply gained a better ranking position on the bitchlist. These expectations included agency workers calling in for shifts in the early part of the week (usually 7.30 am on a Monday morning) in order to express an interest in gaining shifts for the rest of the week. He was explicit in his preference for workers who express their eagerness for shifts:

Hello Team

I am in the process of recruiting more staff as I am struggling to cover all shifts. If you are looking for work and available, please help me by letting me know.

Get into the habit of sending me an e-mail with your availability, or call me and tell me when you are free. I need to know you actually want to work!

We love it when staff ring in early in the day looking for work (around 7.40am is good), we know you are up and if a customer rings in looking for a member of staff, you will get called and sent out to work.

*E-mail sent by Adrian: 9.10.12*

The agency workers as insecure subjects are more inclined to identify with the subject positions offered through the bitchlist. The following sections detail workers' experiences of the bitchlist and the implications on their subjective understandings.

#### 5.4.2.1. Ideal Behaviours

Workers in Staff Solutions often suggested that declining shifts would threaten their position on the bitchlist. For workers who were solely dependent on agency work for income, they were more able to accept work as they had few other commitments. Yet, it was these workers that were more highly regulated by the effects of the bitchlist given their insecure position. For these workers, agency work did not offer flexibility and autonomy, rather it formulated a highly regulated environment where constructing oneself as willing and readily available for shifts would lead to greater work opportunities.

Dan, a British graduate who was working in order to save money to go travelling filled me in on the list when we had been placed to work together. He explained to me that, ‘Adrian definitely has his little list of favourites; you can only get to the number one position through selling your pride and licking all different kinds of asshole’ (*Field notes: 17.3.12*). Engaging with the idea of the bitch list I asked him, ‘where do you think you are on the list?’. Dan replied, ‘I’m up there but I can’t knock Steve or Mihaela off. They’ve had years of practice at kissing Adrian’s ass’. Thus rather than talking in terms of experience on the job, Dan considered experience in “kissing ass” to be tantamount to getting work. Dan went on to explain what he meant by this through describing how he managed to make his way up the list so quickly:

One day Adrian called me and asked me to fill in a shift, it was some place I had never heard of up past Caerphilly. When he called me he told me basically nothing about the venue, just that he had trouble filling in this one because it was a kitchen assistant shift and he needed someone with an up to date CRB check to take it. I thought it would just be a care home or something like that - you know ‘coz you need all your checks when you work in those places. I went and like when I got there it was literally in the middle of nowhere, surrounding the building was a massive wall with barbed wire on top. I thought I’d come to the wrong place because I couldn’t even find my way in. I called Adrian and told him that I must be at the wrong place but he told me “no, I’ll just call the catering manager to come and get you”. When I finally managed to find my way in I realised that I had been sent to a high security hospital

for mental people, you know proper crazy ones - I walked in and there was like a basketball court and some guy bouncing a ball up and down in one spot just repetitively and another guy on a bike riding in circles around him. It was like something out of a comedy sketch. To be honest, it upset me seeing those people who were mentally ill, proper played on my mind. No wonder I won brownie points for sticking that one out.

*Dan, UK*

Agency workers often felt compelled to accept all shifts regardless of personal practicalities, desires and preferences. This was because of the fear that declining work would result in relegation down the bitchlist. Cecilia also expressed her concerns to me with regard to the bitchlist she explained:

I'm on summer holidays at the moment so I'm trying to find all of the work that comes my way but because I'm in school most of the year. I'm still in Adrian's bad books so he's not calling me that much. In May I can't work at all because I got all my exams so I get moved down the list of people to call.

*Cecilia, Zimbabwe*

Christina had moved up and down the bitch list for a number of years. She explained to me that she had been in turmoil over work and personal commitments on many occasions. Christina and her husband had been trying for a baby for nearly five years; she had fallen pregnant on four occasions whilst being with the Staff Solutions and had miscarried the same amount of times:

I have to be a bit careful, because when I'm pregnant I'm so careful to not do anything to disturb the pregnancy. You know the problems I've had keeping them. I tell Adrian I can't do this or that and he says, "pregnancy is not a disability". Like how can he say this, I'm carrying a little life and I'm not going to risk that with a stupid job lifting crates of cutlery. So I get punished, he don't offer me anything after that. Even the regular places I used to go, you know in the college coffee shop which would be ideal for me, he gave that to Paul now.

*Christina: Romania*

Making your way up the list is no easy feat, when an individual initially joins Staff Solutions there is an informal initiation phase in which Adrian tests not only your ability to do the work but also your willingness. Adrian will offer the new starters what are considered to be the worst shifts – the short ones, the dirty ones, the shifts at anti-social times, in awkward

locations, or those in particularly unpleasant organisations. This was often seen by workers as an initiation process to estimate a worker's position on the bitchlist, Steve was perhaps one of Adrian's top-listers remarked on how he had managed to secure his position:

I've earned my stripes with Adrian; I started with doing everything and anything, the worst jobs and in horrible times. Now after four years I get the first pick of work, Adrian knows I'm good, and he understands my reasons for not wanting certain work. I'm lucky to be in a position where I can pick and choose my shifts; I know many others are not.

*Steve, Benin*

However, Steve also explains that regardless of his best efforts he seldom enjoys all of the privileges that the British agency workers do suggesting that, 'Those British guys only put half the effort I do and get the same treatment by Adrian.'

Mihaela made similar remarks regarding her escalation up towards the higher ranks of the bitchlist and the sacrifices she made in order to achieve this:

I know I am a bit popular with Adrian, I think you noticed that, actually I think everyone noticed that (laughter) but I really had to prove myself as a good worker to be in that place. I used to go any time and any place to work even doing dishes and I broke all my nails<sup>12</sup>. I don't care I just say "yes, yes, yes". I even used to leave Boian (her son) with the old lady next door to run to do a shift. Then when I go to work I'm working really, really hard.

*Mihaela, Romania*

However, Steve also noted that this position on the bitchlist is by no means secure:

The thing is with Staff Solutions is that although I been here for four years now I know that that all the reputation I built up can go quite quickly. The relationship I have with Adrian is like a glass and can be broken in anytime but you can in some way fix that glass. Like last year, I think it was in July my small brother came to stay and it was a bit difficult for me to take lots of the work he was offering to me because of course I want to stay with my brother. After my brother left I had a lot of repairing work to do, going back to do kitchen porter and night shifts again, so that Adrian will give me good work again. That was hard because I felt like I'm at square one again, like three years are wasted. But that's the thing with agency work, if you want the work you have to earn it somehow.

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<sup>12</sup> Mihaela was particular fond of her long nails and would go to great lengths to avoid cutting or breaking them.

I had experienced the workings of the bitchlist myself when I had started out with Staff Solutions. Although I had told Adrian I have university commitments he still expected me to drop everything when a shift came up. For at least my first month at the agency, I was doing four-hour breakfast shifts from 6am until 10am, and then studying for a few hours until my evening shifts which usually lasted between four to five hours, starting around 6pm and lasting until 11pm. It was exhausting; many of the shifts offered were as kitchen assistant (a glorified dishwasher that got to chop the odd cucumber) or in greasy staff canteens. The work of course dried up, it always does with the agency – or perhaps Adrian has found new blood to take on the ‘donkey work’.

This fear of relegation has material impact on workers’ lives. Mercie had commented to me:

Even on my days off I am waiting for the phone to ring. Yesterday I went to meet my friends in the city centre for a quick drink but I had an orange juice because I was thinking ok Adrian might call and I wouldn’t want to turn up to a shift tipsy. I carry this sports bag everywhere with black trousers, black shoes, black shirt and a white shirt just in case I get the call. It’s not that I’m worried that turning down four hours here or there will kill me – it about being worried about what turning down shifts will lead to. At the end of the day Adrian calls me first because he knows he’s going to get a yes. He’s not going to call a person that will refuse, that’s a waste of time.

*Mercie, Zambia*

Staff solutions rely on supplying workers to places that need them. However, in order to do this he requires a compliant work force that will readily accept work offered to them. The disciplinary effect of the bitchlist manifested in not being offered shifts, thus in order for agency workers to elevate their position they bought into the discourse of flexibility, which resulted in a trade-off between their own autonomy and flexibility. For these workers, constructing the self as a flexible ideal worker resulted in ameliorating feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. For Mercie this meant instead of being able to enjoy a day off with her friends, she was not free from the disciplinary gaze of Staff Solutions.

Mercie's experience is by no means unique. I had encountered a similar issue on a breakfast shift with Zalia when she and I had been at work since 7am and were due to finish around 3pm. On checking her phone she uttered, 'oh god Adrian wants me to cover a night porter shift tonight, and I'm so exhausted' (*Field notes: 10.03.13*). I responded, 'Just tell him you can't – he can't expect you to do everything'. She looked at me astonished and said, 'I really can't - if I say no now I don't know if he will call me again. I don't want the phone to stop ringing'. Her desperation for consistent work kept her saying yes even when she believed it was physically beyond her.

Zalia has been working with Staff Solutions since the first week she arrived in the UK and after six months of employment and countless applications for other work she was still waiting for the opportunity to gain full-time regular work. Her aim was to get a regular job so that she would be able to rent a place of her own and move her children from Portugal to start school in the UK. She explained to me since coming to the UK and working for Staff Solutions:

I had to grow a hard skin and be determined. If Adrian says there is no shifts I call again and again and again but you know when there is no work, what can I do? I'm trying and believe me and I'll take anything they offer me.

*Zalia, Portugal*

Some agency workers even suggest that the desired flexibility that is required to get a good ranked position on the bitchlist is also a key reason why workers find themselves locked into agency work and unable to find other forms of employment. As Christina suggests:

People always say "Christina why do you do this crap job, you only get 10 hours a week" but what they don't realise is that I'm waiting for a call every day. When I should be looking for jobs I'm calling Adrian to see if there is work. It's hard to go around and look seriously when you always waiting for the phone to ring in case you have to go to work.

*Christina, Romania*

Maria had also acknowledged that the uncertainty about getting work with the Staff Solutions and the fear of declining work stifled her ability to get more regular work:

I hate this job, but I'm trapped. You know the other day I was called to this Italian restaurant to make an interview for that afternoon. I was on my way and then Adrian called me and said he had an eight hours shift he needed covering. I'm there thinking ok, if I say no Adrian I'm not going to get work for like a week or two (because declining work results in not being offered more) but then I could get work in that place. But it's uncertain, and I can't afford to take the chance and turn down the shift only to be let down by the restaurant.

*Maria, Brazil*

Turning down work did not only result in not receiving work but was also manifested through the kinds of work agency workers would receive. Agency workers who were deviant in some way often commented that they would be offered the poorest work, at anti-social hours, in unfavourable venues. Mikhael recounts his experiences of being disciplined through the bitchlist:

Once Adrian called me on a Saturday evening to cover a shift starting after two hours, which he knows I can't cover<sup>13</sup> because of the bar and all that. He was saying he needs me and he's really stuck finding someone to cover. I just said no, I ain't doing it. The weeks after that I was offered nothing but kitchen assistant stuff, half way across Wales. And you know you have no choice because if you don't say yes to that you will get nothing.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

Agency workers who were not entirely dependent on the agency for work often employ strategies to avoid calls, texts and emails so that they can avoid having to refuse inconvenient shifts. Missing a call was considered less inflammatory than an outright refusal. Rachel an Indian MBA student who was working for with Staff Solutions in order to fund her studies suggested:

You know they call you from all kinds of weird numbers now, withheld, out of area, 0800 or mobiles just to catch you. The best advice I can tell you is, if you don't know the number, don't pick up.

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<sup>13</sup> Mikhael and his ex-wife ran a bar together which meant that he was unavailable for work on the weekends.

*Rachel, India*

Similarly Cassie a British undergraduate student suggested:

To be honest I only work the really busy shift days (rugby international days, concerts, Christmas), that's the only time Adrian calls me and its fine for me, I don't need more than that. It's only a bit of clubbing money for me.

*Cassie, UK*

The disciplinary effects of the bitchlist were less relevant for those who didn't rely on Staff Solutions for full-time shifts; however they were still faced with the threat of poor work in unfavourable venues where non-compliant. For those reliant on work the effects of the bitchlist were not only manifested through workers' compliance with shift allocation, but also through their relations with other agency workers.

#### 5.4.2.2. Competitiveness and the Bitchlist

The bitch list not only works to ensure that agency workers succumb to the will of Adrian, becoming docile, pliable and flexible but it also works to fragment the agency workers, eliminating any collective identity that may be formed. Individuals seeking to gain work have a significant interest in competing over sought-after positions. This means that agency workers quite often work in silent opposition to one another. For every worker who is relegated on the list, a space of opportunity opens up for another. Agency workers thus became extremely skilled in navigating the bitchlist in an attempt to manipulate their location on it. Not only did the list serve to craft a compliant, pliable and flexible workforce, as has already been illustrated, but also had more insidious effect of individualising the workforce and creating a system of peer surveillance. Those reliant on Staff Solutions as a source of full-time income sought to get as much work as possible and given the scarcity of work, competitive strategies emerged amongst agency workers in order to manipulate their own and other workers' positions on the bitchlist. Workers unaware of their position on the bitchlist

would often interrogate one another on their shift patterns, how many hours they had been given that week and what kind of venues they had been working at. All questions were directed at deciphering who was in Adrian's favour and the ways in which work was being distributed.

Where workers sought to win favour from Staff Solutions through their performance, this was usually considered in relative terms. Thus agency workers were often disinterested in how they carried out their work per se but more interested in how effectively they worked in comparison to their peers. Workers performing on shift were usually reflexively aware of how their actions may be used to valorise their own performance whilst belittling others. Shifts often involved a series of one-upmanship games where agency workers considered themselves to be under constant pressure to prove themselves as a more efficient and capable than their agency counter-part. Mario explained:

I do what it takes to make myself be the forward one [stand out] in the places. We all the same to them (clients), so I try to give a service that makes me be in front from the rest of them (agency workers).

*Mario, Portugal*

This created a form of competitive compliance where workers sought to ensure that their performance on shift stood out from the average. However, more often than not, more devious strategies were adopted which sought to decrease other agency workers' credibility in the workplace. Agency workers engaged in dirty games where misbehaviour on shift would be swiftly reported back to Adrian, forming an insidious layer of concertive control through peer surveillance. Mikhael rationalised this, suggesting that the nature of agency work requires these hyper-competitive attitudes:

This agency is 'dog eat dog' or survival of the fittest. You can't say everything in your heart because the people here want to see you mess up. What everyone [agency workers] wants is more work. If they take you out of the game then maybe it's [going to] mean more work for them.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

This competitive behaviour stimulated individualism and distrust amongst workers. Christina reflected with me on her understandings of collectivism in agency work:

Me: So you said you don't like to socialise outside of work, how about in work do you feel like agency workers form part of a team at work?

Christina: Not really. It's tricky because half the time you don't really know the people but to be honest there is not really a group or team – learnt my lesson with that. Before I used to think all us Staff Solutions lot are in a team but really we are not. I was telling people before I'll go out for a fag break or when I'm texting and then somehow Adrian finds out. How come? Because they go straight back and tell him.

*Christina, Romania*

Christina went on to tell me about an occasion where another agency worker had reported her misbehaviour to Adrian. She suggested that this had been part of the reason she had lost consistent day time work in a college café a key outcome of her relegation from the higher positions on the bitchlist:

I had that college job before. That was one of the best jobs I had from Adrian because it was easy and so near my house. The people was nice there, all the students is friendly. I really loved that job. I think I was pregnant, maybe three months at the time and I don't know why but one week my feet became so swollen so I couldn't wear my work shoes. I was wearing my trainers until I could go to town to buy new shoes that was going to be more comfortable for me. Before I even had the chance Cecilia who was working there with me told Adrian about my trainers. I know that because he rung me and told me that I needed to sort out appropriate footwear.

Like Christina, Fiora reflected on an incident where she had felt that agency workers had been instrumental in ensuring that her regular work in a venue was terminated:

I think that lots of backstabbing goes on here. I had a regular thing going in the Sunnyview Inn. It was a bit convenient for me because it's not far from my flat and it was the breakfast shift, which meant I could fill out my other appointments for massage for the afternoon. I was working with two girls from Staff Solutions, Samjeeta and Rachel, and then I find one of them or maybe both of them, I don't know, told Adrian they find me hard to work with, so he told me it's better to put me somewhere else.

*Fiora, Greece*

John an American Lithuanian worker made similar comments on the levels of distrust within the agency. He considered that the backstabbing and snitching that occurred within the agency was directly related to a worker's position on the bitchlist:

You got to be aware Adrian has this place hooked up with his informers, if you fuck up or you get caught doing shit you shouldn't be then you can be damned sure Adrian will find out and you can be damned sure you going to be bumped down the bitchlist.

*John, America/Lithuania*

Steve also spoke of his awareness that people inform Adrian of things that happen during shifts. He suggests that he regulates his actions in order to avoid being subject to the competitive tactics of other agency workers:

I find it difficult to work with some people, especially Kevin or Ben – the guys that are usually placed as shift leaders. They are like Adrian's eyes and ears. They tell him everything. So I usually mind my own business and just get on with my work.

*Steve, Benin*

Therefore the bitchlist can be seen to have both self-regulatory effects as well as panoptic peer surveillance affects. Workers aware of the ranking processes involved in the bitchlist considered themselves to be in competition for work. Seeking to navigate their positions on the bitchlist through dirty tricks, agency workers created a network of surveillance underpinned by a rationale of enterprise. In this way the operation of the bitchlist had both self-disciplinary and peer surveillance effects over the workers, where workers regulated their actions in view of the potential material consequences of being relegated down the list. Exhibiting enterprising, individualistic and competitive attitudes was thus considered to be fundamental to a worker's success in Staff Solutions. This worked to ensure that Staff Solution was able to regulate and discipline workers at a distance.

## 5.5. Concluding Comments

This chapter has outlined the general context of agency work detailing the standard practices and operations within Staff Solutions. Following this the chapter draws on the concepts discussed in chapters two and three, identity, subjectivity and discourse, to analyse how and in what ways practices such as recruitment (section 5.3.1) and work allocation (5.4.2) inform agency workers' understandings of their selves in the context of work, and how this results in increased compliance with the ideals of the agency. The result being workers identifying with the discourse of insecurity engaged in behaviours compliant with the image of an ideal agency worker being flexible and readily available. In this context, agency workers often considered themselves as individuals in competition with their agency peers, thus forming a layer of concertive control.

The following chapter explores the relationship between migrant agency workers and the contracting organisations. This chapter examines the regulatory practices and considers how these are used to construct migrant agency workers as transient organisational 'non-members'.

# 6. Regulation and Exclusion: Constructing Subjectivities through Organisational Practices

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## 6.1. Introduction

Drawing on the experiences of agency workers in contracting organisations, this chapter uses a Foucauldian (1977) understanding of disciplinary practice to shed light on how the collective identity of the ‘agency worker’ is constituted and understood. Specific focus will be placed on how mundane organisational practices form the basis of the agency worker identity and how this works to craft agency workers as marginal, subordinate and disposable in the context of the contracting organisation. Firstly, workers’ understanding of their collective identity is explored by analysing the discourses of agency work. This is followed by an examination of the regulatory practices used by contracting organisations and how these are constitutive of workers’ self-understandings. In particular details of how task allocation, aesthetic regulation, spatial regulation and labelling practices are utilised by contracting organisations to craft a tarnished and stigmatised agency worker identity.

## 6.2. Identities and Work

For many workers the experiences of working in Staff Solutions was a negative one. Workers spoke about how they felt agency workers were generally portrayed as powerless, subservient, flexible and lacking agency. Many of the workers considered their position in relation to the organisation’s regular workers, and how they were considered second-class. Steve, for example, suggested:

There are times where you go to places and you're not equal to the staff and they make you feel like you're an agency worker, that's what you got and that's all you are, so don't think high about yourself and don't look down on me.

*Steve, France*

For Zalia, this negative construction had implications for the desired expectations for agency workers:

In reality we are less than them (regular employees); we feel the employees from the hotel are their workers so they are much more than us. What the hotel wants from an agency worker is to do anything, to hear and shut up

*Zalia, Portugal*

This can also be seen through the kinds of work given to agency workers. Their lesser status within contracting organisations meant that they were often given harder tasks:

Cecilia: I definitely think agency workers get it harder than normal workers, but I think it's to be expected so to speak.

Chloe: Why is it to be expected?

Cecilia: Well we are not their staff, they don't have that responsibility over us and they want to keep their workers happy so if there is agency worker there to do the dishes or do some lifting obviously they will ask them.

*Cecilia, Zimbabwe*

Thus, for agency workers their marginalised status within the organisation had material effects on the kinds of work they were expected to perform. Christina noted that this often resulted in performing degrading activities for regular staff reinforcing feelings of servility:

I get sick of it sometimes, not only are we waiting on the customer but also on the staff. It's like you come and even the KP<sup>14</sup> is telling you to making him a coffee. Agency - we are the servants of the servants – now that's low.

*Christina, Romania*

Naser reiterates this point, although concerned with distinctions between the treatment agency workers and regular worker he rationalises this to be due to agency workers' marginalised status:

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<sup>14</sup> Kitchen Porter

Well they treat you a bit differently to their regular staff, there is definitely more control but at the end of the day they need help so they call you. They get you to do the shit but that's normal. They have their own staff so of course they are going to do the best jobs and then you do the shit. Is it fair? No! Is it happening everywhere? Yeah! Do we accept it? Never! But at the end of the day if we stand up and say something they will just tell us to fuck off, everyone knows it and no one is going to do anything about it.

*Naser, Morocco*

The work and status of agency workers meant that they often felt unable to contest their position in work, as Fiora suggests:

You really have to be very polite, very, very polite, over polite. Eager to do anything they throw at you, without complaining and just being happy because you made £6 an hour. So basically if you have no self-esteem and you're just thankful you have a job and you're really desperate and you'll do anything then that's the kind of person they want.

*Fiora, Greece*

Maria also draws concern to the voicelessness of agency workers and how agency work often means that workers lose autonomy over the body and mind:

If I could say anything it's probably that they [contracting organisations] want a robot which they programmed to always stand straight, have their hands in front, look so neat and always accept everything, never have any emotion apart from just being happy to say yes, please, thank-you, you're welcome. Yes that's what they want.

*Maria, Brazil*

These concerns were reiterated by DJ, expressing that agency workers were required to accept poor treatment without contestation:

There are some places you go and they treat you like an animal – it's like they are doing us a favour by having us working there. They think they can say anything to you, do anything to you, and you gotta just sit there and nod like you're happy about it. Then when you said 'no' or you question them they look so surprised – like they never heard an animal talk back.

*DJ, Nigeria*

Some agency workers suggested that their inferior status as well as the menial tasks they were expected to perform was due to a negative conception of the kind of people that enter into agency work. For example, Mikhael suggests that the status of an agency worker is an indication of an individual's own inadequacy and employability:

If you're an agency worker it means you didn't find a job anywhere else, so people obviously has to take a bit of shit- people are going to do that to you naturally.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

These negative images of agency workers were seen to be reinforced and strengthened by equally negative images of migrant workers:

I think we get treated a bit shitty because of a lot of things. First of all we are not their workers so whatever we do we will always get the bad side of the deal. Maybe it's because most of us aren't British and they think "oh she from Brazil, she's used to shit work and no money" or probably it's because lots of people think "oh Staff Solutions they will give anyone a job, they must be not so good".

*Maria, Brazil*

Similarly Mercie comments on how agency workers identities are bound up with assumptions about migrants being both negative and reinforcing a generally tarnished and stigmatised identity:

You go there and they already assumed you're going to be incompetent, can't speak English and [are] lazy, so you have to make sure you work 200% just so they will consider you to be acceptable. And be sure, if anything went wrong on shift it will always be our [agency workers] fault.

*Mercie, Zambia*

The construction of the agency worker subject position was a complex one, with implications for the construction of the self as a moral subject:

I think they see us [agency workers] like a crew of bandits. We come to the shift and they assume we are all going to steal, lie and cheat. That time I got accused of taking a camera in Sunnydale Inn. I know it's because I was the only agency there, like the black sheep. They are going to blame the foreigner. They think we don't have morals.

*Paul, Malta*

This negative construction is not only seen to have implications on the individual's self-understanding but also impacts on the material aspects of work. For these workers hard work and poor treatment, coupled with voicelessness was considered to be part and parcel of what it meant to be an agency worker. The following section discusses how task allocation and the division of privileges is used by the contracting organisations and how this affects agency workers' self-understandings.

## 6.3. The Working Lives of Agency Workers: Inside Contracting Organisations

This section details the nature of work within contracting organisation, focussing on how the different tasks are organised in order of preference by agency workers. In order to understand how identities are created through work I will foreground this with how agency workers develop informal understandings of various tasks.

### 6.3.1. Informal Hierarchies of Work

More often than not agency workers were sent to organisations on the premise of being ‘plate-waiters’, yet this rarely materialised. Usually plate waiting was only a partial description of the activities performed by agency workers. There was a large array of activities associated with catering, these ranged from those performed in front of the gaze of the customers such as setting up the restaurant or banquet halls, dinner service and drink preparations, to those performed away from the public gaze such as cutlery polishing, glass polishing and napkin folding. However, these tasks were not considered back of house given that they supported front of house functions and were performed by the workers who were positioned as front-of-house workers (and therefore predominantly white European workers). Surrounding front of house tasks, an informal hierarchy developed that was thought to signify the position of the worker in relation to the organisation. This emerged perhaps from pragmatic and self-interested reasons, yet was meaningful within the context of contracting organisations.

At the top of the hierarchy were those tasks that were likely to earn tips for workers, these are labelled ‘cash earning tasks’. The low wages offered in the industry meant that workers competed for jobs that may earn them extra cash. However, cash earning tasks were rarely

given to agency workers. Even where agency workers had been positioned on plate waiting duties and had earned tips, these tips were pooled and given to the regular workers. Generally, agency workers were not allowed to benefit from cash earnings. I had experienced this first hand in the Radley hotel where I had served as a plate waiter for the evening in the hotel restaurant. The shift supervisor demanded that I place all of the tips I received into a glass behind the bar. In fear that carrying cash may lead to the false accusation that I had stolen or somehow improperly taken the money, I placed it in the glass only to watch my extra earnings divided amongst the regular workers, some of whom had not even served on the tables.

Agency workers who were aware of these rules found ways to take their tips undetected. For example on a shift serving at a gala dinner held at the Newtown Arts Centre, I saw Mario and Paul stuffing notes and coins that had been left on the tables by customers into their pockets. Later in the evening I had asked them both whether we were allowed to take the tips, Paul replied:

The official line is no, but I'm not busting my guts to line everyone else's pockets. You gotta take what you can from these tables man, don't stick it in their collection; we're just letting them walk all over us.

*Field notes: 10.09.12*

Agency workers acknowledged that the potential to earn tips was an attractive prospect. This was often seen as one of the principal 'perks' of the jobs, yet agency workers were rarely assigned to such roles. Where the potential to earn tips arose, these tasks were more often assigned to regular workers.

Aside from cash earning duties, which were the most valued of tasks, the work could be divided into dirty work, heavy work, front facing and back facing work. Dirty work was the most highly resented; tasks associated with dirty work were those that were the most servile

and that offended most of senses (sight, smell and touch). These were often both physically and socially demeaning. They involved scraping dirty plates and cutlery in the food clearing areas, washing dishes, cleaning dirty back-of-house areas (usually soiled with old food and grease), cleaning the floors and washroom facilities.

