

Precarity and the crisis of social care

**Everyday politics and experiences of work
in women's voluntary organisations**

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SUMMARY

In the context of shifting public expenditure and related cuts to public services, the Voluntary Sector (VS) has been given a prominent role in the organisation of social care. Government reform agendas in the UK try to thrive on public support for 'empowerment of local communities', more 'voice and choice' for service users, and a discourse of 'partnership' with the VS for implementing policies that imply an increasingly competitive commissioning of sensitive services.

This research traces the neocommunitarian turn in neoliberal discourse and develops a critique of the imposed pseudo-marketisation of social care by examining everyday experiences of labour. The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in London's VS. In relation to reports in the sector on the loss of funding for women-only projects and services, it examines the transformation of working conditions and the strategies applied in dealing with the outcomes of reform.

The study draws on in-depth interviews with 31 women working for 19 different women's organisations. Additional interviews were conducted with union representatives and officers working for local infrastructure organisations and commissioning bodies in two inner London boroughs, in which the outcomes of commissioning practices for the workforce in the VS were further explored.

It is argued that neocommunitarian neoliberalism results in insecure work environments and the institutionalisation of volunteering, which will exacerbate the ongoing crisis of care. While employment in the women's sector has always been precarious – as being short-term, insecure, poorly remunerated and supported by high amounts of volunteering – women reported on a loss of control over the quality and direction of work as well as the imposition of inadequate workloads. This makes it increasingly difficult to endure and resist precarity in social care. It creates harmful work environments and implies a loss of needs-adequate service provision, both traced to intensify existing inequalities along the lines of class, gender and race.

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List of abbreviations

AE	Amanda Ehrenstein
BAME	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic
BAMER	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, Refugee
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
B	Borough
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DV	Domestic Violence
EC	European Commission
EI	Excerpt of interview
EEA	European Economic Area
EPSU	European Federation of Public Service Unions
EU	European Union
EVAW	End Violence Against Women (coalition and campaign)
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
k	thousand
LA	Local Authorities
LAA(s)	Local Area Agreement(s)
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LIO(s)	Local Infrastructure Organisation(s)
LSP(s)	Local Strategic Partnership(s)
LVSC	London Voluntary Service Council
m	million
NAVCA	National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NHS	National Health Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OTS	Office of the Third Sector
p. a.	per annum
PCT	Primary Care Trust
QAF	Quality Assessment Framework
SARC(s)	Sexual Assault Referral Centre(s)
SBS	Southall Black Sisters
SP	Supporting People
UK	United Kingdom
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VCO(s)	Voluntary and Community Organisation(s)
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
VS	Voluntary Sector
WRC	Women's Resource Centre
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WVCS	Women's Voluntary and Community Sector

Preface

Since the late 1990s, imaginative and creative forms of protest have addressed the radical transformation of working and living conditions under neoliberalism. Contestations have evolved on a global scale against labour market flexibilisation, migration regimes and privatisation programmes. Mobilisation around the subjective reality of *precarity*¹ has thereby contributed to forming a new political consciousness visualising the concerns and ongoing forms of rebellion and everyday struggles, especially among younger generations in central and southern Europe. By addressing the erosion and structural inadequacy of the remaining forms of labour interest protection and practiced forms of democratic representation, these social struggles have created new modes and spaces for collective action by inciting various forms of self-organisation. These found a prominent and publicly discussed articulation in alternative and colourful May Day parades on International Workers' Day, first organised in Milan in 2001.

Creative forms of protest beyond trade union parades on the first of May have since then been coordinated in various European cities under the *Euromayday network*². Coordinated days of action addressed the overlapping and multifaceted experiences of insecurity and vulnerability of *precarious labour* and created broader trans-sectoral, trans-union and trans-national alliances. Autonomous groups and political activists used a tactic of artistic bricolage by sharing and recomposing each other's creative media productions, organisational tactics and thought provoking contributions. Happenings and joyful forms of protest attracted media attention and provided inspiration for others so that political groups organising around the issue of precarisation soon spread across different localities in and even beyond Europe. Early on, these mobilisations invested in knowledge production and its dissemination as a crucial element for empowering political practice which resulted in the interconnection, elaboration and further development of autonomous forms of protest and subversion.

From 2005-2008 I participated in activities and initiatives that had been called out for this purpose, taking place in Hamburg, Turin, Madrid, Rome, London and Paris. These involved activists-researchers from different local collectives that participated in Euromayday mobilisations. I joined these projects because of my longstanding interest in

¹ *Precarity* is a neologism. The concept is in use to make apparent the direct connection to political discourses and practices in central Europe that evolved around *la precarité* in France, *la precarietà* in Italy, and *la precariedad* in Spain.

² <http://www.euromayday.org>

the alterglobalisation movement and the necessity I experienced myself to find new forms of political expression and alternative modes of developing and engaging with academic research. In particular the various mapping initiatives³ provided opportunities for in-depth discussions about the criteria for adequate representation of social conflicts and the various modes and forms of doing politics on the issues of *precarity* in such a transnational context (cf. Casas-Cortés 2009; Cobarrubias 2009; Hamm 2011).

In 2005/2006 I had started my journey in the British context by exploring everyday experiences of young workers in the visual arts in Cardiff, in a pilot study on affective burdens, enjoyments and subversive forms of living and working in precarity (Ehrenstein 2006). The vivid discussions on issues of (self-)care in the Euromayday related initiatives, and my presentations at international conferences based on that pilot, transformed my theoretical grasp and political understanding developed in regard to post-operaist readings of Deleuzian affect theory and related conceptualisations of *affective labour* in precarity. The prominent rearticulation of autonomous Marxist theory⁴ proposed by Hardt and Negri (Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004) seemed to invest mainly in a cheerful celebration of the subversive potential for immaterial labour in contemporary forms of value creation: this did not successfully articulate the pitfalls, the unequal division of (additional) burdens and the harm created throughout this transformation. While the privatisation of social services was a common point of critique in many mobilisations in and against precarity across Europe, the discriminatory outcomes along the lines of class, gender, citizenship and race of these developments had not yet been explored in great detail. Neither had the effects on the division of labour in the affected realms of employment and their impacts on the overall organisation of care attracted broader attention. These debates (see for example Dowling et al. 2007) and experiences

³ These initiatives gathered and discussed experiences from local struggles and social unrest against precarity from various European countries. They aimed at creating interactive multi-media tools to be used for further transnational mobilisations. Various meetings in 2005 and 2006 resulted in a first interactive version of such a tool on the site www.precarity-map.net which, however, was soon found to be hacked. Another mapping initiative amongst a smaller group of activists was then set up in 2007. Both sought to create a visualisation of the various projects, collectives, and activist groups as well as the organisational tactics involved that stood in connection to the Euromayday mobilisations. Mapping was here embraced as a *process* that enhances debate on the foci of struggles, the concerns and the (potential) overlap of demands, as articulated in different spaces. It provided a framework for building up a common understanding about the existing lines of conflict.

⁴ In this thesis *Autonomist Marxism* is used as an overarching term for critical Marxist theories that were first developed in 1960s' Italy and put emphasis on the ability of labour to transform capitalism through self-organisation and a productive *refusal of work*. These accounts emerged from political groups that criticised the hierarchical structure and selective mode of political organisation in the labour movement as practiced by political parties and trade unions. *Post-operaism* refers to poststructuralist rearticulations of such accounts as in writings of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2009).

incited me in 2007 to consider further research on the experience of labour in care and community settings.

Inspired by the political practice and conceptualisation of subversion in precarity by members of the feminist collective *Precarias a la deriva* in Spain, I was looking for meaningful ways to translate the gained understanding into a research project that would connect with ongoing political debates in the British context. In this respect, the Voluntary Sector in the UK provided an interesting field for research on the precarisation of labour *and* concomitant struggles over collective forms of organisation. Organisations operating in this sector have a longstanding history of campaigning, policy and advocacy work especially on behalf of service users in social care (Richardt et al. 2007). Government initiatives, though, increasingly addressed the sector as a *provider* of services, with outcomes that were criticised by unions as putting a strain on the predominantly female workforce and the sector's 'independence' (Davies 2007).

While I was working on my theoretical grasp of these structural dimensions regarding the transformations in public service provision in the UK and the framing of subjective experience of precarious labour therein, I was also exploring in more detail the ongoing political mobilisations in the field of social care. In London, women's organisations had just initiated a forceful collective initiative against public spending cuts across different sections of social care provision, communities and organisational frameworks. In 2006, the Women's Resource Centre (WRC), a second-tier organisation of women's organisations, had officially launched the *why women?* campaign in reaction to alarming reports by its members on the difficulties they experienced in retaining funding for women-only projects and services, calling on government and the wider public to put gender back on the political agenda (WRC 2006b, c).

My attention was attracted by the campaign's attempt to create a collective form of protest against cuts across various fields of service provision and the direct focus on the implied outcomes of the ongoing diversion of public funding *for women*. The campaign was building upon a broad network of various campaigning groups, workers collectives, single activists and more established women's organisations – a complex structure resulting from decades of collective achievements and pitfalls of the feminist movement in Britain. It seemed to me that the 'women's sector' embodied transformations that are related to precarity in quite exemplary ways: (1) the precarisation of working conditions; (2) a loss of state support for care and community initiatives resulting in a widespread crisis of projects; (3) a reduction of the range of services and projects that were still attracting state funding; and (4) a crucial role designated for affective labour, political

commitment and forms of apparent self-precarisation of women in the overall organisation of work.

My first contacts with women working for women's organisations in London were then formed during the *Why Women Conference* organised by the WRC at the King's Fund in central London in October 2007. The WRC's aim for this gathering was to raise the profile of the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector (WVCS), to inform the participants on the policy and funding context of women's organisations, and to facilitate further alliances against public service cuts. In 2007 the *why women?* campaign focused on persistent gender inequalities in the UK, the need for women-only spaces and services, and the gender blindness of government (funding) policies as a bridging and joining issue for collective mobilisation (WRC 2007b, c). Working conditions and the division of labour in the women's sector itself had then only indirectly been addressed.

My definition of and access to the field for empirical research on social care work in London was thus framed by the *why women?* campaign, which I interpreted as *one* important sign and outcome of struggles of women engaged in the Voluntary Sector over the ongoing shifts of boundaries in social care work and its dividing features. I expected here to gain further insights into how to address and deal with the challenges posed by intersectional forms of discrimination in precarity. I experienced these as being crucial for building up a critical feminist reading of the ongoing transformations in social care and thus for building up the ground for more sustainable forms of political organisation in precarity *in and despite difference*.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Recent decades have seen a radical transformation in the organisation of social care. Rationalisation and short-term efficiency pressures have been imposed on providers of social services and community projects in a 'mixed economy of welfare'⁵. Conditions for direct support work and professional standards have thereby been transformed. The concomitant augmentation of pressures on carers under workfarist regimes and the implied delegation and individualisation of burdens have been described as leading to an increase of unmet needs, delineating the contours of the current *crisis of care*. Quality in social care is based on the conditions provided for contributing to it through labour. The ongoing transformation and perceived problems can therefore be considered as a crisis of the overall organisation and division of labour that impacts on the processes of social reproduction and the ways in which these are formally and informally organised.

It is therefore important to explore the theoretical and political discourse that frames the use of the term *social care* in this research project and has guided the presented analysis of the ongoing transformations in direct support work as being related to *precarity*. This research combines a critical reading of: (a) commentaries on neoliberalism and state retrenchment by the regulation school; (b) analyses of the transformation of work and employment, the role of volunteering and institutional change under British public service reforms in social policy literature and labour studies; and (c) post-operaist analyses of these transformations; with (d) feminist care theory. Accounts that address intersectional forms of discrimination and the necessary affective efforts for dealing with these as an *inherent* part of work in social care were also crucial for developing my understanding of the ongoing transformations in the settings I investigated. This linking of autonomous Marxism with critical feminism paves the way for a reappropriation of the concept of social care as an embodied, interdependent and contested social practice.

The thesis starts with an introduction to the broader context of the ongoing transformations in social care by discussing the outcomes of neoliberal state restructuring, workfare and deregulation policies in their impacts on labour protection. The current *normalisation of precarious employment* combined with welfare state restructuring is thereby presented as a contested process. The formation of voluntary sector service provision in neoliberal service economies and the advent of global care chains as discussed under the heading of the *feminisation of labour* shed light on the ongoing and

⁵ This term is used to point at the complex organisation of welfare states, with services provided by statutory, voluntary and private sector bodies (Powell 2007b).

contested *re-ordering* of structurally embedded intersectional dimensions of social inequalities in British society along the lines of class, gender, race and citizenship.

I continue with these considerations by elaborating on the debate of *precarious labour* and mobilisations against *precarity*: social movements have addressed the crisis of democracy and labour interest representation under the regime of economic and labour market deregulation and unmasked the inadequacy of the remnants of publicly funded social security systems and prevailing forms of wealth (re-) distribution. Here it has been argued that systems of social protection based on wage labour contributions are being seriously eroded and result in inadequate tools for labour protection and social transformation. New forms of collective interest organisation and a vision for the effective protection of *the commons* are deemed necessary to safeguard sustainable handling of resources necessary for labour in the creation of value: there have been claims to guarantee free and open access to services (e.g. social care and health services, education, public transport, internet) and the protection of natural resources (e.g. water, common land) from further privatisation and destruction.

In research on precarity, the blurring of productive and reproductive spheres has been described as a common characteristic in everyday experiences of precarious workers, amounting to increased efforts in the affective realm. In chapter 2 of this thesis, I argue that for further exploration of experiences and burdens in social care a critical examination of the prevailing discourse on the supposedly inherent positive qualities of *volunteering* in British society is necessary. A theoretical framework is required under which affective efforts to shift the relations of power are addressed as *work*, and in relation to particular contexts of employment and value creation. For the realisation of sustainable *practices of care*, these efforts should be conceived as collective tasks that require attention to the particular necessities of care and relational interdependencies.

The study is contextualised in the *why women?* campaign that was initiated by women's organisations in 2006 and addressed the increasing difficulties faced by voluntary and community organisations in the UK in retaining funding for women-only projects and services. In chapter 3, I present this field and discuss the sites of the empirical research and the methodology chosen. Over a period of nine months, I entered into extensive dialogue with women working on various positions in policy organisations and front-line support projects organised by women's organisations in London. I followed campaigning activities and lobby events and visited various women's projects throughout the metropolis with focus on two Labour-led inner London boroughs. Women were invited for in-depth interviews in which I asked them to explore their

concerns regarding the change in funding and working conditions in social care. Two main concerns guided my research: a further exploration of the structural dimensions of the current transformations in social care and an investigation of the issues at stake *for labour* by examining everyday experiences in front-line support work. The ongoing knowledge production by various Voluntary Sector bodies regarding the transformation of public services in the UK was thereby consulted for critical analysis. I also contacted representatives of unions active in organising Voluntary Sector workers, as well as capacity building officers of local infrastructure organisations and commissioning officers in the two inner London boroughs for semi-structured interviews.

The thesis continues by analysing the discursive framework of recent public service reforms and the imposed structural changes by central government. The transformation of social care is a process under which a neoliberal discourse has emerged that promotes the marketisation and commodification of social services and community projects: the introduction of the principles of entrepreneurship into new areas of society is displayed as a necessary requirement for reform. However, in its application to the area of social care, this discourse has been structurally transformed. As I will argue in chapter 4, the incorporation of communitarian elements has built up a new activation discourse that gravitates towards the instrumental use of 'volunteering' and the supposedly pursued 'empowerment' of local communities for neoliberal reform. Neocommunitarian neoliberalism, as I call this regime for the governance of the third sector, emerged under New Labour governments and features today as a constitutive strategy in the further implementation of marketisation and privatisation agendas. I will discuss the understanding gained from policy analysis and my interviews with representatives of unions and local infrastructure organisations on New Labour's Third Sector Strategy and the outcomes of local government reforms⁶: concerns were raised about the continuous transfer of services under competitive commissioning, the use of the Voluntary Sector as a Trojan horse for the further privatisation of sensitive services, and the loss of support for small community-based organisations.

Chapter 5 provides insights into the repercussions of neocommunitarian-neoliberal reforms for women's organisations and direct support in women-only projects and services. The shift from grant funding towards contract funding under the commissioning of social care services is characterised as resulting in further delegation of the duty to care for vulnerable women from statutory bodies towards the voluntary

⁶ The analysis presented in this thesis focuses on policies for London/England. These policies do not necessarily apply to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

sector, with organisations mobilising resources for minorities being hit hardest. Women's organisations face difficulty attracting consideration in the setting of priorities for local government spending through Local Area Agreements, which have resulted in the agglomeration of funding for highly regulated and quantifiable outcomes driven service provision. In combination with newly introduced central government guidelines for funders that suggest avoiding 'single group funding', women's projects and organisations representing Black, Asian, refugee and minority ethnic communities have increasingly lost out on government support.

Dramatic shifts in terms of funding have been traced in the area of projects for women affected by rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence: while some women's organisations have grown and become 'super-providers' through mergers and take-overs and/or gained influence by specialising in policy work and infrastructure programmes for other women's organisations, micro and small women's organisations and particularly highly specialised front-line support projects for women only have lost out under recent reforms. This is discussed in more detail with reference to the traced changes in public funding allocation under Supporting People, a programme that was introduced in 2003 for housing-related support for vulnerable people in social care. Its repercussions for women's refuges restrict their leeway in providing needs-adequate support. Women's organisations are facing increasingly competitive frameworks as generic service providers enter the field.

These shifts in public funding towards more restricted and highly regulated forms of service provision under larger contracts were reported by the women I interviewed as resulting in a new division of labour in the women's sector. It potentially removes informally organised qualities of work and the cherished collaborative and feminist work ethos among women's organisations that had supported women enduring precarious working conditions. While there are some organisations that have been able to improve their formal employment conditions, direct support work has become generally more regulated. Front-line workers need to adjust to new working routines and face the loss of projects. Higher workloads need to be taken on board due to increasing levels of administrative burdens. Job insecurity remains a pervasive characteristic of work in the women's sector but is added to in front-line support by increased stress provoked by working routines that are experienced as inadequate. Mutually supportive activities and space and time for grassroots collective campaigning in front-line service provision have disappeared.

The disempowering impact of recent reforms on women in front-line services is

reflected in splitting and isolating and thus not only exploitative but potentially harmful working conditions. Chapter 6 provides illustrative insights into women's everyday struggles under these circumstances, working hard to keep women-only projects running. There is a drastic loss of government support for highly specialised projects for Black, Asian, refugee and minority ethnic women yet these women-only services continue to be highly requested. Women working in these organisations are particularly challenged, as they know that there is often no alternative service provision for the women that address them. Women's ambivalent experiences reflect their efforts in commitment to *everyday politics*. Re-positioning themselves to improve their and other women's lives requires continuous affective efforts. However, increasing competitive pressures impinge on previous collaborative settings that supported them in doing so and impose conflicts of loyalty and interest.

Neocommunitarian neoliberalism, in the following also referred to as the neocom neolib project or the neocommunitarian phase of neoliberalism, has resulted in a pseudo-marketisation and dissection of services under which institutionalisation of volunteering has been imposed in social care. In chapter 7, I summarise the main characteristics of this project and explore further its effects on social care. Necessary contributions for the running of projects are pushed into the unpaid realm and are systematically made invisible. The loss of funding for highly specialised services under concomitant bureaucratisation has thus deeply affected the quality of work in social care and the leeway for labour in dealing successfully with precarious employment conditions. The current loss of control over resources for front-line support work and attempts by government to instrumentalise volunteering for neoliberal reform pose challenges to the mere application of autonomous strategies of self-organisation in struggles over the organisation of social care. Under the New Coalition's Big Society agenda, the instrumentalisation of volunteering for neoliberal agendas continues and has become intensified. Even more drastic cuts to public services are announced that are widely seen as hitting women hardest. Under these circumstances, broader alliances are urgently needed to address the looming care voids and the ongoing loss and destruction of spaces for collective practices of empowerment and life-saving social care services for women and their dependents.

CHAPTER 2: Social care in transformation

Social care has been at the centre of economic, social and political transformations in North Atlantic societies in recent decades. There has been a re-organisation and new definition of spheres for production and social reproduction with hard-hitting transpositions in related labour rights, entitlements linked to employment, and the direction and amount of public endowments for social security and care. In the UK this has been a process marked by the early imposition and dissemination – compared to other European countries – of neoliberal agendas and the concomitant gradual marketisation of care and social services since the 1980s, which has affected both the quality and range of these services and the formal working conditions within, and also the informally and indirectly created conditions for social care practices.

Any attempt to deepen our understanding and ability to forcefully address the formation of social inequalities linked to the very organisation of social care requires a combined focus on the highly contested spheres of *employment and production* as well as *welfare restructuring*, as these phenomena are interlinked and interrelated. Both spheres imply demarcations for entitlement to benefits and social protection and impact, in their interplay with citizenship rights, on the embodiment of social care work (cf. MacLeavy 2007).

Over decades, feminist scholars have problematised existing public-private distinctions in public discourse, social policy and research, claiming to recognise value creation in social reproduction and a politicisation of care and the domestic sphere. While some gendered boundaries around production and reproduction have been shifted, others seem to be further entrenched. There are new divisions of labour in the formally and informally organised forms of social reproduction, emerging in response to discriminatory migration regimes. Social care work is thus highly stratified and is characterised both by different degrees of economic and cultural recognition and legal protection (Federici 2009). In the context of shifting public expenditure and relative cuts to public services, the increasingly important role given to Voluntary Sector organisations and voluntary work in public service provision marks an important field and starting point for research into the ongoing qualitative transformations and shifting divisions of labour in social care.

2.1 Neoliberal state restructuring and divisions of labour in social care

Three dimensions of the reconfiguration of social care in the UK will be addressed here, introducing the transformation processes that pose challenges for interest representation and labour protection in social care: (1) labour market flexibilisation and workfare policies in neoliberal service economies; (2) welfare state restructuring and the rise of Voluntary Sector⁷ and private sector providers in publicly organized social care; and (3) the feminisation of labour, segmented labour markets along gender and race lines, and the advent of global care chains.

2.1.1 Workfare and the challenges for labour representation and protection

Since the late 1970s, neoliberal reframings of nation state policies have spread, to various degrees and in different variations, across the globe (Tickell and Peck 2003). The UK is a major player in the neoliberal reconfiguration of the political arena for socio-economic regulation. Free trade, deregulation and marketisation agendas had been promoted early on by national and international initiatives of UK governments, with a drastic shift in policy making embodied iconically by Margaret Thatcher, as the new Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party in 1979. A highly contested process was thereby set in motion that ultimately transformed the UK from a national economy based on industrial production – in some areas owned by the state – to a neoliberal service economy, characterised by residual industrial production, dependent on foreign investment in highly volatile globalised production chains and an increased commodification of services such as finance, education and interpersonal services. It has been widely argued that the underlying transformation towards a post-Fordist production regime (Amin 1994) has put labour interest representation and previously existing forms of social regulation and welfare provision into deep crisis (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

Where the UK is concerned, the neoliberal imprint on nation state policies for socio-economic regulation under post-Fordist production is composed of six principles, followed by Conservative *as well as* New Labour governments (Jessop 2004): (1) liberalisation: free trade, with competition as the basis for market forces; (2) deregulation: more freedom for entrepreneurs; (3) privatisation: reduction of the public sector in direct service provision; (4) commodification of the rest of the public sector to strengthen

⁷ The various concepts in use for non-governmental and non-private organisations in the field of social care are introduced in section 4.1. Until then, the term Voluntary Sector (organisation) is used as a blanket term.

market forces; (5) internationalisation: support for mobility of capital and labour and an import of processes and products; and (6) minimizing: reduction of direct taxation to support consumers and investors.

In regard to labour protection and interest representation, the UK is a special case (Ewing 2006; Gray 2004): compared to other European countries, the British government encouraged the flexibilisation of its internal labour markets early on by directly deregulating individual sectors and dismantling entitlements and collective rights of employees. Previously established systems for protection were eroded and more restrictive trade union rights imposed on collective bargaining. Privatisation and marketisation policies addressed state owned industries in the 1980s and later on also public sector services, which has further undermined previous arrangements.

It has been argued that major reformulations in the active deregulation of labour markets have led, for example, to lower standards of protection against dismissal in the UK for even those workers on full-term and permanent employment contracts than in other European countries (Hudson 2002; McDowell and Christopherson 2009; Vosko 2006). Such moves should be read in conjunction with welfare policies by national governments and supranational bodies reflecting attempts to create a new modus of socio-economic regulation in times of crisis. By adapting social policies to the new globalised form of neoliberal capitalist accumulation, *workfare regimes* (Peck 2001; Peck and Theodore 2000) have replaced previous modes of social regulation that had been realised under the *Keynesian welfare state* (Jessop 1994, 2002b; Jessop and Sum 2006).

In the UK, the change towards a workfare regime *through welfare reform* has been traced back to the beginning of the 1990s when the Conservative government first introduced direct 'work incentives', marking the end of the unconditionality of welfare benefits and thus earlier forms of citizenship rights (Dwyer 1998): benefits for single mothers changed, encouraging them to take on employment; Job Seekers' Allowance replaced unemployment benefit in 1996. Since then, the unemployed are required to sign a contract that they will seek and accept work regardless of the wage, the hours and the type of work, in order to receive support, while other welfare benefits and services have been replaced by 'add-on' support under formal employment.

The provision of state support has thereby shifted steadily from a system based on *legal entitlements* and certain forms of welfare granted as a citizen's *right*, towards a system in which benefits and support are increasingly linked via taxation to *employment* (e.g. Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit) and to means-tested programmes (McKay 2005). Benefit claimants are increasingly coerced into taking up *any* form of employment

or training in order to receive or retain support, a measure which has been described as leading to increased pressures for people to enter the labour market under whatever conditions, and interpreted as a further tool by governments to increase the supply of cheap and willing workers through interventions in the realm of welfare (Gray 2004; Grover and Stewart 1999).

In industrial relations and the sociology of work, the transformation of work has mainly been delineated using analyses of developments in the labour market in terms of changes in paid and formal employment patterns in different sectors (Parry et al. 2005). As such, neoliberal service economies have been characterised as displaying a growth in *non-standard forms of employment* (Gallie et al. 1998; Vosko 2009). In European countries the debate has focused on the differentiation between permanent and non-permanent employment, or typical versus atypical employment, and the resultant under-representation of certain subgroups of workers in existing forms of interest representation and regulation. This has led to an increasing number of workers being excluded from still existing forms of labour protection (see for instance Rodgers and Rodgers 1989).

In the British context, this rise in non-standard employment has particularly been discussed in the context of *contingent labour* (Cam et al. 2003) and *workforce insecurity* (Standing 1997). Contingent labour refers to the increased use of temporary (agency) work, the growth in numbers of workers pursuing portfolio careers under different employers, and the increase of project-related employment. These areas represent challenges for existing practices and modes of labour organisation and interest representation by trade unions (Heery 2009; Heery and Salmon 2000). It is argued that contingent labour and emerging forms of employment under subcontracting, outsourcing and leasing imply the formation of new employer-employee relationships and create a new understanding of obligations and legal constellations with regard to labour protection (Gallagher 2008).