Moving up from dirty work were the tasks known as heavy work. This, as the label suggests, was physically strenuous work, which involved moving tables, stacking chairs and lifting crates of cutlery and glassware. This kind of work was extremely tiring and was part of the reason that agency workers often complained of sore muscles and joints and physical exhaustion. Christina had often complained that such work had given her a prematurely bad back. Being only 29 she often complained that she should not be suffering with back complaints at such a young age. Mario had complained that the heavy lifting involved in agency work had exacerbated an existing knee condition that often made work close to unbearable.

The next category of activities was front facing tasks. These tasks were usually associated with food service: running plates<sup>15</sup>, clearing tables, serving drinks and coffee, and setting up the restaurant or banquet halls. These jobs are often considered the core activities associated with catering work, yet although preferred in comparison to dirty or heavy work the continuous surveillance from both guests and management made such tasks unattractive. Workers performing these tasks were unable to take any respite or relief from the watchful eye of the guests. Self-presentation, for example, ones posture, as well as the care and attention provided to the guests would constantly be monitored which made the job unrelenting. Although front facing, these tasks seldom had the opportunity for workers to

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<sup>15</sup> Taking plates of food from the kitchen to tables

make tips. This was because many of the venues used agency workers for events such as wedding parties or other pre-paid dinner functions where there was no exchange of cash.

The final category of activities and by far the most preferential of all of the non-cash earning jobs was the back facing tasks. These were the jobs that were performed in support of front-of-house activities, yet were performed out of the gaze of the customers. The tasks involved were usually mundane and repetitive involving activities like cutlery polishing or napkin folding. Yet, many hospitality workers preferred such tasks as they meant that workers could slouch, sit, rest, chat, drink coffee and even on occasions eat whilst working.

This informal hierarchy of tasks was commonly understood by both agency workers and regular workers. Status was therefore associated with task assignment: preferred tasks were given to preferred workers. The next section discusses how the assignment of tasks was considered to impact on the way agency workers understood their position in the context of the organisation.

#### 6.3.1.1. The Allocation of Tasks and Task Based Identities

As discussed in the in Chapter five, Adrian, the recruitment consultant for Staff Solutions ran an informal allocation and a ranking system rewarding the most flexible and compliant agency workers with the most attractive jobs. The allocation of tasks within the contracting organisations, however, was made according to a hierarchy of workers, with regular workers taking precedence over agency workers. The allocation of tasks was therefore considered significant to agency workers in signifying and reinforcing their marginal status and therefore their subordinated identities within the contracting organisation.

More often than not agency workers were assigned dirty work or hard work, for example in the Radley breakfast shifts Mercie and I were frequently allocated such tasks including mopping floors, moving chairs and tables, or servicing and cleaning the food wastage area. This was always in contrast to the regular workers who were usually assigned to back facing duties. This was the source of frustration for Mercie who felt that the work had derogatory meanings for both her and for the wider agency worker identity. It was a particularly busy morning and Mercie had been placed on food clearance which involved heavy lifting of stacks of plates, cups and vats of cutlery, scraping the remnants of old food into the bins and cleaning the area after. Looking particularly disheartened, I asked if she was ok, she responded:

No I'm not ok, I'm so fed up of this place. Being wrist deep in bacon fat wouldn't irritate me as much if I didn't have to watch that sadistic Kamilla (a regular worker) eating croissant and drink coffee while I struggle. We are meant to be here to help them out but we are carrying them. Without us they would crumble. But no to them we are agency workers - here to pick up all the shit.

*Field notes: 13.05.12*

Mercie's concerns were due to the division between regular workers and agency workers. For her, the dirty work she had been assigned served to highlight agency workers' relative inferiority. I had also experienced this division in the hotel Amici when five agency workers had been called in for an evening banquet shift. The regular workers had been sent to place glasses and napkins on the table settings, whilst agency workers were asked to bring the chairs up and set them out. This task involved hauling around 200 chairs up two flights of stairs and then placing them next to the place setting on the table. The work was exhausting.

Maria a Brazilian agency worker poked fun at the obvious distinctions between the workers:

Why they didn't call the farm and bring donkeys if they just need people to bring carry these chairs? They don't need waitresses, they have theirs already.

*Field notes 17.09.12*

It was rare that an agency worker would be assigned back facing work. This only happened when there was some pressing need for work to be completed and where no regular workers were available. This was illustrated by an incident that had happened on a breakfast shift in the Radley. Lenira was asked into the food service area (located back of house) in order to polish cutlery because there was such a backlog and there would be insufficient cutlery to relay to the tables when more guests arrived. Lenira sat leaning against a counter polishing, however as soon as one of the regular workers was back from their break she was quickly replaced. Lenira commented on this suggesting that:

We never get the good jobs or the easy jobs, it's like all the nice ones are given to their staff and we are left with whatever is left over. It just annoys me sometimes but it won't change because we just an agency worker and isn't worth to keep us happy or satisfied.

*Field notes, 16.04.12*

Agency workers were therefore given little autonomy in the kinds of tasks they were asked to perform which was seen to signify their lack of value or worth within contracting organisations. Furthermore, given the high price paid for agency workers, contracting organisations wanted to ensure they got value for money by ensuring that their time and physical efforts were fully exhausted on shift. Where agency workers were caught without anything to do they were often reprimanded. Empty handed or inactive agency workers were considered problematic; management would often relay complaints to Adrian about 'the lazy crew he sent over' or assign workers to laborious, pointless, backbreaking tasks while the regular workers relaxed. Fiora expressed her concern about this allocation of work in her interview. She noted:

Sometimes they give you some things to do; you can't see the logic in it. You feel like you're in a boot camp or something. It's like a pointless task that is just to show you that you have no power.

*Fiora, Greece*

Fiora also explained that during a shift in the Sunny View Inn on a particularly quiet Friday evening, she had been asked to clean the back-of-house shelves and all the items on them. This involved polishing 120 teapots and 100 salt and peppershakers as well as polishing cutlery. Her main concern was that she had done this task just two days before and since then most of the items had not even been touched. I had a similar experience one morning when I was called into the Radley to work a 6am- 12pm shift. During the shift, the food and beverage manager, Alan, realised that he did not need quite as many staff as he had anticipated. As Staff Solutions stipulates that workers must be paid for a minimum of four hours, he asked me to leave my waitressing duties, fetch an ice bucket full of hot water and disinfectant and ensure that every surface in the food service area was spotless. The cleaning task involved removing months of grease that had accumulated on the skirting boards, dried milk that had crusted under the work surfaces and congealed ketchup that had been splattered on the sink splash back, as well as moving huge storage units and drinks fridges, in order to ensure that the floor underneath was clean.

The expectations placed on agency workers were far higher than regular workers. The allocation of tasks had two effects. It not only emphasised the material differences between regular workers and agency workers but also served to emphasise their marginal and powerless status in the organisation, constituted as servile and obedient bodies. This was also reinforced through the allocation of privileges discussed in the following section.

### 6.3.2. Allocation of Privileges and Crafting the Underprivileged

The distribution of privileges within contracting organisations also served to emphasise the low status of agency workers. The provision of meals was one of the most valued privileges that catering and hospitality workers enjoyed; workers often commented on how this would

save them the expense of buying food. However, the provision of food during a shift was not guaranteed for agency workers. There were venues that were particularly mean; these were often the outdoor catering companies and the larger hotel chains. Others were a little more generous. For the most part, however, agency workers accepted that their low status in the contracting organisations meant that they were seldom afforded privileges.

An example of this can be drawn from a shift in St Sires Castle where we were scheduled to work on a seven hour shift. When we had arrived at the Castle, the shift managers informed us that he would need us until 3am instead of until 11pm. This meant that we would be working eleven hours instead of the previously agreed seven. We had collectively agreed to stay on a little longer because DJ and Samjeeta said they were seriously short of hours and were getting pretty desperate for money. However, accepting this extension of hours meant that we would be reliant on the organisation to provide a meal during the shift. The usual protocol was that after the food service, the leftover food would be divided and given to the regular workers. On this occasion although there was an abundance of leftover food, it was plated up and expressly reserved for the regular workers. This meant that none of the agency workers would eat until they got home in the early hours of the morning. At around 10pm we noticed that one plate of food had been left over - it had gone untouched for two hours and was cold and unappetising. Two agency workers, Mehn and DJ started to eat the plate of food between them. The shift manager walked into the area where the food had been kept and immediately questioned where the food had gone and why the plate had been touched. We remained silent making little eye contact with one another while the manager exclaimed, 'listen, any food that is on a plate is not yours. Agency workers don't get food unless you are told that's yours'.

The food issue seemed to create a great deal of friction between regular staff and agency workers. Many agency workers saw it to be another way through which they were constructed as undeserving and of lesser value and status than regular workers. Another firm, TJ Catering quite often had trays of food left over after an event which they would offer to regular employees - the remainder being thrown away. On one occasion Christina and I had witnessed six platters of buffet food being scooped into black bags while we had worked for seven hours with no break or food. Christina muttered under her breath, 'I don't want your disgusting food but come on throwing it the bin is just a sin' (*Field notes, 14.09.12*).

George, a Greek Masters graduate had been in the UK for around seven months. He had initially entered the employment market through Staff Solutions. After working for four months he had been offered a few 'cash in hand' shifts working directly for TJ catering<sup>16</sup> on a casual basis. George had experienced both sides of the employment fence, being concurrently employed by the agency and directly employed (although casually) by TJ Catering. Noticing our frustration over the waste of food he pulled the company owner aside and asked her where the logic was in throwing away food when there were staff members to feed? She looked mildly embarrassed but told George that she was not responsible for agency workers and would prefer to discuss staff meals in a formal meeting. However, the next time I was assigned to work for TJ catering we were entitled to our pickings of the left over buffet food after the regular staff or anyone else more important than us had taken their portion. This felt like a small win for agency workers who previously had had no entitlements.

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<sup>16</sup> This was rarely allowed. In fact Staff Solutions contract stipulates that any organisations that wanted to directly employ agency workers would be bound to pay the agency a 'bonus' - basically buying agency workers out of the zero hour contracts they had with Staff Solutions. However I knew of four agency workers who had made the conversion but this was kept a strict secret from Adrian and the other office workers in Staff Solutions. Adrian had not been informed by other agency workers, probably given that if workers leave Staff Solutions it opens up greater prospects of workers getting more regular work – perhaps a dysfunction of the bitchlist.

Although the denial of breaks and food privileges was common-place in contracting organisations, it didn't extend to all organisations. Cecilia noted:

I don't mind working for Celtic Court, it's small and family run so they [regular workers and managers] are always a bit nicer to you, you know if they are stopping to eat or having a sit down they feel a bit guilty and ask you to join them, but you don't find that with the big hotels.

*Cecilia, Zimbabwe*

Christina spoke of similar experiences where she had received breaks but noted that these were few and far between:

With the break things I didn't find many places where they give for you. I was working down at this care home and it was O.K. they allowed me to have some food and have a seat when I'm having my break or even go out and have a fag. But apart that I didn't find many places they let you take some break.

*Christina, Romania*

Generally speaking, there were very few places where agency workers were given food, the organisations more likely to do this were the contract catering units. These kind of venues usually had regular staff and then just one or two agency workers. Contract catering units tend to have consistent or predictable levels of demand and established set break times. The implications of having a routine meant that there was some awkwardness about leaving a lone agency worker to continue her or his kitchen duties while regular workers sat down for breaks.

It should however be noted that any 'sat down' breaks, no matter how short and uncomfortable, and whether or not food was provided, were always deducted from agency workers' time sheets at a rate of 30 minutes. So, for example, if an individual was only given a ten minute break this would still cost workers 30 minutes from their time sheets. Moreover, allocating breaks was occasionally used by contracting organisations to reduce the costs of

using agency workers. This practice fostered bad feeling amongst agency workers most of whom would ask to forfeit breaks rather than have the money taken out of their pay-packet.

An example of the contention that surrounded breaks arose during a shift in the Auditorium, a large concert hall that often hosted dinners. The Auditorium was hosting a dinner and awards ceremony that would accommodate around 500 guests, serving a three-course dinner, cheese, petit fours and coffee. Around 25 agency workers had been enlisted to work at the event. Our shift was due to start at 5pm and was likely to finish at around 11pm - a six-hour shift. The dinner included speeches in the intervals between courses, which meant that staff usually loitered around the back-of-house in search of things to do. The speech between the main course and dessert was set to go on a little longer than anticipated which meant that valuable productive time would be wasted.

The shift manager Mark decided that he would round up all the staff, herding agency workers outside and allowing the regular workers to go to the staff canteen. Agency workers stood outside in the biting late night chill for around 30 minutes before being called back in. At the end of the shift one of the newer agency workers Nigel who was placed in charge of time sheet signings handed our collective time sheet to Mark to sign off. Mark signed off that each of us had worked for five and a half hours, with a 30-minute break for the time we had been sent outside. Mihaela and I confronted Mark concerning the time sheet, questioning why the deduction had been made when we had not been given a break. His response was, 'I have to take off your breaks guys, I have bosses to answer to'. I responded, 'that's all well and good but we were not given a break- if you are referring being chucked outside next to the rubbish bins in the cold of the night without a drink, food or even any place to sit as a break you are mistaken'. Mihaela added, 'You didn't tell us it was a break, I would have smoked at least

three fags if I had known that'. Mark said that he was unable to change the times on the timesheet, I rolled my eyes at him knowing that taking 30 minutes off the time sheet of twenty-five members of staff would save them around £150.

Twenty-five furious agency workers bustled out of the building already drafting emails on their smart phones to Adrian about what had happened. The coercive effects of the bitchlist meant that agency workers seldom complained to the client; however complaints were directed to Adrian, probably because the time lost also came at a cost to Staff Solutions. Agency workers therefore felt that there was a mutual interest in voicing their complaints to Adrian. However, the size of this contract meant it was highly unlikely that Adrian would do anything. Adrian's response to this event was pure acquiescence. He agreed that we had been treated unfairly yet he was not willing to jeopardise the established relationship between the Auditorium and Staff Solutions.

A similar occurrence unfolded on a shift in the Radley where a group of seven of us had been sent to work a 10-hour shift for a wedding event. We had worked the entire shift without being offered the chance to sit down or have any food. As the shift drew to a close the supervisor Geraint signed off our shift authorising only nine and a half hours of paid work. I asked why, suggesting that he had miscalculated our hours. Geraint then told us that he had to deduct time off for breaks, which explained why we were down half an hour. In protest I exclaimed, 'Geraint we weren't given a break, we have worked non-stop'. Assuming that he had not realised about our lack of a break I expected him to quickly back down but he merely explained that if we had not taken our break that was our own fault, the 30 minutes would be deducted from the timesheet regardless. Incensed by his response I told him I wanted to speak to his manager. The Conference and Banqueting manager came to speak to me and I

explained the situation. He answered in much the same way as Geraint, that it was our responsibility to take our own breaks and if we had failed to do so then there was nothing he could do about it. I was infuriated, as were the rest of the agency staff. I explained that if we were not provided with formalised breaks yet had pay deducted for them, we would take breaks in the most inopportune moments in the future – perhaps during food service. The manager looked mildly alarmed yet stood by his decision. He responded ‘if you have an issue, raise it with your agency, these are our rules I can’t abandon them’. Of course for this outburst there were repercussions in terms of my position on the bitchlist. One of my fellow workers reported the incident to Adrian, even though my actions were intended to benefit everyone, and in doing so I was reprimanded.

These kinds of inequities were a regular occurrence. I lost count of the times that agency workers were expected to stay and finish a task, working 20 or sometimes 30 minutes after their finish time but we were never paid for this extra time. Rarely did they complain, however, mindful as they were of the importance of maintaining good favour with Adrian.

Mercie spoke candidly about this issue when we were working on a shift in the Radley. We had worked for 45 minutes over our finish time and again this was not represented on our time sheets. When I said that we should complain, Mercie explained:

I tend not to make a big deal out of it. If I start being pedantic over my timesheet they may call Adrian to send someone else. I rely on these regular slots, without them I’d be screwed.

*Mercie, Zambia*

Samjeeta expressed similar sentiments. When working in St Sires Castle, the manager had signed off, not taking into account 30 minutes worked over the scheduled time. Samjeeta explained:

I hate feeling like I don't stand up for myself, but they have you in the position where if you don't say anything you are being used and if you do say something you will be seen as troublemaker. I'm so desperate for hours at the moment I just take everything.

*Samjeeta, India*

In his interview Mikhael also noted that:

The thing with working for an agency is that you have to put up with a bit more shit than normal workers but that's normal. You have to make extra effort, work longer hours, do lots of the time without pay or a thank you but there is always pressure to prove yourself otherwise they won't be calling you back.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

The deduction of breaks and hours off workers time sheets served to emphasise the agency workers' fragile positions within contracting organisations. Unable to contest due to their insecure positions, and their awareness of the regulatory functions of the bitchlist, workers accepted that their subordinated low value and low status position. The following section discusses how regulation of agency workers' dress, posture and embodied performance within contracting organisations has a specific impact on their crafting of their identities. In particular, the section demonstrates how regulatory mechanisms are used to encourage workers to dis-identify with the organisations, and to constitute their selves as transient individuals.

## 6.4. Aesthetic Regulation

Contracting organisations often sought to discipline the aesthetic appearance of agency workers, in ways that emphasised and reinforced their difference from regular workers. Many of the organisations placed strict rules over agency workers' bodies that were often more demanding than those applied to regular workers. It became clear, through my experiences, that there were two sources through which the organisations sought to control the body of the agency worker. The first of these was through more conventional mechanisms such as, stipulations over uniforms and rules on appearance. The very stringent rules on agency

workers' appearance was one way in which the agency worker was made materially visible and distinguishable from regular workers, but also a source through which workers' identification with the organisation could be limited. The second of these was through the embodied performance of work. Organisations sought to control the embodied stance and posture of agency workers in the execution of duties. These controls were exercised more rigorously on agency workers, which in-turn reinforced the agency worker subject as servile and subordinate.

#### 6.4.1. Materialising Difference: Uniforms and Regulation of Appearance

In the majority of the organisations that agency workers were sent, the regular employees wore branded uniforms reflecting the corporate image of the company. Staff Solutions workers were given strict guidelines over their uniforms, being asked to wear either a white or black shirt with black trousers, black shoes and black socks. We were also told not to wear strong fragrances, to remove all piercings, wear no jewellery, have no 'crazy hair colours', apply only a little makeup (for girls only), have no visible tattoos, ensure that long hair is tied up and remove all traces of nail varnish. The rules on uniforms were stringent; they allowed little room for individuality or forms of self-expression. Mihaela likened the uniform rules to that of a nun, suggesting that adherence to all the rules is similar to ordination into the church.

The various rules and regulations on uniform ensured that agency workers seemed entirely unremarkable to customers, whilst simultaneously creating them as a distinct to workers inside the contracting organisations. For agency workers, this reduced any possibilities of being seen as an employee of the contracting organisations. Although for the most part uniform differences went unnoticed by the customer there were a few occasions in which uniform became relevant.

On one occasion I had been working a breakfast shift in the Radley. The uniform for employees was light blue branded shirts, beige aprons and nametags; yet agency workers were asked to wear all black and were given black aprons to wear on shift. That morning one of the guests had asked me whether there were any kippers on the buffet. I had informed him that none were offered on the breakfast buffet but that I would check with the chef to see if he had some he could prepare. The chef gave an unequivocal ‘no’ to this request telling me that ‘there is no fish ever served for breakfast’. I went to relay this message to the guest, however, dissatisfied with the answer he called on Valentina one of the regular employees to ask the same question (*Research Diary: 12.05.12.*). On discussing this event later that day with Mercie, she suggested that similar occurrences happen to her quite regularly, she exclaimed, ‘let’s face it Chloe, we look like the help, I mean that’s exactly what we are anyway’.

Another incident similar to this had occurred involving John, a Lithuanian-American agency worker who had become frustrated when he had a disagreement with a guest. John had explained to me that he was serving behind the bar when one of the guests who had been drinking there all evening had become quite unpleasant regarding his bar tab and charging his bar bill to his room. The system in the Amici Hotel only allowed this facility to those guests who had left credit card details at reception when checking in, as a guarantee of payment. John had explained to the guest that he would not be able to charge his drinks to his room because he had not provided his credit card details. The guest became unpleasant and told John that he would prefer to speak to an actual hotel employee. John was incensed by this reaction explaining that:

The guy didn’t like my answer but I was following hotel protocol. He would have the same answer whether I’m wearing a uniform or not but he still tries to push his luck. You know something they see the black shirt and think ah this guy is an idiot, we can take the piss.

*Field notes, 10.11.12*

The distinguishable uniform was sometimes used to the advantage of agency workers, non-membership was often used as a way to avoid the duties and responsibilities of dealing with difficult or awkward customers. Fiora explained this to me drawing on one of her experiences in Mayflower hotel:

There are times where you think “ahhh I’m agency, I got a black shirt, see I don’t work here – I don’t need to deal with this”. You know at that wedding we served at and there was the evening buffet, the guests were so pissed that they didn’t hardly touch the food so the bride came up to me and was asking if she could pack all the food up and take it away with her. I know with the buffet and health and safety stuff it’s like a complete no-no to keep food for longer than 2 hours or to let it go off the premises. I know all of this but I was like I’m not going to tell her, I don’t have to deal with her kicking off, so I was just like, sorry I don’t work for the hotel, I’ll get someone who works here and knows more about it to answer your questions.

*Fiora, Greece*

Distancing oneself from the organisation in this way was a practice agency workers engaged in, using their uniforms as a material indication that they did not belong to the organisation.

Paul reiterated a similar point in his interview:

Sometimes I play into being an agency worker, you know we don’t have the same uniforms as the lot of them so when I got someone being awkward I just point to my black shirt and pull out the whole “sorry I don’t work here I’ll get someone who works here to help you with that” card. At the end of the day I’m not paid enough to deal with bullshit.

*Paul, Malta*

The differences in appearance, on one hand served to reinforce the agency workers’ subordinate and servile status, on the other functioned as a strategic resource from which the workers could evade work and unpleasant encounters. It thus had both regulatory and resistant effects.

On occasions agency workers wore uniforms that they were given by hotels and catering companies but these were quite often substandard, unwashed, scruffy, torn or ill fitting. On a few of the shifts in the Mayflower Hotel during the Christmas period, one of the managers

decided that it would be a good idea to make agency workers wear a logoed mandarin style jacket in order to match the regular workers. At the beginning of the shift we were led to a small laundry cupboard and directed to a big black dustbin full of jackets and asked to rummage through them to find a suitable size. We were lucky if we found a jacket that was even close to our size. I wore a large jacket styled for a man which looked ridiculous on my petite frame. When I pulled the jacket over my head the smell of stale cooking wafted from the fibres of the material. With a disgusted look on my face I exclaimed to another agency worker, Sergio, 'this jacket is dirty, it smells'. I looked down to see splodges of gravy encrusted into the material. Sergio responded, 'Just be thankful yours doesn't smell of BO' (*Field notes, 10.12.12*). Hannah, a Hungarian agency worker made comment on the uniforms during the shift:

It makes me feel low that we are asked to go into a dirty bin of uniforms and wear from that smelly pile. I come to work clean and tidy and I don't wear dirty clothes I made dirty myself why would I want to wear anyone else's dirt?

*Field notes, 10.12.12*

Christina also commented:

I'm going to refuse next time (to wear the uniform). They give you uniform and say it's you make you fit in but actually you stick out like a homeless person.

*Field notes, 17.12.12*

As a worker wearing soiled clothes I felt personally degraded, reinforcing further the low status of agency workers in relation to regular workers. Uniform stipulations were relatively more severe for agency workers than regular workers and this was quite often the source of animosity between the two groups.

In an interview, Fiora talked about how stricter uniform standards that had been set for agency workers than their organisational member counterparts:

Then there was another thing that happened, I don't think you know about it. I had one henna tattoo on my hand, I was in St Sires Castle through all the weddings in the summer and the supervisor there told me you're not allowed to have that tattoo, even though that girl Kate who works there has a real one in her hand. Then he sent me to work on the bar, most of the day on my own, all day I was isolated so I felt like I was being punished because I had a henna tattoo, but really no one ever said anything about having a henna tattoo. I know you're not supposed to wear your hair down, have strong perfume, long earrings or nail varnish but no one ever said anything about henna tattoos so yeah basically they told me off because I couldn't wash it off- it's henna you can't wash it off. I really felt like I couldn't be myself and there was an Indian guy in there who said, "I'm really offended by what they said because it's a cultural thing and in our country is normal in the weddings." I don't know I felt like a five year old being punished for doing something wrong. I felt like I was being unfairly treated because I'm agency, otherwise they should sack Kate (a regular worker) for having a permanent tattoo. I should have stood up and said "look it's a cultural thing" but I'm Greek not Indian but still it's cultural because I'm involved with other cultures but I couldn't because I need the shifts and if I make my point, probably they don't want me there again, they will just tell Adrian.

*Fiora, Greece*

Fiora observed how the stipulations over the uniform reinforced her powerlessness and marginality as an agency worker. However, Fiora feel that her insecure position as an agency worker and the disciplinary effects of the bitchlist made resistance too costly.

A similar incident occurred in the Hotel Amici. Kareem had been serving behind the bar when the manager confronted him about wearing a necklace that was concealed just beneath the collar of his shirt. He later turned to me to explain:

These uniform rules wouldn't piss me off as much as they do if it was a case of one rule for all, but it never is. This guy is having an issue with my necklace when he's got his own staff wearing knuckle dusters and hoop earrings. Where's the logic in that?

*Kareem, Barbados*

The uniform regulations were seen to be illogical, pointless and overly stringent particularly where agency workers worked in back-of-house jobs such as kitchen, portering or kitchen assistant work, where most regular workers dressed casually. The uniform regulations for such roles were again white shirts, black trousers and black formal shoes, yet given that all of

these were performed back-of-house, the stipulations for formal attire seemed ill-founded. In an interview DJ, a Nigerian student expressed his concern with the uniform stipulations:

Remember that day they had put us in the National Music Arena for that Mother and Baby conference? Well I was down doing the dishes for that day. They asked me to wear a white shirt and formal shoes, so I turned up with my patent dinner shoes and a white shirt while the other guys in the kitchen wore trainers, t-shirts and sweatpants. I felt like a right dickhead, they took the piss the whole day then telling me, 'did you get demoted from the guest speaker position?' By the end of the day it was like a wet t-shirt contest, you could see nipples and everything- I was proper humiliated.

*DJ, Nigeria*

Steve had noted similar concerns with the uniform, particularly for kitchen portering duties:

The agency uniform makes no sense, I mean white shirt to go wash some dishes is the most stupid thing you can wear, I don't understand that, it's like a pointless rule.

*Steve, Benin*

Agency workers were aware of their low status within the contracting organisation and through uniform and aesthetic regulation were made to feel like 'outsiders' within the organisation.

#### 6.4.2. Labour Fully Sweated: Regulation of Performance

For most hospitality workers – both agency and regular – the body becomes a significant part of work. This is because when performing front of house duties presentation and postures are on view for the customer. Most workers were told to maintain a certain posture: to stand up straight with hands clasped in front of them. Management often commented on workers slumped statures against bars, work-surfaces and walls suggesting that it looked unprofessional. However, for agency workers their postures were not only controlled when performing tasks front of house but were also monitored and regulated back of house. Many workers saw this as a desire by contracting organisations for agency workers to demonstrate physical exertion at all times. The prescribed bodily forms were always more onerous for agency workers than regular workers and involved performances that intensified the

strenuous nature of their work. For agency workers sitting down, leaning or resting against something while doing a job was never permitted even where not in plain-sight of the customer. Agency workers often commented on the onerous nature of this regulation suggesting that contracting organisations were ‘keen to get their money’s worth’.