There has been a lively debate within labour studies concerning the extent of the unions' reaction to these transformations in formal employment, and whether they are able to forcefully represent the interests of employees under the transformed conditions for production and political organisation in the UK (Heery et al. 2011). Whereas contingent labour had for a long time been perceived mainly as a threat to labour organisation, and unions refused to organise this part of the workforce and focused on campaigns against the rise of these new forms of employment, some unions have now adopted strategies of inclusion, addressing contingent workers more directly in specific

organisational campaigns (Heery 2009). However, since the 1970s union membership in the UK has fallen drastically by 32%, from its peak in 1979 with 13.2 million union members, to 7,656,000 in 2008. Despite relatively stable membership figures since the 1990s, union *density* has been even further in decline, as there was a growth in labour market participation, which is *not* reflected in any substantial membership growth. As such, the proportion of the workforce in Britain which is organised through union membership “fell from 55% to 27%” between 1979 and 2009 (Jochum et al. 2011, 1.2).

Discussion on the subject of union renewal has focused on the perceived strategies of unions to actively deal with the consequences resulting from the changes to nation state legislation and more volatile modes of production in a globalised economy. Union renewal has been traced in improvements through transnational alliances and support through supranational union bodies, as a response to increasingly complex production patterns and dependencies (Fairbrother 2000a, b, 2005; Fairbrother and Hammer 2005; Vosko 2009).

In regard to employment in social care in the UK, difficulties in workforce organisation and protection have been traced back to the increasing transfer of services under new commissioning practices in welfare organisation, resulting in a fragmentation of a previously relatively well-organised labour force in the public sector (cf. section 4.4). There are increased pressures, under competitive conditions for service providers, to meet the contractual obligations set out by commissioners, a process marked by shrinking resources for social care in the mixed economy of welfare (Rubery and Urwin 2011; Unwin and Molyneux 2005). It has been argued that in this climate, unions would need to extend their collaboration with other civil society organisations to embrace strategies and campaigns that also address those needs of workers that are not directly linked to employment and workplace characteristics but still have an impact on their ability to claim better remuneration, working conditions, and entitlements (Heery 2009).

2.1.2 The rise of private and Voluntary Sector providers in social care

In the UK, the organisation of social care in the public sphere is marked by the strong impact of continuously imposed public service reforms. There has been a decline in direct public service provision by the state since the 1970s. In health and social services this process has emanated from the dismantling and reform of previously existing welfare state institutions, the curtailing and modification of entitlements to services, and public support for alternative social, community and health care services (Powell 2007b; Taylor 2002, 2004). This process has transformed the organisation and regulation of social

reproduction, as well as the very demarcations between the public and the private sphere under an ongoing re-definition of services. In this process, the UK has experienced the emergence of a more disseminated form of welfare state organisation with new modes of regulation, which necessitate highly complex interaction between government bodies, various independent organisations, and semi-independent institutions (Jessop 2002b).

Welfare state transformation has thus not only been a process marked by state interventions from above: since the 1960s, powerful critique of state institutions has been articulated by service users' organisations. Space for alternative provision was created under various civil society organisations, which addressed the deficits and blank spots of existing state provision (Kendall 2003; Kendall and Knapp 1996; Powell 2007a). Disputes focused on rights and representation, equal treatment and the recognition of minority interests in service provision, with struggles around the allocation and direction of state funding in social and health care services.

The very definition of work (content), and therefore also the demarcations for the field and theoretical framing of research applied in relation to welfare and social services, are indeed highly contested. The term *social care* has been in use since the early 1980s, particularly in the British context. *Social care* was initially introduced to refer to qualitative changes in residential care for vulnerable people towards more community based provision, and hence arose out of struggles over institutional change. The concept has been acquiring increasing prominence since the late 1990s and has replaced concepts such as *social services* and *social work* in social policies as well as in professional practice discourse and research (Adams et al. 2009). *Social care* is thereby increasingly used as an overarching term. Adopted also by the New Labour government in its social policy discourse, it refers to a situation in which care, community and social work activities are increasingly organised by *independent* providers *outside* the local authority social services departments and beyond previously defined professional framings (Payne 2009).

Social care has thus an interesting genealogy, which reflects social struggles and professional contestations around the conditions for, and the very content of, work. While it refers to institutional change and the emergence of new forms of labour in *non-statutory* contexts, it also appeals more directly to the dimension of *care* in the understanding of social and community work. These connotations were decisive for using *social care* as the central concept in this study to explore ongoing qualitative changes in the transformation of work under welfare and public sector reforms in the UK.

Since the Thatcher government, centrally imposed modernisation agendas have been expanded into increasingly new areas of public service provision. The

implementation of business techniques and the concomitant reframing of inter-agency relations can be traced back to the advent of New Public Management in the UK from the mid-1980s onwards. Resolving insufficiencies in public service provision became a matter of enforcing management techniques and rationalisation processes alongside short-term efficiency thinking and cost-cutting objectives that were presented as having proved to be 'successful' in other sectors of the economy (Clarke and Newman 1997; Flynn and Williams 1997; Flynn et al. 1996).

In 1990 the NHS and Community Care Act introduced the purchaser-provider split for social care services. The principle of *Compulsory Competitive Tendering* was pushed alongside cost-cutting measures. Services were outsourced and managed using contracts and Service Level Agreements. This marked the early onset of a quasi-marketisation of social care services in the UK in comparison to other European countries, with private and Voluntary Sector providers gaining terrain (Batsleer and Paton 1997; Taylor 2002, 2004). Under the increasing influence of business techniques and rationales, public funding allocation was linked to the meeting of targets measured in terms of quantifiable outcomes, rather than being regulated over input, in the sense of higher spending for certain areas of work (Clarke and Newman 1997).

Commentators on professional change in social work *practice* have highlighted the fact that in the ongoing process of institutional change under these increasingly competitive and contractual arrangements, a new term like *social care* had been necessary to take account of the created diversification in terms of work and employment. New jobs have been created which are no longer necessarily related to the professional qualifications and pay arrangements of social workers and other already existent (health)care and social professions. Although they still carry out many of the activities of these professions, workers are no longer protected and regulated by law or existing professional codes (Dame Platt 2007; Payne 2009).

Moreover, the ongoing transformation is seen as imposing qualitative change regarding the very definition and content of work in care and social services. It has been argued that professional knowledge and expertise has been overwritten and devalued by the imposed restrictions and pressures of accountancy and efficiency (Ferguson 2008; Latimer 2000; Seithe 2010). The focus of professional care work has thereby been deferred from the present to the imminent future: Increased attention is given to meeting targets, to the aims and potential future outcomes of a particular interaction or event, rather than the present moment. Care staff are reported to face difficulties concentrating on the tasks they are involved in and their direct interaction with service users (Latimer

2008).

Furthermore, the constant ambition to standardise and measure services in terms of quantifiable outputs has been described as leading to a 'creaming-off effect' (Rappo and Wallimann 2004), by which people in need of care who are hard to reach, who need special attention and support beyond the recognised aspects under centrally set standards, are tendentially neglected. Their predominant recasting as service *consumers* neglects the fact that speaking of separate areas of production and consumption in social care does not account for the professional definition of working relationships in front-line support. In these, users of services are cast as crucial constituent actors in any activity and in the very value being shaped (Ferguson 2008; Rubery and Urwin 2011).

While Conservative government policies aimed primarily at state *retrenchment* and implied the privatisation of some services and a delegation of care duties to the family and individual carers, New Labour's modernisation agenda focused since the late 1990s on dispersed state interventions via regulatory bodies for securing better quality of services. Under its 'personalisation' agenda and imposed 'service user led assessment' of support needs, this process has highlighted personal caring responsibilities and *outcome focused* practices in quality assessments of care and social services. This reframing under new regulations has been discussed critically as marking a shift in regard to previous accounts of quality and the internationally widely recognised definitions and guidelines for *social work*, which are more *process oriented* and explicitly include a mandate for (therapeutic) problem solving and *social change* (Ferguson 2008; Payne 2009).

Furthermore, New Labour looked more to the Voluntary Sector for the delivery of services under the enforced commissioning of social services than had been the case under previous governments, with the outcome that employment in this sector grew faster in the UK than in other European countries (Kendall 2003). Between 1996 and 2005 there was a dramatic growth of employment of 26%, with the headcount of employees in the VS reaching 600,000 in the UK in 2007, although with growth happening mostly in large organisations (Clark 2007) (see Appendix 1 on workforce characteristics and forms of employment in the UK's VS).

Under a new partnership paradigm for the relationship between government and VS agencies, the sector has been more closely bound to state agendas via contracts for public service delivery, arrangements of interchange for policy development, and newly imposed regulatory restraints. The question has been addressed of the extent to which the independence and potentially critical input of VS organisations has been impacted upon and endangered (Charity Commission 2007; Davies 2007, 2009; Macmillan 2010;

Richardt et al. 2007; Rochester et al. 2010).

The comparatively early onset of outsourcing policies regarding *long-term residential care* in the UK has already resulted in the creation of a new market that is today dominated by the private sector and some multi-national corporations (Scourfield 2007). In long-term care, worsening of employment conditions and quality of care has been reported, marked by the increasing use of contingent and low-waged labour and the reduction of the range of services on offer (Player and Pollock 2001). However, employment conditions in *social care* settings focusing on the increasingly dominant presence of VS providers in this field have only recently received more attention in academic research (Cunningham 2008b; Davies 2010).

Studies focusing on the impact of public service reform on employment conditions in VS social care providers observed mainly negative outcomes for the terms and conditions of its predominantly female and randomly unionised workforce (Cunningham 2008b; Davies 2007). Cunningham and James (2007, 2009) highlighted the worsening of working conditions in terms of increased employment insecurity, even in unionised workplaces⁸: across various fields of service provision, employees reported worrying mostly about eventual job loss and ongoing changes in terms and conditions, including their pay arrangements. Work intensification was a widespread feature “stemming from a combination of worsening staff-client ratios, changing user needs and increased administrative work” (Cunningham and James 2007, p. 2).

However, referring to a research project carried out among VS employees in social care organisations in Scotland, Cunningham (2008a) has also highlighted the possibility of autonomy in employment matters in inter-organisational relations between local government agencies and VS organisations. He emphasised the crucial roles of organizational size, existing capacities, experience in successful lobbying and fundraising, and the strategic positioning of VS organisations for creating leeway to alleviate the impinging pressures on working conditions under competitive tendering. Beyond the author's concern about the current low degree of unionisation in social care, especially in small workplaces in the VS, a fact which would require more union attention and a modification of organisational strategies of unions, it is emphasised that the organisations themselves would need to focus on securing market niches in reference to the sector's

⁸ The authors refer to a study on employment conditions and workplace characteristics carried out among twelve VS organisations in which the public sector union UNISON had a presence and/or was recognised for the purposes of collective bargaining. These organisations operated in different fields of social care provision and were based in different localities across England and Wales.

innovative role in the development of service-user adequate projects to ward off more negative outcomes in employment conditions. Cunningham suggests that VS providers would need to invest more efforts into securing themselves additional state independent funding to become more resilient to the negative effects of regulatory intervention and the imposed cuts in social care services under current statutory funding regimes.

2.1.3 The feminisation of labour and global care chains

What often remains hidden in analyses of transformations in social care that only focus on working conditions in *formal employment* in social care services is the burden imposed by *informally* organised work and those unpaid activities which are (still) not or no longer recognised as work, but are nevertheless required for social reproduction (Bakker 2003). Social care work is characterised by a highly gendered division of labour in terms of both the existing formal *and* informal care and domestic work arrangements. Being overrepresented in areas of employment relating to – and created in – publicly organised forms of social care currently under increased competitive pressure, women are not only hit harder by the ongoing 'modernisation' of public services, but also when it comes to retrenchments in welfare provision. This is because they are more dependent on this form of support for dealing with the continuing gendered delegation of care and devaluation of caring efforts in public as well as domestic spheres (Albelda 2002; Daly 2001).

For decades, feminist scholars have emphasised the complexity of tracing the gendered divisions of labour in social reproduction (Boudry et al. 1999). Working conditions are dependent on the public definition and recognition of work, marked on one hand by public expenditure, employment regulations and the actual modalities of funding provided, for instance, for particular social care and childcare services, and therefore the possibility for the creation of good quality employment in these areas in more formalised settings (Aulenbacher 2009). But working conditions in social care are *also* influenced *indirectly* by the mode in which employment patterns, forms of production and the very organisation of work *in other areas* of production leave financial leeway, choice, time and affective resources for workers with caring responsibilities to recognise and engage themselves in, and/or provide others with resources for social care activities (Folbre 2001, 2003). This has not only been argued for the case of domestic and caring labour (ibid.) but also for voluntary engagement and people's willingness, experienced pressures and capacities to take on work in the Voluntary Sector (cf. Rochester et al. 2010; Taylor 2005).

Feminist analyses of the discriminatory features of the division of labour in social care have early on displayed the welfare state as one of the crucial stages for the imposition of change in production regimes (Graham 1991). By regulating the pressures to enter into paid employment and setting boundaries between the spheres of production and social reproduction by defining and organising public support for care, welfare policies and regulations intervene in the contested sphere of labour by shifting public-private distinctions and providing conditions for the definition and recognition of paid and unpaid work (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2002).

The compromise under the Keynesian model for socio-economic regulation favoured (and was in a certain sense based on) a sexual division of labour. Under the 'male breadwinner/female caretaker' ideology for nuclear family organisation, women perceived as housewives, mothers and caring volunteers secured social reproduction by unpaid contributions. They were thus highly dependent on their labouring husbands' income – though one could argue at least *indirectly* included in the social protection system via their husbands' employment benefits and pension schemes (McDowell 2001). *Standard full-time employment* provided a kind of 'family wage' and the norm for the public understanding and recognition of work; women's work, if performed at all under formal employment, was perceived as complementary (Gibson-Graham 1996). Workers in part-time work or temporary work arrangements faced difficulties in getting collectively organised protection for periods of non-work. The underlying assumption of a family wage, and therefore sufficient provision for retirement and periods of non-work, did not reflect the conditions and needs of the working poor either (Vosko et al. 2009).

The Keynesian model of welfare and the British welfare system under Fordism was thus far from being inclusive and protective of all parts of the population: women and many migrant workers were excluded or discriminated against, as employment benefits did not apply, were insufficient, or even completely denied in and for the work performed. Moreover, the services provided under the created universal model of welfare state and the established organisations for interest representation often did not respond to the existing and newly emerging diversity of needs in terms of an adequate welfare and social care provision (McDowell 2001; McDowell 2006; Vosko et al. 2009). In the face of a patriarchal ideal of full-time work, care work and domestic labour featured as a given, contributed by women in their families, with efforts being mostly unpaid and unrecognised, thereby declassified and devalued as 'unproductive' activities (Folbre 1991).

Under post-Fordist production there has been increased participation of women in the workforce and a concomitant rise, diversification and professionalisation of the

service sector (McDowell 2009). Under the neoliberal marketisation agenda and the new workfare arrangements, the dual-earner model has increasingly become the norm. Neoliberal service economies are thereby marked by highly segmented labour markets with women predominantly making up the low-paid and part-time workforce, and being overrepresented in social care jobs across Europe (see for instance Gonäs and Karlsson 2006).

Some scholars have indeed characterised the rise of atypical forms of employment in neoliberal service economies as a *feminisation of labour* (Jenson et al. 1988; Standing 1999). Caretaking has for a long time been deeply gendered, resulting in mainly women being forced into part-time, temporary and flexible work arrangements. However, the tensions and insufficiencies for the female workforce implied under the Keynesian compromise are today *extended* and are increasingly becoming *the norm* under labour deregulation policies, while the state, under the concomitant marketisation and privatisation of services, is retreating from providing accessible support for instance in childcare and in welfare matters. The population is here particularly hard hit: Britain has recently been addressed as performing drastically unfavourably in terms of providing support for people with caring responsibilities in comparison to 27 other European countries, being placed just behind Romania and Bulgaria when it comes to “financial and work pressures, (...) paternity and maternity provision, and poor living environments” (Ashcroft and Barker 2011, p. 3).

Inadequate welfare services and insufficient protection under the established workfare regime in Britain are affecting people very differently, with *intersecting* inequalities in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and entitlement to citizenship rights, not only in terms of provision and remuneration, but also in terms of access and the very conditions for participation in different sections of the labour market. The proportion of workers with an ethnic minority background in *temporary employment*, for instance, has been reported to be steadily on the rise since the 1990s (Cam 2006). Temporary workers are exposed to higher levels of job insecurity, less ability to influence terms and conditions under collective bargaining, and their employment status results in less benefit entitlements compared to employment on permanent contracts.

The Equal Opportunities Commission has reported on the various ways in which British women with black and minority ethnic backgrounds are faced with highly discriminatory practices. Intersecting discrimination along ethnicity *and* gender lines by employers results in a situation in which these women have “higher risks of unemployment, lower pay, and fewer prospects for promotion compared to their male

and British white women counterparts” (Equal Opportunities Commission 2006, p. 7). Women categorized by the state as black or minority ethnic are confronted with a highly segmented labour market with higher concentrations of women from ethnic minority background in particular parts of the UK’s service industry, than women classified as ‘white British’: while “a quarter of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women work in the wholesale and retail sectors, and 28% of Black Caribbean women work in health and social work, (...) the highest concentration for white women in England is with only 18% in health and social work” (ibid.).

By pointing at the deepening divisions of labour not only on a national but also a global scale, emphasis has been put on the increasing exploitation of migrant labour for social reproduction in Western societies. Under highly discriminatory conditions, *formally and informally* organised global service and care chains have been created with exploitation and pressures handed over to *other*, often migrant communities (Hochschild 2000; Kabeer 2007; Mies 2009). This necessitates a discussion of the issue of protection in, and accessibility of labour markets also along those differentiations that are given due to entitlements to or the refusal of citizenship rights and the right to cross borders (Anderson 2000; Jungwirth and Scherschel 2010) and points at the highly discriminatory practices of employers vis-à-vis new immigrants.

While the pressure to enter the paid labour market increases under workfare regimes, and the created formal labour markets are characterised as being highly segmented along gender and race lines, migrant and working class women are taking on those tasks (at home) that were previously performed paid and unpaid by middle class women, and this in often highly precarious, not randomly *informally* organised work relationships. Whereas under Fordism it was predominantly men who made up the migrant labour force, over the last decades an increasing number of women are migrating to affluent countries. Here, despite their often higher qualifications, they work in low paid service jobs, performing work in the domestic sphere (Anderson 2000), in institutional health and social care settings (Bishop 2011; Dyer et al. 2008), in the hospitality sector (Alberti 2011), and also in sex work (Augustin 2007) to support themselves and their dependents. Women's participation in these labour markets and the related emergence of increasingly complex transnational care chains is seen as the result of neoliberal policies and migratory regimes, imposed in the sending as well as the receiving countries (Hochschild 2000; Kabeer 2007; Pyle 2006).

The debate around *global care chains* has thus added a new dimension to the outcomes of the flexibilisation of labour in workfare regimes and the far-reaching

consequences of missing or inadequate state provision in terms of welfare and affordable (child)care for the divisions of labour in social care. It traces the related issues of exploitation not only to missing or inadequate employment and labour market regulation and the ever-patriarchal division of labour, but also to confinements and restrictions in terms of citizenship *rights* for growing parts of the British population.

It has been emphasised that there is simultaneously a widening and a blurring of class divisions *amongst women*, which is reconfiguring the conflicts of class, race and gender (Barker and Feiner 2004; Charusheela 2003). Low-paid workers, often migrant women, perform the tasks in everyday care and domestic work. McDowell (2006) describes the blurring of work/life, public/private distinctions under the current reconfiguration of social care, depicting the home as a new locus of class conflict. Relationships of care are formed between the predominantly female workers and their employers (families), which would make it difficult for workers and their employers alike to define and address these relations as employer-employee relationships. Thus, the ongoing marketisation and commodification of social care in Britain is discussed here as necessitating increased efforts to better understand and unravel the ongoing shifts in the *formally and informally* organised spheres of work in social reproduction, perceived as crucial political arenas in which social inequalities related to the division of labour are today reflected, (re-) produced and transformed.

2.2 Precarity and mobilisations around care

As with other areas that have been addressed by neoliberal reforms, transformations in social care are thus highly contested, yet these contestations might not always have taken on institutionalised forms that are already recognised by the broader public (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). The created imageries and conceptualisations of *precarity* have made an important contribution as they brought widely neglected concerns, especially of younger generations, back on the political agenda. The embodied practices of protest and created imageries around alternative Mayday parades, first organised in Milan in 2001 and then spreading to other European cities in the following years, created only one interesting point of departure. These mobilisations and days of action articulated informed protest against the increased but in many ways invisibilised precarisation of working *and* living conditions.

By using new media and online networking tools in creative ways they addressed the interconnectedness of developments in various fields such as employment, restrictive border and immigration law, and the privatisation of previously publicly funded services, to articulate subversive forms of dealing with these constraints and impositions on everyday life. It has been argued that the particular politics that appeal to precarity, its imageries and embodied practices of contestation, have thereby amounted to an important process of politicisation which has been seeking strength “not in unity, but in difference” (Hamm 2011, p. 5), building up as such a constituent power that has crafted *new* arenas for political expression and broader alliances⁹.

In reference to the term *precarious labour*, these mobilisations had first emerged from the debate, discussed above (see subsection 2.1.1), on the rise of non-standard employment in neoliberal service industries (Casas-Cortés 2009). They addressed and thereby reframed the already articulated concerns about the “proliferation of atypical and irregular work relations” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008, p. 243), by depicting it as an *ongoing and contested* process (Lorey 2010). *Precarious labour* is conceived here as work carried out under temporary arrangements, as in short-term or part-time employment, freelance work and subcontracting. It should be stressed that work under temporary arrangements is increasingly project-based and product-oriented, with remuneration and

⁹ For a more detailed analysis of different mobilising issues and some illustrative examples of these creative forms of protest and their conceptual framings under the heading of *precarity* see also Casas-Cortés (2009).

acknowledgement dependent on outcome. The temporary mode, the often indirect and complex modes of employment, combined with the recognition of work by outcome is seen as radically transforming the experience of work and the related affective burdens for precarious labour. The proliferation of precarious labour is increasingly undermining the allocation of individuals to particular labour markets, as precarious workers often engage in various fields of work and across different localities to make a living (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

However, as suggested above, precarious labour is not invoked here as a merely descriptive concept for a particular set of employment conditions, under which we could differentiate between particular, separate groups of vulnerable employees, addressing different forms of the imposed strains under capitalist exploitation, the various degrees of experienced job insecurity and differing modes of exclusion from certain employment benefit entitlement or missing protection under existing forms of employment law. Indeed it has been addressed as a point of fierce debate that precarious labour ranges from low-skilled, low paid jobs to high-skilled work in executive and often comparatively well paid jobs.

Rather, *precarious labour* has been embraced to address a common *and potentially* mobilising aspect of the ongoing transformation of work: it is argued that, while precarious forms of labour are becoming (again¹⁰) a widespread feature, contemporary modes of value creation are increasingly taking place *beyond* the wage-labour relationship. In this process, previous norms for work organisation, including hard-won and indeed *employment* related social security systems under Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state have been discarded or at least radically undermined (Vosko 2009)¹¹. Previously established systems are losing relevance for workers because of their general loss of financial endowment, the created generational imbalance and the ultimately inherent dimensions of exclusion in these systems (as discussed above). It is argued that precarious labour therefore requires a new strategy for mobilisation, new models for future organisation (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2006) and visions for different forms of social protection.

In the case of *precarious labour*, there is a combination of concerns that are based on but reach beyond the very characteristics of the worsening of *direct* employment

¹⁰ Often there is the suggestion that labour protection was an exception anyway under Fordism, only reliable for certain privileged sections of the waged labourforce in Europe (see Neilson and Rossiter 2008).

¹¹ See Vosko (2009) for an overview and discussion of attempts to address precarious employment via international labour regulations.

relationships. These include (a) a discontinuity of employment, combined with a non-remuneration of central aspects of work; (b) it is the very quality of embodiment of these expanding periods of non-remunerated periods that feature as crucial components for remaining productive and inserting oneself into the paid labour market; (c) increasing aspects that are crucial for workers' productivity are not only taking place outside a remunerated wage labour relationship but have also become subjected to serious processes of privatisation, which impose additional financial and affective burdens on the *individual*, rather than framing them under collective responsibility; (d) this process is depicted as blurring previous boundaries of productive and reproductive spheres in the everyday experience of precarious labour (cf. Casas-Cortés 2009; Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

2.2.1 The blurring of productive and reproductive spheres for precarious labour

The debate on *precarity* is thereby inspired by recent reframings of the autonomous Marxist critique of political economy that had been formulated in 1970s Italy (Borio et al. 2002; Murphy and Mustapha 2005). Scholars writing in the post-operaist tradition argue that, under post-Fordist production, life in its communicative and collaborative aspects has become productive, with capitalist exploitation happening increasingly beyond the boundaries of previously defined settings for wage labour, spreading into and transforming workers' everyday lives.

Value creation in post-industrial societies is described as gravitating increasingly towards *immaterial* and *affective labour* (Hardt 1999). In this process, rather intangible and collectively organized aspects of value creation are pushed to the fore as valuable sites for capitalist production and commodification: for the branding of products in manufacturing through collaboration with the creative industries, in education, finance and research, as indeed also in relationships of care, knowledge production and its dissemination. In all these areas, the creation and fostering of affects become crucial aspects of production. In distinction to labour processes under the 'Taylorist factory regime, value creation and expropriation are depicted as becoming fragile and exposed to rapid changes, with fixed forms of measurement and control a difficult if not impossible endeavour if productivity is not to be jeopardized (Hardt and Negri 2009).

The imposed regimes of labour control have become more complex and diffused, revolving around the very embodiment of subjectivity, the formation and articulation of life. Under *biopolitical production*, the product of labour is no longer a fixed object but has itself a 'subject' status. Experiences of work-related burdens are described as expanding

far beyond the immediate conditions of formalised employment, colonising the workers' whole life time-space (Hardt 2004; Hardt and Negri 2009). It has been argued however, that there is an ongoing selective recombination of life, in the sense that only certain aspects of everyday life are addressed and used for capitalist exploitation (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

One aspect of the various attempts of capital to control and subject workers to discipline under this form of production is the precarisation of work. The remuneration of work for precarious labour is irregular, insecure and does not provide any, or only insufficient, collectively organised contributions for periods of non-work through tax funded or employee-employer contributions (such as holiday pay, sickness pay, maternity/paternity leave, contributions to pensions, and in some countries to unemployment benefits). Previously existing forms of support and social nets or benefits which had been funded by the state are not accessible, others are dismantled and open to exploitation by private interests. Furthermore, while work becomes increasingly project- and outcome-oriented and requires continuous yet hyperflexible commitment, this commitment ceases to be remunerated and supported.

As precarious workers are forced into continuous commitment and worries about re-employment (the next contract, the next project) they engage in manifold parallel investments. Existing elaborations on everyday experiences by precarious workers stressed the workers' intensified sense of vulnerability, hyperactivity, restlessness and the need to juggle various interdependencies. Efforts such as the forming and handling of various informally organised support networks, the fostering of good affective relations to various (potential) income generating sources, investments in work content beyond the particular contract, the gathering of work experience in unpaid internships and voluntary engagements while juggling additional part-time bread and butter jobs and the ability to dis-identify from work content as soon as another job opportunity comes up become essential ingredients for remaining integrated in recognised realms of production (Ehrenstein 2006a; Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

Emphasis has thereby been given to “the centrality of emotional exploitation, or emotional intelligence, for the control of employability and multiple dependencies and feelings of affective exhaustion” (Papadopoulos et al 2008, pp. 234). The formation, support and maintenance of communicative and collaborative practices in affective relations are thus crucial, yet often completely unrecognised efforts by precarious labour. It has been argued that these efforts need to be taken into account when looking for

answers to exploitative practice in precarity (Ehrenstein 2006b; Precarias a la deriva 2004a; Shukaitis and Graeber 2007).

Hence, the rise of temporary modes of employment and the related loss in relevance and weakening of wage-labour based security systems could be depicted as engendering a vast amount of unpaid affective labour: precarious workers invest and engage in various forms of networking and interdependent support practices, not only to remain or become employable and productive, but to enable themselves to survive under conditions of restraint and insecurity.

The crucial point is that the involved affective efforts become increasingly indistinguishable, from the workers' point of view, from their everyday life projects and ways of caring for people, particular interests, themselves and their surroundings, so that they face difficulties when it comes to confronting problems in these areas, to addressing and relating to these difficulties as mere problems of the established and recognised spheres of work and employment. Referring to the proliferation of precarious labour means acknowledging that previous analytical differentiations are unable to encompass the ongoing transformation, based as they often are on time- and particular space-based distinctions such as productive/reproductive spheres, private/public life, work/non-work, work/leisure, work/care. These distinctions become deprived of their earlier sense for critical analysis for precarious workers themselves, as they do not apply to a potentially fruitful analysis and distinction in their *subjective experience* of work-related burdens, the multiple vulnerabilities and conflicting priorities in their everyday lives.

Evolving from this labour and productivist analysis, a move has been made by scholars from different theoretical backgrounds to push agendas for a re-organisation of value creation via a radical modification and reconfiguration of collective social security systems (Laboratorio Feminista 2006; Lucarelli and Fumagalli 2008; McKay 2005): there are claims for new *social citizenship rights* which entail the provision of more than meagre material support, the right to mobility (in view of the established border regimes around Fortress Europe) and a focus on better public infrastructure and public services. Under claims for a *commonfare* a collective vision is created for a new economic and social system that would recognise that healthcare, education, and community services must be protected from privatisation and cuts. These are claims that can be articulated without necessarily directly referring to better remuneration for a particular part of the employed and already recognised workforce. This perspective has made broader alliances possible, beyond affiliations along the lines of the traditional and formally defined workplace (e.g.

between media activists, migrant collectives, students, grassroots labour organisers, and feminist collectives).

Claims for social security based on a *citizens' basic income* under the headings of *advanced citizenship rights* are radical steps in this direction: state organised forms of support would be freed from a direct connection to waged labour, and thus granted independently of employment status. These claims aim at opening up the political debate via a radical reformulation of our understanding of what a welfare system would look like in a production regime, which in its current neoliberal framing has deprived many citizens from any form of control over or hope for a collectively and publicly organised redistribution of income, an ecological protection of resources, and sustainable organisation of *the commons* – as in public education, healthcare and social care services. As such it has been discussed as a useful *mobilising* strategy, which connects the already ongoing but yet often separated struggles in and against precarity (Bojadijev et al. 2003).

2.2.2 Precarity and the *politics of care*

In the UK the debate on precarity has mainly focused on the experience of workers in the media and cultural industries and has been taken up by writers active in these spheres (Gill and Pratt 2008). From the outset, feminist scholars have addressed the focus on labour in the creative industries, and the resultant iconisation of the creative worker as the subversive precarious worker. A closer analysis in the precarity debate of the gendered and racialised dimensions of spreading precariousness was said to be missing (see for instance Kömürcü 2007; Mitropoulos 2005). The debate around immaterial and affective labour had mainly been used in reference to activities which have already been partially included in the paid and recognised realm *of work* and again failed to discuss highly sexualised aspects in the embodiment of precarious labour (McRobbie 2010). While the debate around the precarisation of work had pretended to finally point at unrecognised feminised efforts, the neglect of interests and experiences of all those subjects affected by unrecognised burdens in care and domestic labour had once again been extended (Jungwirth and Scherschel 2010).

This critique falls short of the ongoing contestation *inside* the mobilisations around precarity by feminist activist groups such as *Prec@s* in Italy and *Precarias a la deriva* in Spain, which have emphasised the strain put on relations of *care*, the heteronormative and ethnicised matrix in which new divisions of labour and everyday practices of precarious labour occur. Confronted with the normalisation of precarious labour and the ensuing practice of relying on informally organised care work and support networks,

these groups addressed the question of what this actually means for the organisation and creation of empowering contexts for care (Ávila and Malo 2009; Fantone 2007; Precarias a la deriva 2004a).

Combining a political economy analysis that focuses on the organisation of value creation, the inherent exploitation of labour and its hidden potential for *autonomous* organisation with feminist concerns about an ecological organisation and practice of care has, however, been a difficult and for decades often highly conflict-ridden endeavour (Arruzza 2010). Relations of care are defined by dimensions of asymmetry and inter-relatedness in regard to vulnerability and mutual empowerment. They yield various degrees of dependency that are under continuous transformation, as life and the need for support evolve and become actively transformed.

An emphasis on *care* highlights the fact that caring for somebody or something is not an isolated activity which could be separated into individual contributions and thus controlled by an individual 'carer' with reference to normative ethics. Rather, dealing with affective efforts in caring is a *process*, which is always entangled in relations of care *for* matter and living beings, and is thus characterised by ecological dimensions of interdependency. The process of 'taking care' is thus embedded in *collective practices*: it is perceived as situated in specific contexts of collective endeavours and affections (Latimer and Puig de la Bellacasa 2011). Addressing practices of care by starting from their situatedness does not, however, result in predetermination of action but still actively addresses the potentiality and openness of *relational ethical doings* (ibid.). These are considerations of the collective dimensions of the characteristics and necessities of care which render mere appeals for individual autonomy and self-control highly questionable, and frameworks for quantitative measurement of individual efforts in care difficult to sustain, which however again undermine many traditional assumptions of discourses in (political) economy (cf. Joachimsen 2003).

The activist group *Precarias a la deriva*, based in Madrid, has argued for a shift of focus within the *precarity* discourse and autonomous political practice: from areas of value creation and production towards a direct politicisation of the *collective organisation of care*, a shift which would necessitate the acknowledgement of mutual interdependency rather than autonomy and deal with the non-predictability of affective burdens (Ávila and Malo 2009; Casas-Cortés 2009). Arguing for a recuperation and politicisation of the logic and practice of care, while responsibilities and care work related burdens are not only heavily unequally divided along a gendered and racialised division of labour, but also structurally

individualised in multiple scientific as well as everyday lay discourses (Pieper and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2003; Precarias a la deriva 2006; Rose 1996) is, however, not an easy task.

2.2.3 Volunteering and the decontextualisation of unpaid activities

In contemporary Britain, a dominant discourse regarding social care – the challenges imposed by public service reform and the potential rescue points – is centred around volunteering. I would like to refer in more detail to the evolving discourse around *voluntary action*¹² and to draw attention to the potential pitfalls of this powerful decontextualised perception of unpaid activities in social care and the isolating and individualising effects it has.

Britain has a long history of framing volunteering as a valuable phenomenon to be promoted *per se and as such*. Although the history of voluntary action and the Voluntary Sector has been widely discussed in relation to socio-economic developments and government policies, volunteering is still predominantly framed as having an inherent value, which nurtures a quality to be addressed independently from the actual division of labour in particular parts of society (Taylor 2005).

Volunteering, which can broadly be defined as “unpaid work outside the home” (Taylor 2005, p. 119), has attracted academic research interest in various disciplines since the mid-1990s (Billis and Harris 1996; Dekker and Halman 2003; Hustinx et al. 2010; Williams 2004; Wilson and Musick 1997). In keeping with Taylor, I would argue that a major pitfall of the current policy discourse and existing academic literature on volunteering is that it is framed as forming a merely positive phenomenon, being by its very definition, “‘beneficial’ for the volunteer, those they help, and society at large” (Taylor 2005, p. 121). Interest in voluntary action as shown by government policies and international programmes for volunteering is focused on increasing the numbers of volunteers and encourages those communities who would lose out on its positive effects (UN Volunteers 2009)¹³.

This has created a favourable climate for the narrowing down of research and academic discourses on volunteering which have mainly focussed on organisational and managerial issues regarding the attraction and treatment of volunteers. The discourse created around voluntary action isolates the phenomenon of volunteering from its

¹² In the following volunteering and voluntary action will be used as synonyms.

¹³ In 1997 the General Assembly of the United Nations designated the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (INV). Various national and international programmes for volunteers have been started since then and additionally planned to mark the tenth anniversary of INV in 2011.

broader socio-political contexts. It promotes a perspective which “sees volunteers as a group, who are interesting in as much as they need to be recruited, supported and retained” (ibid. 121) which is reducing volunteers to mere objects of study. Voluntary work is here increasingly analysed separately from the spheres of work and employment.

I will now lay out some of the problematic conclusions that can be inferred from accounts which portray voluntary action in this manner, without directly addressing a particular context of work and employment in which voluntary action is performed, nor in direct relation to its wider context of ongoing transformations and contestations regarding the recognition and definition of work under new workfare arrangements. I will do this with particular reference to a recent publication (Rochester et al. 2010), that addresses “the emerging and enduring challenges for voluntary action” (ibid., p. 3) under the promising title *Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century*. This book aims at providing an overview of the existing literature and statistical evidence on voluntary action with particular focus on the UK. It reflects in exemplary manner the current zeitgeist concerning volunteering with discursive elements that recur in other publications (Dekker and Halman 2003; Hustinx et al. 2010).

In this publication, volunteering is defined by the authors as a three dimensional phenomenon: predominantly understood in British society as (1) a philanthropic not-for-profit undertaking, a perspective which emphasises the altruistic motivations of volunteers and stresses the moral duties of citizens to serve for a good cause; as recently also recast in more complex ways, for instance as being motivated and driven by (2) “activism” and political campaigning; and in some instances even understood and discussed as (3) constituting a “serious leisure activity” (Rochester et al. 2010, p. 10). Volunteering is then portrayed in encyclopaedic manner in various aspects and formations, by listing all sorts of areas and forms in which volunteering takes place (ibid., Chapter 3 *Capturing the Diversity of Voluntary Action*).

Throughout the book, the 'independence' of volunteering and voluntary action is put forward as a *crucial inherent value* to be protected. In promotion of its independence, the authors seem to be mainly concerned about the question of whether voluntary action will further be performed by citizens under current conditions (see, for instance, ibid. p. 230). The authors critically refer to the recent history in UK governments' policy development and welfare reforms, endeavours that attributed Voluntary Sector organisations and volunteering programmes a more prominent and instrumental role in the commissioning of public services and community development (Chapter 16 *Defending the Spirit of Volunteering from formalisation*). At the same time, the book fails to address the

outcomes of these processes for particular areas of work and employment. Instead of providing closer analyses of these contested processes as also implying an ongoing redefinition of work, and hence of shifting boundaries between recognised and unrecognised spheres of embodied activities in certain areas of social (re)production, it focuses on the outcomes of these reforms and programmes for *volunteering per se*.

The book reads in some paragraphs like a manual for management and social policy makers, portraying volunteering as being in need of protection rather than certain areas of activities or those subjects who embody it. It is if the only concern were to keep volunteering, and hence massively underdefined, unpaid work ongoing, so that it can continue to be fruitfully harnessed in society. At some point, volunteering is even depicted as 'a source', and thus implicitly imagined as a commodifiable object, which would be in need of replacement if certain parts of the population (women?!) cease to be available for maintaining it:

“The first set of challenges concern, on the one hand, the future composition of the volunteering population, and on the other hand, the ways in which people become involved in voluntary action. Recent employment trends have significantly reduced both the numbers of women who are not part of the labour market and the length of time they remain outside it. The long-term impact *on volunteering* [sic!] is likely to be considerable as the *supply of people* for the section of the population that has historically provided large numbers of volunteers overall, and many of the most committed of them in particular, begins to dry up. However, the growing numbers of the 'active retired' are a potentially *rich source of replacement* and a variety of initiatives have provided evidence that older people have a major contribution to make to volunteering, if targeted efforts were made to recruit and support them” (Rochester et al. 2010, pp. 80, italics added).

There is a critical reading and evaluation of current UK government initiatives, but only in so far as it affects the realms of volunteering. Government is thereby criticised as promoting merely an instrumental approach to volunteering that would have resulted in formalisation processes. However, this form of critique remains stuck as it appeals merely to a more forceful promotion of the supposedly inherent values of volunteering:

“In short, we are in danger of losing the spirit of volunteering and the creativity, sociability, and autonomy which underpin it. Adopting a far more formal approach to volunteering sees volunteering increasingly cast as an instrument of delivery, and volunteers as a resource to be used, rather than as stakeholders or co-owners” (ibid., p. 230).

By perceiving volunteering as independent and therefore inherently positively connotated activity, without analysing the ongoing changes in the various related realms of paid work and employment in which volunteering actually takes place, this discourse

lacks critical impetus regardless, or perhaps even because of all its emphasis on stakeholder interests and the protection of autonomy in volunteering matters.

Activities approached under volunteer engagement are framed as achievements but remain isolated from the wider context of social transformation. Furthermore, the appeal to voluntary action is framed as an individualised obligation and moral duty. This cheerful embracement of unpaid engagement as of positive value per se and the promoted emphasis on the value of its 'autonomy' culminates in one paragraph in an indeed strangely worded statement. With reference to the negative outcomes of the ongoing formalisation process around volunteering, it says:

“At worst, it has led to the replacement of volunteers by paid staff within voluntary organisations” (ibid., p. 221).

Volunteering, I would like to argue, is in these discourses on the verge of being regarded as a sacred cow, as if the activities it embraced would automatically just lose their meaning if they were performed in the context of employment, and thus payment. Moreover, this sort of analysis provides no further insights into the ongoing shifts and reconfigurations of the paid sphere of employment and as such cannot draw attention to specific working conditions and pressures.

Read against studies on the transformation of public service provision and related employment issues in social care (alluded to in subsection 2.1.2) and studies reporting on work intensification and the widespread experience of job insecurity amongst employees, this cheerful embracing of volunteering and the portrayal of voluntary action as having an inherent quality to be valued as such is more than questionable, it is an affront to all those engaged in the struggle to improve existing *working conditions* in social care.

What could all too easily be neglected is the point that the created spheres of and for volunteering (unpaid work outside the home) might be the result of the contestation of boundaries of the definition and actual recognition of paid work – and thus of the gendered and variously stratified divisions of labour in a given society, in which social policies and 'volunteers' do interfere (and clash) for particular reasons that need to be further addressed.

What have been the most prominent attempts to analyse paid and unpaid efforts in social care under the perspective of such a critical political economy discourse? One influential framework is the discourse and empirical body of research on emotion work (cf. Greco and Stenner 2008).

2.2.4 Conceptualising affective efforts in social care

There is a long feminist tradition of critical thought which draws its strength from an analytical separation of productive and reproductive spheres, and how the latter has been obfuscated in its role in value creation in Marxist analyses of capitalist production. Many scholars in the sociology of work that have focused on efforts in the affective realm *as labour* have followed feminist claims from the 1960s and 1970s to include work burdens in social reproduction, mainly performed unpaid by women in the private and domestic sphere, into the realm of financial recognition, which found its most prominent expression in various *wages for housework campaigns* (Dalla Costa 1988; Dalla Costa and James 1972). Here, attention is focused on the huge amounts of individual efforts in relation-work that remain hidden in economic analyses and existing forms of remuneration. This political strategy can thus be referred to as a feminist *strategy of inclusion*.

Hochschild (1979; 1983) then introduced the concept of emotion work to describe an individual's "act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling", be it their own emotions/feelings or those of others (Hochschild 2008, p. 122). She criticised the colonization of people's feelings by the commercialisation of emotionality in the service sector and addressed the difficulties and strains workers had when required to perform a particular form of affectivity at particular workplaces under certain feeling rules. Her distinction between emotional labour (commodified, paid and in the public sphere) and emotion work (unpaid and in the private sphere) was used to describe, explore and criticise the quite striking gendered formation, delegation and thereby often implied devaluation of efforts in this realm.

Under this paradigm, emphasis has later been given to the amount of unpaid emotion work performed in the domestic sphere by women in the form of care for children, the elderly and sick. New racialised divisions of labour under the commodification of the reproductive sphere have been accounted for by addressing the widespread phenomenon that white middle class women are increasingly delegating domestic work and caring (Anderson 2000), which entails strenuous forms of emotion work, to other women, and increasingly to women of colour and/or migrant labour, to enable themselves to enter (emotionally better equipped) the professional labour market (Hochschild 2000, 2003).

In recent studies connecting with this debate, the increasing use of low paid and often migrant workers in social and health care services has been depicted as reflecting the further ongoing devaluation of emotional labour and the work on bodies it

necessitates. Work in direct care is deplored as being devalued, perceived as dirty work, undertaken increasingly in “precarious, informal or temporary” arrangements (Dyer et al. 2008, p. 2030). Conceptualising emotional labour has thus helped to focus on its necessity for productivity in terms of the exploitation of these efforts, the various devaluations of their embodiment in particular, as yet insufficiently recognised realms of production, by stressing their highly gendered and racialised features.

Mirchandani (2003) has tied in with this debate to draw attention to the unrecognised efforts involved in “dealing with inequity” (ibid., p. 738). She emphasised the unequal relations of power in highly gendered *and* racialised settings for emotion work, and thus the relational aspects of unpaid emotion work in paid jobs. In her overview of studies on emotion work, she emphasised that emotion work has mainly been discussed in three interconnected dimensions: (1) the management of self feeling; (2) making others feel a certain way; (3) and in defining one's work. However, little understanding has evolved of the relationship between the emotion work people do and their social locations within interactive gender, race and class hierarchies and as such the 'public' aspects of their 'private' struggles. Alongside other scholars, she argues that the often maintained distinction between paid and unpaid settings for emotion work would paint over the high interdependence and blurring of these spheres. Subjects are not fixed in certain social positions but are engaged in reacting to being positioned by actively trying to keep or transform social practices and discourses, activities which are burdensome and take effort:

“First, rather than possessing particular ethnicities, class positions and gender traits, individuals occupy social locations which are relational and shifting. The work of recognizing, managing and participating in these shifting relations of difference requires emotion work which is done in conjunction with the work of managing one's own feelings, making others feel a certain way and defining one's work. Second, both racial majority and racial minority groups do emotion work which is racialized, that is, which is situated within hierarchies of racial privilege and disadvantage (...) Women do emotion work to maintain privilege or to challenge disadvantage in conjunction with the emotion work they do as part of their jobs” (p. 729).

Mirchandani describes impressively the various ways in which the women she was involved with in her study were engaged in emotion work “to shift the 'relations of difference’” (ibid., p. 736).

The problem I see here with approaching these issues under this theoretical framework, however, is that most research on emotional labour/emotion work focuses on coping strategies in terms of 'emotion management' and defines effort in this realm

solely as an *individual task*, *personal ability* or *individual commitment*. It therefore cannot grasp and fruitfully address the collective endeavours and experienced interdependencies to transform power relations in the everyday reality of precarious workers. Efforts in the affective realm remain bound to individualised experiences and burdens; dealing with affectivity is here perceived as being rooted in the individual.

If we translate this into research into the experience and difficulties faced by precarious labour in social care, relational experience and transformation in collective and interconnected engagement cannot be grasped and problematised as crucial and inherent aspects of work in this particular context, as a form of labour which is per se collaborative, and necessarily collectively organised in relations of deep interdependency. A further elaboration on these activities and how they are impacted upon by political and socio-economic transformation processes remains thus potentially unexplored. These – mostly informally organized – aspects of affective efforts are often neglected or seen only as additive 'political' components, and thus not as inherent parts and indeed necessary requirements for creating settings of care and for keeping them ongoing and productive.

Addressing the divisions of labour regarding these caring activities by conceptualising them as an inherently necessary component of social care work might help to focus our attention on the current challenges in articulating subjective experience and the necessary preconditions for labour organisation and the articulation of labour interest in social care in this regard. Attention might then be given to workers' subjective definitions of work and the related burdens. This attention would go above and beyond the detection of difference in individually mastered burdens. Emphasis could be given to distinguishing supportive or indeed obstructive conditions to foster a desire to master challenges *collectively*. Despair in regard to these aspects of work could then be addressed, as could indeed crucial components of the exploitation of labour in the ongoing transformation of social care settings, and be further politicised.

The conceptualisation of efforts in the affective realm as necessarily collectively embraced endeavours thus brings important issues of care and difficulties faced by labour in social care to a different level, as it directly and explicitly includes a political economy aspect without even giving the opportunity to address this form of labour as an activity which could be dealt with on an individual level and in isolation.

2.3 Everyday experiences of precarious labour in social care

How does the need for additional and transformed affective investments in the handling of precarity referred to above relate to the ongoing transformation of the realms of work and employment in social care? How is work experienced in these realms? And what do these experiences tell us about options for an effective and sustainable organisation, or at least mobilisation of precarious workers in the future? The activist group *Precarias a la deriva* in Madrid has elaborated some useful considerations in this regard.

Precarias a la deriva grew as a political project from collective inquiries into everyday experiences of precarious work by women, organised by a feminist collective in Madrid in 2002 on a day that had been identified as a general strike by unions. The women of the collective did not feel addressed by the unions' political programme, as the very claims and proposed action for change would neither have been feasible nor have resulted in any positive change in the very conditions of the “fragmented, invisible, informal work” in which they were involved (*Precarias a la deriva* 2004a, p. 157). Instead of joining the picket lines, they addressed women on the streets, asking them about their concerns and working conditions with the aim of identifying singularities and common ground in subjective experiences in the “circuits of feminised precarious work” (*ibid.*).

Precarias stress that putting everyday practices in care in the foreground is crucial to addressing and developing ecological modes of subversion in precarity. In the context of constant transformation and increasing dismantling of institutional care settings, a *strategy of attention* towards ecological and sustainable modes in the embodiment of care is urgently needed (Ávila and Malo 2009). Attention to care is seen as the starting point in the organisation against the imposed isolation and vulnerability in precarity, enabling precarious workers to engage with the challenges imposed. What these reflections on collective strategies and struggles around care are pointing at is that efforts and endeavours in the affective realm can be used, when organised well, for establishing a mutually empowering practice that can build up strength and impact on and against precarity.

Under the so-called *care-sex-attention continuum* activities and efforts in social (re)production that are marginalised, devalued and often made invisible are seen as *interwoven and interdependent* with affect “at the centre of a chain which connects places, circuits, families, populations, etc.” (*Precarias a la deriva* 2004a, p. 159). *Precarias a la deriva* introduced this concept to address the interconnected ways in which women's activities in the affective realm of metropolitan territories articulate themselves to create

newly emerging possibilities and realities for making a living and thus also for potentially subversive endeavours.

The stratification of affective efforts into separated spheres for attention, sex and care work is traced by Precarias as a problematic result of the long history of the capitalist, religious and patriarchal exploitation, discrimination and subjugation of women and feminine sexuality (Precarias a la deriva 2006). Efforts involved in feminised care, sex and attention work demand dealing with corporeal affect that can be invoked and embodied more or less subversively under the dominant heterosexual matrix. The establishment of separated spheres for affect builds thereby on the deeply culturally embedded distinction between virtuous versus deprecatory and abject models for feminine social relationality. The idealised and restricted forms – as symbolised by carers/mothers/housewives – are put against sexually active and independent subjects – as symbolised by sex workers (ibid.).

Precarias report on affective relationality being harnessed in precarity by processes which impose rather debilitating and isolating forms: affective relationality is disciplined as mere attention work in customer relations, epitomised by the call-centre worker who is urged by its supervisors to placate callers on the phone; it is reduced to a restricted form of attention work in professionalised counselling impinged by cuts to public services; it is invisibilised and unrecognised in the informal care of children by domestic housekeepers; it is commodified in an ever flourishing but also marginalised market for sex work. Tracing the continuum between activities and experiences in these areas is an attempt to guide political attention to the elaboration of *other*, more empowering ways of articulating affect beyond the above described binary distinction by putting *care* at centre stage.

On a conceptual and political-practical level it is here that Precarias convert the description of care-chains and the related exploitative social phenomena as described in section 2.1 into a *transformative recognition* and active tracing of the subversive, already existing interdependencies and inter-connections between feminised precarious labour in single activities and affective efforts. Addressing care through this theoretical framing recognises the point that in order to confront precarisation, creative ways of living and working together by *mobilising* and *embodying* affect anew are necessary. This requires first of all increased political attention to the 'field of desire' (cf. Berardi 'Bifo' 2012), as a sphere where exploitation *and* subversion take place. Thus, the concept of the care-sex-attention continuum underlines that *practices of care* – derivative of already embodied forms of collective and interdependent social practice – rely on affective efforts in re-

positioning ourselves in unequal power relations along the lines of class, gender, race, citizenship and sexuality.

Precarias argue that, for a conceptualisation of efforts and strategies of subversion to occur, the ambivalences that are experienced in these realms have to be taken into account. Engaging in forms of protest which would make a *refusal of work* as in an *interruption* of activities necessary might be experienced as rather difficult in the care-sex-attention continuum: a potentially life-transforming, if life-threatening issue (Precarias a la deriva 2006). Precarious labour might not simply engage in a strike of efforts in the affective realm as this would directly harm the constituency of social bodies, including the ones to which it belongs: every omitted effort in the affective realm might have consequences on a direct existential level. This is a crucial characteristic of social care work which has also been discussed as the *barriers to exit* in caring relations (Joachimsen 2003).

Rather than seeing the ambivalent experiences stemming from these characteristics of efforts by precarious labour in the care-sex-attention continuum as an ideological misunderstanding under capitalist seduction, it has been argued that these experiences need to be further addressed and explored in order to create better understanding and thereby better conditions for organising precarious labour for more empowering forms and practices in social care (Precarias a la deriva 2007).

However, these empowering efforts in social care need to be addressed as a collective public responsibility that must be recognised and adequately supported and provided for *as work* (cf. Glenn 2000). Currently *caring* is still predominantly perceived as an individualised and decontextualised obligation, mainly delegated to women – mostly to mothering women in unpaid domestic and family work, but also increasingly to low-paid, often even informally engaged workers who are deprived of any formally organised employment rights and benefits. In such times, the *politics of care* need to forcefully confront any attempts to depict their caring activities as an additional, however politically or morally motivated commitment.

Putting everyday experiences under such circumstances in the foreground means using precarity as a political concept for research: an exploration of everyday experiences can thus give important insights into the lived tensions for workers that are emerging in their field of engagement. Lived experiences in social care are here conceptualised as being part of the care-sex-attention continuum. Their study requires a detailed analysis of the socio-political context and the ongoing structural changes in the field under exploration to which these experiences can then be related. This is then research that not

only engages in an exploration of working conditions in a descriptive way, but attempts to tackle the ambivalences and frictions that lead to a politicization of the field.

In this study, the exploration of everyday experiences in social care in the UK has therefore been organised around two main concerns:

1) What structural changes have taken place in the field of social care in recent decades?

How has the organisation of social care been transformed under the increasing commissioning and contracting out of public services? How, and in which ways, have social bodies from different sectors been addressed by public service reforms and what are the outcomes for those operating in the field of social care? What are the outcomes of these transformations for the division of labour in social care?