In the context of the contracting organisations the embodied performance of work was a facet of regulation – management would impose tiresome, illogical expectations on agency workers when performing tasks back of house. Such impositions can be described as illogical or irrational because performance of tasks whilst sitting often did not impede the workers’ ability to do their jobs, in fact most of the time it facilitated it.

Christina and I had been placed to work for three days consecutively in a university hosting graduation ceremonies. We had been asked to set up the champagne reception, which involved unpacking over 3000 plastic champagne flutes each of which was packaged in a transparent polythene bag. The glasses were in huge boxes about knee height so this work was back breaking as it involved bending to pick up each glass, bending to place the discarded polythene into the bin and then bending again to place the unpackaged glass into another bag. After the first 500 glasses, I grabbed two of the full boxes gave one to Christina to sit on and sat on the other myself, and we both continued to unpack yet far more comfortably. The supervisor of the marquee we were working in came to check that everything was on track, when she saw Christina and I sat on the boxes. She turned to us and said, ‘Right girls can you shift some of the boxes of champagne from the other tent instead of doing that’. Christina and I were bewildered because there was no point in having champagne if there are no glasses to put it in. Christina turned to me and said, ‘It’s because we were sitting, they hate the idea that a job might actually be comfortable’. After carrying around 20

boxes of champagne from one tent to the next we continued unpacking glasses taking up our seated positions. The supervisor came in again and seemed to be loitering around us, observing us from a distance. She then approached us and said, 'Listen girls, can you just not sit down while you're doing that, you know in case the manager walks in, she doesn't want to see agency sitting down' (*Field notes, 31.08.12*).

A similar incident had occurred in the Radley when Samjeeta, DJ and I had been assigned to polish cutlery. They had been sitting on the workbenches (mimicking what regular staff do) when they were told that they have to remain standing when polishing cutlery. Samjeeta begrudgingly turned to me and said, 'They can't let us make life easier for ourselves, can they? I like sometimes think they want to see us exhausted' (*Field notes, 26.10.12*).

Similarly a group of workers had been contracted to the Mayflower Hotel in order to serve a Christmas party. The preparatory work required that we folded napkins and wrapped cutlery in napkins. This job was done in the back of house area where around six of us had gathered around a long trestle table in order to complete the task. The height of the table meant we had to lean at an awkwardly uncomfortable position in order to complete the task. Maria and I pulled up six spare chairs so that we could sit to finish off the work more comfortably. On noticing a group of agency workers sitting the shift leader walked towards us and queried where we had got the chairs from. I explained that there was a stack of spares that had been left outside in the corridor. She then exclaimed, 'Yeah no one told you could sit did they? I need you to stand, it just looks more professional' (*Research Diary, 19.12.12*).

This insistence on always standing was often a key source of frustration for agency workers. DJ commented on a shift in St Sires, 'man I need to take the weight off my feet; I'm not a

cow or some animal that can just keep going and going' (*Research Diary, 16.08.12*). A similar comment was made by Fiora:

In most of the places they don't offer any chance to sit down, it's almost like we are not even human, we don't feel tired or pain. If their staff can't do it, how can they expect us to?

*Fiora, Greece*

The onerous nature of the regulation yet again brought attention to the low status agency workers had within contracting organisations. Many of these workers passed comment on how the treatment and expectations of embodied performance made them feel subordinate and powerless:

When I see all the rest of them (regular workers) sitting and chilling and then we get in trouble just for leaning on the work surface I think "what the hell am I doing here?" We (agency workers) don't have any say, we can't even say nothing back. It's because we're agency, we are nothing. They don't really want us there.

*Christina, Romania*

The previous sections have illustrated how the regulation of dress and body and the allocation tasks and privileges within contracting organisations have the effect of both distinguishing agency workers from regular workers and positioning them as subordinate. This positioning was largely uncontested by agency workers who, mindful of the bitchlist and the insecurity of agency work, are discouraged from resistance, and serving therefore to accentuate this feeling of subordination. Furthermore, the distinctions made between workers through uniform and allocation of privileges also had the effect of workers dis-identifying with the contracting organisations and more readily, drawing in their status as organisational non-members to gain some autonomy. The following section explores how the regulation of space by contracting organisations, serves to further strengthen the outsider identity of the agency worker.

## 6.5. Regulation of Space: Located Identities and Identities in Location

Space in contracting organisations was rarely neutral in meaning. For example the bathroom a worker uses, where they are positioned to work, or their access to staff eating facilities, all served to denote a worker's position and status within the organisation. In most of the venues, space was carved into territories that defined the divisions between guests and workers but also agency workers and regular workers. Given that agency workers are neither organisational members nor organisational non-members and usually (although not always) have only a very temporary presence in the organisation, contracting organisations seldom provided agency workers with a designated space.

Organisations often formulated normative rules over space to the disadvantage of agency workers. Space in contracting organisations was managed in a number of ways. Principally it was organised through gendered, national and ethnic stereotypes and these applied to regular workers as well as to agency workers (see Chapter five for a discussion over the distinctions between front and back of house). However, given that a far greater proportion of agency workers were from migrant or BME communities, these national and ethnic divides were almost always synonymous with agency and regular worker divisions. Secondly, space was also more purposively organised according to status – either as agency worker or regular worker. These were often more obvious rules where agency workers were forbidden from certain areas or facilities. Some spaces in contracting organisations were considered contested, these were spaces that were neither forbidden nor permitted, rather were more ambiguous and often signified the tensions of agency workers presence. The following section examines these forbidden zones and how management of these has specific impacts on agency workers' self-understanding.

### 6.5.1. Exclusionary Practices and Forbidden Zones

The most obvious manifestations of exclusionary practices were the clearly defined rules stating that agency workers were not permitted to use staff amenities, such as staff changing rooms, bathrooms, lockers and staff canteens. These rules were replicated in all of the organisations I had worked in (on only very rare occasions were we granted access to staff canteens). I had worked on more than 40 occasions in the Radley and had only once been given access to the staff canteen and changing room. I had been told explicitly by one of the regular employees that agency workers were not permitted to use staff facilities; it was a rule they strictly enforced. Curtis, a British agency worker who worked in the Radley as a kitchen porter for two months, shared his experiences of these spatial exclusions. He told me that although he had been given regular hours for two months consecutively this did nothing to improve his status in the organisation:

That place man [the Radley Hotel], if we are given food, it's usually eaten while standing in the same place I clean the dishes. The only time I was allowed to actually go in the staff canteen was to clean it. You would think that because they know me and see my face every day they would think "oh ok this is a bit unfair or we feel bad for this guy" but no, nothing's changed since being there.

*Curtis, UK*

Christina made similar observations in a hotel where we had been working for three days consecutively:

They don't let us go sit and relax in the staff area like the rest of the workers and eat like human beings. They must think we are animals to stand and eat - like a cow. I end up now saying no to food if that's how I'm treated with it, I'd rather just go and smoke and at least feel like I'm still a human.

*Christina, Romania*

On the rare occasions agency workers were permitted to use the staff facilities, organisational members still perpetuated the spatial divisions between agency and regular workers<sup>17</sup>. On a 13 hour shift in the Radley, agency workers had been permitted to take a break in the staff area. We were only allowed to take our break after the regular workers had taken their first pickings over the food. The staff area was set up with two long tables that were positioned parallel to one another, each surrounded by chairs. The regular workers had colonised one table, naturally the agency workers sat around the other. When we entered there was not a single word of conversation between the two groups throughout the meal. This silence was broken when one of the regular workers Alessandro stood up and asked if 'one of the agency can take our dirty plates back to pot-wash when you finish'. This request shocked me, however other regular workers simply left their dirty plates and cutlery on their tables when they had finished eating, expecting the agency staff to clear their mess.

This canteen experience was not an isolated incident. I had a similar experience in the Mayflower hotel, when we were offered a break and given access to the staff canteen. As we entered the canteen the regular employees, who were already sat at different tables moved in order to avoid sitting at tables with agency workers. There was a certain discomfort surrounding the interactions between employees and agency workers. Those who chose to sit or converse with agency workers were often considered 'outsiders' in the organisation or deviants. For example Abdu, a kitchen porter in the Mayflower Hotel, from South Sudan, had come to sit at my table during the break. Abdu, spoke with me in Arabic as his English was still very broken. Abdu seemed excluded from the general work force in the Mayflower,

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<sup>17</sup> The breaks when offered in the hotels were even given right at the beginning of the shift or towards the end of the shift which contradicted the purpose of a break. The beginning of the shift was probably the point that one felt most invigorated, not hungry or in need of a coffee and the end of the shift when only an hour of the shift was not the time when one needed the energy or rest.

perhaps because of the language barrier, and he rarely interacted with the other regular organisational workers.

There were other spatial management techniques that created informal boundaries between agency workers and regular workers. The unplanned nature of agency work meant that it was often difficult to come to work dressed in uniform, and so workers often carried a bag containing their uniform and changed at the beginning of their shift. However, this was problematic in most contracting organisations as agency workers were only rarely allowed to use the employee changing rooms. I had asked Valentina whether there was somewhere I could get changed to which she responded that agency workers were unable to access the staff facilities but I would be able to use the guest bathrooms provided that no one would see me (*Field notes, 21.06.12*). Tariq an agency worker had made similar remarks, complaining on one shift that his socks had been saturated with urine as he was not allowed to access staff changing rooms and had no option but to change in the dirty toilets. The exclusion from this space appeared illogical, serving merely to emphasise the divide between agency workers and regular workers and to reinforce agency workers non-membership within the organisation.

Agency workers were also excluded from using storage facilities to store their personal belongings while on shift. On one of my first shifts in the Radley Hotel had I asked the shift leader where I could leave my belongings, and he informed me that there were no facilities for agency workers and that my items would be stored in the cupboard under the sink (*Research Diary 24.02.12*). I shoved my bags and coat inside the dirty, damp cupboard, and on return found them to be saturated with water from a leak in the sink pipe. Mercie, who was also on the shift advised me to never bring anything ‘worth owning’ to work, they would either end up being stolen or destroyed. She had told me about one incident where she had

stored her bag and coat behind the bar and had returned to discover that it had been saturated in beer because of leaky pipe connected to the barrel. She explained:

No one really cares about your stuff; they don't even give you somewhere safe to store it. At the end of the day they don't have to face you tomorrow to feel guilty about ruining your stuff.

*Mercie, Zambia*

The disregard for agency workers' belongings and the inaccessibility of facilities was also illustrated in a shift in St Sires Castle. St Sires Castle was hosting a string of weddings over the summer period, which meant that Staff Solutions supplied the Castle with workers on a regular basis. On one of the shifts I was assigned to work with Mikhael, Fiora and Dilpreet. We all travelled to the Castle together, given that it was around 20 miles outside of Cardiff. As I was about to leave the car Fiora told me to leave my bag in the car, she explained:

Chloe there is no space to put your bag. Last time each one of us agency workers had cash taken from our bags. Imagine, I just had a massage client before I went so I had 40 quid in my purse. I worked a 10 hours shift for 60 hard earned pounds and had 40 of those stolen from my wallet.

*Field notes, 7.7.2012*

Management in these places saw little reason to ensure that agency workers' belongings were kept securely. The implications of this served to reassert agency workers' non-membership in the organisation since they had no significant spatial occupation that could signify a sense of belonging or permanence. Given that agency workers are only intended to be transient and temporary, the contracting organisations seek to minimise their permanence through excluding agency workers from space. However, spatial zones were not always clear cut. In many organisations there were contested spaces where agency workers presence was negotiable. The tensions that arose within these contested spaces are often meaningful and related to how agency workers were positioned within contracting organisations.

### 6.5.2. Contested Spaces

In all of the venues I had worked I noticed that there seemed to be tension around agency workers 'loitering' in the back of house (either food service areas or kitchen). As mentioned previously in section 6.3.1 tasks such as polishing cutlery or glasses or folding napkins were coveted because they were repetitive and mindless which meant that workers could chat while performing them and, given that they were back facing, they offered respite from the customer gaze. Agency workers were rarely assigned these back facing tasks so their presence back of house created certain tensions. On one banqueting shift in the Mayflower Hotel, Beth the Conference and Banqueting Manager had expressly ordered that she did not want to see any agency workers back of house (it was often assumed workers would gather there to shirk duties). Later Samjeeta and I were looking for the laundry bin in order to place the soiled napkins that we had collected from the tables. Beth had seen us chatting amongst ourselves as we searched and exclaimed, 'Look girls this is exactly why I said I didn't want to see you guys back here, you come back for a chat while we've got guests in the room waiting. Get back in the room please' (*Field notes, 19.12.12*).

Lacking legitimacy of spatial occupation within the back facing regions of contracting organisations, agency workers quickly became adept at creating spaces in the margins of the front of house area. Yet, contracting organisations became equally adept at eradicating any spaces where agency workers could collect and talk. When I had initially started working in the Radley there were three service stations set up on the restaurant floor. These were places that had cutlery, napkins, glasses, trays and cleaning products where we could go to refresh tables after guests had finished their breakfasts. There were around 50 tables on the restaurant floor with the capacity for around 150 guests, and these service stations made agency

workers' jobs a lot easier. These service points also acted as good meeting spaces for agency workers who had been banished from congregating in the back facing areas.

Meeting over gathering fresh cutlery provided an acceptable excuse for loitering; it is where we would chat, usually complaining about management, staff and customers. Just a month after I had been assigned shifts in the Radley the manager decided that there was no need for the cleaning stations on the restaurant floor. They had relocated the service stations to a single position located in the back facing area. This meant that agency workers could only stay in this zone for fleeting moments and only for the purpose of clearing plates or collecting clean cutlery. This system was highly inefficient and made agency workers' jobs significantly more strenuous and difficult. It meant that heavy plates and cutlery had to be transported to back of house whenever a table had finished. This was physically challenging; plates and cutlery became extremely heavy when stacked, and this coupled with the distance of running plates back and forth meant the task of clearing and relaying a table became a chore.

Mercie had become irritated by the inefficiency of the new restaurant floor arrangement; she questioned Davide, the shift supervisor on the logic behind this new system. He responded that, 'Alan (the food and beverage manager) wants them gone because you agency are wasting time talking when you should be working, and we're running a business here not a social club' (*Field notes, 02.04.12*). For agency workers, this not only had the effect of minimising resistance but also meant that workers were unable to form relationships or a sense of collective with their agency peers (explored in chapter seven). Agency workers were therefore highly regulated, their 'non-belonging' and extra organisational status made these forms of control more accessible to the contracting organisation who used space to minimise agency workers' identification with the organisation.

## 6.6. Naming and Labelling Practices

The previous sections discuss how marginality and ‘non-belonging’ was constituted through discipline of appearance, spatial regulation and material privileges afforded to agency workers. This had the dual effect of drawing distinct divisions between agency workers and regular workers and constructing workers as marginal in terms of the organisational whole. In the context of contracting organisations, labelling practices were also drawn upon to crystallise these constructions, constituting agency workers as a non-distinct, substitutable workforce.

Agency workers were rarely referred to by their own names on shift; they were more often marked through impersonal labels such as numbers or simply called ‘agency girl/boy’. This was particularly so in the Radley hotel. Management and regular workers in the Radley made little attempt at generating any form of personal relationships or interaction with agency workers. The hotel was heavily understaffed and had been using agency workers on a more or less regular basis for around three months. Therefore, the hotel’s workers had worked in close proximity with agency workers for extended periods. Mercie, Mihaela and I had each been assigned four-hour breakfast shifts, around four times a week, under the supervision of Alessandro the breakfast supervisor. Despite this, Alessandro still insisted on referring to us as ‘the agency girls’. One morning Alessandro had decided that he would write our tasks for the day on a white board that was located in the back of front-of-house area. This white board gave details of the tasks and the name of the individual that had been assigned to it. In the Radley the work was mainly divided by sections, the breakfast shift had various areas which a worker was assigned to oversee, then there was buffet supervision, hosting and tea and coffee duties. The board had assigned agency worker 1 and 2 to sections 1 and 2, Rita a Romanian regular worker to section 3 and Kamilia a Polish regular worker to section 4. In

addition food clearance duties were allocated to agency worker 3, and tea and coffee duties to Maria a regular worker. I asked Alessandro which number I was out of those marked on the board to which he responded, 'it really doesn't matter you agency are the same. I'll let you all decide what you prefer' (*Field notes, 18.03.2012*).

This was a regular occurrence, so much so that agency workers were accustomed and unquestioning of this practice. Yet most workers noted that their names were quickly remembered when complaints or queries were made to Staff Solutions. Mihaela noted:

It's always agency girl do this, agency girl do that until they get on the phone to Adrian and then it's Mihaela Glover wore nail varnish and came to work 10 minutes late

*Field notes, 08.04.12*

Many agency workers had noted the fact that quite often their names were either mispronounced or completely disregarded during shifts. Cynthia, a Ugandan student had worked with All Faiths Centre intermittently for around six months, she expressed one day:

I don't get it. Gareth known me for six months now and he still calls me 'agency girl.' If he calls me by name he calls me Celie. Does he think I'm a character from that book Colour Purple or something?

*Cynthia, Uganda*

Mercie also expressed similar concerns:

I been working with Staff Solutions for near on two years now and Adrian still hasn't learnt my name, sometimes and Mary, Maria even Glory. It's embarrassing like I'm irrelevant or something. My name and personal stuff is not important but whether I am available to work certainly is.

*Mercie, Zambia*

Fiora noted a similar sentiment with regard to naming practices:

Its common courtesy to at least call someone by their name but that doesn't happen in Staff Solutions. The only time they want to know your name on shift is when they [contracting organisations] have something bad to tell Adrian about you – then they take down your name and say, 'never send Fiora again, she's a trouble maker.'

*Fiora, Greece*

Paul noted his view on the naming practices within the context of agency work, he was particularly concerned with this practice and saw that it was integral to the way in which the organisations construct agency workers as transient. Paul had made the following comments after he had taken a slip on a concrete floor where one of the chefs had left oil residues. Paul had injured his knee in this accident and was in a lot of discomfort, yet the catering company had failed to record this in an accidents book or even offer him ice to soothe the injury:

The thing with these fucking people is they don't give a shit, I mean look they don't even make the effort to know your name so of course they won't care if you injure yourself. At the end of the day agency workers are expendable to these people, they want the job done and don't a shit about the person doing it.

*Paul, Malta*

The naming practices not only worked to homogenise workers but also had the effect of reinforcing a sense of transience and substitutability. For agency workers, this meant that relationships were rarely formed with contracting organisations, which resulted in an understanding of agency workers as merely replaceable working bodies.

## 6.7. Conclusions

Contracting organisations provided little potential for agency workers to formulate a positive and legitimate identity in relation to the organisation. Task assignment, uniform regulations, embodied controls, labelling practices, and the regulation of space were all widely adopted practices serving to distinguish agency workers and to construct them subordinate in relation to regular workers. The effects of this on self-understanding will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter, however as section 6.2 suggests, agency workers in Staff Solutions had constructed a negative understanding of agency workers as voiceless and marginal to regular workers. The onerous and often inequitable regulatory practices used by contracting organisations went largely uncontested, with agency workers being strongly aware of their

insecure status (section 5.3), reinforced through the discipline of the bitchlist (section 5.4.2) and constructing them as servile and powerless.

The implications of this pejorative identity are explored in detail in the following chapter. This chapter draws on the discourses of migrant agency workers to gain a rich understanding of how the regulatory practices observed in chapter five and six have effects on individual's self-understandings. Furthermore, the analysis in this chapter draws on the way workers complexly negotiate their identities as migrants along with other discourses to craft more positive self-understandings.

# 7. Crafting Distinctions and Crafting Selves

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## 7.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have focused on regulatory practices exercised by both Staff Solutions and the contracting organisations. This chapter considers how migrant agency workers negotiate, craft and construct their identities in the face of the milieu of discourses they are subject to. Drawing on the concept of identity work (chapter two) this chapter examines how agency workers negotiate discourse through material and linguistic practice to craft more legitimate versions of the self. The chapter starts by considering how agency workers craft themselves through identity work, dis-identifying with the agency collective and other agency workers and attaching their self-understandings to more entrepreneurial and individualistic ideals. Following this, the ways in which agency workers craft preferred identities through dis-identification, identification and relational identities is discussed. Finally, the chapter considers how the individualism of agency workers is both constructed and reinforced through physical and observable forms of resistance.

## 7.2. Fragmentation of Agency Workers: Constructing discursive difference

This section expands on the ideas developed in chapter five and six on how the dominant negative discourses of agency workers are negotiated by agency workers. As chapter six suggests the regulatory discourses craft a stigmatised collective identity of agency workers; while chapter five shows how workers become self-sufficient, independent and hyper-competitive through the regulatory practices drawn on by Staff Solutions. Within this section it is demonstrated how, whilst accepting the negative meanings attached to the dominant

discourse of agency workers, workers seek to distance their own identities from this label, and, in doing so, results in practices of division and fragmentation. The following explores how distancing through talk and material practices, as well as forms of competitive distancing, together with instrumentalism were influential in agency workers' crafting of selves.

### 7.2.1. Distancing through Talk and Material Practices

Workers in Staff Solutions seemed very insular; they rarely sought relationships with other agency workers, and friendships never existed beyond the realms of the workplace. This distance created between agency workers and their colleagues was constituted through both talk and material practices. Many agency workers rationalised the reasons for this as equating to negative or stigmatised understandings of 'other agency workers'. Agency workers constructed themselves as different, distancing themselves from what they saw as a stigmatised class of workers with the effect of reinforcing the negative collective identity of agency workers. Workers were keen to highlight that they had few common interests with their fellow workers, expressing this in terms of the digressions between morals, dress, integrity and attitudes. Lenira explained:

Sometimes I stand here and say to myself: 'what the hell are you doing Lenira?' I left my bank job where I worked with good people, who always dressed so smart and speak in real nice way to come to the UK for what? [Laughter]. To work with a shit people, I won't even walk in the street with these people in Brazil. I just tell myself 'come on Lenira, be strong, carry on, just until you learn English, then you can pretend like this never happened.'

*Lenira, Brazil*

Lenira spoke to me on shift about her frustrations of working with Staff Solutions. Her sentiments towards other agency workers were clear: she actively distanced herself from what she considered to be a group of workers of considerably lower status than herself. She rationalised her presence within the agency as being something transient and instrumental:

she was there to improve her English and would leave as soon as it was good enough to get a better job as a hotel receptionist in Paris. Her opinions about other agency workers were by no means unique. It was often assumed that fellow agency workers were a substandard or inferior set of workers. A 'them and me' dichotomy between the individual and the collective understanding of agency workers was dominant among the people I spoke with. For example, Naser considers himself different in the eyes of client organisations:

You know how it is most of the agency workers are shit, especially in Staff Solutions. What they mostly employ is fucking Africans who haven't got a clue how to do the job and can't speak good English. You know what I mean? So when they send me it's like something completely amazing for them [the client] like, 'this guy is actually alright.'

*Naser, Morocco*

Naser considers himself as distinctive from the rest of the agency workers in terms of race (although he is himself North African), skills and linguistic ability (and although his first language is Arabic, many of the African migrants are English speakers). He considers that these differences are critical in the ways in which the clients perceive him and his success as an agency worker. Similarly, in a conversation with Christina during a breakfast shift she made reference to a shift she had worked the night before. Her complaints centred on the personal hygiene of agency workers, relating this to upbringing:

Last night I was down in The Auditorium on a big banquet last night with probably 20 of us from Staff Solutions and I swear to God I couldn't stand it Chloe. All of the agency workers stink like with b.o. I see it all the time, dirty, no standards, I don't understand how they can come to work in that state. Maybe they shower just once a week. I dunno how they can... I wasn't brought up like that, being clean is too important to me.

*Christina, Romania*

During an interview with Christina she expanded on this distinction of herself from that of other agency workers, questioning their integrity. I had asked Christina whether she

socialised with agency workers beyond work, and she was quick to outline the reasons why she had little interest in pursuing social engagement with other agency workers:

No I don't socialise with them outside of work, why would I? You can't find good people in the agency. It's like most of them are low-class and they haven't been raised with some values. I'd never steal or lie but to many of them it comes to them naturally, like breathing.

*Christina, Romania*

This disassociation of the self from other agency workers was also evident with Mercie, who suggested that her educational achievements distinguished her from other agency workers:

*Chloe:* Do you ever socialise with the any of the Staff Solution workers outside of work?

*Mercie:* No, no I don't! I wouldn't see anyone outside of work or plan anything with them

*Chloe:* Is there any reason for that?

*Mercie:* Essentially I don't think I have anything in common with them. I don't like to sound stuck up but I have my Masters. I like to talk about politics and world affairs. I like to dress nice and to go to good restaurants. Until now - and no offence because I'm including you in this - but I didn't find anyone who is like me. So why would I bother? I don't want to make friends with people who won't improve me, I just want to keep myself to myself – do my work and go.

*Mercie, Zambia*

Fiora made similar references to the incompatibility between herself and other agency workers:

I don't really see myself as one of them. I mean Staff Solutions attracts a type of people that I really don't fit with. I am open minded and am quite involved with different cultures and countries but even though everyone in Staff Solutions is from a different place I find them so closed minded, they still hold on to their countries and not open minded about other peoples. It's not really the type of people I find myself to go along with.

*Fiora, Greece*

Nationality was also drawn upon as a difference that created divisions between workers. However, national identities often seemed to be the source of tension and friction that

exacerbated the fragmentation of the workforce. Crude and stigmatised stereotypes used by workers served to create antagonisms, this was particularly so when large groups of agency workers were sent on a job together. There were frequent jokes between some of the European agency workers – usually the Romanians, Lithuanians and Polish - and the Muslim agency workers (both Middle Eastern and Asian). The Eastern Europeans would often poke fun at Mikhael, Naser, Tariq and myself, based on stereotypical conceptions of Muslim Arabs. This included ridiculous questions that were mildly offensive, yet packaged as ‘good humour’ or ‘jest’. On one occasion Tomos, a Polish agency worker asked me why I had not brought my bed-sheet with me to work (referring to the Islamic face or head covering of Niqab or Hejab). Another time Mihaela was concerned whether my backpack contained bomb-making devices. I had often laughed off the comments preferring to assume that such questions were not asked with any malice. Yet such blasé attitudes were not always taken towards these jokes. Mercie had an incident with Lucas, a Polish Agency worker, when he had made some derogatory comments about African people being primitive and uncivilised. Mercie expressed her anger whilst we walked home from a shift together:

Mercie: Fucking ignorant fucks. That’s the Polish for you. They look at you like they never saw a black person before and they are racist from the inside.

Chloe: Why what happened?

Mercie: That Lucas guy asking me fucking stupid questions. He thinks I live in a mud-hut and I have a click in my name. Doesn’t he know I’m more educated than he could ever wish to be?

*Field notes, 24.03.12*

Another incident resulted in a heated disagreement on a shift at TJ catering. The result of this argument revealed darker sentiments behind jokes based on racial or national stereotypes. The argument started when Mihaela asked Tariq why he had chosen to go into catering when he had a career in terrorism all planned out. Immediately Tariq retaliated to this statement suggesting, ‘you should tell me, you left your gypsy life behind to be a waitress.’ Tomas

stepped in telling Tariq, ‘hang on a minute it was only a joke, why do you have to get personal?’ At this point I could not refrain from reacting, ‘if Mihaela thinks it’s ok to label all Muslims terrorists then she should accept other people labelling Romanians as gypsies.’ This had touched a sensitive spot with Mihaela who snapped, ‘I’m not a fucking gypsy, and you think I’m a fucking gypsy?’ Tariq sneered, ‘my family are not terrorists. That’s the issue with you Mihaela, you can give, give, give, but the moment someone said anything back you cry’ (*Field notes, 21.09.12*).