2) What are the issues at stake for labour engaged in direct front-line support?

How is social care work experienced on an everyday basis? To what extent can these experiences be described as precarious? What do workers in social care define as palpable change in work-related burdens? What is experienced as problematic, and what as reassuring in their everyday working conditions? What lived tensions are emerging that could contribute to a further politicisation of this experience?

The next chapter presents the methodological framework in which these questions were addressed and considers epistemological issues regarding empirical research on precarity.

CHAPTER 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter discusses epistemological considerations that informed my study on precarity in social care and describes the methodological approach chosen for conducting, analysing and presenting empirical research. Informed by feminist standpoint theory and accounts of co-research in precarity my project aimed at building up connections between different critical practices of knowledge production. In 3.1 I discuss these premises and present the trajectory of my multi-sited ethnography in London's Voluntary Sector. I also provide first insights into the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector which was chosen as primary focus for empirical research on working conditions in social care. Subsection 3.1.1 presents the constituent parts of the envisaged research design by discussing my methodological considerations for choosing them. The chapter continues in 3.1.2 with a reflection on how ethical considerations regarding the experiences made in the first encounters with women in the field and my own status and working conditions as pregnant student researcher impacted on the strategies applied for data generation and analysis in this thesis. This part accounts for my own conditions for research and the challenges I experienced in translating the envisaged research design into a careful research practice. 3.1.3 then provides a short overview of all the research activities that were embraced in this process and generated primary data and a collection of secondary data for analysis. The chapter ends by providing insights into the process of analysis of interview material and my considerations leading to the chosen form of presentation of empirical material.

3.1 The trajectory of a situated methodology and a multi-sited ethnography

The research design and methodological approach of this thesis is informed by a re-reading of feminist standpoint theory which argues for the production and reflection of *situated knowledges* (Haraway 1991). Feminist standpoint theories have been formulated against the androcentrism of established social and natural sciences, but also the relativism of radical social constructionist approaches. Here, research is not perceived as an innocent practice coming from nowhere but as originating from embodied and located experience (Collins 1991; Harding 2007). It aims at ethical accountability of research activities that entails a positive vision for research as opening up connections to other critical knowledges. The striving to build up a standpoint from where a research process can contribute to the enhancement of collective practices and commitment to transform society requires effort, here perceived as stemming from “collective achievements of both *analysis* and political *struggle* occurring in a particular historical space” (Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa 2004, p. 311).

Empirical research in precarity can then be conceived as a tool to establish *collaborative practices* that enhance the generation of data relevant to the construction, further development and connection of critical knowledges, in between ongoing political struggles and practices of subversion concerned with the increasing precarisation of life. Research questions have been formulated not only to gain insight into the specific conditions and subjective experiences of precarious workers, but also to invite people to reflect on their own conditions, social position and political commitment. This practice seeks to involve precarious workers as co-researchers in the process of data generation and analysis, aiming to overcome binary distinctions between researcher-subject and research-object (Bishop 2011; Borio et al. 2002; Malo de Molina 2006).

What kind of methods would allow me to gain insights into the policy framework of British public service reform and the practices of policy implementation in London, including the complex context of their contestation in social care? What was the best way to approach the exploration of working conditions and everyday experiences of precarious labour in social care, attending to intersectional dimensions of inequality, emerging divisions of labour and subversive practices in such a context? How can collaborative practices of data generation and analysis thereby be initiated? These were the main methodological questions I was grappling with while immersing myself in the Voluntary and Community Sector in London.

Studies conducted in the tradition of governmentality studies (Bröckling et al. 2011b) are a promising but at the same time not unproblematic framework for research on precarity (cf. Lessenich 2011). Neoliberal modes of government are here explored by drawing on late writings of Foucault (Foucault 1991) stressing the *productive* rather than merely repressive effects of power (Burchell et al. 1991; Dean 1999). By attending to complex forms of (self-) regulation through discipline and responsabilisation, strategies of neoliberal government have as such been traced in the promotion, implementation and application of 'technologies of the self' (Rose 1990; Rose 1996) and 'technologies of citizenship formation' (Clarke 2006; Clarke et al. 2007; Cruikshank 1999).

In these post-structuralist approaches power and authority are perceived as being not merely constituted and exercised 'top-down' and in oppressive ways via state institutions, legal and regulatory frameworks. Rather, power relations and “the art of government” (Bröckling et al. 2011a, p. 11) are traced in the complex definition and application of (scientific) knowledge, the performance of professional practice and the formation of rules of conduct in various organisational settings and social institutions. These discursive practices build up “the complex ways in which selves and populations are managed, directed, ordered and administered“ in contemporary Western societies, by creating blueprints for 'ethical practice' and processes of subjectivation (Marston and McDonald 2006, p. 1).

What has been criticised in regard to governmentality studies is an overemphasis on the impact of coherent discursive frameworks. Studies focused on already established and institutionalised social practices in which forms of (self-) government and the regulation of population were traced. Through such a focus on coherent frameworks for agency and prevailing forms of rationality (see for example Lemke 2004; Opitz 2004), incidents of rupture and fracture often remain unacknowledged. Practices that subvert 'the conduct of conduct', that break or at least undermine the established regimes of subjectivation are here tendentially neglected (cf. Braidotti 2006; Hemmings 2005; Papadopoulos and Stephenson 2006). A crucial question for research on precarity is however not only to analyse the structural transformations in *prevailing* discursive practices, but also to create an empirical research practice which is attentive to difference, contestation, ambivalent positionings and incidents of subversion in the lived experience of precarious labour (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

Starting from the perspective of 'the other(ed)' while attending to the resourcefulness and not yet fully acknowledged dimensions of that position is a longstanding concern of feminist research (Olesen 2003) which despite the great variety

of feminist research agendas and advocated methodological approaches “recognizes the importance of women's lived experiences to the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge” (Hesse Biber 2012, p. 3). This goal necessitates attention to the exploration of lived experience via a set of ethnographic methods, not for tracing a reality outside discursive frameworks (cf. Atkinson and Coffey 2002), but as baring potentially anchor points for reflection of experiences that might not yet be accounted for in particular settings of research and prevailing discursive formations. Genealogies are thus important tools for critical theory but they do not suffice for research on precarity. Ruptures and blockades to representation that are currently addressed by social movements might thus be first phenomenologically explored to then be analysed from a different angle, leaving the circuits of established symbolisation behind, raising questions rather than providing definite answers.

What kind of research strategies and data generating methods would help me in creating such a research process? How would these tools support me in initiating and innervating processes of reflection, not only for myself as the initiating researcher but also the participants of my project? How could I invest in the further elaboration of existing accounts of lived experience in precarity by creating links to other critical knowledges about the transformation of social care and the outcomes of public service reforms in Britain for unravelling potentially some not yet represented aspects of gendered experience in these?

3.1.1 Approaching the exploration of working conditions in the WVCS

Attracted by the emerging contestation of public service reforms across various areas of social care by women's organisations in London, early on I focused my attention on the women's voluntary and community sector¹⁴, conceived in this research project as being composed of a wide range of not-for-profit organisations, networks and informal community groups that “seek to improve the status and situation of women”. This broad definition of a women's organisation has been introduced by Riordan (1999, p. 2) and has also been applied by the Women's Resource Centre¹⁵ (e.g. WRC 2006c).

¹⁴ See Appendix 2 for a short introduction into the historical roots of the British women's sector and overview over organisational forms and activities in the WVCS.

¹⁵ The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a membership-based second-tier organisation that provides support, information and training for women's organisations in England and is strongly involved in campaigning and policy work on behalf of the women's sector in the UK. WRC is the *only* pan-London umbrella organisation for women's organisations. In October 2007, it counted 254 organisations and 93 individuals as its members, with those organisations being predominantly based in England. WRC states that there are over 10,000 people working or volunteering for these organisations that support

In 2007 the ongoing mobilisation in the women's sector was gaining momentum: The official launch of the second *why women?* report built upon manifold contributions and productive collaboration among a broad alliance of women's organisations and supportive individuals across the UK (WRC 2007b, c). The WRC had taken on a leading role in creating public awareness about the equality issues at stake in public service reform by organising and disseminating empirical evidence about its impact on women-only projects and services. This facilitated a collective feminist voice regarding the discriminatory outcomes of reform on local, regional and central government level. While the campaign focused on the discriminatory outcomes of the ongoing commissioning processes in terms of their impact on women-only projects and services, an explicit reflection of the emerging division of labour in social care and thus the created potential lines of conflicts that concern but reach beyond the WVCS had not (yet) taken place.

In the early stages of my research project I planned to *follow* and trace but also *initiate* myself collective processes of reflection on employment conditions in the (W)VCS, working conditions in social care, and the ongoing contestation of power relations in the (W)VCS. These wide-ranging and ambitious plans were however turning into a different project as the chapter will go on to clarify (see below).

Envisaged was a multi-sited ethnography (Burawoy 1991; Falzon 2009; Marcus 1995) involving a) attendance at events and involvement in actions organised in the sector and around the *why women?* campaign, b) overt participant observation in the form of a volunteer placement in a front-line women's organisation that would both give me hands-on experience and opportunities for informal discussions of the everyday realities of work in the WVCS, and c) the setting up of in-depth interviews with women working in the WVCS to spot opportunities for the development of a collective research process on working conditions in social care. I planned to enrich this research process with d) the collection and analysis of an extensive and comprehensive set of government documents regarding public service reform and related materials circulating in the (W)VCS and e) semi-structured interviews with key informants on policy issues and commissioning practices concerning the Voluntary Sector via establishing contacts to trade union

around 500,000 women a year. In recent years, the WRC has focused its activities on campaigning and lobby work at central government level and has been very successful in organising funding and winning government contracts in order to do so. In December 2007, it was appointed by the arms-length organisation *Capacitybuilders* to lead the *ChangeUp* equalities programme, a national infrastructure programme for Voluntary and Community Organisations. Since 2009, membership of the WRC has been free for organisations with incomes below £100,000 p.a. During the period of this research project (2007-2011) WRC has been incredibly productive in terms of research and policy work on behalf of the women's sector and has extended its membership base (see <http://www.wrc.org.uk/>, access date: 09/08/2011).

representatives, commissioners in local authorities and campaigning agencies in the (W)VCS.

This research design would provide various entrance points to a multi-sited and multi-faceted exploration of work environments in the WVCS in relation to their structural and subjective dimensions. I aimed at facilitating a collaborative framework with participants from the women's sector by creating multiple opportunities for interaction between me and women with different backgrounds working in various positions in different women's organisations and organisational settings. I planned to use my own experiences during the overall research process for prompting women in the women's sector with my conceptualisations of precarity and gained understanding of the challenges that participants were confronted with. This would create a realm for exchange and enhancement of shared understanding – or indeed the perception of difference and potential lines of conflict (Malo de Molina 2006).

The research design would thus combine ethnographic fieldwork in the (W)VCS that generates 'primary data' for analysis with critical discourse analysis of a collection of already circulating textual materials ('secondary data') in the tradition of governmentality studies (cf. Mckee 2009). This design would enable me to explore the multiple discursive frameworks that “both constitute and engage subjects in processes of welfare restructuring” (Marston and McDonald 2006, p. 3) while also giving access to discussions about potentially yet unrepresented practices. Participant observation and direct exchange with women working for women's organisations would allow me to try and unravel the tensions, the created conflicts and ambivalences of precarious labour in social care.

Crucial for me was thereby to consider the potential lines of conflict I would be involved in while aiming at acknowledging and privileging the *activist standpoint* (Maddison and Shaw 2012) in my research. Focussing my research on 'the women's sector' I was attracted by and would be engaged in a field that had been created and sustained by women in a long history of struggles over the formation, institutionalisation and diversity of women-only projects, services and feminist forms of campaigning. While this history is characterised by controversies and disputes over the very orientation and organisation of the feminist movement, here there was an attempt by a membership-based and apparently widely supported second-tier organisation to build up a collective feminist voice and campaign in view of the outcomes of recent public service reforms that I wanted to acknowledge in its own political and epistemological relevance. At the same time, my own involvement in the precarity movement that aims at building up consciousness, alliances and processes of contestation by emphasising concerns of

precarious labour, made me aware of the potential lines of conflict in this arrangement that I would need to engage with in reflective but productive ways. Women's organisations were conceived as facilitating important gender-sensitive critique of the outcomes of public service reforms but would also be addressed in my research project as *employers* with perhaps differing commitment in creating supportive working conditions in social care.

In the following paragraphs I will explore in more detail the constitutive elements and methodological underpinnings of the ethnographic research strategy that I embraced with these considerations in mind. These were the tools that I applied for exploring the background, implementation and outcomes of public service reform and the particular ways in which experiences of labour of the ongoing transformations in social care were framed, performed and analysed.

Participant observation

The method of participant observation as a tool for qualitative empirical research has a long tradition in the social sciences (Atkinson and Coffey 2002). It lends itself to exploring the contested performance of power relations that craft social realities (*ibid.*), as it provides opportunities to explore, discuss and analyse particular events from various perspectives and viewpoints. Rather than presenting it as a data *collection* method (cf. Kawulich 2005) I would like to discuss it in the following as an adaptive tool in my research project to *generate* data by organising opportunities for involvement and facilitating processes of reflection and analysis.

Participant observation is a complex method that involves researchers as observing *and* participating subjects in activities in the selected field for research over an extensive period of time (*ibid.*). The writing of fieldnotes about the settings, encounters, different viewpoints and interpretations of particular events informs a conscious practice of doing empirical research by understanding and discussing ethnographic research activities as a *process of involvement* in ongoing processes of meaning-making, reflection and analysis. The researcher jots down her/his experiences and observations in form of preliminary notes that are eventually re-worked to become more elaborated forms of writing, including ever influential aspects of experience and analysis. These then also involve reflection on informal interviews, exchange of analysis and discussions that evolve from the overall research process, as well as on textual materials that circulate in the field of research (Atkinson and Coffey 2002).

Attending events organised in the WVCS, visiting women's organisations and participating in actions of the *why women?* campaign in London over an extended period of time would allow me to gain insights into the ongoing forms of contestations in the WVCS while also providing opportunities to confront participants with the gained understanding about working conditions in social care. Attention could here be given to the potential lines of conflict emerging from subjective experience of these environments, their spatial and organisational features, and the particular communication of concerns in the field. Participant observation allows here for an exploration and interpretation of these aspects in *various settings* with *various actors* who can be approached in formal and informal ways before, during and after the selected events.

Participant observation in the form of a volunteering placement in a women's organisation was envisaged to give further opportunities for such exploration and discussion I planned to realise through offering unpaid labour for direct work experience and the opportunity to conduct overt research in a front-line project. Observing while participating in ongoing activities in the women's sector would create manifold opportunities to explore working conditions through my own experience, the observation of others' performances of social care work and the processes of reflection that my presence and research activity might thereby enhance in others.

However, participant observation is also limited when approached as a tool for eliciting a practice of co-research on precarity. Data is generated through the lens of the researcher who is conceptualised as the main actor in terms of observing and writing up the process of reflection. The effectiveness of participant observation in providing in-depth insights and entrance points to establish practices of co-research obviously depends on access for participation and direct observation, and the willingness and capacities of the actors in the field for (such form of) collaboration. Gaining the acceptance of being addressed and observed by *all* actors in the field is most unlikely (cf. Kawulich 2005). While events of the *why women?* campaign were imagined by myself to be easily accessible, as they were announced as accessible public actions, it would certainly be difficult to gain consent by the present actors regarding participation in the overall research process. This raises a well-known dilemma for activist research focussing on social movements (cf. Maddison and Shaw 2012) in complex organisational settings, especially when interested in building up processes of co-research (Bishop 2011).

While I planned to openly display my status as a student researcher and my activist background throughout the research process whenever possible and in all personal encounters, I could not make sure that all people at bigger events would be

adequately informed. Neither did I expect agreement by all participants of such events on getting involved in my research project in whatever form. Due to these considerations my fieldnotes regarding campaigning events and those deriving from my participation in particular actions were not planned to be *directly* presented and discussed in great detail in this thesis. Rather, the documentation and reflection of activities and impressions gained through participant observation was conceptualised as eliciting material for discussion that I would bring in – anonymised, without referring to particular individuals – in formal interviews where participation in my research project could be negotiated directly. I envisaged similar challenges for the implementation of this method in form of a volunteer placement in a front-line women's organisation; access for such placement would most likely be contingent on decisions made by management, and even if management would agree to participate in the overall research process this decision would not necessarily involve and cover the interests of all co-workers and service users that I would eventually encounter in these settings.

Formally arranged interviews

Interviews are the most prominent method used in qualitative research for exploring accounts on experience (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; May 2002). Setting up a formally arranged encounter for exchange in the form of an interview is an established practice for eliciting attention to neglected aspects of experience and everyday life which can bring yet uncovered topics and issues in public debates to the fore (DeVault and Gross 2012). For the formally arranged encounters with women working in the WVCS I chose a strategy of in-depth interviewing, aiming to provide me and my respondents with sufficient leeway to negotiate hierarchical power relations in our conversations (Kelly et al. 1994). I expected complex constellations for interviews between me and the women I was planning to interview – regarding *performance of difference* in regard to class, age, race and gender as well as contradictions and convergences in political stance. In-depth interviewing is widely used in qualitative research that engages with complex research questions in complex settings and aims to unravel lived experience (Johnson 2002). It allows involving research participants flexibly in the meaning-making process, as the flow and direction of the conversation can be adapted to situation-specific circumstances and particular needs for further clarification. As it allows interviewees *and* the interviewer to self-disclose, it provides a setting where an in-depth discussion and analysis of multiple meanings and perspectives on events and emotionally connotated experience can *potentially* take place (ibid.). The rather un-structured format would allow me and the

participants to play out different aspects of our various identities in flexible ways, and to thereby follow and deepen our understanding of the concerns advanced in the encounter (Doucet and Mauthner 2008).

However, in-depth interviewing has also demerits as a research strategy; interviewees might feel overwhelmed by the openness of such encounter or divert attention from difficult issues and questions. The underlying motivation and reasons for such interaction might thereby not be brought explicitly to discussion. Feminist researchers have pointed at the long history of silencing the concerns of women, the working class and people of colour in public discourse and academic research. This context of silencing can result in difficulties for participants to express their concerns during a formally set interview, which as a particular setting for communication can be associated with established and discriminatory modes of knowledge production (Reinharz and Chase 2002).

Listening carefully to the concerns discussed in the encounters adopting a 'strategy of immersion' while paying attention to the wider social and political context in which women were meeting me was thus of crucial concern (DeVault and Gross 2012). I planned to invite women for further explanations and reflections on the interview itself and to show me around in their direct work environments, thus creating opportunities for more informal exchange before and after the interview. Further meetings and inviting women to comment on transcripts and my analysis were envisaged to provide participants with opportunities to intervene and contribute at various points in the meaning-making and overall research process. I hoped that formally arranged face-to-face interviews would give an entrance point to endeavour options for such co-research that would eventually also provide opportunities to link up women among each other for a collective form of inquiry, for exploring and addressing working conditions in social care beyond the interview-dyad.

I also planned to approach key informants outside the WVCS to discuss the history and more recent developments in Third Sector policies and social care settings. Envisaged were interviews with policy officers of trade unions, representatives of local infrastructure organisations and people working for local authorities in charge of commissioning to social care and women's services. These would provide me with further insights into particular readings of policy frameworks, the outcomes of public service reform, and various attempts by government to support the Voluntary Sector. I wanted to use these encounters to explore the interviewees' perspective on the most pressing issues regarding public funding allocation and working conditions in the VCS

and contrast these views with reports from the WVCS. As such these interviews were not necessarily focussed on an in-depth exploration of personal experience. Therefore, I chose a different, more distanced and structured format. Semi-structured interviews were here more suited, establishing more leeway for me as a researcher to elicit insights regarding pre-formulated areas of interest (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

Analysis of policy documents and publications circulating in the (W)VCS

For forming an in-depth understanding of the regimes of power and concrete funding conditions regarding the WVCS and social care work in London I necessitated further insights into the history and current frameworks of third sector and welfare policies in Britain. The tracing, collection and analysis of circulating textual documents was therefore a crucial part of my research strategy which was aimed to focus on gathering: (a) Government and political party documents regarding British public service reform; (b) VCS reports on commissioning guidelines and funding conditions in social care with particular focus on the WVCS; and (c) trade union analyses of public service reform and developments in the UK's Voluntary Sector. Regular consultation of British newspapers was planned to keep me informed about ongoing public service reforms and publicly discussed contestations in social care. This research strategy would result in a collection of secondary data in form of textual documents to be analysed in the tradition of governmentality studies in social policy research (Marston and McDonald 2006; Mckee 2009).

Following the *why women?* campaign I was aware that the WRC plays an increasingly powerful role in the discursive framing of the WVCS as such: early on it took a proactive role in generating knowledge on women's organisations in London by collecting and organising evidence of the activities and problems faced by women's organisations and has built up a wide membership base including a variety of women's organisations and feminist collectives in London. Since 2004 (WRC 2004a, b) WRC has systematically gathered on behalf of and in collaboration with other women's organisations¹⁶ evidence on the status quo of women-only public resources and spaces in Britain, drawing on various case studies and membership surveys¹⁷ with regard to public funding allocation to the women's sector (WRC published recently a summary of

¹⁶ WRC refers here to a wide range of not-for profit organisations. To simplify matters I will also use the term *women's organisation* in this thesis (if not otherwise stated) to refer to the great variety of social bodies active in the women's sector as referred to above.

¹⁷ "69 interviews and 159 in-depth surveys with women's NGOs across England, and seven focus groups with 60 service users of women's organisations" (WRC 2008d, p. 2).

activities in the campaign, see WRC 2011). WRC's research, policy briefings and consultation responses as well as publications and campaigning leaflets by other second-tier and front-line women's organisations were approached therefore as a key resource for analysis and background information on the WVCS in this thesis.

Generating data via participant observation, formally arranged interviews and collecting already circulating textual material for analysis thus composed the main pillars of my strategy for empirical research. While all these components were applied, I encountered major difficulties in implementing these tools in the ways I had planned. The following subsection discusses the challenges I encountered in translating my research strategy into careful research practice.

3.1.2 Reordering research in precarious conditions

In 2007 I stood in contact with a small women's project that was campaigning for support to keep its premises and local authority funding, and had gained first insights into the intricacies of funding allocation to social care services in that inner London borough by attending public meetings of activist groups against cuts to public services. After the *why women?* conference in autumn 2007, I made further contact with women working for women's organisations across London, asking for participation in my research and opportunities for voluntary placements in their projects.

I started from a list of the organisations whose presence I had noticed during the conference and the direct contacts that I had established. I addressed women via phone, mail and email, asking for participation via face-to-face interviews¹⁸. I also handed out leaflets on events in the sector that I attended, and directly asked those women who I met while visiting local women's projects across London. Interviews were proposed for reflection on everyday experiences at work and the projects' and organisations' conditions of funding. I was looking explicitly for insights into working conditions for women across the women's sector, so tried to establish contacts with women working on different positions in micro to major organisations, in terms of their organisations' annual income but also in terms of their focus of work. Front-line and second-tier organisations were addressed.

I prepared a list of topics and questions regarding employment in social care, working and particular funding conditions in the WVCS, as well as regarding the network and campaigning activities of my interviewees and the focus of the particular

¹⁸ See Appendix 3 for letter of invitation, participant information sheet, and consent form.

organisations they were engaged in. This list of questions was thought to be transformed over the research process and adapted to the organisations' activities and my interviewees' position in their organisations. I did not plan to use these lists as strict interview guideline but rather as a source for intervention when the conversation did not flow¹⁹. Questions, but also the concerns brought forward by the women I met, changed in character from interview to interview and also over the entire research process, so that different issues were explored in subsequent interviews, influenced by both the particular encounter and the understanding I had gained.

Early on I had the chance to interview union representatives on their analysis of public service reforms and perceived challenges for the organisation of workers in the Voluntary Sector over the established contacts via my supervisor Peter Fairbrother²⁰, and was soon able to establish contacts with local infrastructure organisations, second-tier organisations and a handful of women that I became aware of during the *why women?* conference. However, establishing further contact with women working in front-line support turned out not to be an easy task. I also faced hindrances in organising myself a suitable volunteer placement.

Explicit explanations and reflection on the contexts for research can offer insights into how material constraints shape the researcher's situatedness and thus enable a *certain kind* of knowledge generation as these form “situated possibilities and impossibilities” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010, pp. 162). I was soon confronted with strong dilemmas in terms of what I had envisioned to be a reasonable approach to researching precarity in social care in collective and multiple ways, the lived and then changing reality of my own conditions for pursuing ethnographic fieldwork, and the requirements for involvement for action in the field itself. I saw myself and potential research participants confronted with constraints on extended collaborative forms of involvement and thus needed to reformulate my strategy for pursuing research on precarity. However, this process also informed my analysis and understanding of the challenges for labour in social care work and for involvement in political campaigning in London.

In the following I will present the main challenges that I encountered during the research process.

¹⁹ See Appendix 3 for initial topic guide used for interviews in the WVCS.

²⁰ Peter Fairbrother supported me in this project as second supervisor until he left Cardiff University in 2009 for taking on employment at RMIT University in Australia.

Challenge 1: contact with direct support workers

When I contacted women's organisations without a previously established personal reference, I was often referred to women working in management positions and/or as fundraisers. In the field of service provision for women affected by domestic violence, which was increasingly attracting my attention due to its reliance on a funding programme by central government, I faced an additional hurdle for getting into direct contact with support workers: almost all organisations operating in the area of domestic violence had a public address for their offices, but the actual workplace for direct support were women's refuges, whose addresses are unknown to the broader public to protect service users from aggressive perpetrators. Thus when I visited the offices of these organisations I made contact with (project) managers, fundraisers and administrators but not always with (other) direct support workers²¹.

Challenge 2: women working at the limits

At the initial meetings I arranged at the women's projects I was told – and observed first hand – that women were working at the limits of what was possible, regardless of their position. The women I met often had difficulties taking time off even for that one meeting, they often gave me appointments several weeks later, postponed them several times, or cancelled them and rushed to other meetings soon afterwards.

When trying to establish contacts with some prominent women's organisations known for their strong commitment to campaigning work, I was told that these had too many requests for participation in research projects and just could not deal with it any more. One woman I finally convinced to take part in an interview reported that she had several requests a week asking for contributions to research or consultation exercises that she usually declined.²²

How much could I ask in terms of engagement in my study on a mere voluntary basis in a context in which potential participants were overworked, precariously employed and already committed to many additional activities besides their jobs? Women I met and contacted were heavily burdened, not only with direct support work, fundraising, management issues and caring responsibilities, but also campaigning and

²¹ Many project managers I met were also directly involved in front-line support work.

²² Refuge, one of the major organisations in the field of generic service provision to women affected by domestic violence, already stated on their webpage that they were not able to contribute to any research projects by students any more due to the high number of requests in this regard and their limited capacities to answer to all these enquiries. This was in summer 2007. When I looked up this organisation's webpage in 2011 it had been reworked, had a different design, and this comment was no longer to be found.

research activities. Could I expect them to commit themselves to another collaborative research project, additional meetings or just even a row of interviews? How feasible was my plan to include research participants more actively in the process of knowledge generation?

These first encounters and the overall process of getting into contact with women working in women's organisations in London gave me insights into how work is organised and divided in the WVCS. It was only later on that I was capable of fully appreciating the conditions under which some of the women were working; many women couldn't meet me not just because they were too busy but also because they were precarious. Precarity inherently undercuts possibilities of developing collaborative projects, as it already demands from people so much effort to mobilise the resources and forms of social relationality necessary for dealing with the working and living conditions in their everyday life (insights that I elaborate in chapter 6).

Challenge 3: pregnancy

However, the drastic reduction of options for extensive active involvement in the field I was confronted with in late autumn 2007 due to my pregnancy and missing resources was more decisive than anything else in changing the previously envisioned more collaborative research design. The perspective of soon acquiring the status of a 'non-working' mother²³ in London was experienced as highly challenging: how should I organise on my low stipend²⁴ suitable and affordable childcare in London to continue my studies after giving birth, which I soon realised would cost around £50 a day? I neither had sufficient funds for full-time childcare nor was I entitled to any state support in this regard. I also lacked adequate surroundings for informally organised or shared care arrangements as my partner could not work flexibly and we depended on his income through full-time work. There were no non-working friends in London, and no family

²³ It was soon clear that I would need to stop my teaching activities in Cardiff after giving birth and that as a postgraduate student I would not be considered to be 'at work' under the UK's workfarist welfare system and thus not fully entitled to state support for childcare.

²⁴ I started my research on precarity in the UK on a 1+3 school grant by the Cardiff School of Social Sciences (SOCSI). This paid me £5,000 p.a. in the first year while studying for the Master's Degree (2005/06) in addition to school fees. The stipend was then increased – due to the support of my supervisors – to £7,500 p.a. in the first year of my PhD. However also under this arrangement and despite my teaching activities at SOCSI, I was not able to get to the equivalent annual income of what a full-time job on the UK's *minimum wage* would have paid me and could only endure this situation because of the financial support by my full-time working partner. With support by other PhD students, my supervisors and other staff at SOCSI we were able to convince the Head of School in spring 2008 to elevate school grants for non-UK post-grad researchers (at that time this concerned other two students) about £2,500 p.a., and one academic year later to the equivalent of what British post-graduate students are granted on ESRC scholarships outside London.

members close-by who could have taken care burdens from our shoulders on a regular basis. What kind of commitment to a *politics of care* was feasible under these conditions? Very soon, the issues I dealt with in my dissertation regarding the crisis of social care were experienced by myself in an embodied way as directly affecting my own existential conditions.

Precarious working conditions in research without serious caring responsibilities had been manageable and enjoyable because of support by my supervisors, my partner, and my ability to invest flexibly extra hours and commitment, also in the evenings and on weekends. The often seized option for active participation in political and academic activities criss-crossing national, institutional and discursive frameworks (as in several precarity webbing meetings, conferences, lectures, school seminars, reading groups, teaching activities etc.) had been experienced by myself as highly instructive and motivating and had compensated material scarcity and income insecurity. While being linked to strong and strenuous efforts, this additional commitment had supported me in dealing with the encountered difficult conditions for making a living as a foreign student researcher in London. This radically changed in pregnancy and was in many ways extremely difficult to realise after birth.²⁵ These circumstances informed my critical view on the 'empowering status' of voluntary action in precarity, and made the gendered outcomes of insufficient public services *and* precarious work in academia and social care drastically palpable in my everyday life.

During fieldwork, visible signs of pregnancy enhanced conversations about the particular situation of carers in precarious employment in British society and in the women's sector in particular. My situated experience of motherhood during my studies for a PhD shaped the methods used and the issues addressed in this research project. It focused my analysis on the availability and definition of resources for finding answers to the necessities of care in non-isolating ways.

Challenge 4: suitable volunteer placement

In terms of my search for a volunteer placement, I was confronted with the fact that women's organisations looked for a) qualified volunteers for specific tasks, e.g. fundraising, trustee work or phone counselling via helplines, activities for which I was

²⁵ After six months maternity leave, we were lucky to find a nursery place but could only afford three days a week that we had to give up in 2010 when my stipend ended. We finally left London and migrated to Zurich. Here, childcare is expensive but subsidised by the City of Zurich if you are in need, even for new residents in any form of (further) education. Because of our German passports and the income-generating job of my partner we were entitled to residency in Switzerland.

not qualified enough and b) women who would be able to engage with them over longer periods of time, or on more than a part-time basis. Voluntary placements in front-line social care projects were advertised like jobs, with similar procedures for access. I was relatively new to London²⁶ and had a studentship and a teaching job at Cardiff University two days per week to make a living which restricted the time I could spend volunteering.

The formal volunteer placement I finally organised was in a second-tier organisation. In the first meeting with other employees in the office of that organisation, which was announced and experienced like a serious job interview, I was told that most volunteers that had worked with them stayed for a year, working part-time somewhere else to make a living. We finally agreed on a placement for three months. However, just two weeks before the arranged volunteer placement would have started, I was told that the organisation had undergone an unanticipated restructuring process due to new funding arrangements and needed to suspend its whole volunteering programme. They were worried about not being able to give the guidance and support volunteers needed during that period and offered to postpone the placement. I had to decline, as the proposed period would have started shortly before the expected date of birth.

While I was deeply frustrated about having lost that opportunity for a volunteering placement, I soon understood that my research was already in full progress, but not as I had envisioned it. Searching for 'access', I was confronted day by day with the realities in the sector. I had already noted down many impressions in my research diaries²⁷, puzzled by the complications I encountered in getting access to workers in direct support work and my own hesitation and the hurdles encountered to involve women more actively in collaborative forms of research. I had witnessed several incidents of how funding arrangements of whole organisations were reversed from one month to the next, putting at risk workplaces in long-standing projects. The differences amongst the various local settings for voluntary and community organisations and women's projects in London I had come in contact with were impressive.

I then decided to reduce the burdens implied in terms of the time needed for participation in my research, by looking for *more* participants and no longer seeking to involve the already contacted women in additional collaborative action. I thus intensified

²⁶ I came to Cardiff University for a 1+3 programme at the School of Social Sciences in 2005, and moved to London in 2006. Before my studies in the UK I lived and worked in different countries in Continental Europe.

²⁷ In my research diaries, I systematically kept track of all the contacts I made, the impressions gained in informal encounters and the suggestions made by women in local women's centres and at public events that I attended. These were then summarised and reflected upon in more extensive memos when I was back at my computer.

my search for dialogue with women in the sector by asking for single face-to-face in-depth interviews and extended my visits to women's centres in London and my participation in public events and actions organised by women's organisations around the *why women?* campaign.

I was then informed by one interviewee about a local network of women's groups and small women's organisations in one inner London borough that had gained extra support through local and central government funding streams. After a meeting with the coordinator of that network, I decided to narrow my focus down in the search for direct front-line women's organisations and key informants to that (B2) and another Labour Party led inner London borough (B1), where I already had established some contacts. Exploratory endeavours indicated that these two inner London boroughs were similar in terms of the populations' ethnic diversity and level of deprivation but differed in local authority support to local women's organisations. I scanned the local authority webpages for contact details of local community centres, women's projects and women's refuge services and contacted directly key informants like domestic violence coordinators and officers working on equality issues in these two boroughs. I collected as such further contact details and gathered these on my list of women's organisations that I invited for participation. This list now also included organisations that had not yet actively been involved in the collective actions around the *why women?* campaign, a fact that I appreciated, as I also wanted to enter into dialogue with women whose experiences had *potentially* not yet been accounted for by this campaign.

3.1.3 Overview of fieldwork activities

Now I would like to summarise all the activities that produced empirical material used for the analysis presented in this thesis. The ethnographic fieldwork – participant observation, formal in-depth interviews, formal semi-structured interviews and the collection of policy documents and publications in the (W)VCS – took place between October 2007 and July 2008. Additional textual material on policy developments regarding the (W)VCS was collected via internet and electronic newsletter subscriptions up until September 2011.

Of the 49 women's organisations that I contacted in the period 2007-2008 in person or via email, mail and phone, 31 women working in different positions and roles for 19 different women's organisations took part in the research in terms of formally arranged and recorded interviews (see Appendix 4 Table 1 and 2). These interviews took

place at the organisations' premises, with exception of the interviews with (former) front-line workers of women's refuges Monica and Alisha.

Additional informal ethnographic interviewing with women working in the sector took place at the following meetings, conferences and campaigning events, after which detailed notes were taken that were then used for prompting questions in the following interviews and informed my analysis of the interview material:

- WRC's Why Women Conference *Making the case for women-only spaces and services*, King's Fund in London, 17/10/2007
- Several gatherings of women engaged in a local women's project threatened by closure in B1, December 2007 - February 2008
- Preparation meeting for the *Abolish No Recourse to Public Funds Campaign* at Amnesty International, East London, 13/03/2008
- Demonstration, gatherings and events of women's groups around *International Women's Day* in various boroughs of London, March 2008
- Event *Still we Rise* including launch of the report *The Crisis in Rape Crisis*, a joint project by WRC and Rape Crisis (England and Wales), Directory of Social Change, London, 18/03/2008
- Day of Action *Abolish No Recourse to Public Funds Campaign*, Portcullis House, Westminster, 23/04/2008
- Demonstration in front of the Royal Courts of Justice to support the case of Southall Black Sisters; attendance of its public court hearing, London, 17/07/2008

Union representatives active in organising Voluntary Sector workers in London were addressed, building up the contacts that I had made, for gaining further insight into the unions' perception of the transformation of working conditions under British public service reforms. In the two boroughs of London that had attracted my attention local commissioning teams and local VCS infrastructure organisations were contacted. In face-to-face interviews I here explored differences in approaches to commissioning processes of social care services at local government level and the understanding of necessity, leeway and challenges met by local commissioners and infrastructure organisations for giving support to local women's projects.

The following list of respondents were thus formally interviewed on the history, social policy implementation practices and outcomes of public service reforms regarding social care in the UK, using semi-structured interviews:

- (1) Six union representatives of two major trade unions active in the field of public services and Voluntary Sector workforce organisation in the UK;
- (2) three local commissioning officers and a domestic violence coordinator working for the Councils of two inner London boroughs B1 and B2, that were then governed by the Labour Party; and

(3) two capacity building officers and one consultant working for Local Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Organisations active in these two boroughs (see Appendix 4 Table 3).

All formal interviews lasted from 1-3 hours and were digitally recorded. After the interviews notes were taken on experiences in the personal encounter, the particular settings in which the interviews took place, as well as highlights and difficulties in understanding. These notes were compacted into memos shortly after. Informal conversations were summarised in retrospect in memos.

During my fieldwork I explicitly kept looking and asking all my interviewees for existing research, publications, self-portrayals and reports on their work and the challenges faced, the content of which was included for analysis. Online available resources from second-tier organisations in the VCS were often distributed via electronic newsletters with free subscription. I received information on a *regular* base via such policy newsletters by WRC, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC). The latter two were chosen for their publicly stated particular focus on representing the interests of small voluntary and community organisations and organising information on policies and activities regarding the voluntary and community sector in London. Over the course of research I narrowed down my focus regarding trade union communication on reports and policy papers by the two major unions active in the organisation of workers in social care that had been contacted for interviews.

I additionally read on a regular basis the online version of the newspaper *The Guardian* and subscribed to the online newsletter of *Third Sector Online*, a leading weekly newspaper on developments regarding the Voluntary Sector. These sources kept me informed throughout the research process (2007-2011) on changes in government initiatives, upcoming consultations, campaigns and research initiatives promoted in London's Voluntary Sector and helped me to form an understanding of the current discursive frameworks for discussing concerns in social care. I thus collected extensive textual material during my research, including:

- 37 policy documents from regional and central government bodies and commissions: including green and white papers, consultation and audit reports, handbooks, operational guidances, and strategy papers;
- 6 party pamphlets and strategy papers of the Labour Party and the Conservatives;
- 41 third sector research reports, consultation responses and campaigning material produced by policy and second-tier organisations as well as coalitions and initiatives in the Voluntary Sector;
- 21 trade union reports, briefings and policy newsletters, campaign leaflets and organising guides;

- 72 documents produced by women's organisations and campaigns in the WVCS: including self-portrayals, campaign leaflets, research reports, policy briefings and consultation responses. From WRC alone there were 16 policy briefings and consultation responses and 29 reports²⁸;
- over 300 media reports from the online journal *Third Sector Online* and the online version of the newspaper *The Guardian*.

A selection of the massive amount of collected textual material, including the most relevant UK government White Papers, policy documents and party programmes were then used for critical discourse analysis (Naples 2003) applying a governmentality studies approach to social policy analysis under consideration of feminist standpoint theory. Criteria for the selection of secondary data to be included into the sample of texts for such closer analysis was its relevance in terms of addressing centrally one or more issues of the following: (a) British public service and welfare reform; (b) public funding allocation to third sector organisations; (c) (improving) the quality of social care service provision; and (d) the organisation and endowment of volunteering programmes. The time span covered by the policy documents used for such closer analysis was the period 1997 to 2009.

3.1.4 Analytic strategies and considerations regarding the presentation of findings

All research participants were informed about the research context, before the formally organised one-to-one interviews took place, via a printed participant information and consent form and through additional information on the broader context of research and my personal background given verbally during the meetings for formally arranged interviews. I aimed at a collaborative framework in the process of analysis and participants were informed not only about the possibility of withdrawing from the study but also the possibility of requesting and discussing transcripts. Furthermore, the chosen format of open in-depth interviews facilitated a collaborative meaning making process in my conversations with women working in the WVCS. However, interviewees were *not* involved in any analysis or comment on the transcripts thereafter, with exception of Monica who I met twice. No further active inclusion in the research process was sought by myself, as for example, in giving feedback and asking for opinions on analyses before the writing up of this thesis. While I had aimed to do so, this turned out to be impracticable under the conditions given and discussed above.

²⁸ Others not listed to guarantee anonymity of my respondents.

Due to pregnancy and maternity leave, the interviews were only transcribed and fully analysed after a longer break in the research process. The interviews were either entirely or partially transcribed, depending on the relevance given after listening to them again, and based on the notes and memos taken immediately after the recording. Nine of the interviews were submitted for professional transcription. A strict anonymisation of interviewees was followed, giving my respondents pseudonyms and omitting their organisations' names, specifications and locations. In some incidents, pseudonyms and particular sections of the transcripts that would have provided additional personal information were omitted.

Due to the vast material generated, I first employed a rough content analysis of all interviews. Listening to the interviews and going over my notes I selected and ordered them regarding the themes that had been discussed. I distinguished first between three main areas under which I listed themes: (1) social (care) policies, funding conditions and accounts of their impact on structural change in the WVCS; (2) employment and working conditions in the WVCS and related affective experience; and (3) (collective) strategies applied for *practices of care* in the WVCS. This enabled me to have an overview of the themes that were raised in single interviews and to make decisions on which parts to transcribe.

On the basis of this rough content analysis and the first tables with the traced themes in my interviews I assembled parts of the transcriptions for further coding using some of the tools and techniques entailed in grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Clarke 2007). For area 2, for instance, I used codes informed by my theoretical framework like '*definition of work*', '*vulnerability*', '*insecurity*', '*precarious employment*', but developed also codes that I traced in the empirical material itself, like '*funding requirements differing from organisation of work*', '*unnecessary and hindering workloads*', '*additional workloads to counteract imposed division of labour*'. While I assembled the various statements and discursive fragments in the interviews under particular codes I compared them to the understanding developed in the literature and the discourses produced in other textual empirical material I had read for marking differences. I had an additional document with analytic memos in which I added comments and explanations to the codes that I traced and the differences between the accounts that emerged. I also used the technique of mapping the different accounts given under particular codes and of reported experiences of change by various respondents in the women's sector. This helped me to build up a further level of abstraction in my analysis. Finally I grouped my codes and developed my broader analytic categories, like

institutionalised volunteering for area 2 with which I capture the tensions traced in the accounts of working experiences in the WVCS.

Some interview (sections) were selected for closer analysis for unravelling subjective experiences of working conditions in the WVCS. These were those (sections) which focused in emphasis and detail on the ongoing transformations in the definition of social care work and women's applied strategies to deal with processes of precarisation. Here I used a post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis attending to genres of discourses (e.g. economic, scientific, identitarian) and tracing their particular use in the interview material (Naples 2003). I thereby attempted to reconcile Marxist concerns of detecting structural capital-labour relations and divisions of labour with post-structural endeavours to mark multiple relations and technologies of power, paying attention to how various discourses were used to constitute and re-negotiate social practices that frame employees as subjects of resistance *and/or* objects of oppression (O'Doherty and Willmott).

I decided to present my analysis of everyday experience of working conditions in the WVCS along selected subjective accounts to provide the reader with thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) and background information on singular cases and particular positionings in precarity. My main focus was neither on presenting the structural features of women's narratives (cf. Riessman 1993), nor on subsuming reports on lived experience under a form of presentation which is guided by building up typologies that support the classification of individuals into particular groups (cf. Dörre et al. 2007; Pelizzari 2009). The main aim of the presentation of empirical data in chapter 6 in which I analyse subjective definitions of work and experiences of working conditions in the WVCS is to give *illustrative insights* into *singular and located* experience for purposes of consciousness raising and presenting the gained understanding about the issues at stake for precarious labour in social care. As such this strategy draws on early endeavours in feminist research of 'giving voice' (DeVault and Gross 2012; Doucet and Mauthner 2008).

Particular emphasis was hereby given to some of my interviewees' accounts on transformations traced in regard to the definition, regulation, management and struggles around direct front-line support work in the WVCS. These illustrative examples are not and cannot be 'representative' of precarious labour in London's WVCS but give insights into a situated reading of precarity. At the end of chapter 6 I summarise the conclusions that I draw from the concerns raised by the women I interviewed in regard of work and employment in social care. Here I draft what could be conceived as common ground in the various positionings of precarious labour in the (W)VCS that I encountered, thus in

and despite the irreducible singularity of lived experience that can be analysed in reference to the intersection of power along the lines of class, race and gender as discussed in this thesis.

Underlined passages in the data extracts express the emphasis given by my interviewees. *Italics* in the interview excerpts presented in this thesis are used to put emphasis on particular expressions and do not necessarily express the emphasis given by my respondents. Longer excerpts of interviews (EIs) that illustrate in exemplary manner the analytic conclusions presented were put in the appendix (Appendix 6 EI 1-10) to increase a better readability of the main text.

Together, the ethnographic material generated through formal interviews and the collection of textual material comprised the main empirical sources of my research whose analysis I am going to present and discuss in the following chapters. I will start by presenting my analysis of the structural changes in the government of the Voluntary Sector in chapter 4. Here I am drawing on the insights gained from critical discourse analysis of secondary data in form of government, political party and VCS social policy documents and on my interviews with union representatives and officers working for local infrastructure organisations. Neocommunitarian neoliberalism, as I call the particular regime of governance that emerged under New Labour governments, has radically transformed the structural conditions for the organisation of social care work. This regime will then be further explored and analysed in regard to its repercussions for the women's sector in chapter 5. That chapter draws on the analysis of secondary data circulating in the WVCS, insights gained from formal and informal interviews with women working for women's organisations and my encounters with officers who dealt with the commissioning of women-only services at local government level. The presentation of my analysis of empirical material then culminates in chapter 6 in which I report on everyday experiences of labour in social care. That chapter draws again on my in-depth interviews with women, this time however with particular focus on those sections in which the transformation of working conditions in the WVCS were explored in more detail. Particular focus is given to experiences of change in regard to front-line support work and my interviewees' accounts of their commitment to and particular performance of everyday politics. Chapter 7 then summarises my conclusions on precarity in social care by bringing the main insights gained from the overall research process to the fore.

CHAPTER 4: New Labour's public service reform and Third Sector Strategy

Recent efforts in public service reform in the UK place emphasis on the potential innovative contribution of the so-called Voluntary or Third Sector for public service transformation. New Labour's *Third Sector Strategy* (HM Treasury Cabinet Office 2007) set out proposals for strong involvement of the Third Sector²⁹ in public service delivery; it organised more infrastructure and capacity building support for Third Sector organisations through additional public funding allocation, introduced new pots for volunteering schemes, and emphasised the government's intention to build upon the created 'partnership' with the sector for future collaboration and civic renewal. The rhetoric of 'partnership' and 'collaboration' for innovation and renewal represented one of New Labour's distinctive features in public service reform (Glendinning et al. 2002). There are, however, many similarities between the public service reform agendas of the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and New Labour's *Third Way*. While the New Labour governments created a distinctive discourse around community empowerment, service user involvement and volunteerism, they maintained and elaborated the main strategies of marketisation and fiscal discipline of their predecessors. New Labour's reform has been implemented through a restructuring of local government under the continued promotion of the 'contract culture' in the commissioning of services, which has been seen to have strong repercussions for the procedures for public funding allocation to Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs).

This chapter presents my analysis of the current regime for the governance of the third sector which first emerged under New Labour government. It draws on discourse analysis of New Labour government papers, consultation reports by government audit commissions and prominent second-tier organisations in the VCS regarding third sector development; critical analysis of existing social policy literature; and the insights gained from interviews with union representatives and capacity building officers working for local infrastructure organisations. Local voluntary and community sector stakeholders have highlighted the fact that funding allocation under New Labour favoured bigger

²⁹ The UK government under New Labour spoke mainly about the *Third Sector* when it addressed Voluntary and Community Organisations. It defined the Third Sector as comprising "non-governmental organisations that are value driven and which principally reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. It includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals" (See Cabinet Office webpage under http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/about_us.aspx, access date: 25/06/2009). In the following I will use the term 'Third Sector' when I refer to New Labour's public service reform policies (for a discussion of the definition and use of terms in regard to the Voluntary Sector see also section 4.1).

charities over small voluntary groups, community initiatives and local front-line organisations. The contract culture has increased the pressures on VCOs to adopt business principles; it is said to compromise independent campaigning, leading to a loss of crucial services. The ongoing re-organisation of local government funding is shifting power to local administration and big Third Sector organisations with negative impacts on small VCOs in collaborative arrangements (cf. Macmillan 2010). Unions describe this policy context as a further step in the ongoing history of privatisation of public services in the UK and they contextualise the British public service reform in marketisation strategies at the European Union level. New Labour's reform is analysed here in its questionable outcomes for both the workforce affected and the service quality alike.

4.1 Contextualising New Labour's public service reform

4.1.1 The enabling state – a *Third Way* to 'active citizenship'

New Labour came to power in 1997 with a promise to improve the quality of public services in the UK. Creating 'opportunities for all' and a 'reconciliation of citizen rights with responsibilities' became main points on the political agenda. Under New Labour, the formation of 'active citizenship' has figured in various policies as the driving rationale. The introduction of welfare-to-work programmes delineated an explicit shift from *welfare* to *workfare* under which the statutory social security grid has been weakened. Citizens are expected to accept any work in order to keep their entitlement for any further support by the state.

New Labour's efforts to create active citizenship through employment and market exposure were paralleled by efforts to address and harness voluntary and community activity for civic renewal and the reform of public services. Politics under the *Third Way* approach switched from individualism and pretended retreat of the state under Thatcher to an emphasis of the importance of the role of the state in enabling civic responsibility, community and voluntary activity. New Labour's reforms highlighted thereby the importance of state support for active citizens and their organisations to unleash their innovative power. For Blair

“a key challenge of progressive politics is to use the state as an enabling force, protecting effective communities and voluntary organizations and encouraging their growth to tackle new needs, in partnership as appropriate” (Blair 1998, p. 4).

4.1.2 Continuity and elaboration of privatisation policies under New Labour

Under the leadership of Tony Blair, the Labour Party programme moved away from challenging market imperatives. New Labour's *Third Way* (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998) introduced an approach “whereby welfare policy supports rather than obstructs the operation of a market system, and contributes to the economic goal of competitiveness in a more open economy” (Page 2007, p. 103). Despite the party's opposition to a direct sell-out of public services to private sector bodies during the eighties, once in power, the Labour government continued various policies of privatisation. Strategies of marketisation, which had initially been introduced by Margaret Thatcher and further evolved by the Major government in the early nineties, were taken on board and have been implemented into new areas of service provision. A critical case to mention here is

the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the encouragement of partnerships with the private sector for core services in education and the NHS, where public and union opposition to direct privatisation had been stronger than it had been to the previously sub-contracted services involving low-paid jobs in catering, cleaning and waste collection (Whitfield 2006).

As a result, direct procurement and commissioning from non-statutory bodies continued to be a popular method in New Labour's public service reform agenda. Competition and contestability featured here as “market incentives to increase efficiency and quality of services” (Cabinet Office 2006, p. 8 Chart A 'The UK Government's Model of Public Service Reform'). Joanne, a policy officer of a public service union I interviewed reported on the implicit transformation of the UK government's understanding of public sector tasks and responsibilities:

“With the introduction of the purchaser-provider split (...) every part of the public sector now is being transformed from providing services to just buying them, commissioning them, that is the soft word that they use”.

Well-known examples of outsourcing and the enhancement of the purchaser-provider split in public services are found in housing related support services, and more recently, employment related services under welfare-to-work programmes by the Department for Work and Pensions. Services that had previously been provisioned by public sector bodies are now contracted out and transferred to private and third sector bodies.

As a consequence, big service providers and private sector organisations have emerged in these fields. Third sector organisations that became active under these new arrangements have reported major difficulties. Complaints have been raised over the fact that core contracts were going straight to private companies and that third sector organisations were being pushed into a mere sub-contractor role. In the case of welfare-to-work programmes, the third sector organisations involved have even considered withdrawing from the established contracts because of under-funding (Plummer 2009). Unions have raised concerns about this *transfer of services* under conditions of increased competition, in terms of the negative outcomes for both the workforce affected and the quality of the services provided (Davies 2007, 2008).

It has to be pointed out, though, that in the UK many specialised social care and community services (women-only services included) have been provided by non-statutory bodies since their creation. In this respect, there is currently no transfer from statutory bodies taking place. What has changed over the years, however, are the procedures and

requirements for public funding allocation to non-statutory service providers. This affects the endowment and specifications for public funding pots for social care services in general, with major effects on Third Sector bodies and women's services in particular.

4.1.3 The 'choice' agenda in the UK's public service reforms

The involvement of non-public sector bodies in the organisation, sourcing and provision of public services is nothing new. Especially since the 1970s, public funding allocation to the Voluntary Sector has risen in parallel to similar developments in many other European countries, but with increased vigour in the UK (Perri 6 and Kendall 1997).

The Conservatives' strategy for a re-organisation of public services under Thatcher and Major had been characterised by an *explicit* top-down approach which found expression in the imposition of Competitive Tendering on local authorities and the NHS. The reform sought to reduce direct public sector engagement and to contract out as many services as possible. Charities and private sector bodies worked under contracts to deliver services on behalf of the state, and were approached as mere providers with the affected services being increasingly commodified.

This was mainly promoted under the 'choice agenda', where a diversification of the range of public service providers was said to enhance service user choice. The citizen is addressed as a consumer of welfare and health care services, whose consumer power ought to help to re-shape the overall system. In order to enhance innovation, this consumer power needs to be freed by introducing the choice element and more competition amongst service providers (Nedham 2007). Under the 'choice agenda' non-statutory organisations are thus addressed as an effective tool to unleash consumer power and build up viable alternatives to state-controlled agencies, which are described as being ineffective, inefficient and user-detached (Taylor 2004; Wolch 1990).