There seemed to be some sympathies between workers of similar backgrounds, for example, workers were often separated into the separate ethnic groupings of Europeans and non-Europeans. Those sharing common languages used these moments to talk covertly about one another or perhaps about the manager whilst on shift. However, such coalitions were rare and generally a more individualistic orientation reigned. The racial or nationality based alliances and division were well illustrated by Christina and Mihaela’s conversation on shift. On our way driving back from a shift Christina had expressed some annoyances to me regarding non-European migrants; Mihaela joined in:

*Christina:* I’m not being funny but all the Pakis and Africans coming here think we are the same or something, all migrants looking for a job but I think I have more right to be here than them. I’m European, I’m white.

*Chloe:* Have you ever thought that many of them are born here?

*Christina:* No they still Pakis though, they want to dress their way and follow their thing but then want jobs here. I think Europeans should have the first choice on jobs.

*Mihaela:* The thing is they don’t want to fit in, they want to go to the Miski [I guessed this meant Mosque] but they still want jobs and opportunities.

*Field notes, 10.09.12*

National and racial stereotypes were commonplace amongst agency workers and were not only used to undermine individuals and to draw differences but also to characterise the ways in which they perform their work. An example of this can be seen in workers commenting

that Africans were often considered lazy by the others, so when Cecilia or DJ were slacking on shift this was considered to be a racial attribute that could seldom be avoided. Other typecasts that were constructed amongst agency workers included that of Indian workers who were characterised 'jobsworths', being pernickety over their work in order to stay in management favour, and many of the Eastern-Europeans were considered to be 'back-biters' or 'snitches', not to be trusted and super-competitive for work.

Most of these stereotypes were talked of in exaggerated ways, such as by Mikhael who suggested to Samjeeta that she offers to iron the supervisor's shirt and clean Adrian's car when on shift, or DJ who insinuated that Tomos had sold his brother's kidneys to get a shift in the Marble Hall. These comments and jokes served to widen the fractures between agency workers, undermining any collective identity that may form and harbouring distrust and resentment between different national and ethnic groups. Thus rather than the nationality or status of migrant being used as a way to collectivise interests amongst agency workers it served to fragment them along different axes, according to stereotypical and mainly negative conceptions.

Nationality only fleetingly provided a collective or common interest between workers. Language was used as a covert method of communicating between workers who may wish to talk about their colleagues or the employees of the organisations they were working in. I had experienced this first hand, where quite often Mikhael, Naser or Tariq would express their frustrations in Arabic. However, use of languages other than English was strictly forbidden in most organisations.

On one shift in the Mayflower Hotel, Christina and Mihaela had been caught conversing in Romanian in earshot of the shift leader Beth. She told them that no language apart from English was to be spoken whilst on shift and positioned them on separate workstations to ensure that it would not happen again. This was followed by an e-mail from Adrian on the following Monday morning that indicated that some clients had complained that workers were using their native language on shift and that this would not be tolerated. He then went on to say:

Where possible I do not place people from the same country on shift because I know there can be a temptation to speak in your native tongue. However, where you are placed on shift with someone from your own country please refrain from using your languages. I've had lots of complaints, people don't like it. They often find it rude.

*E-mail received, 17.09.12*

Staff Solutions along with the contracting organisations worked actively to 'stamp out' any national collective that may form. However, collective interests were also more fundamentally fragmented by the individual's desire to secure work and by their dis-identification with the collective agency identity.

Many of the agency workers sought to achieve a 'them' and 'me' distance between themselves and the other workers. This was due to a negative understanding of the collective identity of agency workers as discussed in chapter six. This distance was both produced and deepened by the distrust that existed amongst agency workers. Something I had both observed and experienced during my time working in Staff Solutions, manifesting itself through bitching and backstabbing amongst workers. This type of culture that had evolved in Staff Solutions can be seen to have emerged for multiple reasons. Firstly, self-interest, which was encouraged and fortified by the regulatory effects of the bitchlist (section 5.4.1) and the insecure nature of work (section 5.3). The scarcity of shifts and the allocation of work

through the bitch list ranking system meant that agency workers needed to engage in competitive plays in order to heighten their chances of finding work. Secondly and relatedly, the distancing of agency workers and lack of personal relationships that had developed between workers meant that individuals had little conscience in playing dirty games in order to get shifts. The following section will explore how the bitching, backstabbing and telling tales became a fairly normal phenomenon amongst agency workers and the effects it has on workers self-understandings.

### 7.2.2. Backstabbing, Bitching and Being Enterprising

This agency is ‘dog eat dog’ or survival of the fittest. You can’t say everything in your heart because the people here want to see you mess up. What everyone [agency workers] wants is more work, if they take you out of the game then maybe its [going to] mean more work for them.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

Mikhael talks openly about his distrust of other agency workers and his awareness that it is in the interest of agency workers to undermine their colleagues in order to gain more work. This was a phenomenon that I had observed on many occasions. I had observed this as two separate issues. First agency workers would often relay negative reports of misbehaviour directly back to Adrian, which would both win favour from Adrian as an informer and disadvantage the deviant. The second, a more devious strategy was where agency workers drew on weaknesses, mistakes or misbehaviours of other workers and fed these back to the contracting organisation’s management who would then send this information back to Staff Solutions. Both of these strategies had the same intention and effect – to limit the amount of work other agency workers would get in order to secure more work for themselves.

My first experiences of ‘backstabbing’ in Staff Solutions arose just over a month after I had joined. For my first five weeks of work I was given regular breakfast shifts in the Radley

Hotel. I had assumed that I would be posted there fairly regularly given that the hotel's staffing issues went unresolved. I had called into Staff Solutions as usual on a Monday morning in order to discuss my shifts for the week. Adrian informed me that he would not be putting me on breakfasts anymore as he had heard that I had often turned up to shift late. I asked him whether there had been some complaint about me from the hotel, to which he responded that the hotel hadn't raised any issues but a couple of 'the girls' had made comments when they came to hand in their time sheets.

This was not the only time negative feedback had been passed onto Adrian regarding my performance on shift. There was a regular weekend shift that was unsupervised by regular workers. This shift required two or three agency workers to set out, supervise and clean up after office buffets for weekend meetings. The agency workers would be given access to the building and were paid for 9am-3pm regardless of whether we finished earlier or later. The virtue of this job was that we were given autonomy, unlike most organisations the unsupervised nature of this venue allowed workers some leverage to drink coffee, talk and eat from the remainder of the buffet. I was soon to realise that this perceived autonomy and the unsupervised nature of the shift was undermined by agency workers, who fed reports to Adrian regarding my performance on shift.

Adrian had called me on a Monday afternoon after I had filled in the Sunday shift to reprimand me for turning up to work late and not wearing the correct work trousers (I had turned up in a jersey material black sweatpant style trousers rather than a formal black trouser). He told me that he would not be sending me there again as I could not be trusted to be left unsupervised.

These feedback systems also operated in a more covert way. Quite often agency workers would also 'tell-tales' on other agency workers to the shift supervisors or managers. I had experienced this on many occasions. On one shift around 15 Agency workers had been sent to the Radley Hotel to work on a Rugby International shift. We had been working in a banquet hall serving around 250 guests. On each table was pre-ordered wine, spirits and beer. During the shift one of the workers, Darren, had become jovial, and noticeably more talkative and friendly. A couple of the agency workers commented that he had been stowing half empty wine bottles under the tables where he could then covertly swig the wine. Mihaela and Cynthia both informed the supervisor of Darren's misbehaviour, which resulted in him being sent home immediately, followed by a furious phone call to Adrian on Monday morning (*Field notes, 17.03.12*). Darren was immediately struck of Staff Solutions books, which meant that more work was available to other workers signed up with the agency.

On another shift in a venue that was catering a three course plated dinner for 300 guests, Mihaela, Veronica and Christina had sneaked out in the intermission between starter and main course to have a cigarette. The supervisor Mark has come to round-up all the workers in order to brief them on how we would go about clearing the room after the guests had finished. Before Mark begun his briefing one of the agency workers Sam interrupted, 'shall I grab the girls? They went outside to have a fag.' Mark looked furious and stated, 'no I'll get them, I thought I said no to fag breaks.' Christina had asked if we could all cover for them while they went to smoke but Sam had chosen to betray this (presumably in order to ensure that they would not be called back to the venue again).

Another incident had occurred in TJ catering which Mario told me about when I offered him a lift home after a shift on the following day:

I was working yesterday up with that bitch Theresa [the owner of the company] for TJ Catering, I was working with George and I overheard him telling Theresa that I'm unreliable, that I sometimes don't show up on shift or I come late. It's not true but I know this guy he wants a job from her so he's trying to put my name down or make me look like shit so he can be the regular one in there.

*Mario, Portugal*

Later George had secured some informal work with TJ catering, so defaming Mario had resulted in additional work. On another occasion I had worked for City Catering in a marquee banquet to which I had been sent with six other agency workers. During the dinner service I was having trouble weaving in between tightly packed tables with heavy and hot dinner plates. Dinner was a supreme of chicken, balanced on top of a stack of vegetables and doused in a jus that swished all around the plates as I walked. As I weaved between the tables some of the jus spilt over the rim of the plates. Feeling the pressure of the speed of service I served the plate although the gravy had moved from the middle of the plates and stained the rim (unsightly in the catering world). Later when I was back of house, I overheard Rachel another of the agency workers informing Ben the manager that I was sending out poorly presented plates.

What became clear during my time with Staff Solutions was the lengths to which workers would go to self-promote at the expense of other workers. This fortified the fragmented nature of the work group and fostered distrust amongst agency workers. However this worked in favour of Staff Solutions who were able to use workers as a form of surveillance. Moreover, as has been detailed in previous chapters, Staff Solutions stimulated this competition amongst agency workers through the ranking systems of the bitchlist and through over-recruitment, which created individualistic attitudes to work and peers. Despite many of these competitive attitudes emerging from the regulatory effects of the bitchlist (section 5.4.1), workers understood this behavior as symptomatic of their entrepreneurialism.

Although workers resented the competitiveness fostered against one another, many of them suggested that they could understand why this competitiveness was a necessary part of getting work. Agency workers often referred to their selves or others as individualised, justifying deceit with the perceived need to prosper. As Christina explains:

When you are on the receiving end it's not nice. I wouldn't do it myself but I can see why other agency workers do it (report on) to each other. I mean we all out for ourselves I don't think you can criticise people for wanting to make a bit of money.

*Christina, Romania*

Mario made similar reference to the 'dirty tricks' agency workers play on one another as being part and parcel of being successful in Staff Solutions. I had asked him his views on agency workers' reporting on one another and he explained that:

When I first started in here I was thinking 'oh what bastards,' you know they all telling on each other and trying to show the other one as the bad worker. I was thinking if you just try hard in here and are good at your job you will be ok. But then I realised it's not really enough, so I just think OK it's every man on his self and if you need the work you have to find a way.

*Mario, Portugal*

The rhetoric of 'each man for himself' seemed synonymous with conceptions of individuals as 'economic man.' Obtaining work with the Staff Solutions was often considered testament to a workers entrepreneurial abilities. Mikhael explains:

Basically if you didn't get that much in the agency you either didn't need it or want it enough. There is work there but you have to be smart and learn the ways to get it. You know what I mean. If you are really smart you will get a lot.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

Mikhael considers agency work as a game which if played correctly can be profitable for the worker. Mercie makes similar suggestions:

Lots of people here complain about not having enough work but if you prove to Adrian that you are reliable and stand out from the rest the work will come in. And if it doesn't then maybe people need to think about what they are doing or maybe take another job.

*Mercie, Zambia*

In fact where workers complained to Adrian that they had not been allocated enough work he would often respond that the work is there but workers needed to be more proactive about securing it (*Research Diary, 17.07.12*).

Individualism was constituted in a variety of ways. First agency workers sought to discursively distance themselves from their peers drawing on national identities, morals and educational background to define themselves from the stigmatised whole (section 7.2.1). The effects this can be seen at the level of identity where individuals in seeking to gain more valorised self-understandings simultaneously perpetuate the negative perceptions many of the contracting organisations are seen to hold (chapter 6) of agency workers. This individualism was also seen as a self-interested 'entrepreneurial' activity that had potential material gains for agency workers. The examples of backbiting and snitching that formulated a form of remote surveillance for Staff Solutions are testament to the workers' individualistic, self-interested attitudes towards their work and their peers. This individualism was further illustrated by the way that the agency workers spoke of their instrumental attitudes towards their work.

### 7.2.3. Instrumentalism and Agency Work

Agency workers' individualistic attitudes emerged from a very instrumental understanding of their work and position within Staff Solutions. Workers often justified their employment with the agency as either 'just for the money' or for other self-interested motives that were unrelated to the job. In an interview I had asked Fiora why she had decided to apply for work

with Staff Solutions. Fiora had been working with Staff Solutions on a part-time basis for around two years yet her ‘real job’ (as she put it) was as a holistic therapist and dance instructor. She explained to me that:

Well basically I’m working with Staff Solutions but its different hours each week depending on how much work I have on and how much Adrian going to call me to work. I don’t like it, only when I absolutely have to, but it’s that shortfall at the end of the month, I got all my things to pay and I just see it a quick way to get some money together

*Fiora, Greece*

Fiora appreciated the flexibility of agency work and although she hated the work it allowed her to pursue her other entrepreneurial ventures. Steve made similar comments:

I got this job as part-time in the beginning. I was working while I was studying my degree and that was ok because it’s quite flexible and I can work around my exams and assignments. Then I graduated and I thought it will be easy to find work in my field but I couldn’t – even in France you know it’s hard there I think they are racist a bit there so I couldn’t really find things that are acceptable. I just started to work full-time with Staff Solutions, I needed the money – it’s not where I want to be but it’s just about survival. Now I been working for more than 2 years as full-time and I can’t say that I actually like the work but it gives me the time to think and work on my other stuff. As you know I’m working on my invention<sup>18</sup> which means I can just leave my shift and give that 100% of my attentions. Also I’m becoming more concerned about my dance and popping<sup>19</sup> and started to enter competitions, so I appreciate that I can leave my work at work and come home and do things I am passionate about.

*Steve, Benin*

Steve and Fiora acknowledged that the work they were involved in via Staff Solutions was not the reason for their employment, rather their reason for engaging in such employment was primarily motivated by the need to supplement their income. However, this form of employment also gave them free time to engage in activities that they valued more highly. Lenira talked about her work in similar ways, suggesting that money was initially what attracted her to work for Staff Solutions, but she also wanted to work where there was interactions which would allow her develop her English language skills. However, other workers seldom acknowledged the other perceived benefits that could be gained through

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<sup>18</sup> Steeve had told me that he was working on a prototype of a solar-powered phone charger. This was a way in which he put his education in electrical engineering into practice.

<sup>19</sup> Body popping is a form of urban/street dance.

working through Staff Solutions. Most of these workers expressed their dissatisfaction with their work but suggested that money was the tie that bound them to engaging in such employment. Gloria, a Brazilian migrant expressed these notions:

In the beginning I was like, what am I doing here? This is not me. But then the money speaks louder and you have to do what you have to do.

*Gloria, Brazil*

Similarly Mercie talks of her position as a highly educated woman working through the Staff Solutions:

What do you think that a girl like me with an LLM from Imperial and a prospective Barrister is doing changing dirty bed linen and washing dishes? I'll let you what, plain and simple, money.

*Mercie, Zambia*

Mikhael talked about how working with Staff Solutions was principally driven by his economic needs as a father:

I do this because I have two little mouths to feed. It's all about them now. If I was still single I could afford to be a bit reckless to do what I love but these kids only got me so I got to take some sacrifice to bring home the bread.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

The workers' expressions of instrumentality further intensified the individualisation and fragmentation of the workforce. Agency workers' expressions of economic motivations meant that positive identities were constructed around the concept of economic independence. Independence was a discourse that was offered by Staff Solutions (chapter five) and rendered employees increasingly susceptible to the regulatory mechanisms used by Staff Solutions.

Instrumentality was also constructed against the negative constructions of migrant workers. Many of these ideas are inherited from neoliberal attitudes suggesting that the 'benefits culture' was an unacceptable means of survival. The migrant agency workers tended to

legitimate their employed status as being self-sufficient and having economic independence rather than relying on benefits for survival. For these workers, being a migrant only served to exacerbate the need to constitute themselves as economically self-sufficient and therefore engage in identity work. Christina had explained her thoughts regarding working in the UK as a Romanian migrant:

A lot of comments I get is this idea that I am just here to get benefits, for a free house and free money but they are so stupid. First of all I'm Romanian so we were not even allowed to come here freely (Romania's full membership in the EU did not come about until January 2014), so even if I wanted to take benefits I can't. Then people say I married my husband because I want the nationality and then to claim benefits. Well that's 100% not true because it was my husband who came and begged me to marry him when I had a good life and good job in Spain. Basically I want to tell all the people who been thinking like that to fuck off! I earn my money and I work bloody hard for it, harder than most of these British are working. I been working since I'm 14. It's just not in my nature to rely on someone else to just give me money.

*Christina, Romania*

Zalia expressed similar sentiments towards the notion that EU migrants come to the UK to claim benefits:

I didn't come here for an easy ride at all, I came here to work. I'm not expecting other people to pay for me; we don't have that thing in my country [Portugal]. It's not in my mentality to have something for free. It's just not how I was brought up to think.

*Zalia, Portugal*

John also drew on his moral understandings of self-sufficiency and his dislike of the 'benefits culture':

I do this work because I need the money and because I couldn't find work anywhere else. There's a whole bunch of shit that flies around saying immigrants are taking all the welfare but for most of us we just don't agree with that. I don't even like that shit anyway. I've lived in USA where you can get some welfare cheques but it's not anywhere near as much as here and then Lithuania I don't think they even have welfare there. All I'm searching for here is an honest living. To go to a country where I know the language, to get a job and earn a living.

*John, America/ Lithuania*

Mihaela also noted that claiming benefits would was not of interest to her:

I work very hard here, since the day I arrived in the UK. I know what a lot of people think about Romanians, it's because of the gypsy, they come and they take everything with the benefits and never work. I paid all my taxes and everything which I'm so

happy to do because I am working here and I'm enjoying the country and you know my boy he's in school here so it's fine. Even if I hate agency work and I want to leave I don't expect anyone to pay for me or for my son.

*Mihaela, Romania*

George expresses similar sentiments towards the dominant understandings of migrant workers in the UK and his need to dispel this myth:

Lots of people think that migrants are here to get benefits, especially me coming from Greece people thinking we got recession so we will come to UK and take benefits, free house or whatever. But the reason I am here is because I can find a bit of dignity through work, no matter what it is. Imagine in my country I have two Masters and can't find a job, there's no dignity in that. At least I stand on my own two feet and say I pay my bills and don't ask no one for nothing, I don't care if I'm cleaning toilet to do that.

*George, Greece*

Agency workers expressed that their key rationale for engaging in agency work was their need for economic independence. Migrant agency workers talked about this need to find work given that they had a strong conviction against 'claiming benefits' and dis-identifying with the negative stereotype of the villainous migrant. Such views seemed to have emanated from moralistic notions, often connected with their national identities, dignity and self-pride. This view could also be seen as a way in which the more positive aspects of agency work could be highlighted given that agency workers were able to develop self-esteem through self-dependency. Although this construction of the self as economically self-sufficient served to valorise individual self-understandings, it also meant that agency workers engaged in competitive behaviours buying into the regulatory discourses offered by Staff Solutions (chapter five) in order to increase the efficacy of their instrumentalism.

Although Staff Solutions workers are seen to craft alternative meanings for their own identities, these fail to substantially challenge the power relations in the tripartite agency worker/Staff Solutions/contracting organisation relationship. Moreover these negotiations do

not change agency workers' material circumstances significantly. Rather this identity work creates a highly fragmented and individualised workforce, through discursive differences, backstabbing and snitching and through expressions of instrumentalism. This sense of individualism as well as the highly competitive attitudes and transactional relationships expressed by agency workers are complicit with Staff Solutions desires for competitive, individualistic, self-sufficient workers (as discussed in chapter five) and thus may be seen as an extension of compliance within this discourse. The following section considers how workers negotiate multiple discourses in order to dis-identify with their identities as agency workers in search of more legitimate selves.

### 7.3. Negotiating Selves: Dis-Identification, Identification and Relational Identities

In Staff Solutions agency work and the collective identity of agency workers therefore offered workers little opportunity to create positive identities. This section explores the complex negotiations that agency workers engage in to create a more valued version of the self. For migrant agency workers national understandings and past careers were often used as a way through which more 'authentic' versions of self could be constructed.

#### 7.3.1. Understanding Work through National Discourses

What became apparent during my time with Staff Solutions was that the interrelationship between work and self-understandings were intersected with cultural understandings of gender and class. In particular, national identity was integral to the subjective experience of agency workers. Samjeeta considers how her national identity is in conflict with the work she

engages in. She explained to me that being from India meant that she had particular struggles in coming to terms with being employed in such work:

Basically back home these kinds of job and all are not really seen as good, it's like a really low class thing to do and I come from a good family and high Caste so they think it's so bad to do this kind of work. It's like a servant work somehow. I'm not lying but in India I'm like a queen and I don't think the people understand that, like we have workers and all [housemaids and drivers]. That's normal thing in my country especially for middle class people. That's why it is so hard for me to come here and work like this. It's not me being stuck up it's something to do with my culture.

*Samjeeta, India*

Similarly Tariq talks about his difficulties with engaging in agency work because of his cultural experiences. Tariq draws on multiple cultural understandings of race, gender and class to suggest that he is unable to identify with agency work:

You know what our countries are like [referring to middle-eastern countries] there is some shame in a man cleaning or doing dishes. OK it's normal for the black people<sup>20</sup> to work in these jobs but not white people<sup>21</sup> [like me]. But you know it's something I have to do just for a time – there is a bigger plan because I'm a business man at heart and this is what is getting me there.

*Tariq, Morocco*

Cynthia talks similarly about the cultural ambiguities between her gendered understandings in Uganda and in UK. For Cynthia, identity as a Ugandan woman meant that agency work has been a particularly hard pill to swallow:

If I tell people back home that I am serving on tables they would be absolutely shocked. We don't do work like this in Uganda, especially girls. I don't know what it is or why but we just don't consider it nice, like you speak to lots of people and you're serving - it's really not a job for a girl.

*Cynthia, Uganda*

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<sup>20</sup> The exact term Tariq used was 'ghareeb' which directly translated means 'strange' or 'stranger.' This is taken to mean black people in the Arabic language – it is quite obviously loaded with normalised racialised stereotypes.

<sup>21</sup> This always struck me that Arabic immigrants consider themselves to be white, probably given that many of the immigrants into Middle-Eastern countries come from sub-saharan Africa or from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan or East Asia and therefore are noticeably darker in skin tone. However, in the UK this distinction loses its relevance.

Hameed an Iranian PhD student also expressed that his national and cultural understandings of gender, class and profession often caused him to experience tensions in working with Staff Solutions:

*Hameed:* This kind of job is not really for me, in Iran we won't do such a job unless it's your own business - then it would be ok. I don't tell my family I do this because they see it as something shameful.

*Chloe:* Why would it be shameful?

*Hameed:* Many reasons, first I am a man so we shouldn't be cleaning and doing the dishes, this is a woman's work. Second because I am from a good family, I have education and people [Iranian people] would be asking why the hell this guy is going to bring his class down.

*Hameed, Iran*

Hameed was mainly concerned about how people from his own cultural background would understand him. His cultural understandings of the work and his self-evaluations meant that he saw himself as incompatible with his gendered and class constructions. Such views were often more regularly held by the non-European migrants such as those from Africa and the Middle East. However, Europeans tended to talk about how the nature and professionalism of the work is transformed in the UK. Mario refers to how gendered constructions of men and women between Portugal and the UK make it more difficult to be an agency worker and engage in certain activities:

There are certain things I don't like and people here call me sexist and things but in Portugal a man will not do the dishes or cleaning, it's a woman's job. So I don't want to do those jobs. I'm a man, you know what I mean? Waiting on tables is also very different in Portugal. It's very expert job and respected. If you say you are a waiter in my country people will be impressed and consider you to have a good career. People don't realise that over here if you say 'I'm a waiter' they see you as a really low class person.

*Mario, Portugal*

Similarly Christina commented on how the idea of professionalism is subverted and changed between the UK and Romania:

Waiting is a professional job in Romania. The waiter he will just take orders and talk to the kitchen then the waiter's assistant will do the running with plates and cleaning

and all those things. And you train for maybe two years then you can become a waiter. Here anyone can be the waiter and waiter means you do cleaning and dishes and just about anything even one place I cleaned the fucking toilets (laughter). So I say I'm a waiter to my family but if they saw what I'm actually doing they will laugh and say, 'no this is not a waiters job.'

*Christina, Romania*

The agency workers thus saw the quality of work and ability to identify with agency work according to their specific cultural understandings of gender, race, professionalism and class. The discomfort expressed with work was largely to do with the way in which agency workers culturally constituted their work. This coupled with the treatment agency workers were subjected to (chapter six) meant that agency workers constructed alternative, preferred versions through which they could identify.

### 7.3.2. Careers, Interests and Identification

In the context of work, agency workers also negotiated preferred versions of the self by dis-identifying with agency work and drawing on their careers and interests as a source of self-understanding. Fiora explained to me that her other activities were more fundamental to her self-understandings:

Well as you know I have my massage therapy work, so I have my own room and clients come to me for all kinds of holistic and alternative therapies, I also have my dance and exercise groups- those are not running at the moment, but I think I'll start up my Zumba class again soon. I do the belly dance in Abo Ayal (name of a local Arabic restaurant), but that's just one night a week. So I got loads. The thing is Chloe, for me is that agency work is like a necessity and a last option which is why if I meet someone I don't say I'm a waitress because I'm not - I'm a healer, a dancer and an artist.

*Fiora, Greece*

Christina who was solely employed via Staff Solutions suggested that:

I am a cocktail waitress by trade, I tell you Chloe I had my dream job in Benidorm; I worked in the busiest bar in the busiest hotel in the area. I was nonstop, I loved it. Good people, good weather, nice tips. Now I'm a wife, you know I have to slow down

and my husband wouldn't like me to stay out all night flirting with the punters (laughter). So at the moment I'm working for Staff Solutions but not forever, I think I'd like to teach languages, I'm good at that, I speak Spanish, Romanian and English. There's got to be a market for that.

*Christina, Romania*

Dinesh, an agency worker from India had recently resigned from his former position as food and beverage manager for one of the local chain hotels in Cardiff. In a conversation we had on the car journey to a shift in Bridgend he explained that he was not in fact an agency worker, rather he was using agency work in an enterprising way:

*Dinesh:* I don't want to sound stuck up or condescending but I'm not an agency worker. This isn't me. I'm a manager. You can't imagine how frustrated I feel when I got some jumped up 20 year old telling me the way things should be done when I can see what they telling me is totally wrong. I'm a problem solver not a doer.

*Chloe:* Yeah I can imagine. So are you going to stick it out for long?

*Dinesh:* For me it's not about the work. I'm using agency work to figure out the places I actually want to work in. I don't want to get another job in a place like my last so I'm quietly doing my research. Then I'll leave when I'm ready.

*Dinesh, India*

Zalia also talks about how her previous work experiences are more indicative of 'who she is' than her employment at Staff Solutions:

This kind of work I'm doing now? No, that's not me. Many people think when you work in an office you stay and not do nothing - it's not true. I like doing paper work, I like learning more that's why I don't like to work in the shops every day it's the same work, it's the same thing- and in the office it's different every day, I help with the lawyers, every day I do a bit more. My boss she used to say the only thing you missing is the course because you know how to do everything. I like jobs that you have to be smart, you to be intelligent - you have to do real life thing. Not with shops, putting something here and there. I don't like physical work; I like to use my mind.

*Zalia, Portugal*

Mikhael also draws on his passion for music as a source of identity:

The thing is I am an artist and a creator - I love music, using my hands to create something beautiful. Sometimes I feel like this job is like a coffin, you know what I mean? It's closing me in, taking me away from the life I want to have so I keep these reminders [points to tattoos of instruments and scantily clad pole dancers on his forearms] to bring me back to the person I am.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

To agency workers the work they engaged in could only seldom be drawn upon as a positive source of identity, workers searched for self-understandings through an expression of alternative interests or aspirations. Not only did they not identify with agency work but also they expressed facets of explicit dis-identification. There were myriad ways in which agency workers chose to subtly challenge the rules through tiny violations of the dress code. They often bent the rules around uniform in order to convey a distinct, non-organisational identity. As chapter six shows, the rules and regulations surrounding agency workers uniforms were stringent and served as a marker of marginal status and organisational non-membership (section 6.4.1). Mikhael had mastered this subtlety and figuring out ways to display his musical interests while ensuring negative feedback wouldn't reach Adrian.

Mikhael's physical appearance conveyed his passion for rock music, his forearms were covered with tattoos that depicted a guitar, musical notes and naked dancers (he once told me that the naked lady on his right forearm was his ex-wife when she was young and beautiful) and had wind tunnel piercings<sup>22</sup> through both of his ears. Instead of black shoes he wore a leather 'rock-style' boot with large silver buckles and wore belt with a large metal buckle engraved with a picture of a naked lady. Mikhael would come to shift, tattoos covered, trousers rolled down, shirt draped over belt buckle, yet where he felt that the shift leaders were lenient, or he wasn't being constantly observed, he would adjust his uniform by tucking in his shirt to reveal the buckle of his belt, rolling up his sleeves to display his tattooed forearms and tucking in his trousers to parade his studded buckled boots. Mikhael thus artfully displayed a preferred version of self in work, while working within the confines of the rules set out by the contracting organisations. Mikhael explained how important clothing was as a form of self-representation in an interview:

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<sup>22</sup> Piercings which are about 1cm in diameter

Whatever I do in life I always like to be different, I never been that person who just did the same as everyone or wore the same, so really no, the uniform doesn't work well with me. I have to make it my own, show myself and my personality. I'm a musician, a creator; I have to be artistic a bit.

*Mikhael, Morocco*

Thus for Mikhael, dress was an extension and expression of his identity. Lenira was also uncomfortable with how the rules surrounding uniform didn't allow her to express what she considers to be attributes associated with femininity and professionalism:

When I moved to France I got a great life I was in the bank and wearing suits every day and painting my nails, I felt like really I'm a sophisticated woman. Now this work [with Staff Solutions] my hands are always ugly, always in water so my nails don't grow anymore. I always smell like cooking smell because they said no perfume, I'm feeling so disgusted from myself. From time to time I spray a bit of Chanel no 5 and paint my nails red to remind myself that I am still Lenira.

*Lenira, Brazil*

Femininity and uniform seemed to be conflicting notions amongst many of the women agency workers. Christina had explained that she had felt almost androgynous in work which is part of the reason why she made an effort to wear make-up, nail varnish and jewellery:

I suppose I hate feeling like I'm not a woman. When I was working in Benidorm it was like I would dress and feel sexy to go to work. Put nice make-up and wear my hair down and men would actually look at me and flirt. I felt attractive. I hate the way this black shirt makes me feel and we're not allowed to do anything, no make-up, no hair, no nails, no rings, no nothing. It's like not being a woman or a man. So now I do break the rules, I paint my nails a very light colour and mostly nobody notices, I put make-up but natural. You know it's nothing so big it just makes me feel better about myself.

*Christina, Romania*

Mihaela was a little more forthright about her uniform. I had noticed that throughout my time working via Staff Solutions Mihaela had always kept her nails long, they were quite often painted and she always wore around five or six rings. She wore heavy make-up to work and insisted on wearing quite large earrings – although they were rarely drop earrings. I had asked her how she felt about the uniform rules:

I wear jewellery, I love my nails to be long and I like to wear make-up. I keep to all the other rules, but these are the things I love, I'm not going to change them for work – they will have to change me first. I'm not doing anything dangerous, I do my job and I do it well, but if I keep to all the rules they tell us I should just become a nun.

*Mihaela, Romania*

What was striking about Mihaela is that she had managed to forge some kind of understanding amongst the contracting organisations that she was regularly posted at. Mihaela was an extremely hard worker and had accumulated many years of experience in hospitality and with Staff Solutions. In this case the organisations had allowed her some discretion in return for her willingness to participate. However there were other organisations that would not forfeit their authority on uniforms to which Mihaela was never sent back. She explained to me:

I've been working with Staff Solutions for almost four years now. I know all the places and they know me and I have a bit of a strong relationship with Adrian. So he knows where to put me and he knows where I should avoid. I had my times in the first few years where I was always in trouble but I proved I'm a hard worker and I know my job very well, so some places they will say OK she wears rings but she's going to get the job done and work harder than any of the others.

*Mihaela, Romania*

Other agency members were not so fortunate and had not been afforded the same level of tolerance as Mihaela. Fiora explained to me that she often liked to decorate her hands with henna tattoos or wear bindis, yet the uniform was restrictive. She explained to me that:

*Fiora:* Although I'm not Indian or Arabic I'm so influenced by those cultures I feel like it's a part of me. My ex used to get embarrassed because I wear a bindi or something and sometimes he told me he doesn't want walk with me in the street but that's why he's now ex. But anyway that's not the point, what I wanted to say is that there will always be things that trying to make me to a square when I'm a circle and working in Staff Solution is one of them but I always try to stay myself and show myself which is through my dress. I can't wear exactly what I want at work but I try to make some small adjustment to uniform.

*Chloe:* What kind of adjustments?

*Fiora*: Like I wear my crystals, look [points to a piece of black leather with a piece of jade attached tied around her neck] or henna or some nice jewellery.

*Fiora, Greece*

For agency workers uniform was used as a mechanism through which they could dis-identify with their work and the organisation grasping onto what they saw as more authentic versions of their selves. This has the effect of unearthing the perceived contradictions between agency work and self-understandings. Thus resistance around uniform was not used so much to get back against the agency or contracting organisation but as expressions of self – to distance themselves from the agency worker identity and to emphasise how they are more than this.

Workers often reflected on their past jobs or interests considering them to more accurately portray their identities. This was further materially constituted through the ways workers often broke rules on uniforms exhibiting material displays associated with gender, nationality or interests. The workers also used national identities as a source of critique of the organisation which was a way in which they could valorise their self-understandings, the most salient example of which emerged around the way workers talked about food.

### 7.3.3. A Relational Achievement: Food, Nationality and Identity

Agency workers often spoke of food not only in negative terms but also in a relational way, to emphasise their negative understandings of the contracting organisation. As suggested in chapter six, the allocation of food was used as a way to delineate an agency worker's marginal and subordinate status within the contracting organisation. However, the ways in which agency workers talked about food often served as a way to undermine contracting organisations and position themselves in more valorised subject positions. Working in the catering industry meant that food was the source of the organisation's income; therefore the quality of the food served could depict the overall quality of the organisation. This is

illustrated by the way Mario spoke about the food that was served in the Radley Hotel. The Radley prided itself on the quality of its food and cooking, however Mario contradicted this view,

Do they really call this five star dining? The food had no class or finesse – I worked in five star places and they will never serve this crap. But that was in Portugal where people love food and like to taste the food not breath [inhale] the food (unlike in the UK).

*Mario, Portugal*

Mario uses his national understandings of food to distance himself from both the organisation and the customer. Similarly DJ talks about his experiences of food in the UK in contrast to that in Nigeria:

OK in Nigeria we don't make the food like a painting with that big white plate and three little carrots and a mouthful of meat and say there's your £25 meal. In Nigeria the food is big it may not look so classy but everything is tasty and when you finish you feel like damn that was a good meal. Here all the flavours don't matter as long as it looks pretty on the plate.

*DJ, Nigeria*

Fiora also talks about her experiences with food in similar terms, constructing differences between food in the UK and food in Greece:

I don't just say this because I'm Greek and I think all things Greek is the best. There are lots of stuff I see better over here, but food is not one of them. Here the food has no flavour. It's like where is the garlic, where is the rigani?

*Fiora, Greece*

Fiora refers to the differences in food, pointing out that British tastes and cooking skills are not as well developed as her national cuisine. Pankash further draws attention to the seeming lack of skill that chefs have in the UK:

A chef is a prestigious title in India – not anyone is a chef, no. You can call yourself a chef when you have a lot of years of experience but until that point you're a cook. In here I found anyone who put a white apron on and knows how to use a microwave is a chef. In the Sunnyville Inn all the chefs look like 16 years old and they can barely make a toast because it doesn't use the microwave. Why should I call them I chef?

*Pankash, India*

Pankash refers to differences in relation to skill between India and the UK to distance himself from the contracting organisations. These kinds of discussions regarding food often happen

during shifts, in retaliation to the food allowance being withdrawn from agency workers. On one shift Amal, a student of mixed Omani/Kenyan heritage explained:

They think they are pissing me off by not allowing me to have food, but seriously if I wanted to eat cardboard I could go to the food recycling area and have a feast.

*Field notes: 24.09.12*

This comment was made when agency workers were not allowed to eat the 'left overs' from a banquet in the Marble Hall. A tension around food was also experienced when agency workers were given food by client organisations. In one incident in the catering division of a large office, agency workers had been allowed to eat from the 'left-overs' of a buffet after the regular workers had taken their share. Christina and Mihaela, who were both working, each took a plate and stacked it high with food. They both dissected each item on their plate, tearing it to pieces, tasting small parts and then throwing it in the bin. After virtually the whole plate had been tossed in the bin, Christina commented:

I wish they don't offer us, everything is disgusting. I don't know how they can give that to people to eat. British people don't know what is the good, tasty food anyway so they put whatever for the buffet.

*Field notes: 27.06.12*

Christina and Mihaela saw this as an opportune time to reinstate their status within the organisation, drawing on national difference to denigrate the contracting organisation. The relational aspects of agency workers identity negotiations position their own tastes and understandings of food as superior to that of the contracting organisations. Agency workers therefore attempt to redress their denigrated marginalised positions through national identities.

This section has demonstrated the multiple negotiations through discourses of nationality, gender, personal interests, career aspirations and dress/ self-presentation that agency workers construct to distance themselves from agency work and the contracting organisations. This is

somewhat ironic, for as suggested in chapter six, contracting organisations also actively discourage workers from identifying with the organisation. Thus in dis-identifying the agency workers inadvertently maintain their compliance with Staff Solutions and the contracting organisations, constructing themselves as an instrumental, individualistic workforce.

So far the thesis has placed great emphasis on the myriad of ways in which agency workers are controlled through their work. However, this is not to say that there was little evidence of resistance. As has already been seen, there are many examples of pockets of self-expression but these largely serve to reinforce practices of control. In this following section, workers' resistance will be focused on in more detail, together with a consideration of the effects of such resistance on both the agency and organisations as well as the workers.

#### 7.4. Overt Resistance and Acts of Misbehaviour

Agency workers were by no means entirely compliant with organisational and agency demands. There were a myriad of everyday practices through which agency workers resisted their marginalised and subordinate positions and prized some autonomy. These forms of resistance were often mundane, routine and discreet, operating 'below the surface' and therefore unlikely to be noticed. This section discusses the many small acts of resistance that I became aware of during my time at Staff Solutions. They included stealing goods and petty pilferage, stealing time and space, resisting participation, and small acts of direct confrontation. This is not an exhaustive list as these everyday forms of resistance made up the rich tapestry of working life within Staff Solutions.

Resistance within Staff Solutions was neither revolutionary nor collectivised, where it was detected it was thwarted quickly either through removing the agency worker from the Staff

Solutions books or demoting them down the bitchlist. Both the regulatory effects of the bitchlist as well as the insecure position of agency workers meant that resistance was often covert, practiced at the level of the individual, and for the benefit of that individual. This reflected the individualised nature of agency workers and the instrumental attitudes discussed in section 7.3.2. Indeed much of the resistance that I observed, experienced and participated in was ineffective in altering or shifting the existing power relations, yet it was often important for the individual's sense of self.

#### 7.4.1. Stealing and Petty Pilferage

Stealing from client organisations was commonly practiced amongst agency workers, however the extent of this varied widely. Quite often agency workers would pilfer small goods of negligible value to the organisation, such as food, coffee, stationary, sauce sachets, cutlery or table decorations. There were however occasions where workers would take items of greater material value. Higher value items were of course enticing to workers if they had a monetary value and could be used or resold, however they were more difficult to take offsite and where detected may result in criminal action being taken against the workers.

One of the more surprising incidences occurred on a summer event that was held in a marquee where four agency staff had been contracted to serve champagne and canapés. We had been asked to set up the marquee for drinks service, polishing champagne flutes and laying tablecloths whilst the regular workers went to take a break. Mario had been given around 20 boxes each containing six bottles of Bollinger champagne. He had been directed to set up the champagne reception and ensure that all of the guests' glasses were filled at all times. While setting up the champagne table, Mario scanned the area for regular employees.

When he found a quiet moment he edged one of the champagne boxes out of the marquee shuffling it along the floor with his feet and concealed it under some bushes outside. He did this completely undetected by regular workers (I had been laying napkins and nibbles around the marquee so had observed the whole event). At the end of the night, we left the premises engaged in conversation about occurrences, annoyances and general evaluative accounts of the night. I asked Mario how he found the shift. Unknowing that I had observed the whole event, he responded in a jubilant tone, 'well it was really quite good.' Curious as to why he seemed so elated I asked, 'oh how come?' He edged closer to me so that neither Tariq nor Dave (other agency workers) could hear and whispered, 'keep this to yourself but I've got six bottles of Bollinger waiting for me in a bush - I'll come back to collect it later.' Seeing the look of disbelief on my face he chuckled, 'well no one is doing us favours around here; we have to take them for ourselves' (*Field notes, 15.08.12*). Mario saw his actions thus as rectifying the inequities of agency work and as a way of taking control over his own material circumstances.

A similar incident had occurred with Tariq, although not on such a grand scale. We had been working for a catering company that had an event running for close to 300 people. The caterers had brought a refrigerated van with them containing perishable items. This was also stocked with food for an event they were hosting the following day. Tariq had been asked to get the cheese to prepare cheese boards for the tables. On searching the van he realised that there was extra cheese stocked in the van. As he unloaded the van he managed to conceal a huge 4kg wheel of French Blue cheese which he placed just outside the marquee. He later retrieved the cheese shoving it in an oversized sports bag he had brought with him. He later told me, 'that's pay back for all the lunch breaks I've never been given' (*Field notes,*

27.06.12). Tariq's act was motivated through his need to settle a personal score, the benefits of which were received at an individual level<sup>23</sup>.

There were however many more accounts of misappropriation of items that had very small tangible value. For example, Christina would often collect decorative shiny beads or tiny crystals that were scattered over tables in events like weddings and parties. She would search for them after events and fill her pockets with them even where the caterers stated that all wedding paraphernalia should be collected and returned to them for safe keeping. Another would be Mercie who would take regular trips to the guest bathrooms in hotels in order to use the complimentary scented hand cream or George shoving sachets of tomato ketchup, mayonnaise and mustard that he found in the various venues into his pockets suggesting that, 'someone at home will use them.'

Cynthia, on a shift in the Cartown office staff canteen, would take the small long-life cartons of milk, explaining that 'I don't even use them but you never know when someone will need a coffee at home.' These incidents baffled me at first, taking things that seemed to have negligible use or value seemed illogical. However, most of these items were taken in an opportunistic manner and in speaking to workers it was clear that stealing was often considered as a reassertion of own autonomy or a redress to the poor treatment received whilst in work. Similar to the observations made by Lundberg and Karlsson (2011) in their ethnography study on housekeeping in a Swedish hotel, they suggest that lack of dignity was a key catalyst behind workers fiddling and stealing. Like the agency workers in Staff Solutions Lundberg and Karlsson (2011) noted that although many of the stolen items

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<sup>23</sup> I was fortunate that my position as a researcher meant that agency workers seldom saw me as a threat and therefore were willing to divulge their activities to me. The distrust fostered amongst agency workers meant that if workers considered me an agency worker then I would be also considered a potential threat to their position on the bitchlist.

seemed useless (things such as 'do not disturb' signs), workers felt that 'getting away with it' was apt retribution for the bitterness they felt over their working conditions (p.146). The observation made of Staff Solutions workers were similar to these – the lack of collective identity, coupled with the lacking dignity made stealing more an issue of redress rather than resistance. These acts were not practiced in isolation - agency workers also engaged in other activities which sought salvage some control over their conditions.

#### 7.4.2. Stealing Organisational Time and Space

As discussed in chapter six, contracting organisations quite often tightly controlled space and time which meant there was seldom opportunity for agency workers to congregate or collectivise. In this context, agency workers found novel and inventive ways to create free spaces. Free spaces were physical areas of the organisation which agency workers could relax in, talk and participate in non-work related activities; therefore in colonising space, organisational time was also used. When agency workers were scheduled for large dinner events, it was rare that they were permitted to enter the back of house regions (section 6.5.1), however these larger events were usually held in big dimly lit halls which presented opportunities for agency workers to gather and chat.

On one shift in Orchestra Hall we had been ordered to remain in the banqueting hall and await the guests with our hands clasped in front of us. The shift supervisor had asked that we remain standing near our assigned tables so that we were readily available should any of the guests need anything. As the guests started to arrive the agency workers slowly began to move toward the darkest corner of the room where they congregated, slouched against the wall and engaged in quiet conversation. I had been standing with Mihaela, Fiora, DJ and Mehn and we all engaged in hushed chatter about how tiresome work was that day, how

disorganised the shift had been and how work had been difficult to come by recently. One of the guests from Mehn's table started searching around for a member of staff. Mehn noticing this commented, 'what the fuck does he want now – can't he see I'm chilling here (*Field notes, 07.10.2012*).' Laughter broke out amongst the small gathering acknowledging the irony in his statement. Mehn as if he suddenly switched roles, stood upright, positioned his hands in front clasped together and walked over to his table stating, 'can I help you Sir?'

The appropriation of space was made more possible in larger venues where agency workers could easily get lost without management realising. These spaces, however, were still within view of the customer, which meant that a delicate balance had to be achieved between talking whilst remaining on guard. On a shift in the Mayflower Hotel I had congregated with a group of agency workers at the outskirts of the banqueting room, while engaged in conversation, Curtis had neglected his table, and one guest, who was particularly aggrieved, complained to the supervisor that it had taken over 10 minutes just to get some attention. Stealing space was risky, yet it gave momentary respite and an opportunity for agency workers to vent their frustrations. However, agency workers simultaneously ran the risk of being outed by peers who may run tales back to Adrian. This meant that such collective complicity was contentious and only occurred on occasions.

More often agency workers tended to congregate in was the smoking areas. Most of the agency workers I had met through Staff Solutions were smokers, yet smoking breaks were never permitted by the contracting organisations. Smoking therefore became a contentious issue and the source of much anxiety amongst many agency workers. However workers became particularly adept at evading management surveillance in order to have a cigarette. This involved a collaborative effort between smoking agency workers which meant they had

to work together despite the general distrust of one another discussed in section 7.2.2. This collaborative effort was only operated amongst smokers and meant that a contentious divide was formed between smokers and non-smokers. Fellow 'smoker' agency workers would figure out how to exit a building without being detected and pass on this knowledge to other smokers. For example, when working in the Radley hotel, it had become shared knowledge that one of the fire exit doors out of the kitchen was not alarmed. This meant that agency workers could get in and out of the building undetected by management. In order to manage a break system, agency workers formed a sophisticated network of smokers who developed a schedule of cigarette breaks coupled with a set of convincing excuses to account for those who had gone to smoke.

On one occasion in the Radley, Mario had exited the building for a cigarette break. He had been gone for around five minutes when the food and beverage manager Alan had noticed his absence. Alan approached Sergio another agency worker and asked him where Mario had gone. Sergio responded with a well-rehearsed, 'I think he went to get a tray to collect glasses' (*Field notes, 09.12.12*). On another occasion Mihaela and Christina had worked together in the Sunnyville Inn where they had told the manager that they were taking toilet breaks. This collaboration between smoking agency workers however caused a new set of tensions which sought to divide the smokers and non-smokers. Non-smoking agency workers often noted that they would be all too happy to reveal the smokers' network to management. Steve spoke about this during an interview:

I really don't like that smokers get a lot of breaks. I think it's unfair for us the ones who don't smoke because we don't have people to cover us. If the supervisor finds out and stops them I'm not going to feel bad about it because they don't feel bad about leaving us to do all the work.

*Steve, Benin*

As mentioned earlier agency workers were highly fragmented and status as a smoker merely provided another resource which could be drawn upon to divide workers. Furthermore, non-

smokers had some incentive to ‘snitch’ on smokers in order to win favour within the contracting organisations.

The toilets also offered a place where agency workers would gather in order to evade work. They had the added benefit of offering a legitimate excuse for disappearing whilst remaining out of the gaze of the customers, organisational members and other agency workers. For example in the Radley hotel, Mercie had commented to me on one shift, ‘I’m going to the toilet; I got to take the weight off my feet, come let’s go sit for a bit (*Field notes, 04.04.12*).’ Mercie and I went to the guest bathroom; I sat on the hand basin counter and Mercie on a toilet with the seat down and door open. It was on these occasions that agency workers would complain about the shift, about supervisors and about other agency workers.

Samjeeta urged me to join her going to the toilet on a shift in the Sunnydale Inn. Once we got inside, she checked all the cubicles were empty and then started a tirade over the various annoyances that had occurred that day and how she had not come to the UK to do something she wouldn’t even consider doing back home in India (*Field notes, 10.08.12*). Similarly, Christina had pulled me into the toilets in the Trinity Conference Hall to tell me about a recent argument she had with Mihaela and how difficult it was to work with someone that intolerable. Agency workers used these spaces to express frustrations or merely to shirk work, however these were always contentious and one had to negotiate surveillance by customers, supervisors and other agency workers in order to claim space or time. These spaces were undetected by the contracting organisations. However there were other instances where agency workers would use more overt forms of resistance, yet these instances came at the cost of a workers position in the bitchlist.

### 7.4.3. Resisting Participation

Agency workers would quite often resist their work in other more obvious ways through either working to rule or going slow on their assigned duties. Finish times of shifts were often the source of great contention; this was because it was often left ambiguous by Staff Solutions which meant agency workers were unable to plan the rest of their day or evening. Adrian was responsible for arranging shifts – this would involve a text and e-mail the day before the shift informing workers of the start and approximate finish time. Adrian would always state that the finish time was approximate – a safeguard for when the contracting organisation decided to alter the finish times.

I had been working in the Radley on the breakfast shift with agency workers Mercie, Mihaela and Lenira, we had been booked out until 12pm by the Hotel. After serving breakfasts, Davide the shift leader explained to us that he expected the whole of the restaurant floor and buffet to be cleared out, cleaned and set up for lunch, then the back of house and room service to be completely cleaned down and set for the rest of the day. Given that breakfast finished serving at 11am and the room was not entirely empty until 11.30am this left less than one hour of paid time to finish all of these tasks. This had happened on around five consecutive shifts when we ran over on time, yet we were never paid for this. On one of these shifts Davide had been particularly unpleasant and informed us that he wanted us to organise the glass cupboard in addition to our other tasks, but we would still only get paid until 12pm. Mercie exclaimed, 'I'm not doing it – that will be an hour of unpaid work.' Mercie and I decided that we wouldn't stay any longer than 12pm, so when the time arrived we got our coats and bags and presented Davide with our timesheets for him to sign off. He looked perplexed and questioned whether we had finished everything. I exclaimed, 'no we haven't finished everything, but we only get paid until 12pm so that's when we will finish.'

He begrudgingly signed the timesheet but threatened that he would be ‘speaking to Adrian about our slacking.’ Mihaela and Lenira had refused to leave before the work had been completed, both explaining that they did not want to get into trouble with Staff Solutions because they needed regular shifts (*Field notes, 27.06.12*). This generated greater tensions between agency workers as a united front against Davide may have persuaded him to pay us for our time – we felt that the compliance of Mihaela and Lenira reinforced the exploitation of agency workers.

On another shift I had been sent with Christina to a restaurant located on a national park. The restaurant was heavily under staffed. Trying to save on costs, the restaurant had called in only two agency workers to cover work of five. We had worked for six hours on a blisteringly hot day, without a break or even a drink. We were due to finish at 4pm; however the crowds of people demanding tables did not subside, and it seemed highly unlikely that they would let us leave at our finish time. Christina told me, ‘they are going to ask us to stay on, but I’m not staying – they haven’t even given us a drink all day.’ I agreed and as we got to 4pm we collected our belongings and handed our time sheets to the supervisor. The supervisor said, ‘you can’t leave now, you haven’t finished everything.’ Christina was very quick to come up with a fabricated excuse, ‘well you see the thing is we are paid by the hour not by the job, and we have another shift in Cardiff at 5pm so we need to get there. (*Field notes, 12.07.12*)’

Agency workers also resisted certain tasks they had been assigned. This resistance ranged from a ‘go slow’ on activities to all out refusals to participate. Quite often agency workers would work at a very slow pace on the less tedious activities, such as cutlery or glass polishing where they were allowed to perform the activities out of the gaze of customers. There were many examples of this, one of which was on a shift in the Mayflower Hotel. We

had been assigned to polishing glassware which was to be performed in the back of house area. One of the regular workers, Warren, was asked to supervise us to ensure that we were performing our activities correctly. However, this did not prevent Cecilia from going slow on her activities. After 20 minutes of polishing she had only managed three glasses, while the rest of us had finished around two crates of 25 glasses each. Warren had left the room to collect more dry clothes to polish with when Cecilia whispered, 'guys slow down – the quicker we finish them, the quicker we have to go back outside and work.' The group did not slow down their polishing activities despite Cecilia's pleas. Instead, later, Zara and Laura, two other agency workers, complained that they 'couldn't stand' working with Cecilia because they had to pick up her slack throughout the shift (*Field notes, 16.11.12*). Many of the Agency workers' efforts to resist work stimulated further divisions between the workers, where a worker was considered to be slacking or evading work they would often be labelled as lazy and were often reported to Adrian.

There were other ways in which agency workers modified or limited the amount of work they performed, however these tended not to generate antagonisms amongst workers as they had no implications for the work of others. This resistance was individualised and usually gave greater autonomy over the way in which agency workers performed their work. In one venue, the Marble Hall that hosted banquets and large catered events, silver service came as a standard. This meant that agency workers were given the task of getting the meat, vegetables and potatoes from heavy metal flats<sup>24</sup> onto the guests' plates. This sounds simple enough, yet workers had to do this by using spoon and fork held between the thumb and forefinger to lift the food whilst balancing the extremely heavy, hot, large flats on an oven cloth on a workers forearm.