While New Labour kept this discourse of personal user choice alive as the driver for its reform agenda, it focused additionally on the 'enabling voice': a discourse around community and service user involvement and co-production (cf. section 4.2). Third Sector provision and organisation of services, combined with new measures to improve the accountability of service providers, as well as more consultation and better representation of service users and professionals for policy development, is said to shape public services 'from below' (Cabinet Office 2006, p. 8 Chart A 'The UK Government's Model of Public Service Reform').

There has been much discussion about the distinctiveness of something like the voluntary (and community)/third/non-profit sector versus the public and the private

sector. Since the onset of privatisation policies in the 1980s, the boundaries between these sectors have become increasingly blurred in many respects. The degree to which the agencies that are operating in the field of public services differ is highly disputed (Taylor 2004). Some of the distinctions that have been made concern legal status, organisational structure, the accumulation and direction of profits, workforce characteristics, voluntary action and ethos, and the organisations' position in regard to the public-private differentiation.

As suggested earlier, the UK government and legislative bodies under New Labour increasingly used the term *Third Sector* rather than *Voluntary (and Community) Sector* (VCS) as an encompassing category in their documents and reports (HM Treasury Cabinet Office 2007; House of Commons Public Accounts Committee 2009; House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee 2008). Voluntary and community organisations feature only as a part of the Third Sector. It could be argued that the reference to a rather broad definition of the Third Sector by the UK government is already, in its very wording, opening the door to the private sector to profit from its Third Sector policies. In New Labour's definition, the inclusion of all organisations which “*principally* reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives”³⁰ means *de facto* that all those bodies channeling up to 49% of surplus into private hands are addressed too.

The term *non-profit* was introduced to distinguish social bodies which do not directly contribute to the shareholder value culture in an increasingly marketised society and is more commonly used in research on the US context (Powell 2006; Salamon 1999), while for the European context the term Voluntary (and Community) Sector has been used by stakeholders of smaller and local community-based organisations and associations to praise their role in and contribution to civil society, keeping the ethos of voluntary action and community involvement alive (Clark et al. 2009; Kendall 2003).

By using the term Voluntary and Community Sector in this thesis, I want to acknowledge this self-definition but highlight a further aspect. I want to emphasise the implicit *expectation* of voluntary *equal unpaid* input by the workforce involved (employees, managers, trustees or volunteers alike - though to different degrees) when the role and financial endowment and status of these organisations is addressed. These organisations have a *tradition* of building up strength on non-remunerated work. When operating under charitable status, they have a strong, structurally imposed voluntary input even at

³⁰ See footnote 29 and Cabinet Office webpage under:
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/about_us.aspx, accessed 25/06/2009 (italics added).

management level, as the boards of trustees are obliged by charitable law to run on a volunteer basis.

Looking now at the impact of social policies on terms and conditions, including those in volunteering, and thus on the ways in which 'value' is created, is crucial to assess the effects and outcomes of the ongoing public service reforms. Explicit reference to the term *voluntary* brings this component of unpaid labour to the fore. By including the term *community*, I want to address and refer explicitly to the discursive realm of community enhancement and empowerment in which this reform takes place. Those two discursive realms combined, the term Voluntary and Community Sector refers explicitly to the distinctive edge of the current marketisation strategy in social care which is marked, as I will argue in this thesis, by a neocommunitarian turn in neoliberal ideology and policy implementation (cf. chapter 4.3 and chapter 7).

4.1.4 Marketisation strategies at European level

Britain is one of the countries in which the marketisation of public services has been pushed hardest (Whitfield 2006). Marketisation policies, however, have also been promoted and reinforced in other European countries and by international trade agreements and legislation at a European level. A discussion of this international context is important to pinpoint the accrued relevance of decisions on public funding allocation for public services at national level.

European Union (EU) legislation and jurisdiction have favoured the creation of an internal market, free of barriers to the movement of goods, persons, services and capital. The UK government has been supportive of the Community Lisbon Strategy³¹, which includes a commitment of the EU member states to increase EUwide competition in the area of services. This strategy for economic development has also been favoured by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) since the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1995.

However, what remains highly disputed is the question of which services fall under established EU competition and internal market law, now and in the future (De Búrca 2005). In 2004, the European Commission (EC) agreed on a *Directive on Services of General Interest*³² which covered education, social protection, security, criminal justice and local government services such as refuse collection and opened them to international competition. Due to public protest and union intervention, social services related to

³¹ The UK ratified the Lisbon Treaty in July 2008.

³² In EC documents and EU legislation the term *public services* is not used.

social housing, childcare and support of families and persons in need were excluded from this directive. However, the EC Communication *Implementing the Community Lisbon programme. Social services of general interest in the European Union* (European Commission 2006) discussed the need to further clarify under which circumstances such services would fall in the future under EU competition and internal market law. Under current EU law, this depends mainly on the definition whether particular services are of *economic interest* or not³³.

It has been argued that, in the past, the EU constitution would have given the option to balance economic and social interests, but that EU political institutions have given priority to the interests of economic operators in the outlining of specific legislative measures for the regulation of specific sectors (Baquero Cruz 2005). In Communication COM (2007) 725 (European Commission 2007) on services of general interest including social services, for instance, the EC still maintains a vague position with the statement “that social services can be of economic or non-economic interest depending on the activity under consideration” (ibid. p. 5).

In the 2006 communication, the European Commission's perspective on the ongoing and future social service reform in the EU was presented in more detail. Here, the situation is described as “a climate favourable to a *social economy*, characterised by the importance of not-for-profit providers but faced with the need to be effective and transparent” (European Commission 2006, p. 8). This statement is accompanied by a list of supposedly characteristic moments of a “*general* trend towards modernisation and quality” (ibid., italics added). The list includes the introduction of benchmarking methods, the decentralisation of the organisation of services to local and regional level, the outsourcing of public sector tasks to the private sector, and public-private partnerships; all being part of a transformation which would give public authorities a new role, that of “regulators, guardians of regulated competition” (ibid.).

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) has pointed out that this communication oversimplifies the diverse situation of social service provision in different EU member states and formulates *de facto* an *agenda* for marketisation, rather than being descriptive. The language used shows the Commission's willingness to bring about further market exposure and public service privatisation in the field of social

³³ This distinction is repeatedly mentioned. In the amended protocol Nr. 26 on Services of General Interest of the Lisbon Treaty, for instance, Article 2 states that “the Treaty does not affect the Member States' competence to provide, commission and organise *non-economic* services of general interest” (see http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm, italics added).

services as well. Critical of the EC's attempt to create a sectoral approach on (Social) Services of General Interest (which anyway gives no clarification in terms of definitions, cf. also European Commission 2010), EPSU has called for a specific regulatory framework for *all* public services –such as binding criteria for social procurement– to protect the quality of public services and the workforce which is involved therein (European Federation of Public Service Unions 2009).

The attempts at European legislative level to open up social services to EU internal market law puts this study's focus on national public service reform policies under a different light: when social services are commissioned out to non-statutory bodies, EU law and jurisdiction might be applicable in the future, especially when bigger contracts are awarded (cf. European Commission 2010). Social services, and thus social care provision, might then only be protected from international competition and corporate interests if precautions are being *explicitly* taken in the commissioning process itself by the commissioning bodies at local or national level.

Without going into further details of the legal framing of commissioning processes regarding social (care) services, it can be presumed that if national government policies in the UK continue to push government bodies into a purchaser role, in which they are asked to enhance competition amongst service providers at local or national level *without* requiring them to introduce any further statutory regulation frameworks they will, in practice, establish social service provision as an 'economic activity'. This, in turn, could give service providers from outside the UK the right to entrance to this newly created 'market' and increase the pressure on local providers and employment relations (cf. Cunningham 2008c).

4.2 New Labour's Third Sector Strategy

In 2007, following a period of spending reviews and consultation with Third Sector bodies, the UK's central government published its final report on its Third Sector Review *The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration* (HM Treasury Cabinet Office 2007). This report, referred to also as the New Labour government's *Third Sector Strategy*, set out “a framework for future working in partnership with the sector” for a period of ten years (ibid., 1.12). It built the core background strategy for investments in the Third Sector and entailed the announcement of additional central government funding pots, by explicitly mentioning an allocation of overall £262m of additional funding for various aspects of support for Third Sector organisations³⁴.

4.2.1 New Labour's 'voice' agenda – 'bottom-up' service development

The government's Third Sector Strategy prominently identified “four major areas of common interest between the sector and government agencies in the UK: enabling greater voice and campaigning, strengthening communities, transforming public services and encouraging social enterprise” (HM Treasury Cabinet Office 2007, 1.16). It was founded on the *Action Plan for Third Sector Public Service Delivery* published in December 2006, which focused on the improvement of procurement and commissioning practices by central and local government to make sure that Third Sector organisations would increasingly be taken into consideration in the allocation of public funding.

In this policy document, the UK government made a commitment to protect the traditionally ascribed strengths of Voluntary and Community Organisations in acknowledging their role in campaigning and advocating for and on behalf of local communities and vulnerable people and their pioneering role in developing innovative solutions to confront inequality, environmental and economic challenges. In his foreword, the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown emphasised the need for a “thriving and diverse third sector” and made the following impressive statement: “At the heart of our approach is our desire to support those thousands of small community organisations who play such a vital role [in] our society. We want them to be free to access the funding or advice they need in a way that suits them” (ibid., p. 3).

³⁴ In terms of explicitly announced additional funding, the main programmes focused on infrastructure (£50m), capacity building (£85m) and youth volunteering (£117m) (ibid., Box 1.3 Summary of key measures in the third sector review).

By strengthening the Third Sector, the New Labour government expected to create a higher degree of community and user involvement in public service reform, giving service users and community groups more opportunity to voice their opinion on policy issues, making sure that these 'voices' are being heard and included in government bodies' policy development. New Labour's voice agenda thus stood for a new paradigm of collaboration between government and Third sector bodies, combined with a focus on service user involvement in service provision.

4.2.2 Compact for partnership – a regulatory framework without statutory power

The New Labour government successfully established a discourse around 'partnership' regarding the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), reflecting its interest in reversing the top-down approach applied by previous Conservative governments, creating a bottom-up strategy for change (Lewis 2004). An important step was the publication of the Compact, a guideline framework for the relationship between Government bodies and the Third Sector.

“Established in 1998, the Compact is an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for how both parties should work together.”³⁵

Although a national initiative at first (agreement between central government and the VCS in England), Compacts have been introduced at national, regional and local levels throughout the UK. Today, these agreements address the relationship between the VCS and central government offices, regional and local government bodies, and between the VCS and statutory bodies like the NHS.

In the first Compact for England, the independence of the VCS was recognised and a commitment was made to better government, to improved funding for the sector's activities and to the sector's inclusion in policy development. For its part, the VCS agreed to follow and promote good practice, to implement standards for accountability, to inform and consult its service users and to contribute to policy development by responding to government's consultations (Home Office Active Community Directorate 1998).

However, this regulatory framework has to be seen as only an expression of good intentions, as it has to date no statutory underpinning and has been undermined by other

³⁵ See <http://www.thecompact.org.uk>, access date: 18/09/09. On this webpage a copy of the National Compact for England and the five Codes of Good Practice can be downloaded.

government policies, and under the New Coalition government (Zimmeck et al. 2011). While organisations can refer to the Compact to make their case in consultations, they cannot base any legal claims on it.

4.2.3 Support for the Third Sector – building capacity for public service reform

The announcement of additional funding in the *Third Sector Strategy* built on previous investments by the New Labour government in the Third Sector and its efforts to get involved in the sector's development. In May 2006, the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) was introduced as part of the Cabinet Office's aim “to support the environment for a thriving third sector, enabling people to change society”³⁶. The OTS coordinated cross-departmental action and has carried on the government's investment programmes in the Third Sector, including the *ChangeUp* programme managed by *Capacitybuilders*, which was built to encourage the forming of partnerships and consortia in the VCS, and the *Futurebuilders investment fund*, which gave support to front-line organisations. Both were explicitly designed to build up capacity in the Third Sector to prepare it for further participation in public service reform.

The government's additional support for the sector came under fire as these two main funding streams were criticised by a prominent audit institution. Following the report of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (2009), the government's investments – which would have amounted to £450m by 2011 – were identified as not necessarily best placed to meet the government's pronounced objectives. While the report mentions that there were signs of improvements and positive effects for Third Sector organisations, the report prominently criticised the missing opportunity to thoroughly assess the outcomes of the funding being spent through these programmes, as no sufficient performance targets were established at first hand. It was also suggested that, instead of giving capacity building support, the programmes have been used to fill up funding gaps that occurred because of insufficient funding provision for appropriate service delivery in the first place. Furthermore, the management of the *ChangeUp* programme was highly criticised as the organisations that participated complained about the procedures of funding allocation, as these were not giving them the opportunity to long-term planning and sustainability.

³⁶ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/about_us.aspx, access date: 18/09/09

The Public Accounts Committee reminded government and the public that the achieved capacity building could only be sustained if there were *more* resources allocated in the long term to these organisations and the services they provide:

“If the improvements brought about by ChangeUp are to be sustained, there are challenges to be met such as finding new sources of income to fund services.” (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee 2009, p. 1).

While these two programmes, which built the core of Third Sector investment, focused on organisations that were willing to be engaged in the delivery of public services, the New Labour government also launched some funding pots which focused more on support for the campaigning and community building activities of Third Sector organisations. Its *Grassroots Grants* scheme (2008-2011) supported local authorities to generate endowments (£50m funding pot, mentioned above in footnote 34) and provided financial support in the form of grants (£80m) for community groups in England that were engaged in grassroots and campaigning work. Then there was *Communitybuilders*, a £70m investment fund launched in 2008 by the Office of the Third Sector and the Department for Communities and Local Government which had been specifically designed to provide financial and advisory support for multi-purpose community-led organisations³⁷.

³⁷ See Office of the Third Sector's webpage on its core funding streams under http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/funding_finance_support/core_funding.aspx, access date: 01/10/2009.

4.3 A neocommunitarian agenda for neoliberal reform

In the following, I want to argue that this Third Sector Strategy was flawed, or at best compromised, by the framing of a wider reform agenda which addressed the procedures for and amount of central government spending through local government frameworks and funding channels for the provision of services to the public. While this broader reform agenda aimed at further devolution of power to local government, a greater say for service users, empowerment of local communities and a more strategic involvement of Third Sector bodies and volunteers for the achievement of these aims (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, 2008d), it also entailed a clear statement of expected efficiency gains through the commissioning of services and imposed an intricate and confusing re-structuring of local government.

The belief in efficiency gains through market incentives, rising pressures for further savings and explicit attempts to 'harness' volunteering for reform makes the emphasis on the positive role of volunteering and the Third Sector for innovation, 'civic renewal' and 'social inclusion' all the more suspicious. I will argue that the appraisal of voluntary commitment, both explicit and implicit, is a key element for a critical reading of the imposed public service reform agendas in past decades. The focus on empowerment and innovation through Third Sector and service-user involvement can be described as forming a new and crucial *neocommunitarian* element in neoliberal agendas, with volunteering playing a more than simply complementary role.

4.3.1 'Empowerment' and the expectation of efficiency gains

Local community and service user *empowerment* gained a crucial rhetorical role in the overall reform agenda by New Labour (Milbourne 2009). In a foreword to the White Paper *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2008a), the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown emphasises his government's "agenda for empowerment" which lies "at the heart of our public service reform agenda" and specifies that this entails not only a devolution of power from central to local government, but also "the transfer of power both to front-line professionals and to users" (ibid., p. I). In the department's use of *empowerment*, three components are mentioned: empowerment presupposes and encourages (1) the vision of

“active citizens”, (2) “strengthened communities” and (3) working in “partnership” between “local people” and “public bodies”³⁸.

The vision of empowerment through 'strengthened communities' is said to be realised by a re-structured relationship between central government, local authorities and citizens, which would enhance the devolution of power: in England, a new local performance framework was introduced which set out new reporting requirements for local to central government regarding the local allocation of state funding. The “best-value framework” replaced the “compulsory competitive tendering regime” of the Tories (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 133). Governance in this new relationship is characterised by top-down performance management based on outcome targets and detailed performance assessment (Taylor 2004).

This framework has been linked to the creation of a new decision making body: the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). This non-statutory partnership is meant to bring together representatives of local government, stakeholders from the Voluntary Sector, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), the police and local business to make strategic decisions on public funding allocation. The specific composition of this multi-agency partnership is intended to show local variation.

LSPs have been described as “hybrid institutional forms (...) of unclear accountability, role and constitution” (Taylor 2004, p. 128). The ways in which democratic control should operate and whether the principle of representative democracy at local government level is actually undermined by LSPs are important questions to be raised. Interestingly enough, local business is explicitly meant to take part in these partnerships.

The importance of LSPs should not be underestimated, as these bodies have to take important decisions regarding the allocation of public funding. LSPs set the course for the local investment and development framework called *Community Strategy*; they assigned and monitored the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal funding³⁹, and most importantly, they decide on Local Area Agreements (LAAs). LAAs set out the priorities for a local area: they compile a set of national standards and indicators for specific issues in health, education, crime reduction, etc. against which central government checks the performance and progress of local government regarding the established Public Service

³⁸ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/aboutcommunityempowerment>, access date: 29/08/2009

³⁹ Neighbourhood Renewal funding was initiated in 2001 to “improve the quality of life for those living in the most disadvantaged areas”. It has been given only to a certain set of local areas “in need”. See: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal>, access date: 02/10/2009.

Agreements at national government department level. There is a set of 188 national indicators from which LSPs have to choose 35⁴⁰. Thus, although LSPs are *non-statutory bodies*, the decisions they take *have a statutory footing and power* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2009).

While New Labour highlighted the improvements for local government gained through this reform by bringing about more 'flexibility' for local authorities and their partners (Department for Communities and Local Government 2008b), the pressures on local authorities to work more efficiently is not to be underestimated. In 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government (2008d) published its *National Procurement Strategy For Local Government – Final report*. Here, the UK government's hopes of cutting spending through public service reform became more explicit as the expected efficiency gains by the commissioning and procurement of public services found prominence (ibid., Chapter 1: Delivering efficiency gains). This document highlights the fact that for the period of 2003-2007 local Councils exceeded the efficiency gains targets set by central government, making £3.1bn of efficiency gains overall. Furthermore, the report announced that local and central government were expected in the future “to create 3% cash-releasing efficiency gains per annum” (ibid., p. 21).

Against the background of this already rather heavy burden for local government under New Labour – with local authorities being reminded to cut their overall spending by organising services more efficiently – the neocommunitarian focus on volunteering, active citizenship and the Third Sector for empowerment and innovation can be seen in a new perspective.

4.3.2 Beyond a complementary role for voluntarism

The neocommunitarian emphasis on community involvement and empowerment is distinct from the individualistic discourse and focus on family and charitable welfare by previous Tory governments, including the well-known claim “there is no such thing as society” by Margaret Thatcher⁴¹.

⁴⁰ The set comprised 198 but was reduced to 188 indicators in 2009. The list includes a set of new indicators: N6 'Participation in regular volunteering', N32 'Repeat incidents of domestic violence', N36 'Protection against terrorist attack' and N185 'CO2 reduction from local authority operations', to mention just a few. Performance management of local government is given through a new monitoring framework called *Comprehensive Area Assessment* (CAA). All 188 indicators are monitored but the CAA focuses on the 35 chosen by local government for which specific “stretching targets” will have to be agreed upon (Department for Communities and Local Government 2008b).

⁴¹ This claim derives from an interview of Margaret Thatcher by Douglas Keay for *Woman's Own* in 1987, in which she argued against the Welfare State and for more reliance on self-help; see:

In her autobiography, Thatcher (1993) commented on that quote and the public response to it. She said that she felt misunderstood and complained that her following sentences had often been omitted:

“There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then to look after our neighbour” (ibid., p. 626).

By further explaining herself, she displayed her stance towards the Voluntary Sector and her belief that it should acquire a more important role in future welfare:

“My meaning, clear at the time but subsequently distorted beyond recognition, was that society was not an abstraction, separate from the men and women who composed it, but a living structure of individuals, families, neighbours and voluntary organisations. I expected great things from society in this sense because I believed that as economic wealth grew, individuals and voluntary groups should assume more responsibility for their neighbour's misfortunes. The error to which I was objecting was the confusion of society with the state as the helper of first resort” (ibid.).

She went on to cherish the virtues of voluntary, neighbour and charitable help evident in Britain during the Victorian era and emphasised her obligation to reduce and redirect state welfare in order to prevent a “dependency culture” (ibid., p. 627).

While there are similarities in the reference to social responsibility in terms of self-help and the duties that individuals owe to society, Thatcher's support of the Victorian model of charitable welfare makes her stance distinct from the one first taken and developed by New Labour. Thatcher did *not* refer to interventions by the state that would *directly* support the Voluntary Sector and involve it in policy making. The 'enabling state' is thus a distinct aspect of the neocommunitarian discourse and funding practices first enhanced under New Labour.

It has been argued that New Labour's political agenda built upon communitarian elements, but was still dominated by a consumerist and individualistic discourse. Nedham (2007) argued that under New Labour the citizen was addressed as consumer, under which the “counter-running narrative around empowerment (...) is potentially co-opted” (ibid., p. 5). I want to argue that New Labour's agenda entailed a distinctive element based on a discourse around active citizenship and empowerment which goes beyond paid employment, and that this discourse plays a much more important role than one which is merely complementary or subordinated. New Labour drafted “a politics that

prioritizes responsibilities and obligations that an individual owes in the community” (Driver and Martell 2002, p. 48) and combined it with an intricate discourse of its distinctive public service reform in regard to Third Sector involvement in the provision of services *and* concomitant state interventions to promote volunteer and community engagement. These new neocommunitarian elements in public service reform try to harness voluntary activity for innovation gains and the further marketisation of Social Services. In this new responsabilisation discourse, Voluntary and Community Organisations, their ('volunteering') workers and voluntary action in general are increasingly addressed *to provide answers and solutions* to socio-economic problems, while direct state responsibility for welfare and social justice is politically repelled and thereby denied (Lacey and Ilcan 2006).

It is widely acknowledged that New Labour's agenda was informed by the work of communitarian thinkers (Fyfe 2005). Communitarian writers actively took part in the discussion of its Third Way policies (Etzioni 2000). Walzer (2007) convincingly argued that the communitarian discourse is *complementary* to a liberal account of society and does *not* strive to overcome its liberal framework. In communitarian responses, civil society is celebrated in its ability to counteract the negative effects of the market, but not the market principle itself. Citizens are envisioned as being 'free' to build all sorts of associations with others. Their commitment to volunteering and community work is seen as a complementary element in the pursuit of people's own interest in self-assertion in the free market. Community and civic engagement, then, is seen as mitigating the effects of market exposure. The power of the market, however, should not be directly restrained by state policies and state intervention in the Third Sector; rather, the market needs to be further enhanced to flourish in bringing about its innate innovativeness. The support for community building in communitarian discourse is seen as being a necessary if merely complementary element to an overall liberal policy discourse.

In the following, it will be argued that the recent focus on community enhancement, Third Sector involvement and volunteering cannot be described as merely a *complementary* element, as suggested by Walzer, in communitarian discourses. It is much more than that, as the appeal of community engagement and involvement is derived from more than its mitigating effects: it is enhanced by the state to bring about the envisioned positive outcomes of reform by helping *a new market* blossom to the full. New Labour's endeavours can indeed be called *neocommunitarian* not only as they were framed by the neo-liberal context (Fyfe 2005; Jessop 2002a), but because they gave its discourses and practices around community and service user empowerment a new *instrumental* role via

particular modes for Third Sector involvement *and* investment in volunteering in public service reforms. In keeping with the analysis provided by Zimmeck (2010) I would argue that New Labour has thereby introduced a distinctive approach towards volunteering, which is defined by a particularly strong *instrumental use* of government support for and attention to voluntary action.

New Labour's highly regulatory approach to public service reform imposed output and process measurement along predefined quantifiable targets on all, thus also on its volunteering programmes. This emphasised and contributed to the rise of highly formalised forms of volunteering. However, in distinction to Zimmeck and her colleagues (Rochester et al. 2010) I would argue that it is crucial to address and analyse this transformation in governments' approach towards voluntary action in the context of the prevalent public service, economic and local government reform agendas. The spheres for volunteering and thus development and change in the role of voluntary action can only be productively analysed and discussed when they are addressed in the broader context of the transformation of work and production; thus the definition, recognition and division of labour in a given society.

Three elements build up the neocommunitarian agenda, one in which volunteering activity has gained a crucial, functional component: (1) involvement of organisations that rely on volunteer labour in public service reform, combined with the objective to achieve innovation gains through establishing a market in the area of Social Services; (2) framing volunteering activity as *the* innovation: seeing volunteers as the force needed to create more people-centred services and the 'caring' element in them, as being crucial to enable community involvement, and to be an important element in giving service users more voice; (3) activating volunteering activity by citizens and service users through support for volunteering programmes, thereby increasing or securing indirectly unpaid or cheap labour for the remaining and new providers of Social Services (in the public, third and private sectors).

In recent years, parallel to the importance given to Third Sector organisations' potential contribution to public service reform, volunteering (in all sectors: Third, private and public sector) has attracted major attention by governments. Volunteerism has increasingly been seen as a 'panacea' for all sorts of social and economic problems in British society, stressing the positive outcomes of voluntary action for volunteers and society alike (Fyfe and Milligan 2003).

The UK government's approach, characterised as "hyperactive" (Zimmeck 2010, p. 91), switched under New Labour to a mode in which support for volunteering was

increasingly orchestrated by and from the centre, “by No.10, H.M. Treasury and the Home Office/Cabinet Office” (ibid., p. 85). Policies and service targets that address support for volunteering were imposed top down on other central government departments, regional and local government bodies. Via the elaboration of new programmes and various initiatives that address voluntary action, the government created new partnership mechanisms for policy development and implementation and inaugurated new infrastructure bodies to build up a positive climate for volunteering (ibid.).

In 2001, the *Compact on Volunteering* (cf. chapter 4.2 on the partnership agreements under compacts) was published. It formulated the common interests of the VCS and government in supporting volunteering and communicated the aim of facilitating good practice around volunteering in England. Government laid out its objective to “work to actively reduce barriers to volunteering resulting from existing legislation, regulation and policies” (Cabinet Office 2001, p. 2) and the VCS agreed on promoting equal opportunities in recruiting and providing sufficient support for volunteers (ibid.). This document celebrates volunteering as forceful and innovative element in society:

“Volunteering is a powerful force for change, both for those who volunteer, and for the wider community. Volunteers offer support, expertise and innovation to any organisation, enhancing impact and adding value” (Cabinet Office 2001, p. 6).

This Compact was followed by various government initiatives on volunteering. In 2004, David Blunkett and Gordon Brown initiated the Russell Commission to “develop a new national framework for youth action and engagement”⁴². In 2005 a year of volunteering was celebrated and Baroness Neuberger was appointed as the government's Champion for Volunteering. The Russell Commission's final report in 2005 recommended the creation of youth volunteering schemes and the facilitation of volunteering in public services. Furthermore, it suggested more public sector engagement in the creation of a volunteering ethos in schools, colleges and universities (Russell 2005). Baroness Neuberger's reports have focused on an increased use of volunteers in public services by highlighting “the need to make more of the huge, largely untapped resource of service users as volunteers” in regard to Social Services and Care (Baroness Neuberger 2008, p. 23). Volunteering agencies have since blossomed and volunteering development centres for each local area were originally planned⁴³.