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<sup>24</sup> Term used to describe the metal trays meat was served on

Moreover we were instructed that we need to, 'get in really close to the plate to serve,' which meant that we would have to contort our bodies and virtually squat over the plates in order to serve. In the Marble Hall there was only a limited amount of serving cutlery which meant on the larger events there was just enough to go around the group. Quite often agency workers would hide the serving cutlery usually by dropping it behind furniture, radiators or putting it into the dirty pot wash so that they would be able to use tongs. Tongs were far easier to use, these didn't require any skill or precision. Of course, this meant that agency workers had some control over the ways in which tasks were performed and a little relief over the challenging nature of the task.

Other examples of this kind of sabotage were ubiquitous amongst agency work. For example, I noticed that John would give guests normal coffee instead of the requested decaf in the Radley hotel because he would have to walk to the other side of the restaurant to fetch the decaf sachets or, Mikhael who would uncork wine bottles at the bar rather than at the guests table (as instructed) as he saw it as extra work. These forms of resistance only served to modify the ways in which work was performed, often self-serving as it made agency workers jobs less strenuous but also gave them autonomy over how they got the job done. This kind of resistance was rarely detectable and seldom threatened one's position on the bitchlist.

An outright refusal to participate in tasks also occurred on occasions, yet refusal to engage in certain tasks quite often resulted in direct confrontation and conflict between agency workers and contracting organisations (which inevitably led to demotion down the bitchlist if not sacking from the agency). A tension that often arose amongst agency workers concerned dishwashing duties. Many agency workers vehemently refused to participate in dishwashing

given that it was considered to be a degrading and subordinating activity (section 6.3.1.1). At the Trinity Conference Centre, Christina had been asked to ‘stay on top of the dishes’ all day. She was forthright in her objections; she asked Gareth, the head chef and catering manager, ‘have you booked a KP<sup>25</sup> for today, because I was told this is a plate waiting job.’ Gareth replied, ‘I need one of you to do the dishes, can you just sort it out between yourselves?’ I acquiesced, and accepted the job. Christina later came to speak to me about it, she explained:

Listen I’m sorry about leaving you with the shit job but I can’t stand doing it – it makes me feel like I’m going back, not forward. In Romania plate waiting is a profession but here it doesn’t mean shit – if you’re a plate waiter you’re as good as a dish washer.

*Field notes, 30.05.12*

Later when Mikahel noticed that I was dishwashing he questioned me in Arabic, the translation of which was, ‘what are you doing? You’re Arab and you’re doing the work of an African!’ Being familiar with Arabic culture these kinds of racist attitudes towards Africans are fairly ubiquitous probably because many of the workers in low-wage subordinate work in the Middle East are migrants from East Africa. Their cultural constructions of race and work (section 7.3.1) played an integral part in organising the work and constituting what work is suitable.

The confrontational resistance was often considered as simultaneously reckless and admirable. It was reckless, because of the adverse effects that would materialise through the perpetrator’s position on Adrian’s bitchlist. Admirable, because of the acknowledgement that these individuals had resisted what was often considered to be subordinating treatment. An example of overt resistance can be drawn from a shift I worked for Pegasus Caterers. There had been eight agency workers booked to serve at a three course dinner for around 150 guests. When we arrived we were asked to assist in setting up the function room, which just

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<sup>25</sup> Kitchen Porter

involved putting cutlery, glasses and napkins on the tables. After around 30 minutes, Diana the catering manager of Pegasus, called us in for a briefing. She began with the usual protocol, ‘right we have 150 people in tonight, serving three course meals, it’s a salmon roulade starter, lamb main and we are offering either a chocolate bomb or a lemon zabaglione for dessert. Normal snake service<sup>26</sup> and I’ll assign you each tables to clear. Is that all ok?’ We all nodded in agreement. She then said, ‘oh yeah, one more thing we don’t have a KP on today so can one of you lot volunteer to do the dishes?’ A deathly silence that fell upon the group, each member tried to avoid eye contact with Diana in the fear she would interpret it as some agreement or acceptance of the task. She scanned the group and then pointed to Mario who was preoccupying himself with picking nails and said, ‘right can you do them please?’ Mario looked startled and then responded in a matter of fact way, ‘no actually I can’t, I am a plate waiter, I’m not here to wash the dishes.’ Mario pulled his crumpled timesheet from his pocket and pointed to the part that said ‘plate waiter.’ Diana looked shocked over being challenged and said, ‘are you refusing to do it?’ Mario responded, ‘yes, I am refusing to do a job which I was not sent here for and didn’t agree to. Get someone else to do it; I’m not touching the dishes.’ Diana then told Mario, ‘listen if you’re refusing to do them then I have no use for you here, you can get your things and go.’ With that Mario raged, ‘you fucking cowboys can pay me my four hours for wasting my fucking time.’ As he left the building he kicked the standing shelves full of pots and pans which made a huge clamour. We all stood in amazement not quite believing how quickly the situation had erupted.

Diana was clearly taken aback that her authority had been challenged, and quickly fought to re-establish her supremacy over the group by assigning the dreaded task to another of the agency workers. She picked up the apron used for dishwashing and threw it towards Mikhael

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<sup>26</sup> Snake service refers to a style of food service where all the staff follow one another and put down the plates as they arrive at a table.

stating, 'right you can do them, and no objections or tantrums like your friend.' Mikhael almost instantly threw the apron back at her directly in her face, before she could even react Mikhael ranted, 'you get a fucking KP in to do your fucking dishes, you don't ask your waiting staff, learn how to manage your business love.' With that Mikhael grabbed his bag and stormed out of the building. The remaining six of us waited for what would happen next.

Diana marched to the kitchen to consult her husband, the owner and head chef of Pegasus Catering. When she returned she ordered that we all go and continue with putting the finishing touches to the room. Diana ended up doing the dishes that evening, probably in fear that she would be left to serve 150 people alone. Mikhael and Mario had risked their position on the bitchlist - going without shifts for a few weeks and also having the effect of saving the rest of us from dishwashing activities (*Field notes: 16.08.12*). Mikhael and Mario had drawn fairly distinct boundaries between plate waiting and dishwashing, they had engaged in negotiations between what was acceptable work and what was unacceptable, considering KP duties to have negative impacts on their self-understandings. For them, these kind of duties is where they would draw the line. Through this confrontation, they regained autonomy over their work but this came at the cost of being excluded from shifts for the next few weeks.

A similar display of anger was displayed in the Marble Hall on what we had been told was a VIP shift. In-house caterers, supervised by a woman called May and her partner, head chef Matthew, ran this shift. There had been a slight disagreement on the shift with regard to removal of the side plates (this was not uncommon as it was practiced differently in just about every place I had been posted). In some venues it was thought that the side plates should be removed with the starter plates, others preferred them to be kept on the table until after main course and others wanted them kept on the table until the cheese course.

Depending on the quality of the briefing that agency workers were given at the start of shift this could potentially be the source of a great deal of confusion. May had given no instructions with regard to the side plates, so on clearing the starter plate's agency workers began to clear the side plates. When we were half way around clearing May realised that side plates had been taken off the table. She began frantically shouting, 'oh for fuck sakes haven't any of you worked in catering before, side plates stay on for main.' Christina had heard her angered tone and responded, 'we weren't given instruction with regard to side plates, so we just do as we know.' May rolled her eyes and we continued with our work.

Later Tariq came into the kitchen, he had around ten plates and cutlery piled in his arms. As Tariq clambered to put the plates in the sink a few pieces of cutlery slid off the plates which produced a loud crashing sound. Matthew, the chef, commented in an audible tone to May, 'don't call Staff Solutions again they are all incompetent.' On hearing this, Tariq threw a dish cloth at Matthew which knocked his chef's hat off. He then walked up very close to Matthew and commented, 'listen fat boy, I've watched you dribble in the food for the past two hours and you're calling me incompetent.' Matthew shouted, 'get the fuck out of here; I'll be speaking to your agency about this.'

In an interview with Tariq I had questioned him over the incident:

*Chloe:* So do you ever really resist in work? Are there ever times that you could call your actions or things you say resisting?

*Tariq:* No not really, I just get my job done and go.

*Chloe:* What about that incident in the Marble Hall when you walked out? Do you consider that as resistance or something else?

*Tariq:* (Laughs) Oh yeah, that wasn't resisting. I wanted to do my job, but I'm not going to have someone telling me I'm shit the whole time. Some people think its ok to

talk about you like you're not in the room or like you're less than a human. I don't know, I'm usually good at keeping it inside but that was too much for me that day so enough I had to say something. They can't just think its fine to speak to agency workers like that.

*Tariq, Morocco*

This kind of overt refusal to participate was not labelled resistance by Tariq, rather a reaction to the kinds of treatment he received as an agency worker. What was interesting about these more overt forms of resistance is that they were generally considered to be not only acceptable but even commendable by other agency workers. Stories like this became legendary, notable and were often passed on when agency workers gathered on shift. Yet there was perhaps a more devious reason why such acts were considered admirable amongst other agency workers. Given that open confrontation would either result in agency workers' relegation down the bitchlist or complete expulsion from the agency this kind of resistance did not threaten the position of the others, rather it strengthened it. The detrimental nature of this resistance is clear, however, there were occasions where refusal to perform tasks was made possible through drawing on competing discourses to challenge requests.

During a breakfast shift in the Radley, Davide had ordered Mercie to stand on a chair and clean the tops of the fridges (they stood around 7ft high). Mercie refused this job; she explained to Davide that she was neither insured by Staff Solutions, nor by the Radley, so if she had an accident she would not be able to claim compensation from either party. Given that he had only given her a chair to stand on, it would be far too risky to complete the task. Unless he had the correct safety equipment she would not clean the fridges. Davide urged Mercie, 'come on Mercie, I need them clean.' However Mercie refused suggesting that he would be an irresponsible manager to make her perform such an unsafe task. Davide was unable to argue with her, through drawing on the health and safety discourse Mercie was able

to question Davide's identity as a responsible manager - she had seemingly won the small battle that had unfolded within the confines of the kitchen.

However, later that shift Davide, determined that Mercie was to clean the fridges, went in search of a step ladder (rather than asking one of the regular workers who were insured) so that Mercie could complete the requested task. After around 30 minutes Davide returned with the step ladder. He proudly asserted to Mercie, 'look I have your step ladder, now make sure I don't find a speck of dust on top of those fridges.' Mercie responded, 'thanks for getting that Davide, the safety of your workers should be of imperative importance to you at all times.' Davide continued to revel in his 'win' over Mercie's refusal to complete the task, yet what he was yet to realise is that this was to set a precedent for the performance of future tasks on the breakfast shifts in the Radley (*Field notes, 27.03.12*). Overhearing this debate on safety, Mihaela, Lenira and I began to draw on this discourse in order to negotiate the tasks we were made to perform. Prior to this point Davide would ask us to clean the mirrors behind the hot-plates on the breakfast buffet. This would involve climbing on work surfaces and tiptoeing around the hot plates in order to polish the mirrored walls behind them. Since Mercie's conflict with Davide all three of us refused to perform such a dangerous task citing that we were not insured and would not be compensated if a workplace accident happened. This overt yet subversive resistance provided agency workers with a way in which to negotiate tasks without causing conflict either with other agency workers or with the contracting organisations.

Thinking more holistically about the nature of observable resistance it seems that resistance emerged mainly in individualised and covert forms. Stealing or pilfering was usually enacted for an individual's own material gains and was rarely spoken of openly for fear that fellow

agency workers would seize the opportunity to snitch on them and better their own position on the bitchlist. Agency workers' stealing of time and space was on occasions collectively exercised, however more often than not it produced greater fragmentation prompting further discord between agency workers. Shirking duties quite often produced resentment amongst agency workers who expressed their annoyance at having to pick up the slack of others. However where the resistance was more overt and confrontational in nature, this was viewed as admirable or commendable by agency workers, perhaps because the visible nature of such resistance meant that the perpetrators were punished for their actions. Discursive strategies of resistance, like those displayed by Mercie were perhaps the most effective in escaping or evading duties, however I had only observed these being exercised on a few occasions.

Resistance in Staff Solutions was more often than not self-serving and reflected the wider identity project of agency workers as individualised and hyper-competitive. Resistance enacted at the individual level did little to contest the prevailing power relations or challenge the stigmatised collective identity of agency workers. Rather, resistance was effective only for the individual and often at the cost of the wider group.

## 7.5. Conclusion

This chapter has considered how migrant agency workers understand and negotiate the subject positions offered by Staff Solutions (chapter five) and the contracting organisations (chapter six). It has focused on how agency workers identify, dis-identity or renegotiate a multitude of discourses in order to craft a more positive version of the self. For migrant agency workers, this identity work was informed by and interlaced with national identities, identities as migrants in the UK and work based identities. Individuals were seen to distance their selves from the stigmatised collective identity of agency workers through material

practices (section 7.2.2), national discourse (sections 7.2.1, 7.2.3 and 7.3.1) and narrative of self as instrumental (section 7.2.3). Furthermore migrant agency workers also dis-identified with their work, drawing on more positive subject positions through embodied forms and talk in order to valorise self-understandings (section 7.3). For these workers, nationality and previous careers were central to how identities were negotiated and became a way through which identities could be seen as relational and where aspects of agency work could be decried. Finally observable resistance reflected the wider power relations and identity work of agency workers – it was by and large individualised and drove greater contentions and conflicts between workers (section 7.4).

In summary, identity work among agency workers was individualistic and self-serving; it made the way for more positive self-understandings at an individual level but did little to alter the collective negative identity of agency workers. This individualistic, self-serving nature of agency workers that dis-identified with many aspects of their work or organisation is hardly surprising, as discussed in chapters five and six, the discourses emerging from Staff Solutions and the contracting organisations aim to craft agency workers as just that. Thus the identity work of migrant agency workers may be seen to reflect but also reinforce the wider dominant discourses of these organisations. Agency workers constitute their own identities within the confines of the dominant discourses that produce appropriate agency subjects.

The following chapter discusses the findings of chapters five, six and seven in relation to the identity literature. In this chapter specific contributions are made to the identities, migrant worker and agency work literatures.

# 8. Discussion and Conclusions

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## 8.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the contributions that this thesis offers to the wider literature on identities, migrant workers and agency work. The chapter begins by revisiting the literature that was critically explored in chapters two and three, highlighting gaps in knowledge that this research seeks to address. Following this, a summary of the theoretical approach, an overview of the empirical study, as well as the aims of the research set out at the start of the thesis, are reiterated. Drawing on the findings of this thesis, the contributions made to the concepts of identity regulation, identity work, and the utility of identity in providing a more nuanced account of migrant agency workers is discussed. The concluding part of the chapter provides details on how the study provides insights for policy and practice, as well as setting out an agenda for future research. Finally, the chapter closes with a reflexive consideration of the wider project, together with a discussion of its limitations.

## 8.2. Theoretical Approach and Aims

The thesis has three interrelated aims to: understand ways in which migrant agency workers constitute their identities in the context of work, through considering the discourses they draw upon in constituting the self; critically explore how employment agencies and contracting organisations are able to harness workers as compliant subjects, considering the ways through which these organisations attempt to influence identity formation; and examine how migrant agency workers construct salient and legitimate understandings of their selves, and the consequences this has on their day-to-day experiences.

Chapters two and three provided a broad overview of the literature on identities, migrant workers and agency work. In critically exploring this literature, a number of areas where further knowledge was required were outlined, providing the theoretical impetus for this thesis. As discussed in chapter two, the organisation studies and critical management studies literatures have well developed understandings of identity. Much of the critical literature draws on a Foucauldian informed framework, which acknowledges the constructed and fragile nature of identities to develop an understanding of how identities are formed and contested through practices of identity regulation and resistance (termed identity work).

This literature has, however, provided little empirical exploration of the identity related effects on migrant and non-migrant workers engaged in temporary forms of employment. Most of the research on identities in organisations has concentrated on professional and managerial workers, with low paid, temporary workers a neglected cohort. Similarly, while there has been a considerable amount of research looking at the influence of collective identities of gender and to a lesser extent sexuality and disability in the workplace, research on the experiences of workers where the intersections of ethnicity, race and religion, along with other identity categories is sparse, and thus, such experiences are still poorly understood. In view of this, the literature on dirty work and stigma was reviewed, to gain some insights on how identities are formed in subordinated and low skill work. These studies provide some insights into how stigmatized identities are renegotiated and reformed in the context of the organisation (e.g. Toyoki and Brown, 2014). Yet, this literature seldom explores how these stigmas are formed through work, and how they are negotiated on an everyday basis through talk and practice.

Chapter three turned to the literature on migrant workers and agency work. The migrant worker literature provided an insight into the identity challenges migrants face both at work and in society at large. The literature primarily focuses on how migrants are able to craft their identities from the multitude of discourses that become salient through migration. The largely interpretivist accounts of migrant identities in this subset of literature suggests that identity work is undertaken in a somewhat unfettered process, with the more critical aspects of migrant work as a micro-political struggle (Thomas and Davies, 2005) being underplayed or ignored. Furthermore, the research on migrant workers, often concerned with labour market movements fails to consider the everyday experiences of migrant workers in the context of the organisation, and how talk and unfolding practice on a day-to-day basis informs an individual's self-understanding and with what material effects.

The agency work literature has similar deficiencies, scarcely considering the dynamics of organisational practices and daily operations with workers' self-understandings. Although this literature has explored identities to some extent, focusing on how the context of work formulates a layer of insidious discipline for workers, little is understood about the identity work of those involved in low skilled agency work.

In summary, based on these three subsets of literature there remains a limited and undeveloped critical appreciation of the detailed organisational experiences of migrant workers in agency work and how these experiences are affected by, and affect, identities. Based on the analysis of these three intersecting literatures, the current study aimed to provide greater understandings into the complex processes through which migrant agency workers constitute their identities through their day-to-day experiences. Drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, power and subjectivity (Foucault, 1972; 1980;

1981), outlined in chapter two, the study conceptualises identity as being constituted through discourse, open to contestation and change and therefore constructed on an on-going basis. The critical Foucauldian concepts of power and discourse are considered as intertwined, where power is understood to circulate through discourse. Discourse is constituted by material and discursive practices that formulate systems of thought (Mills, 2003) through which individuals identities are formed, sustained and constrained (McNay, 2000).

Discourses therefore serve to be both constitutive and disciplinary of identities; they condition at any one time and place, not only what is considered wrong or right, ideal or flawed but also what is possible. However, discourses are never fully constraining, given that they are multiple, conflicting and intersecting. Moreover, individuals resist certain discourses vying for their attention, in the crafting of preferred self-understandings (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). A Foucauldian analytical framework thus utilized, offers a power sensitive analysis that acknowledges individual agency as well as discursive constraint in the processes of identification.

Drawing on this framework a twelve-month ethnography was conducted in the hospitality section of an employment agency 'Staff Solutions'. Staff Solutions is a well-known national agency that supplies temporary workforces to a multitude of organisations. Within this twelve-month period, I participated fully as an agency worker, being signed up to shifts and performing the same work as my fellow agency workers. This provided me not only with depth and richness of experience but also with the opportunity to get to know the agency workers in Staff Solutions.

## 8.3. Contributions

This thesis offers three contributions, which provide greater insights to the current understandings of identities, migrant labour and temporary employment. Firstly through taking an identities lens, the thesis has provided new insights into the control and regulation of migrant agency workers. Secondly, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced depiction of migrant agency workers' identity work. Thirdly, the thesis sheds new light on how experiences of stigma and liminality are constituted and contested at the level of identity.

### 8.3.1. Controlling Identities

The first contribution concerns worker regulation and control and the insights gained from taking an identity lens. This study throws light on how migrant agency workers are regulated through the enterprise discourse (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2007; duGay, 1996; Rose, 1989; Vallas and Cummins, 2015) and the promotion of competitive, self-regulating and flexible selves. There is a great deal of research that demonstrates the relevance of identities to organisations seeking to co-opt their employees' compliance (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Although theoretically well developed, this literature seldom considers how identity regulation and control may also operate in the context of low-wage/ low-skill employment or for those in temporary work. Furthermore, while the literature on temporary work considers the challenges of control through complex third party contracting relationships (Garsten, 1999; Gosset, 2002; Smith, 1997), there has been no consideration given to how identity regulation may play an integral part of the process of control of (low paid) agency workers.

This study offers theoretical and empirical insights into the identities literature illustrating how organisational interest in controlling workers' sense of self is as relevant to low-wage,

temporary workers as it is to those involved in high skill and professional types of work. Furthermore, through taking an identities lens, this study has also thrown light on how remotely located, third party contracting organisations are able to craft a compliant workforce.

Through an analysis of the multiple and complex layers of control emerging from Staff Solutions and the contracting organisations, a composite picture was given of how an enterprising discourse emergent from a multitude of material and linguistic practices crafts compliance from migrant agency workers. In Staff Solutions these practices included the 'bitchlist' which created competition amongst the workforce and thus stimulated peer surveillance (Sewell, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992) and over-recruitment, which had the effect of individualising agency workers and crafting them as competitive, flexible subjects that were compliant with the desires of the agency. Thus the workers exhibit the identity of 'the enterprising-self', where flexibility, competitiveness and individualism are considered normatively desirable (Beck, 1992; duGay, 1996; Fournier and Grey, 1999; Gee, 2000).

In relation to the workplace locations, migrant agency workers were given little opportunity to identify with these organisations. Chapter six illustrates how rather than co-opting agency workers identities in order to gain their commitment, contracting organisations used multiple practices, including the management of space, naming practices, uniform rules, and task allocation to emphasise their marginal and subordinated position so as to ensure *dis*-identification. Agency workers' interactions with workplace organisations were thus limited to specific work-related transactions.

These findings offer a number of contributions. First, in antithesis with much of the organisation studies literature on identity regulation as a form of organisational control (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Knights and Morgan, 1991) which has focused on the ways in which organisations attempt to co-opt the identities of their employees in order to increase their commitment to the organisation, this study highlights how organisations also engage in identity regulatory practices to encourage *dis*-identification. Given the temporary nature of the agency work, contracting organisations have no desire for commitment; rather, they wish to establish a transactional encounter.

The agency workers in the study constructed their identities in instrumental terms. In chapter seven migrant agency workers referred to themselves as economic beings, engaging in work merely as a means to an end. Unable to construct salient and positive identities from organisational discourses, they more readily identified with the economic or social capital benefits of employment rather than the employment itself. In addition, being a migrant agency worker offered little appeal as an identity resource from which to claim a sense of self, given that it was a subject position constituted through negative, denigrated and subordinated terms. Chapter five illustrates the ways in which agency workers were complicit with organisational demands, exhibiting their flexibility, competitiveness and willingness to take on shifts. Agency workers made their selves readily available for work, were disinclined to turn down shifts and were often keen to thwart other workers opportunities to get work. These activities were part of agency workers' wider self-understandings in somewhat individualistic and Darwinistic terms, where competing against and undermining other workers was seen as a necessary activity. Thus, the ideal agency workers as an enterprising subject, crafted by the practices of both Staff Solutions and contracting organisations was effective in crafting self-regulating and peer regulating subjects.

This study therefore highlights the importance of appreciating identity regulation among low paid migrant agency workers – since the particular practices of regulation at play are ones that feed into workers’ understandings of self. In particular, the imperative of entrepreneurialism, while considered in relation to professional, managerial or career workers (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008; Bruni et al., 2014; Cohen and Musson, 2000; Doolin, 2002; Down and Reveley, 2004; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Fenwick, 2002; Vallas and Cummins, 2015) has not been fully appreciated within low paid and temporary work.

This study also provides a more nuanced explanation of how control is achieved in non-standard contractual employment relationships. Studies on agency work have suggested that dilemmas of control exist for the agencies and multiple contracting organisations (Garsten, 1999; Gottfried, 1992; Gossett, 2002; Smith, 1997, 1998) and given that the workers interact with multiple organisations, they are seen to slip through the cracks of multiple systems of control. However, this study has offered new insights into understanding how control operates effectively through the regulation of identities, suggesting that these slippages between organisations are mediated, and remote control is made possible (both through self-regulation and peer surveillance). Despite migrant agency workers’ remote relationship with Staff Solutions and the multiple contracting organisations, their identification with the enterprising discourse served to craft compliance and self-regulation.

Finally as suggested above, the often made assumption that organisations wish to co-opt worker identities to engender commitment is problematised. In organisations that use high numbers of temporary workers, a transactional compliance is evident. This does not, however, mean that these organisations do not have an influence on worker identities, rather

that the contracting organisations encouraged migrant agency workers to dis-identify with the organisation through providing discursive resources to encourage migrant agency workers to craft their identities as individualised and instrumental. Thus, the core assumptions in the identities literature regarding positive and legitimate identities and the desire for commitment are reworked in this context. Contracting organisations and agencies can be seen to work in tandem to reinforce the appeal of enterprising identities through offering no other legitimate sources of self-understanding.

### 8.3.2. Resistance and Identity Work

This study also offers a contribution to understanding the ways in which migrant agency workers craft their identities, taking into account their specific socio-cultural context. The insights provided from this thesis suggest that migrant agency workers engage in complex identity work simultaneously negotiating between the complexities of their employment relationship as well as their identities as migrants. A focus on power and discourse has permitted a more nuanced insight into how agency work bares its effects at the level of identity and how this is negotiated to produce a more legitimate and positive sense of self.

The current literature provides insights into how migrant workers craft their identities through their experiences of migration (e.g. Alicea, 1997; Boyle, 2002; McDowell, 2008; Rogaly, 1998 etc), however as set out in chapter three there was little appreciation of how the mundane practices involved in migrants working lives have effects on migrant workers self-understandings. Furthermore, chapter three noted the paucity in the agency work literature in which identity and agency were undeveloped concepts. This thesis provides contributions on all of these levels through a more nuanced and intricate depiction of the way in which

migrants agency workers' craft legitimate self-understandings in the context of multiple sources of social stigma.

Insights from Goffman's work on stigma, as an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting, that reduces an individual from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discounted one (Goffman, 1963: 3)', can be drawn upon as a concept to understand migrant agency workers' experiences of work. For these workers, stigmatised identities emerged from their position as agency workers as well as their contested status as migrant workers.

Migrant agency workers were able to craft a legitimate self-understanding, refusing the stigmatised identities presented in the workplace and associated with being a migrant. Chapter five describes the ways in which agency workers' collective identities within the context of contracting organisations were crafted as negative, marginalised and subordinate. The production of this marginalised agency worker identity was seen as a result of a number of organisational practices that created a relational identity between agency workers and regular workers – positioning agency workers in a subordinated position. Reflecting on this negative depiction, migrant agency workers distanced themselves from the pejorative collective agency worker identity by drawing on their national, educational, career focussed or family identities. Nationality and culture was particularly relevant and was drawn on as an identity that created distances between the self and other agency workers (section 7.2.1) and from contracting organisations (section 7.3.1 and 7.3.3). Thus, national identity was seen as an integral part of migrant agency workers' positive self-understandings, from which distances between the self and the other could be carved.

Toyoki and Brown (2014) make similar observations suggesting that the prisoners in their study drew on their identities as ‘fathers’ or ‘friends’ to subvert their stigmatised identities as prisoners. However, Toyoki and Brown (2014) also suggest that there is some attempt by the prisoners to reverse this stigma by drawing on the camaraderie and moralistic codes that is seen as part and parcel of the prisoner identity. The current study, however, demonstrates how migrant agency workers’ identity work reinforced the dominant pejorative conceptions of agency workers. Rather than reversing or reconstituting the stigmatised discourse of migrant and agency work (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996 and Kondo, 1991), the workers by and large speak to this discourse, accepting the stigma attached to agency workers, and in doing so reinforcing its power effect, while also distancing their self as separated from the subject position contained therein. Thus, through their identity work migrant agency workers produced an individualised self that may be seen as an extension of the existing power relations, both constructing the self as individualistic and competitive and reproducing the agency worker identity in negative ways.

Chapter seven also suggests that identity work was induced through the awareness of the contested position of being a migrant in the UK. The workers in this study noted that the negative portrayal of benefits migration brought negative meaning to their self-understandings. In opposing this identity, they drew on their work and waged labour to refute these negative subject positions, emphasising their entrepreneurialism, evidenced by their participation in agency work. Furthermore, the ‘bitching and backstabbing’ noted in chapter seven was also seen to function to resist the collective identity of agency workers, through crafting the self as individualistic and enterprising. For migrant workers, enterprising identities offered through their employment with Staff Solutions were notably a seductive and resonant resource in their crafting of a legitimate identity. However, migrant agency workers,

through their distancing from the stigmatised migrant subject position served to reinforce it. Furthermore, through seeking a more legitimate sense of self through enterprising identities also reinforced the asymmetrical power relations.

Distancing or dis-identifying with stigmatised or spoiled identities has been noted in other studies, serving as a strategy to repair fractured identities (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Osborne, 1997; Toyoki and Brown, 2013). Similarly, in this study, migrant agency workers engage in identity repair work, distancing themselves from ‘stigmatised identities’ (either as migrant or agency worker) and pinning their selves to more acceptable discourses. However, the literature pays little attention to the ways in which this identity work serves to reinforce the prevailing asymmetrical power relations that subordinate migrant workers. Furthermore, through crafting more acceptable selves (as enterprising selves), migrant agency workers become complicit with Staff Solutions and speak the discourse and engage in the discursive practices that serve to constrain them. Although the enterprising discourse is seen as cathartic to migrant agency workers, identification reinforces the power asymmetries between Staff Solutions, contracting organisations and migrant agency workers.

In summary, this study presents an understanding of how the interplay between discourses offered through low wage agency work and migrant identities induces identity work and identity repair. The focus on power relations highlights the ways in which migrant agency workers reflect on the negative subject positions offered at an organisational or societal level and distance themselves through drawing on more positive discourses to craft a legitimate individualised identity. Furthermore, this study has also highlighted the detrimental consequences that migrant agency workers identity work can have, through leaving unchallenged and reinforcing the prevailing negative identities of migrant workers and

agency workers by drawing on this as a resource to craft the relational self. It is finally suggested that migrant agency workers, in seeking legitimacy, attached their identities to the enterprising discourse, thus this study provides an in-depth insight into how enterprising discourses can both serve to constrain and emancipate migrant agency workers – acting as a positive and negative source of identity.

### 8.3.3. A Nuanced Account of Migrant Agency Work

This thesis also provides valuable contributions in providing a more nuanced account of migrant agency workers' experiences, through drawing on an identities analytical framework. As suggested in chapter three, the previous research on migrant workers and agency work had given little attention to understanding the workings of power relations and everyday experiences in organisational settings and the impact this has on migrant workers' understandings of their selves and material circumstances (e.g. Colic-Peisker, 2005; McIllwaine et al., 2006; Vives-Gonzalez, 2011). Whereas other studies have been concerned with structural power, there has been less insight given to migrant worker agency and the negotiating or resisting around power relations (e.g. McDowell et al., 2007). The analytical framework drawn on in this thesis drew on the concepts of power, discourse and identity to gain a greater appreciation of how identities form within the intersections between social, organisational and individual discourses. Taking into account both power and agency, the thesis has focused on the constitution of workers' identities as a product of various organisational discourses circulating in specific settings.

A focus on identities has raised attention to the experiences of stigma and liminality and how these inform and are informed by, the self-understandings and material circumstances of migrant agency workers. The concept of stigma can be drawn upon in order to gain greater

understandings of how migrant agency workers negotiate the multiple negative identities that arise as a result of being an agency worker and being a migrant worker. As discussed in chapter six, migrant agency workers understood their positions within contracting organisations to be marginalised and subordinated, and in chapter seven they understood the identity migrant workers to be one that was negatively constituted in society. As Toyoki and Brown suggest, 'stigma operates to marginalise an individual resulting in that person being disqualified from full societal acceptance' (2013: 2), which indeed these workers experienced both in the context of the organisation and within society more generally.

Through conducting ethnographic research, greater insights are given into how stigmatized identities are complexly constituted and negotiated by migrant agency workers. Previous studies have suggested that stigma emerges from employment, blemishes on individual character (unemployment, illness etc.), race, gender, age or religion (e.g. Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Gabriel et al., 2010; Howarth, 2006; Storrs, 1999 etc) or perhaps from multiple facets of identity (e.g. Cornish, 2006; Dodds, 2006; Farrimond and Joffe, 2006). Yet, within these studies stigma is seen as having essential qualities, with the person being stigmatised as a result of being associated with one of these categories. However, rather than being seen as essential, migrant agency workers' construction of stigma was multiple, relationally constituted and bound by context. Through this more intricate understanding of the complexity of stigmatised identities, insights are also given into the negotiations within identity work, and how stigma may be simultaneously a source of positive and negative meaning for individuals, in relation to, and constituted within, various contexts.

For migrant agency workers stigma was emergent from various facets of identity, yet the dominance of these stigmatised identities was contingent on the spatial location and the

relational other. In the context of the contracting organisation, the collective identity of agency workers was stigmatised in relation to regular workers, which was reinforced by the artefacts, spatial entitlements and discursive practices that sought to constitute agency workers as marginal in the context of the organisation (chapter six). In order to distance themselves from the stigmatised identity of the agency worker, the participants constructed an entrepreneurial, instrumental and individualistic self (section 7.2.3). However, in the context of wider society, stigma arose from the dominant pejorative construction of the migrant. Migrant agency workers in this context distanced their selves from the negative migrant identity through drawing on their identities as workers although this more positive identity emerged from the same stigmatised employment they simultaneously tried to distance themselves from in the context of the organisation. Thus for migrant agency workers a stigmatised identity in the context of the organization becomes a source of positive identity in the context of wider society.

Through considering the complex and fragmented nature of how stigma is constituted and understood by agency workers, the very notion of labelling a job role, nationality, ethnicity, etc. as stigmatised becomes problematic. This is because individuals constitute their identities relationally and contextually thus a stigma in one place may not be in another, a stigma amongst one group may not be amongst another group. Given that stigma is considered a social process (Toyoki and Brown, 2014) an awareness of the other and the context is relevant as individuals are reflexive to the others' acceptance of a legitimate identity (Howarth, 2002). The ethnographic nature of this study has therefore enabled a more detailed understanding of the multiple contexts through which migrant agency workers understand and negotiate stigmatised self-understandings.

This study also contributes to the current understandings of liminality in the identities and temporary work literatures. The contributions offered through this study question whether autonomous liminal spaces exist in agency work, suggesting that liminality is better understood as a discursive resource for identity work. Through drawing on identity as an analytical framework and through considering the concepts of identity regulation and identity work, greater understandings of the way in which the concept of liminality is constituted and contested by migrant agency workers are provided. A focus on identity regulation, questions how far liminality as a concept can be applied to all agency workers, and how organisational attempts to regulate workers' identities may effectively fetter the liberation, flexibility and freedom assumed in some studies, to be derived from occupying liminal spaces (Garsten, 1999). This study suggests that the concept of liminality in the context of migrant agency workers is better understood as a powerful resource for identity work rather than as a space.

The concept of liminality has been applied to understanding agency workers' experiences of their temporal relationships with contracting organisations. Drawing from Turner's seminal work, 'liminality is a social space that is 'betwixt and between' the original position arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony (1977: 95).' This concept has been used to describe the experiences of agency workers where the rules and conventions adhered to in various organisations were vastly different and required agency workers to assume a constant state of fluidity (Bauman, 1995; Sennett, 1998). Garsten (1999: 603) drew on this concept to suggest that temporary workers experience 'some of the interstructural and ambiguous characteristics of liminality'.

The agency workers in this study may be considered to exhibit some of the characteristic described by Garsten (1999), given that their contracts with organisations are often temporal

if not fleeting (section 5.2). Agency workers were shifted from organisation to organisation and therefore were in a constant state of indeterminacy (section 5.3.2). In this situation Turner (1982) suggests that participants find themselves being temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure, which both weakens them since they have no rights over others, and liberates them from structural obligations. Turner (1982) takes a structuralist understanding of regulation, yet through considering how subjective regulation operates, questions are raised with regard to emancipatory possibilities of liminal spaces for workers and thus the problematics of control for the organisations. As discussed in chapter five the agency workers noted considerable uncertainty and insecurity in working for Staff Solutions, an insecurity which was recast as an opportunity to be enterprising. For migrant agency workers the liminal identity within liminal spaces between organisations is the enterprising one, where it is down to the individual to exploit their 'freedom' and thus works as a normative control mechanism. Therefore, rather than workers finding the slippages between structures as a liberating experience they were subject to self-regulation and peer regulation through managerially inspired discourses.

Workers in this case, drew on enterprising discourses and became self-regulatory, this was perpetuated not only in the context of the contracting organisation where resistance was individualized (section 7.4) and where workers competed against one another to gain favour (section 5.5.2.2) but also at home where workers commented that they constantly made themselves available to Staff Solutions (section 5.4.2.1). Thus regardless of the complex contractual relationships involved in agency work, the liminal space was effectively eliminated. This is because efforts to regulate identity form an insidious layer of control which craft self-disciplined workers. Workers here are arguably neither betwixt nor between

given that they constructed their identities as an ideal flexible, competitive, enterprising agency worker and therefore self-regulated within the constraints of the discourses offered.

The second point developed here is to suggest that a liminal identity has cathartic and remedial potentials for workers in stigmatised or low-wage work. Returning to the understanding of agency work and workers as stigmatised (as discussed in chapter six), it was suggested in chapter seven that migrant agency workers engage in identity work in an effort to repair spoilt identities. As a part of this identity work, migrant agency workers sought to attach themselves in both the past (locating identities in national discourses, previous careers, moralistic discourse etc.) and aspirations for the future. They reflected both on skills that they had ascertained from home countries where work was preferred and to their aspirations for the future, whether this be more permanent work, self-employment or even to return home with more fluent English (section 7.3.2).

Liminality is seen as an 'inbetween' space, a rite of passage and therefore a process of becoming (Turner, 1987). What is found here is that many migrant agency workers reflect on this rite of passage, suggesting that agency work merely constitutes a means to an end (and thus constructing selves as instrumental). However, through dis-identification with work by and constructing the self as a liminal, instrumental worker, migrant agency workers craft their identities in line with the enterprising discourses offered by Staff Solutions. Therefore, migrant agency workers crafting the self as liminal serves to intensify the seductiveness of the enterprising identity, reinforcing the pre-existing power dynamics. Thus, this study offers contributions to understanding the experience of liminality in the context of agency work, where the analytical focus on identity problematizes the putative liberating potential of occupying a liminal space (Garsten, 1999; Turner, 1982; 1987). Liminality, for these migrant

agency workers is better conceived of as a resource for identity work or a cathartic discourse that provides no material liberation and reduces migrant agency workers to instrumentalism.

Through drawing on identities as an analytical framework, this study has made some progress in gaining a greater understanding of migrant agency workers' experiences of work and has further refined the ways in which concepts of stigma and liminality are constituted. The analysis of discourses circulating at organisational and social level, and how these are negotiated at the level of the individual, has provided new depth of understanding around migrant agency workers' complex experiences of work.

## 8.4. Conclusions

This in-depth study of migrant agency workers has contributed to the understandings of the inner workings of an employment agency. In contradiction to the current understandings of the employment relationship being ambiguous, the findings suggest that the tripartite relationship between the agency, contracting organisations and agency workers offer complementary layers of regulation that is experienced at the level of identity. The regulatory practices coupled with the identity work and resistance of migrant agency workers are reproductive of these relations and serve to grease the wheels of agency employment. The findings further suggest that migrant identities, and the contested nature of their position in public discourse served to intensify the appeal of organisational discourses as remedial to spoiled identities. The vulnerability of migrant workers identities –whether resolute or not– can be seen to be a resource used by Staff Solutions to craft compliance.

#### 8.4.1. A Future Research Agenda

This research could be extended in a number of ways that may provide new insights to the current findings. Firstly, the theoretical insights into dis-identification as a form of identity regulation can be further explored. The burgeoning literature on identity has understood how management seek to encourage workers to craft identities in line with the organisation (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Knights and Morgan, 1991; Hardy and Thomas, 2014). Yet, there is little understanding of the opposite, i.e. how organisations might actively encourage dis-identification. Given that the employment trend is moving towards temporary forms of employment, or increasingly short-term contracts, more research is required in understanding of how impermanence is managed.

The current project suggests that migrant agency workers were susceptible to regulation by the agency and contracting organisation. The need to compete for shifts in Staff Solutions was of fundamental importance to the survival of many of these workers in the UK. These workers were however in the low-skilled, low-paid sector which may mean that their limited labour market power makes compliance with the agency a necessity. In order to consider this in greater depth, contrasting this study with practices of identity regulation and identity work among professional and high skilled agency workers may provide interesting insights. This could aid our understanding of whether agency work or contingent employment is equally exploitative for workers at separate ends of the pay and skill scale. Pharmacists, IT, teaching or lecturing staff may provide an interesting research population, all occupations that increasingly involve flexible, temporary labour yet these professionals often work for very high rates of pay. Furthermore, issues associated with migrant workers' identity work could be further explored through empirical research conducted on migrant workers in professional and high skill roles. This may allow a deeper consideration of the intersections between

national, racial or religious discourses against more positive discourses emergent from work. Finally, a comparative study of migrants in permanent employment and those in agency work would tease out the implications of different forms of work arrangements on migrant workers' self-understandings.

#### 8.4.2. Further Implications of Research: Policy and Practice

The current study provides an in-depth, nuanced understanding of a single temporary employment agency. Although the data is limited to a single case there are a number of policy implications that may be drawn from this research. At present, agency work is regulated under 'The Agency Worker Regulations, 2010'. These regulations serve to protect the interests of agency workers when working within contracting organisations, offering workers access to equal rest breaks, pay, access to workplace amenities with regular employees and no unlawful deductions from wages. My experiences of agency work suggest that these regulations are violated on a frequent basis within contracting organisations. The key issue is that these regulations are largely self-enforced and given that contracting organisations have little interest in offering these benefits and conditions to agency workers, they rarely implement them. Furthermore, there is no monitoring function or external auditing body that ensures these regulations are not violated, and the law relies on agency workers to lodge complaints about contracting organisations to trigger an investigation. However, the findings drawn from this study suggest that agency workers are unlikely to whistleblow on either contracting organisations or their respective agencies for a number of reasons. Firstly, most agency workers are unaware of their rights, and unless workers actively search for the information, they remain ignorant to these laws. Secondly, given that a high proportion of agency workers are migrants this may pose difficulties for workers in interpreting and understanding their rights as workers. Thirdly, even where workers are made aware of their

rights, their tenuous and vulnerable position may disincline them from making complaints. As was seen in this study, any form of challenge results in a loss of work and a movement down the 'bitchlist'. The law can in this case be best described as a 'toothless tiger'; it exists but barely has effects on practice. It may be argued that a more active involvement of the employment agency, monitoring contracting organisations and communicating laws to agency workers would act as a safeguard to agency workers' exploitation. However, there seems little incentive for agencies to work in this way.

The Agency Worker Regulations 2010 also includes the proviso that where an agency worker has been contracted to an organisation for a period of longer than 12 weeks they are entitled to equal pay and treatment to regular workers. This study shows how keeping workers in a particular organisation for long stretches was avoided through practices of over recruitment. Staff Solutions would actively move workers around in order to evade any responsibility that may be owed to the agency worker. Limitations on recruitment may offer a solution to this, given that employment agencies would be able to provide workers with far more consistent work.

Drawing on the findings emergent from this study there are a number of challenges that constrain the strength of regulation and inhibit collective unionization of these workers. Policy is at present largely ineffective and without active independent monitoring and enforcement, it is unlikely that any real changes will ever manifest. Furthermore, the perceived transience of the workers and the inclination towards individualized, self-serving identities makes forming a collective body of workers challenging at best. Logistically, temporary employment poses the greatest challenge to a union's effort to collectivise these workers. Many authors have discussed new forms of community unionism (e.g. Fine, 2000;

Tufts, 1998; Wills, 2001), yet in the absence of enclave communities and where the job market is hyper-competitive, these strategies are unlikely to succeed. With this in mind, regulation coupled with external, independent enforcement seems the only legitimate strategy to ensure that these marginalized workers get a fair deal.

#### 8.4.3. Reflections and Limitations

This study has provided detailed insights into the experiences of migrant agency workers, covering both individual and organisational levels of analysis. The benefit of drawing on qualitative methods and conducting individual level analysis means that the nuances of the organisation life and the implications these have on individuals in context can be closely considered. However, this comes at the cost of being unable to extrapolate findings to the general nature of agency work or experiences of migrant agency workers. Therefore, the ability to draw general conclusions for the experiences of migrant agency workers in low paid work is rather limited. This choice was a negotiation that was informed by the theoretical underpinnings of my study (see chapter four) and also by the literature. The findings of this study may form the basis from which more generalised studies may be conducted.

A further epistemological limitation of this study may emerge from the power that my role as researcher had over the entire project (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2006). Although this was discussed in some detail in chapter four, it is worth reiterating here. As a reflexive researcher I went to considerable lengths to limit or mediate the power relations that emerged during the field work stages of my project. I engaged in a reflexive process in which I found that I was making my own identity negotiations, regulating both my appearance and talk to blend in with the agency workers. However, there was a limit to this, and my position in the field was a contested one. The participants often spoke of me as ‘spoilt’ or ‘a little princess’ and on

occasions 'a bit of a trouble maker.' Although this had an effect over how the workers were able to relate to me, it was also in some ways generative of increased levels of trust. The participants did not consider me to be a threat to their work and were aware that any details imparted to me were bounded by confidentiality agreements. Although this meant I was able to obtain nuanced, in-depth accounts from workers it also meant that I was constituted as a safe confidant but also an 'agony aunt' where workers often off loaded their frustrations. In the awareness that their accounts would be preserved between these pages, the participant used this as a cathartic mechanism. My power over the interpretation and analysis of the workers discourses also may also present a limitation to the study. Given that the project intends to give migrant agency workers' voice there is a contradiction that emerges from conducting ethnography. This ethnography inevitably presents my constructions of the participant's constructions (Thomas and Linstead, 2002), and, unable to avoid this I have incorporated a level of reflexive awareness with regard to the decisions I have made throughout the research process.

My thesis and the story told is also limited by academic conventions. These impose various rules around style of writing, structure of the thesis and the use of theory (Lillis, 1997). I have drawn upon theories in order to help understand the world that I encountered while working for Staff Solutions, however in doing so I made critical decisions over what to include, what parts of the story were most important or relevant and how theory helped to explain this (Hammersley, 1990). I was aware that drawing on theory might smooth over the rich textures of the accounts I collected and therefore presents a compromise. These limitations are perhaps inherent to many qualitative research projects, yet incorporating reflexive awareness helps to mitigate 'shoe-horning' data into neatly packaged theories, or editing aspects of real life beyond recognition.

#### 8.4.4. A Few Final Thoughts

The nature of employment relations in the UK seems to be changing, for organisations that require numerical flexibility the attraction of using agency workers is becoming more pronounced. Thus, organisations have been slowly chipping away at their core workers in exchange for flexible, temporary workers (Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2012). The implication this has for the workforce suggests that workers can no longer expect the promise of permanence or job security. For migrant workers their vulnerability and lack of choices on the labour market makes agency work more probable. However, employment agencies can only maintain this momentum of growth as long as workers choose to engage in such work and are willing to offer their flexibility. If agencies were no longer able to staff organisations with a contingent labour force, then organisations may be forced to reconsider their employment strategies.

This study provides insights into how agency workers are regulated and produced as willing and compliant. For Staff Solutions these strategies meant that workers were uncritical of the nature of agency work, considering it as an enterprising pursuit. Thus, these strategies effectively kept workers reliant on the agency, generating a workforce that is compliant and individualised, manifesting their resistance and frustrations at only an individual level. Workers are as instrumental in perpetuating systems of regulation as the agencies themselves, complicit in the production and reproduction

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of Participants

Name	Nationality	Age (in 2012)	Sex	Race	Religion	Length of Stay in UK (in 2012)	Purpose of Stay in UK	Employment Status	Semi-Structured Interview
<b>Vicky</b>	British	26	Female	White	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Curtis</b>	British	22	Male	Afro-Caribbean	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>James</b>	British	24	Male	White	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Full-time with Staff Solutions – however saving for travelling with Dan	No
<b>Holly</b>	British	19	Female	White	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Casual work with Staff Solutions whilst in full-time education	No
<b>Jessica</b>	British	19	Female	White	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Casual work with Staff Solutions whilst in full-time education	No
<b>Cynthia</b>	Ugandan	20	Female	Black	Christian	3 years	University Studies	Part-time – However required 20 hours a week for maintenance whilst studying	Yes
<b>DJ</b>	Nigerian	22	Male	Black	Christian	4 years	Initially studies, now in search of full-time employment in	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes

<b>Fiora</b>	Greek	29	Female	White European	Greek Orthodox	8 years	UK Economic	Part-time with Staff Solutions- Self-employed as a dancer, fitness instructor and holistic therapist	Yes
<b>Tibs</b>	Hungarian	37	Male	White European	Catholic	7 years	Economic	Part-time with Staff Solutions/ Part-time as a waiter in a hotel	No
<b>Samjeeta</b>	Indian	24	Female	Asian	Hindu	5 years	Initially as student, now in search of full-time employment in UK	In early 2012 in full-time work with Staff Solutions, however towards the end of the year she found a part-time job (12 hours/week) as an admin assistant in a law firm	Yes
<b>Christina</b>	Romanian	28	Female	White European	Catholic	4 years	Married to UK national	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Kevin</b>	British	52	Male	White European	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Full-time with Staff Solutions (20hours/week as office administrator in Staff Solutions and part-time agency work)	No
<b>Maria</b>	Brazilian	53	Female	Mixed Black/ European	Catholic	11 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Mercie</b>	Zambian	32	Female	Black	Christian	7 years	Initially as a student, currently	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes

								saving to start the Bar Vocational Course		
<b>Zalia</b>	Portuguese	41	Female	White European	Catholic	11 months	Economic		Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Nidesh</b>	Ugandan	19	Female	Black	Unknown	2 years	Student		Part-time with Staff Solutions (requires the full 20 hours/ week as sustenance money)	No
<b>Phil</b>	Maltese	42	Male	White European	Unknown	10 years	Married to UK national		Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Mehn</b>	Nigerian	37	Male	Black	Muslim	4 years	Economic		Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>John</b>	Lithuanian/ American	57	Male	White European	Unknown	2 years	Economic		Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Sergio</b>	Portuguese	23	Male	Mixed Black/ European	Catholic	7 years	Economic		Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Sylvia</b>	Ugandan	20	Female	Black	Unknown	2 years	Student		Part-time with Staff Solutions (requires the full 20 hours/ week as sustenance money)	No
<b>Ben</b>	South African	39	Male	White European	Unknown	5 years	Economic		Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Steve</b>	Beninese	27	Male	Black	Christian	5 years	Initially as student, now in search of full-time employment		Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Mikhael</b>	Moroccan	38	Male	Arab	Muslim	8 years	Married to a British national		Initially part-time with Staff Solution,	Yes

								working as bar manager on weekends – later became full-time with Staff Solutions	
<b>Dan</b>	British	21	Male	White European	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Full-time with Staff, saving to go travelling with James	No
<b>Sarah</b>	British	19	Female	White European	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Casual work with Staff Solutions whilst in full-time education	No
<b>Mihaela</b>	Romanian	28	Female	White European	Catholic	6 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Cecilia</b>	Zimbabwean	19	Female	Black	Christian	2 years	Student	Part-time with Staff Solutions (requires the full 20 hours/ week as sustenance money)	Yes
<b>Mario</b>	Portuguese	53	Male	White European	Unknown	8 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Rachel</b>	Indian	26	Female	Asian	Hindu	18 months	Initially as student, now in search of full-time employment	Part-time with Staff Solutions whilst studying, later relied on Staff Solutions for full-time work	No
<b>Cassie</b>	British	18	Female	White European	Unknown	n/a	n/a	Casual work with Staff Solutions whilst in full-time education	Yes
<b>Naser</b>	Moroccan	31	Male	Arab	Muslim	2 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Paul</b>	Maltese	24	Male	White European	Christian	3 years	Initially as student, now in search of full-	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No

							time employment		
<b>Lenira</b>	Brazilian	37	Female	Mulatto (white European, native Brazilian and black mix)	Catholic	1 year	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>George</b>	Greek	34	Male	White European	Unknown	3 years	Economic	Initially full-time with Staff Solutions, later found part-time work with a catering company and continued to work part-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Hannah</b>	Hungarian	32	Female	White European	Catholic	1 year	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Kareem</b>	Bajan	25	Male	Afro- Caribbean	Unknown	4 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Tariq</b>	Tunisian	47	Male	Arab	Muslim	3 years	Married to British National	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Dilpreet</b>	Indian	33	Male	Indian	Hindu	6 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	Yes
<b>Pankash</b>	Indian	36	Male	Indian	Hindu	12 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No
<b>Gloria</b>	Brazilian/ Portuguese	42	Female	Mulatto – European, Native Brazilian	Unknown	9 years	Economic	Full-time with Staff Solutions	No

and Black

## Appendix B: Ethical Approval

### ETHICS 2



#### FULL ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM (STAFF/PHD STUDENTS) or students referring their form for a full ethical review

(For guidance on how to complete this form, please see Learning Central – CARBS RESEARCH ETHICS)

If your research will involve patients or patient data in the NHS then you should secure approval from the NHS National Research Ethics Service. Online applications are available on <http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/applicants/>

Name of Lead Researcher : Chloe Tarrabain

School: Cardiff Business School

Email: Tarrabaincd@cf.ac.uk

Names of other Researchers:

Email addresses of other Researchers :

Title of Project:

Constructing the migrant: an exploration into identity work and identity politics of migrants in the hospitality industry

Start and Estimated End Date of Project: April 2012- September 2014

Aims and Objectives of the Research Project:

- To give voice to migrant workers in low-wage work- question the pejorative discourses surrounding migrants with the marginalised voice of migrant workers
- To explore the meanings attached to migration and the impact of such understandings on migrants material lives
- To explore the intersections of identities and how the meanings attached to these shift through the migratory process
- To understand how migrants gain meaning and draw identities from low-wage work
- To understand how identity gained and manifested in interactions and exchanges in the workplace
- To explore how embodied identities are contested and subverted in the workplace and how migrants may subvert meanings from work as a result of their embodied identities
- To explore the political nature of identity work within the organisation and the political nature of the organisation on identity work
- To gain an understanding of how identities are materialised

Please indicate any sources of funding for this project:

ESRC Studentship

#### 1. Describe the methodology to be applied in the project

The primary source of data collection to be used in this project will be derived from ethnographic

ETHICS 2 (version August 2011)

methods, closely following those methods elucidated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). The site of the data collection will be in two locations both within hotel restaurants. The locations have been selected for their comparative value, but more importantly for their contextual relevance in exploring the research questions.