⁴² <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/russellcommission/about/index.html>, access date: 03/10/2009

⁴³ It is important to mention here that in September 2009 the Minister for the Third Sector under the New Labour government nonetheless announced that these volunteer centres will have to look for

David Blunkett emphasised in 2008 that the Labour Party was deeply “committed to creating an environment where volunteering can thrive” (Blunkett 2008, p. 20). The positive aspects of volunteering for the people involved and for civic renewal are emphasised: “Volunteering does not only benefit those who receive help, it benefits the volunteers as well – volunteers themselves seek and gain personal fulfilment, experience of responsibility and commitment and, increasingly, the acquisition of transferable skills” (ibid.). Although he agrees on the importance of the principle of volunteering being *voluntary* (as all the mentioned reports on volunteering reported upon in this subsection do), he mentions *explicitly* the important contributions of volunteers for public service reform and the will to enhance and *harness* these contributions:

“Research has shown that more people would volunteer if asked. Therefore, in the context of personalising health and social service, awareness of the skills needed to work with volunteers needs to be developed at all levels and performance indicators could be adopted to illustrate the progress made in harnessing the skills and time offered by volunteer citizens” (Blunkett 2008, p. 20).

The same urge to link volunteering to public service reform is followed by Baroness Neuberger, who has given support for endeavours in the future of volunteering in creating the England Volunteering Development Council in collaboration with Volunteering England. The collaboration resulted in the *Manifesto for Volunteering*, published in 2008 (Commission on the Future of Volunteering 2008). The document prominently states its vision:

“Our vision is that at every turn and every point in life it will be easy to contribute – and people will be encouraged to do so in a huge variety of non-remunerated ways – towards a better society, in which communities pull together and care for our collective quality of life. (...) Our vision, ultimately, is that volunteering becomes part of the DNA of our society – it becomes integral to the way we think of ourselves and live our lives, and we are inspired to contribute in this way. (...) *But our vision takes us further, to a situation where volunteering is more clearly at the heart of how we live and how society works. There would be an expectation that at least some of our services will be delivered by volunteers, not by default, but as a positive choice*” (Commission on the Future of Volunteering 2008, p. 2, italics added).

However, a connection between spending cuts, imposed targets for efficiency gains and the increased interest in volunteering is explicitly denied. For Baroness Neuberger, promoting volunteering is not about getting it cheap and reducing costs as critics of government programmes, especially public sector unions, have suggested.

financial support from elsewhere, as government has frozen its plans for additional funding due to the recession (Wiggins 2009).

Instead, it is addressed as “helping to create services that are people-centred” (Neuberger 2008, p. 3).

What often remains hidden, however, in these discourses on volunteering, is the adverse climate in which this reference to unpaid 'community' involvement takes place. In 2005, under the government's youth volunteering schemes, the charity *vinspired* was created “to take the lead in delivering a step change in the quality, quantity and diversity of volunteering opportunities available to young people aged 16-25 in England (...) [with the aim] to inspire 1 million more young people to volunteer”⁴⁴. On their webpage, plain language is used to describe the current context of volunteering for young people in the UK. It becomes clear that volunteering stands for unpaid work (experience) and has gained importance in the competition over paid jobs in times of increasing unemployment rates:

“Can't get a job as haven't got the work experience? Let's face it; Now's a bad time to be looking. With news stories breaking daily about the dire state of the UK's economy and its undulating effect on employment, it's glaringly apparent that there are not enough jobs for the increasing number of people looking for them. Even if you are a graduate or a student, you are only given a 50 percent of getting a job and with unemployment expected to reach 3.2 million by next year alone (according to a British Chamber of Commerce survey) what can we do to better our chances of finding employment?”⁴⁵

The support for volunteering as a central part of the neocommunitarian activation agenda can also be traced in welfare-to-work programmes in which volunteering features as having an important role to play: volunteering was already included in 2008 (under the New Labour government) in plans for future welfare reforms. In chapter 2 *An obligation to work* of a consultation paper it was directly suggested that people on benefits should be 'encouraged' to take on voluntary work. Volunteering was presented here as a road to paid employment and the paper asked for further suggestions as to how volunteering could be further enhanced (Department for Work and Pensions 2008).

A further striking expression of the neocommunitarian pushing for voluntarism is the Border, Immigration and Citizenship Act passed in July 2009 under which migrants would have been able to accelerate the procedures to attain citizenship by two years by participating in volunteering programmes. Third Sector organisations soon gathered together with policy makers to examine and 'deal' with the consequences:

⁴⁴ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/volunteering/youth_volunteering.aspx, access date: 06/10/2009

⁴⁵ <http://www.vinspired.com/about-us/work-experience>, access date: 06/10/2009

“Recent legislation means that new migrants can gain British Citizenship two years earlier if they volunteer. This free policy seminar (run by Volunteering England) will bring together policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to look at how the programme will work and to examine the full range of issues” (Seminar *Citizenship: Earned or Learned? Implications of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act for volunteering* by Volunteering England, 15 October 2009, as announced in NVCO public policy email update in October 2009).

While this Act and the direct concatenation of volunteering with the entitlement to citizenship rights for immigrants were then re-drawn, volunteering still features as a crucial element in current public sector reforms, not only in terms of the above mentioned social policy programmes that directly address and support (formal) volunteering, but also in terms of the indirect outcomes of the imposed funding cuts to specific subsectors and services, as will be argued in more detail in the following section and chapters 5-7 of this thesis.

4.4 Transfer and loss under the contract culture

For an assessment of the implementation and consequences of the neocommunitarian reform agenda, it is expedient to have a closer look at developments and characteristics of public funding allocation to Voluntary and Community Organisations. The pronounced aim to involve more Third Sector bodies in the delivery and transformation of public services in the UK has accompanied a gradual change in the ways in which the Voluntary and Community Sector, the women's sector included, has been and will be supported by public funding in the future.

There has been a clear trend away from grant giving towards a contractual relationship in public service delivery, infrastructure, and capacity building support. Whereas grant aid to VCOs in England and Wales was reduced from 52% in 2001/02 to 38% in 2004/05, government funding via contracts increased from 48% to 62% respectively (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2007).

The difference in these two modes is mainly characterised by a shift in decision-making power regarding the details of service provision in favour of the commissioning body. Under grant schemes, it is the local organisations that initiate projects and design services for which they then apply for funding under broad schemes. When services are commissioned under contracts, however, it is the government bodies that have to spell out in great detail the services they expect to be delivered and the very conditions for funding allocation. There is also a crucial difference in terms of the degree of competition faced by local providers: the commissioning process for contracts is potentially open to a larger range of organisations, including the private sector. Support is monitored in both modes, but in the case of grants it is bound to less specific criteria than under contracts.

Grant giving has been described by stakeholders as a flexible and less bureaucratic funding method and is deemed to be important in securing the Voluntary and Community Sector's (VCS) independence (Cooke 2007). Accessible for local organisations, grant aid is considered to be vital for a thriving local VCS. It is an important community development tool and can provide financial support for the initiating of new projects. Many services to the least advantaged in society are not profitable, difficult to finance, and therefore not attractive for established organisations to take on board. 'Bottom-up' projects that originate from detected needs in local communities are often initiated by micro to small voluntary organisations and community groups, sustained by high amounts of voluntary work. With the help of grants from government bodies these local projects can gain momentum. Grant aid is thus considered

to be an essential part of a sound local funding mix and a crucial tool for attaining the proclaimed objective of neocommunitarian agendas to strengthen and support local communities (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action et al. 2007).

However, despite numerous pleas against the loss of accessible grant aid, the trend towards a contractual relationship between government and the VCS continues. According to a recently published research project on trends in government funding for the Voluntary Sector (VS) conducted by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) (2009a)⁴⁶, the relation between government and the VS has been deeply affected under the neocommunitarian reforms. Reflecting the drive towards the commissioning of public services from the sector, its overall income from statutory sources⁴⁷ increased year-on-year since 2000 with statutory income accounting now “for just over one third of all income the sector receives” (ibid., 02). Regarding direct funding, it went up by 5% from 2005/2006 to 2006/2007 alone, a financial year in which government bodies in England and Wales allocated £12 billion to the VS. However, only £4.2 billion (35%) was given in form of grants with £7.8 billion (65%) spent in the form of contracts (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2009a).

With local government being the largest statutory income source in the VS, *smarter procurement* by local government (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006) can be seen as a key driving force for the trend towards contracts: statutory income of Voluntary Organisations (VOs)⁴⁸ from local government increased from £4.9 billion in 2004/2005 to 5.7 billion in 2006/2007 and more than three quarters (77%) of this funding in 2006/2007 was allocated via contracts and fees (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2009a).

Concerns have been raised that the central government grant schemes (see section 4.2) that were introduced by the Office of the Third Sector to alleviate the effects of the loss of local government grants are ineffective. These additional grant schemes were predominantly focused on micro organisations, as only organisations with an annual income of less than £20,000 were invited to apply. This means that many small organisations could not profit from these grant schemes, as those organisations with more than one paid employee did not qualify (Milbourne 2009).

⁴⁶ By the NCVO's definition, the Voluntary Sector comprises all registered charities that meet the following criteria: formality, independence, non-profit distributing, self-governance, voluntarism, public benefit. The publication reports and comments on a survey which is based on financial data retrieved from the Charity Commission register and accounts data collected by GuideStarDataServices (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2009a).

⁴⁷ provided by local, regional, national and international government bodies, including funds derived from the National Lottery

⁴⁸ in the definition by NCVO (2009), mentioned above

4.4.1 Complexity, mission drift and self-retrenchment

In London, the funding framework for social care services is very complex. Greater London comprises 32 boroughs. The Borough Councils and the City of London Corporation constitute London's 33 local government bodies. These local authorities are responsible for most local services, like waste collection, social care services and schools. The Greater London Authority, headed by the directly elected Mayor of London and overseen by the London Assembly, has some London-wide responsibilities like transport and policing and also some decision-making authority over major development and strategic planning issues. Each local authority has several departments and commissioning bodies involved in different areas of social care provision. There is also the local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) that can be responsible for health related initiatives in social care provision and the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) for overall strategic decisions. All these local government bodies have their own organisational structures that vary from borough to borough.

In each borough, there are Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) that represent, support and develop the local Voluntary and Community Sector. Membership based, charitable and independent – though often on several contracts or co-financed via various grants from (local) government – these bodies provide local Voluntary and Community Organisations with information. LIOs also offer training and in some cases local volunteering programmes.

In my interviews with Voluntary Sector Capacity Builders, Val and Farid and the consultant Tania, who work for LIOs in two Labour-led inner London boroughs (Val in B1; and Farid and Tania in B2), the complexity and diversity of local funding regimes were highlighted. New Labour's public service reform has been implemented in different localities to various degrees and the quality of the collaboration between statutory and Third Sector bodies differs from borough to borough (cf. Department for Communities and Local Government 2008d). Alongside a general lack of statutory support and increased competition among VCOs, it was the rising intricacy of the overall funding system for social care services in the UK which was described as a major factor making the situation for local VCOs, and even for LIOs, very difficult to manage.

Bushwhacking through a funding environment that is characterised by rapidly changing opportunities, priorities, responsibilities, and requirements is a complex undertaking which makes it difficult for most community groups and voluntary organisations to participate in the run for statutory and charitable support. The resource-

and time-consuming race by local VCOs to secure funding for new and long-established projects was described as involving the following activities:

- continuous efforts to be informed about the latest local/regional/national and international funding opportunities and the criteria of various funding bodies;
- trying to keep the organisation in line with the often diverse, sometimes conflicting funding requirements;
- complying with the increasingly complex reporting requirements for monitoring and evaluation purposes;
- delivering input in various forms for a rising number of consultations regarding local priorities, local service provision, service user needs and future strategies of (local) government;
- establishing and cultivating contact with decision-taking bodies and umbrella- or second-tier organisations; and
- using the organisation's networking power to influence the priority setting of the various commissioners and grant-giving bodies.

Following, let alone influencing, the setting of local statutory funding priorities and details of the commissioning processes in the various local government (sub)departments can be a tricky endeavour⁴⁹. Getting an overview of the continuous changes that could potentially affect local organisations is described as a resource-intense business, difficult to manage for a sector which lacks essential funding. This is the reason why the bundling of information is seen by all three interviewees as important practical support which can be offered by LIOs:

“I think it's also important to understand that things change on a monthly basis within B2, unfortunately, so you might have a strategy that might be implemented or has been developed from last year for the next five years but things change all the time, unfortunately, and priorities change. (...) We try to retain as much information as we can which is relevant to the sector and really pass that on to them because we also understand that the sector is in some cases overstretched, don't necessarily always have the resources to enable them to really look at the changes that are affecting them” (Farid).

⁴⁹ Tania told me that she was once invited to organise a capacity building seminar for local VCOs in B2 on commissioning, but could not retrieve sufficient information from local authority commissioners on the details of their own requirements, not even about who was responsible for what services and projects. It was impossible for her to retrieve sufficient information even though she was able to invest three months in doing so. She then asked herself why this whole exercise was carried out and how underfunded organisations would ever be able to retrieve this kind of information.

The new commissioning and procurement practice is described as affecting various subsections of the VCS in different ways. All three interviewees underlined their impression that the system favours the best-informed organisations. Larger organisations here have an advantage because more resources are at hand. However, they can sometimes try to align themselves too much to the criteria requested by statutory bodies in order to be able to sustain all their projects, with the consequence that they drift away from their initial aims and objectives. This is described as *mission drift* in the VCS, creating potentially a greater distance between those organisations that go for contracts from their community base, from local issues and the needs of the organisations' service users. In turn, small organisations with a strong connection to service users and local communities can be excluded from the commissioning process due to lack of information, missing resources and increased competition.

Consistent with the indication given by Milbourne (2009), Val highlighted the fact that resources are missing especially for those small projects and initiatives which aim to overcome their purely voluntary status:

“There's lots of grants, £5,000, £10,000, small grants that people could get, the smaller groups, but then when they want to progress and may become a bit larger, also to pay them a salary, those kind of £40,000, £50,000, £60,000 kind of grants just don't seem to be there and those that are there are so oversubscribed already that it's already very difficult for them to move up that ladder from a small organisation to that kind of medium to large organisation” (Val).

VCOs were also persistently described as working more for local government than they are funded for:

“They're all [referring to a cross-London meeting of directors of LIOs] just saying there's not enough money available to be able to deliver the services. They're asked to do far too much, just too much work. There's too many requirements from [local] government and there's things, there's initiatives that they want the Voluntary Sector to start up and start delivering on, and funding will follow later but it's, you know, then you've got to write business plans and development plans and do all of this work, but there's no funding there, so there are lots of requirements from, sort of down from government. They expect you to do all of this work but there's no resources to do it! They say it will come later on but it never comes” (Val).

Furthermore, it was mentioned that VCOs have no chance of winning government contracts or getting grants if they dare to ask for the money their projects really cost. Some organisations are forced into closure, but many projects and services are delivered even without getting (enough) money, driving down the quality of the services

they provide and/or relying on extra hours of volunteers and employees. Extra commitment by VCOs is also required due to the rise of consultations in which participation is generally unpaid. The consequences are tolerated, just to remain involved and to get a chance for any further support and impact. Central duties of government agreed upon in the (local) Compact – for instance a commitment to full cost-recovery and long-term funding – are not fulfilled in practice.

Local VCOs providing services are described as being torn between the rising and always changing requirements by local government and the local authorities' request for information, and their commitment to provide adequate services to local communities and service users:

“They're coming all the time for lots of further information, strategic, for their reports, and information for this and that and we're always getting consultants from the local authority coming in and wanting information, so it's, I guess it's because it's the local authority and even if they didn't fund us, they would still kind of want that information from the local voluntary sector – it's the time and resources that it takes for us to do that! – and small groups with no payment of staff or just one payment of staff which are meant to be delivering services. We're getting more and more feedback at the moment that the requirements, that they're taking away from actually delivering their work which is, they kind of look at it that their work is to the community, not getting involved in this whole bureaucratic process for bidding for money, monitoring. They just want to deliver that service to the community but then government and the local authority and funders are engaging groups to become more business like and more professional. It's a kind of tug, a tug from both ways really” (Val).

Farid referred to a kind of self-retrenchment by his own organisation to illustrate the consequences of these pressures on common practices in the VCS. All the major funders have signed up officially to a practice of full cost recovery. The funding practice on the ground, however, is different: organisations need to offer more services for less funding than needed in order to be successful in bidding. Even LIOs are involved in extra work to make sure that the local VCS is not excluded from consultation processes:

“We don't have to do it, because we don't always have money for it. But because it benefits the sector, we have to, because we don't want the sector kind of missing out and being excluded from the consultation process. (...) So even if we don't get funding for it, we just work an additional number of hours, just to kind of make sure it happens, really. (...) My experience is that when I do full recovery and particularly any contribution to my central costs, it's too much. But that's the true reflection of what it costs us to run that service! But if I put that in it means that I do decrease my chances of getting the funding. So I have to be a bit more, shall I say, 'flexible' in how much I ask for (laughing), and

that means making kind of difficult choices in some cases, unfortunately” (Farid).

Organisations affected by spending cuts and under-funding rely heavily on unpaid work and voluntary commitment. It goes so far that some organisations continue providing services to the community without being paid for them, with local authorities counting on their voluntary engagement:

“I think the difficult thing as well to the groups that have had their funding cut recently, the council is still sort of referring the same level of people onto them and continues to refer people onto them but they haven't, you know, they cut their funding! More organisations shut completely and the council still refers people onto them. And for these organisations it's kind of, I suppose, in the heart they don't want to turn these people in the community away because the council aren't funding to see them, they don't have the heart to sort of say “sorry, we can't see you because we haven't got funding” so they keep seeing them but it just makes them more and more overstretched on limited resources” (Val).

4.4.2 Smaller organisations and working conditions at risk

I also had the chance to speak to Ben, Joanne, Kate and Rose, four London-based policy officers of two unions that are major players in organising public and Voluntary Sector workers in the UK, as well as to Steven and Marianne, an officer and manager of one of the unions' Voluntary Sector Branches in London. They expressed their deep concern about a missing long-term strategy of support for VCOs that provide services to the public. Their analysis conveys recent changes in the practice of commissioning and procurement of services by local, regional and central government as resulting in a further marketisation of the Voluntary and Community Sector. The contracting out of public services has led to a fragmentation of services and increased competition among providers. Commissioning and procurement under contracts has thereby initiated a race to the bottom which is harming the workforce, is detrimental for keeping and supporting the Voluntary Sector's unique status and therefore reducing its positively described characteristics and potential contributions to public service reform.

Unions describe a situation in which, under the guise of a transformation of public services, a *transfer* of services is taking place, not only from public sector bodies to voluntary and private sector organisations, but also from one Voluntary and Community Organisation to another. This practice of *transfer* is resulting from an increasingly competitive funding framework in which cutting costs is the main driving force. Cutting back on terms and conditions and an increasing fragmentation of the workforce has been

deplored as the common outcomes of reform on a local community level (Cunningham and James 2007; Davies 2007, 2009).

In this situation, unions are confronted with new challenges: when employees are transferred to a new employer, due to a more 'competitive' bid, difficulties remain in enforcing the transfer, and therefore protection of previously arranged standards in working conditions, granted by British law according to the TUPE regulation (UNISON 2008)⁵⁰. Challenges for workforce organisation and representation arise also when workers doing the same jobs in one organisation are differently remunerated and entitled to benefits when TUPE regulations *are* applied. Workers are reported to be increasingly isolated, and unions face difficulties addressing this fragmented workforce, with major hindrances being reported in reaching out especially to those employees working in smaller organisations in the Voluntary Sector⁵¹.

The trend towards a 'procurement-type relationship' parallels the award by commissioning bodies of larger contracts (cf. House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee 2008). Under these conditions, the involvement of Third Sector organisations in the delivery of public services is making the VCS look increasingly like the private sector:

“In our view what the government is doing to the VS is making it into another kind of sector, which in many ways, not always, but in many ways is like the private sector, has market behaviour (...) They seem ready to contracting out to the sector, and a very narrow form of contracting out, you know, financially driven, marketising the Voluntary Sector (...) It is supposed to be about competition based on both, the price, the cost and the quality of the service, but you know it is not, the bottom-line is cost” (Ben).

It has transformed the VCS into a field of competitive players that gather together in bigger and bigger organisations, which then try to rule other providers out in the fight over funding (see also Davies 2009):

“They [New Labour government] are grooming the Third Sector to become contractors (...) so that their funding is changed from grant to

⁵⁰ When a transfer of service to a new provider is taking place, employees are granted a certain degree of protection by employment law. By reference to TUPE or Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, previous collective agreements and agreed union recognitions are principally protected and can be reclaimed under the new employer. TUPE, however, does not secure future entitlements to pension schemes (ibid.).

⁵¹ In this regard it is interesting to mention that an employers' consortium of 58 Voluntary Sector social care providers (employing over 65,000 social care workers) launched a campaign to draw attention to the growing crisis in social care and employment issues in the sector so early as 2004. Here, problems recruiting and retaining staff were highlighted, denouncing the inadequate provision of funds for statutory provision in social care (Barnard and Broach 2004).

that they have to fight for contracts, and then they, of course, they start to behave like any other company out under these pressures” (Joanne).

The statements by unions which point out the advantages of big players in commissioning processes and the subsequent formation of conglomerates are supported by the previously mentioned NCVO survey, which highlighted the fact that public funding is mainly directed towards larger Voluntary Sector Organisations (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2009a, ch. 05): In 2006/2007, an impressive 76% of all statutory funding had been allocated to large and major VOs. Only £13 million (0.1%) was spent on micro organisations and £324.3 million (3%) on small organisations.⁵² In commenting on these figures, Debra Allcock Tyler, Chief Executive of Directory of Social Change, pointed to the harsh consequences of this practice for local communities and their abilities to sustain 'bottom-up' services and organisations: contracts are allocated to a very small number of national organisations “at the expense of established local providers and their connection to the communities they support and are part of” (ibid.).

The commissioning practice is therefore deemed to have detrimental effects for the development of the VCS as a whole. Micro and small organisations in particular face difficulties orienting themselves in the continuously changing, competitive and complex funding environment, finding a position therein from which they are able to claim the appropriate amount of funding for the services they provide. The consequences are then registered by unions, to which the worsening of working conditions has been reported:

“It's the nature of small voluntary organisations that they are, their decision making process are quite often ad hoc kind of fly by wire, make it up as you go along, you're just responding to vogues of funders, policy makers and things like that, that are not robust enough to stand up and that is where terms and conditions are being driven down. You know, the funders, the local authority, family care trust, family probation service can say 'there's some money, you've got to fight over it' and they're not going to turn around and say 'well, we need to provide quality services, we need this that and the other', and say 'well that's the contract price, you meet it', you know. We just had some hundred projects through, increasing the number of hours from thirty five to thirty seven and a half hours because they've got to compete over funding” (Marianne).

Smaller organisations are becoming very vulnerable under contract funding, as they have to decide whether to build up consortia/partnerships in order to bid for larger contracts or to renounce public funding altogether and try to get money from elsewhere.

⁵² NCVO (2009) places VOs in five categories according to their income per annum (pa): *micro* (less than £10k; *small* £10k -£100k; *medium* £100k - £1m; *large* £1m - £10m; *major* more than £10m.

However, statutory support is a very important component as the climate has become worse for smaller organisations also in regard to charitable support, a fact that contributes to their current vulnerability. Organisations are under pressure to adjust to the specifications and conditions set out by government, which often do not meet the organisations' and service users' needs.

4.4.3 The implicit privatisation of sensitive services

Offering incentives for setting up more competitive frameworks in new areas under an internal purchaser/provider split and focusing on efficiency gains under outcome-focused regulatory frameworks are seen by the unions as strategic steps by government to further fragment the public sector. The increased attention on Third Sector providers is analysed as being “the latest move” (Joanne) in the long and multifarious history of privatisation policies in the UK initiated by the Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher from 1979. Although the New Labour government seemed not to be explicitly interested in privatising sensitive services and the VS, its policies have had similar effects.

The Third Sector Strategy is described by unions as seen as being politically less risky for the UK government than previous forms of privatisation (Davies 2009). Government can refer to its good intentions (innovation and transformation of public services through the involvement of trusted Third Sector organisations) and might therefore not be blamed directly for the potentially bad consequences of its decisions:

“[I was asked] 'Do you think that the government, do you see that this is privatisation through the back door? ', and I think it kind of is, but what - I'm not sure the government is totally ideologically committed to privatising the VS, but it sees the VS as a way of getting away with the risk of providing public services, but also interlacing itself from the political risk, because if you privatise something and it goes wrong you get all the bad press. [If you involve] the Voluntary Sector: well, we've given it to an organisation which has good values and they are friendly and so on” (Ben).

While central government stresses its invitation to the VCS to profit from present and future commissioning practice, it is the private sector that is now entering the stage. The Third Sector is assigned the role of the Trojan horse:

“I think we will see more and more of the private sector winning the contracts; we believe the Third Sector is being used as a Trojan horse. We believe that the private sector is getting its act together and that it's got a big interest in taking over the services. They are seeing contracts going

out already, I think the CAB⁵³ is a very good example recently. We've seen it in other areas, in housing, in delivering Supporting People services. We've seen the private sector in there, it doesn't have the expertise but certainly can win the contracts and making the best of it. So, lots of concerns about where this is all going, where it's ending up and who will be delivering the best services in the future” (Rose).

Public funding allocation is characterised as being driven by short-term thinking in which the big players are favoured over smaller providers. This practice results in a multifaceted transfer of services to and among a couple of providers, involved in a race to the bottom with working conditions especially at the front line being driven down. A rising pay gap has been openly denounced with increasing differences in the Voluntary Sector between the rising numbers of employees working close to the minimum wage and high earners at chief executive level in large and major organisations (Lepper 2009)⁵⁴. From a union's perspective, the neocommunitarian agenda is therefore deemed to fail as it enhances a business culture in areas of sensitive services, a development that puts the quality and sheer existence of crucial services and working conditions at risk. Mooney and Law (2007) state that New Labour has thereby “pushed the institutional 'reform' of the welfare state to much deeper levels (...) bringing increased market exposure and worker insecurity” into wide parts of the *public service industry* (ibid, p. 4).

⁵³ Citizens Advice Bureau, providing advice regarding legal and financial problems

⁵⁴ Regarding specific characteristics of the remuneration practice in the Voluntary Sector, there is no official data available at national level. In a summary of NCVO's 2010 Civil Society Almanac, the ratio between the highest earning chief executive officers (CEO) in Voluntary Sector Organisations to the lowest paid employees was however reported as 5:1, with the median total annual earning at CEO position in the VS being £71,070 in 2009/2010, compared to the median total annual income in a trainee non-professional staff/office service role of £13,661. It is also stated in this same report that average staff costs as a proportion of overall expenditure in the Voluntary Sector *have fallen* “from 43% in 2001/02 to 37% in 2007/08” (Skills Third Sector et al. 2010, p. 4). But the representative status of these findings on earnings in the VS must be interpreted with caution, as the data was collected from only 178 employers in the VS, covering 29,000 employees, and do probably account more for the remuneration practice in bigger organisations than in smaller ones.