The researcher will play the role of complete participant in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) taking on an active membership (Adler and Adler, 1987; Monaghan, 2004). Access to the field will be ascertained through working in the hotel in a part-time job- this has been access through an employment agency. The researcher will fulfil the normal duties of a member of staff, using the observations and experiences from the field as a key source of data.

The data collection will last for six months- commencing in May 2012 and finishing in November 2012. It is difficult to say the hours that will be spent in the field given that work through an agency is precarious and often unpredictable. However, this uncertainty will form a valuable source of data. I will record my observations after each shift, given that it is practically impossible to record my observations during the shift due to the sheer intensity of the work, but also because this will be adverse to the interests of the hotel.

**PLEASE ATTACH COPIES OF QUESTIONNAIRES OR INTERVIEW/TOPIC GUIDES TO THIS APPLICATION**

**2. Describe the participant sample who will be contacted for this Research Project. You need to consider the number of participants, their age, gender, recruitment methods and exclusion/inclusion criteria**

Two organisations will be selected in order to conduct the study- these will be hotels in the South Wales region. The hotels have been selected for their comparative value, for the characteristics of the staff population and for their accessibility. The hotel restaurants will substantiate the main site of data collection- this has been chosen given that it forms a context where a superfluity of interaction occur on a regular basis. The participants included within the participant observation section of the data collection will include all of those employed within the hotel or those who work in the hotels and access employment through agencies, although this study will chiefly focus on the interactions and exchanges that occur within the hotel restaurant and catering sections.

**3. Describe the method by which you intend to gain consent from participants.**

For my ethnographic research I will take on the role as an active participation in the field. This stage of the research it will involve me getting a job in a hotel, either through an agency or directly through the hotel. For this stage of the research, no consent will be sought and no disclosures will be made to the hotel or the initially to the staff within the hotel.

**PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF ALL INFORMATION WHICH WILL BE GIVEN TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS (including invitation letter, briefing documents and, if appropriate, the consent form you will be using).**

4. Please make a clear and concise statement of the ethical and health and safety considerations - <http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/index.html> - raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them (please use additional sheets where necessary)

Covert research brings about very specific considerations with regard to the potential harms that may arise during the course of undertaking my field work and in the subsequent analysis and authorship of the collected data. The harms that arise from the research are exasperated where research has not been consented because harm is solely the responsibility of the researcher. It means that organisations and individuals will not be given the opportunity to audit or censor their accounts or provide information that portrays themselves in a favourable light. Thus, as a researcher it is within my ethical remit to ensure that harms that emanate from the research are effectively mitigated. All of the perceived harms to the potentially affected parties will be considered in the table below;

Interested Parties	Harm in the field	Harm in publication
<b>Employment Agency</b>	As a full participant in the field, I will be making observations unbeknown to the employment agency. It may be suggested that this would have implications on the way in which I conduct my work as a full participant in the field as a researcher would usually take down notes and tape record data whilst in the field. The danger in doing such is that the hotels or the clients of the agency would no longer use the agency as a source of labour. The kind of implications that may stem from this is loss of profitability or potential damage to the reputation of the agency amongst its clients. This harm will be mediated by strictly not taking notes or recording data whilst in the field and performing my work as a full participant in the field.	Given that the research is covert and will be conducted without the knowledge and agreement of the agency, a potential harm may arise through reputational damage to the employment agency through publication. As the field work is conducted without disclosure to the participants, this may mean that the employment agencies may be more candid and open about the information they offer, and do little to censor their accounts. The reputational harm to the agency can be mitigated through maintaining the anonymity throughout the research process. This will include assigning pseudonyms to all of the staff within the agency, the name of the agency, the location of the agency and all of those connected with the agency.
<b>Hotel</b>	Similar to the perceived that may affect the employment agency, it is also true that the hotel would be adversely affected where the researcher neglects the normal duties as an employee in order to	The harm in publication chiefly related to potential harms to reputation of the hotel. This harm can be avoided through maintaining the anonymity of the hotel- this would include obscuring the identity of the staff, the location, the

	<p>record data. The harms arising from this in the hotel may mean that the hotels customer service will be compromised, there will be a loss in productivity or that other employees will need to pick up the slack of the researcher. However, all of this foreseeable harm can be circumvented through ensuring that all data is recorded off site. Recording data during shifts would be implausible and impractical given that the shifts are often far too busy to break and that persistent note taking would foster suspicion amongst other employees.</p>	<p>name of the organisation and details such as uniforms, unique corporate structures, etc. Given that Cardiff is home to around 75 hotels, the use of a pseudonym should be sufficient to conceal the identity of the hotel.</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-weight: bold;">APPLICATION APPROVED Research Ethics Committee Cardiff Business School Cardiff University</p>
<p><b>Agency and Hotel Employees</b></p>	<p>If time in the field is spent recording data, due care and attention to the job maybe neglected while working potentially causing an increased work load for colleagues. However, this danger will be negated given that my role as full participant and my non disclosure in the field will mean that I will be acting within the normal capacity of a member of staff. Furthermore, the virtues associated with non-disclosure mean that employees will act within their ordinary capacities- meaning my presence in the field will not bring about any additional harm.</p>	<p>The harm arising in publication emanates from two sources. First, there is the potential to damage employment prospects of those who work in the hotel or through the employment agency. This may be where information or misconduct of employees is recorded and discovered by management which may cause considerable damage to their employment within the hotel. This harm will be avoided by fully anonymising all of the texts- this includes using pseudonyms for staff, for the agency, for the hotels and all organisations in connection with these places.</p> <p>The second harm that may arise is the potential harm to the employees trust. As a full participant in the field the closeness of the relationship between peers may mean that information is imparted to each other that may be private or sensitive. Given that the employees will be unaware of my role as a researcher this may mean that they will not censor their comments and accounts of the workplace. During the course of my field work -and in the stages of writing- I will employ a sense of ethical reflexivity. This will be used in order to evaluate whether the information imparted by the employees within the organisation is sensitive or personal thus shouldn't be disclosed or whether it is relevant to answering the research questions. This reflexivity will also be used to consider whether the information imparted is of potential detriment to the employees. Furthermore, the anonymity of the</p>

		individuals and their related organisations will also be used in order to protect individual interests.
<b>Cardiff University</b>	Given that the research will be conducted without disclosure, the universities reputation will not be put in harm within the field.	Covert research is often criticised for being unethical, thus the nature of my research may viewed as potentially detrimental to the research reputation of the university. However, this criticism is not all-encompassing as there are some significant examples of precedents of non-disclosure set within the social sciences. This usually arises where the information would otherwise be impossible to access and where the research is conducted in the name of social justice (e.g. Calvey, 2000; Cavendish, 1982; Diamond, 1992; Lauder, 2003; Miller, 2001). Cardiff University's social sciences ethical committee approved Gabriella Alberti's PhD research which was conducted covertly and also in the hospitality industry. The aims of the research are not intent in deceiving the research subjects but use non-disclosure as a way of accessing a field that would otherwise be inaccessible. The research will adopt an ethical standard in authorship, disclosing materials that have been fully anonymised and that have theoretical pertinence.

APPLICATION APPROVED  
Research Ethics Committee  
Cardiff Business School  
Cardiff University

**STUDENTS SHOULD BIND THE SIGNED AND APPROVED FORM INTO THEIR REPORT, DISSERTATION OR THESIS**

*Please complete the following in relation to your research project:*

		Yes	No	n/a
(a)	Will you describe the main details of the research process to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b)	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	If you are using a questionnaire, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x
(f)	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x
(g)	Will you offer to send participants findings from the research (e.g. copies of publications arising from the research)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x
(h)	If working with children and young people please confirm that you have given due consideration to University guidance available at: <a href="http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govms/concom/resources/2010%20November%20Safeguarding%20Children%20&amp;%20VAs.doc">http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govms/concom/resources/2010%20November%20Safeguarding%20Children%20&amp;%20VAs.doc</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**PLEASE NOTE:**

If you have ticked **No** to any of 5(a) to 5(g), please give an explanation on a separate sheet.

(Note: N/A = not applicable)

There is an obligation on the principal researcher/student to bring to the attention of Cardiff Business School Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

Signed:  
(Principal Researcher/Student) Channabain  
Print Name: Chloe Tarrabain  
Date: 23/04/12

**SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION (Student researchers only):** As the supervisor for this student project I confirm that I believe that all research ethical issues have been dealt with in accordance with University policy and the research ethics guidelines of the relevant professional organisation.

Signed: signed off by Robyn Thomas – LBC confirms signatures on hard copies 23/4/2012

Print Name: Professor Robyn Thomas  
Date: 23/04/12

**TWO copies of this form (and attachments) MUST BE OFFICIALLY STAMPED by Ms Lainey Clayton, Room F43, Cardiff Business School**

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

This project has been considered using agreed School procedures and is now approved.

Official stamp of approval of the School  
Research Ethics Committee:

Date: 1/8/2012

## Appendix C: Sample of Analysis

Theme	Observation	Interview	Reflexive Diary
<b>Competitiveness</b>	<p>Mihaela snatched a wash cloth from Zalia on shift, she started wiping surfaces frantically. It appeared as if she wanted to look busy and for management to see that she was an efficient worker.</p> <p>Rexham Office 08.08.12</p>	<p>When I first started in here I was thinking ‘oh what bastards,’ you know they all telling on each other and trying to show the other one as the bad worker. I was thinking if you just try hard in here and are good at your job you will be ok. But then I realised it’s not really enough, so I just think OK it’s every man on his self and if you need the work you have to find a way.</p> <p>Mario, Portugal</p>	<p>I feel that there is a lot of competition in Staff Solution, Cecilia interrogated me today, asking me where I had been, what I had been doing, how many hours Adrian had given me that week. I feel like it’s all a big competition and nobody really knows for sure who is winning</p> <p>15.06.12</p>
<b>Nationality</b>	<p>The Romanian girls were on shift together today. Mihaela and Christina just spoke their language the whole time and then were talking about how bland and tasteless British food is.</p> <p>TJ Caterers 27.06.12</p>	<p>I don’t just say this because I’m Greek and I think all things Greek is the best. There are lots of stuff I see better over here, but food is not one of them. Here the food has no flavour it’s like where is the garlic, where is the rigani?</p> <p>Fiora, Greece</p>	<p>TJ caterers let us take our pickings from the leftovers today – the food actually tasted pretty good but I was honestly scared to say that I liked it in front of the other agency workers because I thought it make signify that I am perhaps a sympathiser with the other.</p> <p>27.06.12</p>
<b>Uniform</b>	<p>Mikhael has a neat operation going when it comes to his uniform, today I</p>	<p>So now I do break the rules, I paint my nails a very light colour and mostly</p>	<p>I’ve noticed that the longer I work with the agency the more inclined I am</p>

	<p>witnessed him transform from a plate waiter to rock star in a few second. He tucked his trousers into his studded biker boots, revealed a large belt buckle engraved with a naked lady and rolled up his sleeves to reveal tattoos on his forearms. Radley 03.04.12</p> <hr/>	<p>nobody notices, I put make-up but natural. You know it's nothing so big it just makes me feel better about myself. <i>Christina, Romania</i></p> <hr/>	<p>to break the uniform rules a bit. Today I was wearing a light coloured nail varnish. I got told by the manager I wasn't to wear it again. After that Christina started to talk to me a bit – she's usually unfriendly. I think my flouting of the rules won me some kudos in her eyes. 17.03.12</p> <hr/>
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## Appendix D: Sample Interview Transcript

**Chloe: Can you describe the different kinds of work you do to me?**

Fiora: Umm well I do the massage, I rent a space, well a room, before I was in a centre for therapies but there was a lot of competition there so where I am now they sell a lot of jewelery and anything you can imagine. They have a shop upstairs which I rent a room from, so there are people who come in the shop and see that I give massage so come upstairs, it's mainly ladies sometimes I get guys as well, sometimes ladies come in and ask if they can pay for their husbands to come in. Mostly its people who come into the shop but sometimes I get work from flyering too- like I give out my own flyers too. So I get customers from my flyering and then from the shop, like this week I've had quite a few clients from flyering. I do my dance also, in the clubs, parties and restaurants and I teach as well. I was teaching belly dance doing a lot of classes around the place that was my main income, teaching, it was really popular but then when Zumba came in everyone wants to do Zumba and no one was interested in belly dance anymore. So people started asking me to set up a Zumba class so I did but then the competition became too much so people started asking for belly dance again. So I also do a few classes for fitness- I just follow what people want. When my business is quiet and I don't have much on I just ask the agency to give me a bit of work but when everything is fine from my business, the agency is just kind of a backup- just for money.

**Chloe: Do you like that flexibility of being able to manage your own time?**

Fiora: Yeah yeah I do- I manage my own time table which is cool. I like that I can organise my time like going to the gym or visiting friends, I can be independent I have a choice of what I want to do and what I like.

**Chloe: Do you think that your life style is quite important to you, being able to pick and choose what you want to do or is career more important?**

Fiora: It's about balance, I mean I love what I'm doing and I want to make a career from it but I need to be myself, in another job like let's say a call centre I would hate what I'm doing, I would begin to hate my life, so it's important for me to be able to love what I'm doing. Many times I think 'oh money is not enough maybe I should do another job' but I have tried it really gets me down and then I'm thinking 'ok as long as I can live decently I'd prefer to do what I'm doing.' I become happy from doing this and I can see progress.

**Chloe: When you work for the agency to you have a feeling of belonging?**

Fiora: Ummm yeah well I don't actually enjoy it, it's not the work, I don't mind to work. To be honest I like always being in action, being active but it's the attitude of people that makes me hate it.

**Chloe: What kind of things do you mean?**

Fiora: They are so rude, so rude, I'm thinking I'm a human being I don't need to be treated like this. I'm human, I do this because I just need the money. I'm not a slave, and sometimes I really wanna say, you know I'm trying to take it out, especially because I'm from a

Mediterranean country I have that temper. I mean I'm not really working that much- I did a couple of the Christmas parties, and I was working with one girl, she was holding the tray while I was picking up the stuff because it was so heavy to hold myself, so I'm carrying the tray and one guy was trying to tickle me and I was in the first time said nothing but in the second time I thought no so I held the tray over him and said to him 'if I drop this tray it's going to be all over you- do you understand?' I wasn't that rude but I made it clear- I was just so offended they think it's ok to touch you.

**Chloe: What do you think about the employees of the venues you go to work in?**

Fiora: Well they definitely treat you differently because they have that attitude- they treat you like you are a second class citizen. They think you should be working twice as hard, because the agency takes money from you. I mean they think we are getting paid more than them, like 8 or 9 pounds an hour because the agency takes money from our wages, because they give the agency more they think we get it, but we take 6 pounds. So all these people think we are taking a lot of money so they think they can take the piss out of us. Like for example in the Radisson they make you do things that are really, it's like a boot camp or you're in the army and they make you do things which haven't go logic just because they have the power to do it and they do it because you need the shift but they are just taking the piss out of me. I had so many bad experiences there, I don't wanna say but basically there was this one time and you know Gavin the guy- I hate him, I absolutely hate him, I've asked Adrian to never send me back there. He did this to me two times but basically he make you work extra over your timesheet and never pays you for it. I'm not working for free, I told him next time I won't. And they don't even feed us there and if they do they don't allow you to go to the staff room to eat, they make you stand like an animal. What they do is they don't let you have your

lunch break, they just keep you working until you forget about it. Another time what we did was ask when the lunch break is so then we took a proper lunch break with their staff in the staff room because they will just take it from your timesheet anyway so why should we accept that? I definitely think that is the worst one.

**Chloe: Do you think that there is an ideal type of worker for an agency worker, a look, attitude, characteristics?**

Fiora: You really have to be very polite, very very polite, over polite. Eager to do anything they throw at you, without complaining and just being happy because you made 6 pound and hour. So basically if you have no self-esteem and you're just thankful you have a job and you're really desperate and you'll do anything then that's the kind of person they want.

**Chloe: Do you think appearance has anything to do with it?**

Fiora: Ummm they are I think they like they look for British people, they prefer them. They are a bit funny with African people because they have an accent and uhh it's more preferred to employ English people. But I do notice that in the hotels they always employ white people and the agency staff are usually migrant people. I think it's because it's easier for British people to find a permanent job. I remember I went to a canteen, it was outside of Cardiff in the valleys and a lady said umm, well everyone in that place was so rude and they said that was because I was not living there. Even there were some workers there in the factory who were Asian and from I don't know where but they all had this attitude of being really rude and even the way they order the food is so rude and anyway they came and told me oh we are so glad that you can understand us and speak English because before they sent another girl

who couldn't understand them before. I thought this was a bit rude and a bit racist because it was not about whether they spoke English or not it was about the accent. It's nothing to with English because if you can speak properly everyone can understand you. I mean I never came across anyone in the agency who couldn't speak English or that I couldn't understand, lots of them are doing really difficult courses like masters in business and law. They know English they really understand it, it's just the accent it's all about the accent.

**Chloe: Do you think when you go to work with the agency you have to change things about yourself to fit in?**

Fiora: Yes, I feel like I have to be kind of transformed in a way. You know because they like you to look nice. It's something I don't like but you know you just have to be completely open. It things that they say to you that makes no sense but they ask you to do it even where it really offends you. I remember one time last year Adrian said something at the Christmas party about Greek people and everyone was like 'WHAT?!' and he was like I'm joking guys my wife is Greek. He saw everyone was pissed off and since then he stopped saying it. I feel like he's taking the piss like he always pretends he doesn't know or can't pronounce my surname, and then one day I was talking with him on the phone and I said oh for God's sake you don't even know my surname yet and then he was like ah I'm only joking but it's like little things like that. But things like this you have to bite your tongue because if you go around saying he's racist, he said this, you won't get work they won't call you back. So many times in the past year you know my country has been in crisis and I hear from people, they really have offended me, they are like 'ooooh poor you, you don't have money, can I give you some?' Or they say that I owe them money and I'm like 'sorry I've been here for 12 years' I've been here so long, I'm not responsible. They don't actually know what's

happening, they just have a very basic opinion, but they haven't got a clue. I had another guy who was very naive actually so I didn't take it as offensive he was telling me that he was working on the train collecting tickets. He said 'of do you mind me asking you where you're from you look Mediterranean. I said I'm Greek. He said 'Oh I can get some advice from you because I want to go on holiday and obviously I want to go to a cheap country, so how are the prices there now, is everything going up? Because I went to Turkey and everything goes up.' And I'm thinking, 'oh thanks a lot' calling my country cheap. I mean they think they can say something because they heard it in the news.

**Chloe: Do you feel like you have to perform when you work with the agency?**

Fiora: Yeah definitely. I have to remember please, thank you, sorry all the time and you know for a Mediterranean person that's not right, like in Greece we say thank you and please when we need to not all the time and sometimes I have to smile when I don't feel like smiling, when people are rude you just have to pretend like everything is fine. You just have to keep going. I put like a mask or field around me and say ok I'm not myself now, I'm just here to do the role so definitely I'm playing a role. It the role of doing whatever they want you to do.

**Chloe: What do you think are the things that mark or distinguish you as an agency worker from other people who are employed by the organisations?**

Fiora: Ummm most of the agency workers come from another country, I feel like there is such a big gap in the culture between people. The British people don't really experience other cultures because when they go someplace they go to a resort and visit it as a holiday and they don't experience the whole thing. Living in another country I think helps people to realise

and to understand other people. I think you realise that every country have their own cultures, a different mentality, a different way of thinking but we are all the same we are all people. It like people always think their countries are the best but when you move you can see the bad because there are always things that are better than your country. Sometime I think it's hard but then I think if I was back home where would my life be? I'm thinking ok I'll just take all the good things of what I have here- I'll just be grateful of what I have here an just take everything and not moan about what I don't have. When I speak to people they say, 'why did you come here your country has such an amazing weather, why would you stay here.' I just think I have so many things here that I would never be able to have in my country the more busy I keep myself, the less I think about the weather.

**Chloe: If you were to define yourself as a person, what elements of your life would you draw upon in order to best describe yourself?**

Fiora: Ummm I so diverse, it's very hard to define or describe myself because although I am from Greece I'm not stuck in my culture. Since such a young age I was really open to other cultures. I was into native American culture and you know how they perceive God and nature and all that, they are at one with nature and respect it. Then I was really interested in India, but it was only when I came here that I started to appreciate my country and my history because I realised that when you are into one situation you may think like yeah I'm a better person but you may be thinking that for the wrong things. Yeah ok we may have had a great empire and civilization but there is nothing left from that apart from some old ruins in a museum and the mentality is stupid so I do feel proud but I don't see why I should be really snobbish or thinking I'm better than anyone else. In other cultures there are amazing things, music, food, dress I think it's just amazing to just explore everything and I think the main

reason I came to this country is because I just wanted to explore other cultures, there is this multicultural element of Britain which I really love. It's not just that I am a foreigner so I can fit into a multicultural society but it's because I like exploring different cultures. For example I like to wear a bindi- you know bindis? So I had my ex-boyfriend and he was embarrassed to take me out while I was wearing a bindi. He was like you're not Indian why do you need to wear a bindi and I'm like because I like it and I like taking elements from different culture and making them my own. So for me that's just amazing and meeting people from all over the world.

**Chloe: Do you define yourself through your work as well?**

Fiora: Ummm sometimes yeah I can see that I define myself through my work but some other times I feel like it shows some aspects of who I am but not completely who I am. I have so many things I like to be, I have some many different things that I am. Like I'm very sensitive with my hands so it's natural for me to massage, like even when I was young I used to massage my sister. So that side of me, I'm quite sensitive so I'm really interested in the natural healing of the body, so lots of people they massage for money, but they don't really care they just want to have money but for me I actually want to see the results and I', like yeah I actually like this work. It's like with music, I love music, I don't like sitting down at all, when I hear it I don't actually want to sit down I just want to get up and dance so it's like a joy because ok I can make this my job. If I can make people happy as well. Some people talk about the clothes saying I just want attention- it's not about the clothes, I could wear normal clothes but for me it's that I want to share my feelings through the music, to be happy and share it through the other people.

**Chloe: So it's just like an expression of a different part of you?**

Fiora: Yeah, yeah that's what it is. There are so many parts of me I would like to express, like with my art that's another thing that's willing to come out. It like balances me out because when I do art work I'm so peaceful and focused and then when I do dance I'm so active but I can't be active all the time like last year I was like active all the time teaching zumba classes but I couldn't sustain that- I needed balance.

**Chloe: What kind of controls do you think the agency has over you?**

Fiora: Definitely you shouldn't show you're annoyed when people are rude, they just expect you to act like its normal or part of your job. So there are times when I have been abused verbally and when I don't accept it- it's just a case of you won't be going back there. There are times when I am annoyed and I don't react and because I held it inside I can't do my fake smile. They are not happy with me because of that- they are like you have to smile now, keep smiling, keep smiling and I'm like 'I don't wanna smile' I wanna go and tell them how rude they are. So they even push you to feel the way you feel.

**Chloe: Do you feel like you resist it at all?**

Fiora: Sometimes I just ignore it and am like yeah ok and I'm going to go home and forget about it and other times well it has happened two or three times with the agency in the past year that I thought I'm going to explode. Then there was another thing that happened, I don't think you know about it. I had one henna tattoo on my hand, I was in St Sires through all the weddings in the summer and the supervisor there told me you're not allowed to have that

tattoo, and then he sent me to work on the bar, most of the day on my own, all day I was isolated so I felt like I was being punished because I had a henna tattoo, but really no one ever said anything about having a henna tattoo I know you're not supposed to wear your hair down, have strong perfume, long earrings or real tattoos but no one ever said anything about henna tattoos so yeah basically they told me off because I couldn't wash it off- it's henna you can't wash it off, I really felt like I couldn't be myself and there was an Indian guy in there who said, 'I'm really offended by what they said because it's a cultural thing and in our country is normal in the weddings.' I don't know, I felt like a five year old being punished for doing something wrong and I should have stood up and said 'look it's a cultural thing' but I'm Greek not Indian but still it's cultural because I'm involved with other cultures. For me I'm doing yoga so it's normal what's wrong with it? And you know the ironic thing is the next time I went to work I came in to check my hand to see if I had a henna tattoo and it was an Indian wedding and everyone there had a henna tattoo. How much irony is that? If I had worked a week later it would be fine, I would have worked with no problem, nobody would have complained. I was even telling the customers- I'm so annoyed they have left me to work on the bar on my own and I was actually moaning to them that I've been punished and put here because of my henna tattoo. And the other guys were saying so what? I have a million tattoos! So the actual guests of the wedding didn't care, so what was the big deal? No one actually cares. I seen people having long nails, like Mihaela, she always wears rings on her hand and lots of jewelery and she hasn't been told off ever. I asked her, how come you've never been told and she said, 'well if you do everything that they say you will be a nun.' Ok maybe I should ignore them but I think with Mihaela she's so quiet, tough and hardworking they kind of make a compromise with her and just ignore a few things.

**Chloe: Do you feel like your past experiences have informed how you do your work now?**

Fiora: Yeah I think I have. I mean i can never get used to how much people drink here, it's like a self-abuse and it's not just that they drink is that the do stupid things as well. They don't drink to enjoy, they drink to get drunk and then they put themselves into danger and things happen all the time- you hear about it in the news, people get drunk, they get run over by cars and it's like why do they do that to themselves, I don't get it. I will never, no matter how long I stay here I'll never become like that. I just can't understand it, you drink to have fun not to do all of this stupid stuff. It's other stuff like I don't see why I should have to be polite formally if I don't feel like it, because people feel secure with me- they feel like I'm someone they can relate to but I don't see why it should have to be like that. Some people think I have tantrums or whatever it's a reaction to their attitude- my attitude it's not that I want to have a tantrum or whatever if they are rude I'm going to talk back and I'm not going to sit there and get offended. In some ways I have changed because I used to be so polite that I started hating myself and because if you are too polite people can manipulate you as well, especially when you are a fitness instructor it's just you know it's hard to explain, when you are a fitness instructor, you have to be polite but you have to be not patronising but putting people into their position because people won't be abusive but they may try to take control of the class and then you won't be able to perform, so you have to be polite but also it depends on peoples personalities, if there is someone trying to take over. It's like a control game in a way but it's like not written in a book, your experiences guide you. Like if you are over polite you get people who are like no it should be like this or like that, you have to be focused on the class otherwise it goes out of control. I don't know why they are so rude and moan about everything maybe that the way they are in their lives but they have to understand that they

have to be respectful when they come and have a massage or whatever. You can't just come and talk like that with anyone.

**Chloe: Do you think this approach is something you have developed since being here?**

Fiora: Well I was always like this, maybe more in my country- I was always over polite even before I came to the UK. You know when people are working I'm always polite even when I go for a coffee, I'm get upset with people when they are rude because I know they are just working. I'm thinking about the other people. So when I came to this country- this manner of politeness, I felt like it was something I could actually relate to, so I felt like I could actually breathe in a way but also with people that are rude I feel like I have to bite my tongue because if I start an argument I feel like the first thing they are going to say is 'oh you are a foreigner.' I have to think how I'm going to say something without being rude while defining my opinion and making people understand where I'm coming from. I think the way I look, well I could look anyway I could have blonde hair - because I'm from Greek parents I can say I'm Greek. The way I- I don't follow fashion for example, I don't straighten my hair, I don't have short hair, I don't follow fashion for my hair or for my makeup, I have my own style- I stand out so by looking at me you can see oh she is different. They see it as a threat for no reason, I don't understand why I should have to follow them for no reason. Like I don't care what celebrities are wearing, many people look at celebrities, look at their style, what they are wearing and try to wear it but they don't look like them. For me I can't imagine acting like I'm not myself.