4.5 Neocommunitarian neoliberalism and the citizen as volunteer

In this chapter, the neocommunitarian reform agenda introduced under New Labour has been discussed in its core, and at times contradictory, elements. In the neocommunitarian phase of neoliberalism, government pins its hopes on the transformative power of Third Sector involvement and voluntary action, expects further innovation gains through a restructuring of local government, and strives for efficiency gains in public service delivery through the establishment of a competitive commissioning framework under centrally orchestrated regulatory regimes.

Despite the expressed aim of increasing statutory support for small and local front-line organisations and the acknowledgement of how important a balanced collaborative framework is in preserving the Voluntary and Community Sector's independence and diversity, the imposed contract culture in social care provision seems to result in the very opposite. Stakeholders of small and local voluntary organisations report a decrease of public funding and the loss of accessible grant schemes and crucial services. Local, service-user focused and community based projects report finding themselves in a weakened position in relation to government bodies and large to major Third Sector organisations.

The reinforcement of competitive commissioning in new areas of public service provision has favoured bigger organisations in the VCS that operate across different localities and service fields. These organisations seem to have many similarities to private sector organisations, and unions report that private companies have already entered the stage in some areas of social care provision. Union representatives expect that the pressures on voluntary organisations to adopt private sector strategies will increase. As a consequence, working conditions could further be driven down by the contract winning VCOs (cf. Davies 2009).

Against this background of transformation in social care, the focus on third sector innovation and volunteer achievements must be reconsidered. In the neocommunitarian phase of neoliberalism, a new discursive element is introduced that mobilizes citizens and communities under a banner of local responsibilities. Citizens, service users and local communities are called upon for more active commitment and direct involvement in public service reform. Characterised by an emphasis on information sharing and consultation exercise, government reforms are explicitly building upon more direct involvement of Third Sector organisations at the very core of policy work (cf. Poole 2007) and public service delivery. In practice, this involvement seems

increasingly to take place – at least on local government level – outside a paid relationship, based on the commitment of Voluntary and Community Organisations and volunteer work. Despite more organisational leeway for inclusion in the New Labour government's policy development framework, the available financial support for small community-based organisations and initiatives seems to become more and more restricted.

Commentators have argued that the public service reforms introduced since 1997 have pushed the Voluntary Sector into a position in which organisations are reduced to a service delivery role. However, a first glimpse of the practice at local government level suggests that this is not the case. Many Voluntary and Community Sector organisations *continue* to deliver in many more roles: for example in terms of information gathering for policy consultations, of service development and of professional advice. However, their engagement in and contribution to reform is scarcely remunerated and the support given is unevenly distributed.

Drawing on initial explorations of the created conditions for Voluntary Sector agents, it seems to be mainly the local micro, small and medium organisations which provide the input for the kind of local bottom-up development of community projects and the information on services user needs for which the neocommunitarian agenda is supposedly so enthusiastically striving. While public services are meant to be shaped by voluntary and community involvement, the State is reportedly retreating from paying for this kind of 'service' and the actual quality of public services expected and delivered in reality. The discussed outcomes and traced trends for the Voluntary Sector so far put the neocommunitarian reform agenda in a dim light. The discourse around community and service user empowerment through Third Sector involvement in public service delivery and government as enabler of independent voluntary action emerges as a rather frail front. Behind the façade, the neocommunitarian reform programme appears to rely on market-oriented cornerstones and the expectation of highly formalised volunteer, indeed unpaid, commitment for public service transformation (cf. Rochester et al. 2010).

Volunteering and citizen engagement seems as such to be calculated from the very outset of the neocommunitarian public service reform to achieve the quality that government bodies are expecting. This is not only by imposing higher standards on service providers without paying adequately for it, but also by relying on the supposed unpaid engagement of Voluntary Sector workers and citizens in general, which is adding additional expectations outside the commissioning framework. Furthermore, while central government stresses the positive effects and counts increasingly on volunteer

participation and unpaid engagement for the very delivery of service quality, it is ready to place public funding into private hands. The further privatisation of services and the reported rise of business-like Third Sector bodies under New Labour are an alarming sign of this trend. It has been argued that the focus on Voluntary and Community Organisations and voluntary action under neocommunitarian neoliberalism has switched from a complementary role to one which attributes these elements a direct instrumental role in the establishment of 'profitable' new markets and state retrenchment.

A crucial consequence of these developments is that exploitation is not only taking place in a direct government-provider-employee relationship. It is spread out and takes place through implicit expectations of volunteer engagement throughout the social realm. Competitive commissioning of services under the auspices of expected efficiency gains and the praise of collaboration in a constellation of unequal partnership reveal the real basis of the neocom neoliberal project: *the citizen as volunteer* is emerging as the central protagonist. It is no longer the State that is addressed as actively alleviating the negative effects of a system which is permanently creating rising inequalities. It is the 'active citizen' who is explicitly and implicitly addressed as agent to overcome by magic the failures of a capitalist market system through its own voluntary – thus unpaid – engagement.

While the marketisation of public services is taking place throughout Europe, with the privatisation of sensitive services further enhanced by competition and internal market law at European and international level, this explicit referral to and strong belief in the power and inherent qualities and the very necessity of volunteering can be seen as a crucial and specific characteristic of New Labour's reform and contemporary British society. It represents an important element to consider when working conditions in the UK's Voluntary Sector are further examined. It is of central concern when the question is addressed as to how people in the Voluntary Sector are reacting in and against the complex funding system, and when strategies in social care for dealing with the consequences of neocommunitarian reform are explored. What kind of repercussions does the neocom neoliberal project have for the division of labour in social care and on practices of subversion in the everyday context of community projects and service-user engagement in front-line support? The next chapter starts by considering the ongoing structural changes in social care by more closely examining their repercussions for women's organisations in London.

CHAPTER 5: Structural change in social care – repercussions for women's organisations

This chapter provides a critical account of the regulatory and discriminatory features of neocommunitarian neoliberalism in regard to the organisation of social care projects from the perspective of women involved in the organisation of women-only projects and services. It traces policy frameworks and commissioning practices that are amounting to a loss of state support for *needs-adequate* women-only projects and services. It draws attention to the *qualitative* transformation of the traced quantitative shifts in funding (towards larger and generic providers as well as super-structural support), which is discussed as resulting in a reduced range and quality of *state funded* front-line women-only projects.

My analysis of the ongoing structural changes in the field of social care and the contested but nonetheless reflected transformation of the women's sector draws on the insights gained from my encounters with women working for women's organisations and my attendance at *why women?* campaigning events. Analysis of secondary data in the form of publications by second-tier organisations in London's Voluntary and Community Sector, particularly my collection of publicly disseminated reports, policy briefings and consultation responses by women's organisations in the period 2004 to 2011, also provided crucial reference points. Important insights into the complex policy frameworks and the quality of change in practices of public funding allocation on local government level for women-only projects were also gained in the analysis of my interviews with local commissioning and procurement officers for women's services in two Labour-led inner London boroughs and my meeting with a local Domestic Violence coordinator.

Reports about transformations in the VAW subsector were crucial for developing my understanding of the ongoing transformations, as this was one of the areas in social care in which competitive commissioning practices via contract funding had already been widely established when I started my research. However, the traced changes in terms of the bypassing of equality and diversity issues in policy frameworks and public funding allocation practices also have direct and indirect repercussions for other women-only projects and services. This is something that was emphasised by my respondents and will be argued in due course in the reminder of this thesis. Reported experiences regarding the practices of funding allocation to women-only projects that are not explicitly specialised in VAW, as in education or (mental) health, were indeed important in gaining

the presented understanding of the underlying principles and pitfalls of neocommunitarian neoliberalism.

The chapter starts with a closer analysis of the regulatory and commissioning frameworks and funding practices regarding social care that have been implemented since New Labour came to power, with reference to their guiding rationales, and the traced and expected outcomes reflected upon by my interviewees. In subsection 5.2. impacts of this funding regime on women's organisations are then examined in more detail by tracing the trend towards larger and generic organisations and the 'facilitation' of front-line services. Subsection 5.3 summarises the main outcomes of these transformations. It is argued that the combination of the traced shifts in the women's sector – as in (1) a shift of funding towards agglomerates; (2) a shift of decision-taking power over the direction and definition of projects and services towards commissioners, agencies and organisations *outside* the WVCS; and (3) a shift in terms of the re-direction of funding towards super-structural support – have wide-ranging implications for the *quality and range* of women-only projects and services that are (still) granted state support. These shifts mean a loss of resources and organisational leeway in the WVCS in regard to needs-adequate direct support work, with organisations providing support for Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee women being most dramatically affected.

5.1 The regulatory and discriminatory face of neocommunitarian reform

The financial situation of women's organisations in the UK has always been precarious (Davis and Cooke 2002; Riordan 1999; Sheridan 2004; Soteri 2001, 2002). However, in the first decade of the new millennium it has been reported as reaching crisis levels in some areas of service provision: projects offering women-only services in women-led organisations are confronted by funding bodies concerning their women-only status; they lose out against generic service providers and are placed drastically under pressure (WRC 2006c, 2007b, 2008c, 2009). In a shadow report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Women's Resource Centre pointed out that women's organisations in the UK were “facing the worst funding crisis in recent history and the sector's sustainability is seriously undermined” (WRC 2008d, p. 2)⁵⁵.

In 2009, the WRC published a report on projects and services provided by the women's sector and the trends in the endowment of women's organisations (WRC 2009). This report is based on the analysis of data retrieved from online databases on VCOs in England and Wales. It traces a loss of women's organisations and depicts a negative trend for the remaining organisations in terms of their financial status. Over a period of three years (2004-2007) the women's organisations that were covered by WRC's analysis had an overall higher rise in expenses than the rise in income generated⁵⁶.

The effects of recent public service reforms on the women's sector have been relatively well documented for organisations with focus on Violence Against Women. This certainly reflects the extensive struggle by women to draw attention to this pervasive and structurally embedded phenomenon, and the difficulties in organising adequate support for women affected by domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse. But it is also due to the early implementation of centrally orchestrated regulation and marketisation strategies by government regarding housing-related service provision in social care that the VAW subsector gained attention. The VAW subsector comprises organisations that provide support for women affected by domestic violence (DV), rape, sexual assault or abuse. The range of projects in VAW include prevention, information, counselling, mental health, legal advice, community and outreach services, as well as accommodation for women and their children who are escaping violence and are in need of special care,

⁵⁵ And this before the even more drastic cuts announced under the 'austerity' plan by the UK's new Coalition government (see subsection 7.1.4).

⁵⁶ See Appendix 5 for a short summary and analysis of WRC's findings.

shelter and protection from aggressors⁵⁷. Whilst campaigning against and providing information around VAW is part of the ethos of many of those women's organisations that deal on a daily basis with the social consequences of structural violence against women, the VAW subsector includes those that provide highly specialised care, accommodation and front-line services for women and their children⁵⁸.

The precarious situation of women's organisations in the VAW subsector is today well documented for *Rape Crisis Centres* that give support and advice to women who have experienced rape and sexual violence. Whereas in 1986 there were 68 counselling centres in England and Wales, today there are only 38 left, with a reported closure of nine centres over the period of five years (2003-2008), only one centre in Greater London remaining and eight organisations with no secured funding for 2008/09 (WRC and Rape Crisis England and Wales 2008). This is reported to have drastic outcomes on the workforce in this area of service provision: Six of the remaining *Rape Crisis Centres* reported in 2007/08 on instances of having relied *entirely* on volunteering to keep going (ibid.)⁵⁹.

5.1.1 Prescriptive commissioning and the loss of small funding pots

Experiences of front-line VAW refuge service provision under commissioned contracts have been gathered by women's organisations since the introduction of Supporting People (SP). This funding programme for housing-related support services for vulnerable people⁶⁰ was launched by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2003 and

⁵⁷ Women's Aid defines domestic violence as “physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place in an intimate or family-type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive or controlling behaviour (...) Domestic violence is very common with at least 1 in 4 women experiencing it in their lifetime and between 1 in 8 to 1 in 10 experiencing it annually (...) On average, two women a week are killed by a violent partner or ex-partner [in England and Wales]” (Women's Aid *Domestic Violence FAQs document*, for more information and statistical evidence on DV see this and further documents provided under: http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic_violence_topic.asp?section=0001000100220041§ionTitle=Domestic+violence+%28general%29, access date: 19/08/2011).

⁵⁸ It is often emphasised by women's organisations that they rely on each other's contributions, on projects and services in and beyond the VAW subsector. As suggested above the differentiation of a VAW subsector is also an outcome of increased specialisation due to the existing funding regime. Several respondents from smaller women's organisations in the VAW subsector who I interviewed mentioned the fact that their remit had once been *wider* than VAW. Reduction and funding regulations had forced them to reduce the services and projects on offer.

⁵⁹ In August 2009, the UK government announced a special central government funding pot of £3million *for victims of rape and sexual violence*, reacting to forceful campaigning of the women's sector and support for this campaign in the British media.

⁶⁰ These are services that offer support for such different groups as homeless people, people with disabilities, teenage parents, people at risk of Domestic Violence, elderly people, ex-offenders, those with alcohol or drug problems, people affected by HIV or AIDS, travellers, those with learning difficulties, and young people at risk. Initially, SP funding provided support for around 1.2 million people. It involved around 6,000 providers under an estimated 37,000 individual contracts that were commissioned by around 150 administrative authorities (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004).

subsequently run by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). SP replaced local government grant aid with contract funding and introduced a new quality assessment framework for local service providers. SP has deeply affected the VAW subsector as it has transformed the provision of public funding for women's refuges. A WRC study in 2007 identified 39 women's refuges in London providing shelter and support for women fleeing DV. Only three of these were not receiving funding under SP contracts (WRC 2007a).

In many ways, SP can be seen as a precursor for the envisioned commissioning process and contracting out of various social care services under LAAs (see section 4.3). SP was meant to introduce so-called 'partnership working' in the planning and development of social care services via increased consultation of service users and the creation of a SP Commissioning Body composed by local Third Sector and private service providers and statutory agencies. On a day-to-day basis, however, it is the administrative authority which administers and manages the SP contracts and allocates funding to housing associations, VCOs and private care companies (UNISON 2007). The programme set out new requirements for service providers and combined them with expectations which would deliver efficiency gains in a step-by-step process. I interviewed several project managers of the women's organisations that run refuges. They mentioned that in the first years of SP, the process was not yet open to wider competition, in the sense that local providers were directly offered contracts. They expected, however, that this privileged treatment would be offset in the upcoming funding rounds under LAAs in which services would be put out for tender (Natalie, Evelyn, Sita).

SP initiated a major restructuring of local government's funding pots for social care services. Annual grants were to be replaced by one- to three-year contracts, a move that was meant to bring more options for long-term planning for both local authorities and service providers. Local authorities were asked to combine different funding streams to build up the programme. The amount of funding which went into the local SP funding pool depended on the priority setting by local government in 2003 and the size of the pots available to the particular local area at that time. Once these decisions were taken, the amount of money in the local SP pot was fixed and the funding ring-fenced for SP contracts.

The programme enforced a more prescriptive handling of service providers. For the first three years (2003-2006), local authorities were asked to do service reviews of local providers along the centrally developed Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) to make sure that the services funded were meeting certain minimum standards with users

being supported to live 'independently' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007). The framework covers a wide range of requirements: for instance, the provision of service user support plans, procedures for needs and risk assessment, a structured report on the outcomes of the organisation's work, the formulation and implementation of a complaints policy, procedures for and evidence of service user involvement, and rules for the recruitment of staff and employment standards. Organisations were given interim contracts of up to three years during which the local authority administration carried out these assessments.

After the first three years, service providers could then be given contracts for up to another three years (2006-2009), given they were meeting the standards. In this second phase, central government introduced the Outcome Framework for SP funding with local authorities being incited to reduce their spending. After a major review of the programme, a Supporting People strategy paper in 2007 proudly announced that local authorities had already achieved efficiency gains of £345 million in the first five years, and that this route was to be continued (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007). However, in this very same strategy paper, central government also had to recognise the disproportionate increase of administrative burdens under SP on both sides – the local administration and the organisations offering the services – a fact which has been vehemently criticised by unions and VS stakeholders since the introduction of SP.

In the course of my fieldwork, I spoke to four local authority officers in two Labour-led inner London boroughs (B1 and B2): Prita and Michelle worked in local SP teams as review officers managing contracts with women's refuges, Prita in B1 and Michelle in B2. Nora administered local voluntary sector grant schemes in B2 with a focus on women's organisations and Tracy was interviewed in her role as the local Domestic Violence coordinator in B1. The huge amount of work linked to the assessment, evaluation and management of services under SP was acknowledged, but presented by these officers as a necessary step towards increased accountability of service providers. The interlacing of quality assessment with the enforcement of efficiency savings for better accountability was a ubiquitous issue in all these interviews.

Insights into the local commissioners' strategies to comply with central government's targets were offered in the interview with Prita: by introducing “a very structured format” SP set out to ensure that providers would implement preset standards and provide the evidence to local authorities that “they deliver on quality and value for money”. For the commissioning of DV services under future LAAs, two strategies were

mentioned: (1) choosing bigger providers for running several refuges under larger contracts in order to save money on overheads and (2) favouring those organisations which have shown the ability and capacity to organise extra funding on top of local government funding.

This is seen as a change in funding priorities for which many organisations are not prepared. Prita foresaw a difficult future for small specialist Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) organisations but was keen to highlight that in her view, the borough (B1) would still be able to secure the provision of specialist services for local women⁶¹, although perhaps no longer directly delivered by charitable and self-organised BAMER groups. Her belief in achieving possible savings by hiring larger organisations for several services in the borough, which could then profit from the economy of scale whilst keeping the quality of the services provided, found direct expression (see Appendix 6 EI 1).

Prita emphasises the need for making savings on local government level. The often-heard phrase 'value for money' in New Labour's policy papers is depicted and preceded by a clear indication that the administration in B1 is under pressure from central government and therefore willing to increase the expectations of service providers. Saving money ought to be secured by an emphasis on 'value for money', by measuring the quality and the efficiency of services along the assessment of organisational features and quantifiable results ("we want to get more outputs"). Hiring one big experienced and nationally exposed organisation for several services in the borough is presented as the convenient solution: it would bring savings for overheads and potentially additional funding from non-governmental sources.

My respondents from the women's voluntary and community sector, however, took a rather different view on the characteristics and outcomes of funding allocation under Supporting People. To begin with, they vehemently criticised the fact that the requirements under SP have not been differentiated according to the particular service being offered. Local authorities therefore refer to quality standards that do not reflect the particular quality of these services. Current SP reporting formats make no difference whether funding is provided to a service for disabled people, the elderly or indeed for women who experienced violence. Neither would the SP format acknowledge extra expenditure for specialist services, e.g. for women affected by drug abuse or for specific advice and support needed for BAMER women. As a consequence of this generalization, important aspects and requirements in women's projects have not been accounted for.

⁶¹ For this important focus on 'locality' see subsection 5.2.3.

Funding has been allocated neither for professional capacity building, culture-specific training and translators, nor for the specific legal advice provided for and required by some service users. Some crucial services were excluded from SP funding altogether, like outreach work and children's services in refuges, and are in many cases no longer covered by the remaining grant schemes in the local areas.

Thus, from the perspective of women's organisations, local authorities could indeed make additional savings under SP: This has mainly been achieved by withdrawing funding for particular aspects of service provision. This deplorable state of affairs in the commissioning of DV services has been reported upon by the women's sector in great detail (WRC 2007a, 2008c), but has not yet resulted in any concrete improvement of the commissioning framework⁶². Furthermore, women's organisations have also commented on the reporting requirements by SP as being overtly excessive with a negative impact on the organisations' capacity to provide adequate support for women's needs. Thus, while SP has slightly increased the overall income of the *remaining* providers of refuge accommodation, it has vehemently impacted on the range and diversity of services on offer for women affected by VAW (ibid., see also subsection 5.3.1).

Insufficient funding for the services on offer combined with increased administrative burdens is not only concerning small and medium-sized organisations. Helen, a project manager working for a large women's organisation (X)⁶³ which provides refuges in several London boroughs, questioned whether real efficiency gains in administration costs on the side of the providers could be attained by hiring larger organisations. Whilst she acknowledged some possible savings in management, the administrative burdens under SP would remain high because of the local differences in requirements and reporting standards:

“You have to do this [SP reports] for every borough or every area in which you have properties. So when you come to do pan-London working, you have a problem. So, organisations who work in one borough will do one SP return. X is working, we used to work in [>5]⁶⁴ boroughs, which meant [>5] different returns, they are not all the same, they are all a little bit different, they all have their own way of doing things. Which means [>5] times as much bureaucracy for us, [>5] times as much staff time and staff power recording this.”

⁶² However, central government has recognised in a recently published strategy paper (HM Government 2009) that VAW services need further support in form of specific guidelines for the local commissioning of VAW services and specific performance indicators for DV on local government level. These announcements were cautiously welcomed by the women's sector as they have not yet been followed by any more substantial guidelines or implementation of policies regarding the specific allocation of public funding.

⁶³ X is an organisation with an income of over £1 million p.a.

⁶⁴ Exact number hidden to secure anonymity of the respondent.

Spending cuts and restrictive funding at local government level have negatively affected the relationship between local authorities and the women's voluntary and community sector. My respondents from women's organisations deplored the fact that the standards for partnership working between government and Third Sector organisations set out in the COMPACT are not met in practice. Partnership working is high on the agenda but not supported financially. Sita, who works as a project manager for a BAMER organisation that provides a refuge, described this situation as a conflict in which VCOs are "squeezed out":

"Supporting People did a value for money exercise last year, and they all cut our contract prices (...) for all the providers, and they standardised them, but it's not full cost recovery (...) There is a conflict, because there is the government guidelines, things like the COMPACT, better working with the VS, and full cost recovery is one of them, but it is not like that for us."

So while SP resulted in a slightly more stable financial commitment for some service providers, due to single contracts that are given for up to three years instead of various annual grants, it has resulted for many organisations in a reduction of local authority funding. B1 seems not to be an exceptional case in this regard, as the above-mentioned study by WRC from 2007 reports on the fact that refuges in London derive on average only 54% of the income needed for their service provision from SP funding (WRC 2007a, p. 2).

A deplorable state of affairs in terms of full cost recovery was also reflected in the interviews I conducted with local authority officers in B2. However, in B2, emphasis was given to how some sections of the local administration had used the past decades to support women's organisations in preparing them for the upcoming changes. However, my respondents Nora and Michelle were still skeptical about whether the amount of support for the local women's sector could be maintained in the future or had been sufficient in order to make women's organisations – especially the smaller ones – robust enough for the upcoming requirements for funding allocation under LAAs.

In B2, most of the funding for smaller VCOs has been given via the so-called *mainstream grants* scheme. With the introduction of SP, this pot was reduced. From autumn 2008/09, it was announced that most funding pots in B2 were to be re-organised due to the onset of LAAs⁶⁵. This requires a major re-structuring of the local administration by which responsibilities and management structures are once again

⁶⁵ All the interviews used in this study took place between October 2007 and July 2008, as suggested in chapter 3.

changed over. The transformation towards a commissioning approach is characterised by more prescriptive priorities. The major “danger of going to the commissioning approach” is seen by Nora in the fact that former “tiny pockets of money (...) will all marry up”. This trend towards bigger pots in the move from grants towards contracts is described as being introduced in a top-down approach. There is a lot of discussion inside the LA as to what the outcomes might be and whether the consequences would be welcomed. Thus, the overall process to establish LAAs is characterised by uncertainty about future priority setting and the amount of funding available for different priorities and services, not only for providers but also among local authority development officers and commissioning staff.

The amount of competition faced by local Voluntary and Community Organisations in the commissioning process depends on the decisions taken by local government. Whereas the above-mentioned mainstream grant section inside the B2 administration decided to ring fence their pots to Voluntary Sector Organisations from *within* the borough, they also decided to commission *all* services, including those “with less tangible outputs” (Nora). From Nora's perspective, it is the commissioning of services under the social inclusion and community cohesion agenda which is difficult to realise.

She points out that the application and consultation procedures, payment methods (payment in advance or arrears) and the time schedules as to when certain criteria have to be met by VCOs can vary from one department to the other and from one funding pot to the rest of the funding pots in one local authority administration. How the local VS is affected by the transition towards commissioning depends on all these details. The approach taken by each commissioning body influences how well the commissioning process is set up and managed, and its results. Certain factors are seen as decisive: personal commitment, understanding and strategic action in favour of joint strategic partnership initiatives by the borough's leadership, administration and the local Voluntary Sector.

In B2, it was during a quality assessment of the mainstream grant scheme of the Third Sector Development section in the mid-nineties, then headed by the Equality Section of the local administration, that it was understood that women's organisations and especially smaller BME⁶⁶ organisations would need more support and training in order to survive the upcoming changes which were seen as potentially harmful to the

⁶⁶ BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) was used by my interviewee. This concept does not *explicitly* refer to refugee groups and people of Asian decent.

women's sector in the borough. It was decided that consorting would need to be encouraged. A network for women's organisations was initiated to make women's organisations fit in terms of the standards and requirements needed in future commissioning processes. This local network is about providing the women's sector in B2 with specific training and support, and building up a consultation body from within the women's sector (thus beyond a mere focus on VAW services). It encourages partnership working, consortia building and joint bidding. The women's sector was the only subsector in B2 that was able to get this special support by the council. This network has been established on very little resources to support meeting costs: initially, the network received £4,000 pa. It was increasingly able to attract more capacity building funding from different pots inside the LA and also from other funders, amounting to £100,000 in 2006-2008.

Both officers in B2 stressed the point that there is a difference between direct commissioning/procurement of services and their kind of approach in grant budget and SP budget commissioning, which they understand rather as “commission in process” (Michelle) and “development work in partnership” with the VS (Nora). Despite the fact that this partnership is characterised by a structural inequality in terms of the ultimate decision-making power over the allocation of resources, Michelle stressed the leeway for officers in organising the collaboration with VS providers:

“I would say it is a partnership, but it's not an equal partnership, because we've got the resources and they've got the need. But it can be a grown-up partnership with an inequality in it; you have to work around that inequality”.

Their favoured model of commissioning would bring about consistency in terms of cost and quality of the services offered by VCOs. Their hands are bound, however, by the fact that their own recommendations are not always taken on board, neither by the organisations nor by the commissioning body in the borough. There are differences between funding streams, and it was mentioned that SP is particularly bureaucratic compared to grant programmes, because SP officers have to follow central government guidelines, a process which leaves less leeway for the aspired development work with local organisations. Bigger organisations might even get conflicting messages and recommendations from within one team in a borough or across different boroughs.

For both Michelle and Nora, problems with the commissioning approach arise when the commissioning process is not adapted to the local needs and service providers. Then, local organisations might be forced to change their aims and objectives to get the funding they are depending upon. The expected efficiency savings from central

government limit the leeway of local authorities and Nora mentioned that there were already officers who think the VS could provide the services cheaper than statutory providers.

Despite the efforts to support small women's organisations in B2 over the established women's network, it was highlighted by Nora that the envisioned commissioning approach under LAAs will affect small organisations and campaigning projects the worst as savings must be made. As mentioned above, there is a clear trend towards bigger contracts through which smaller organisations will lose out. Furthermore, shortage of adequate resources to support the VS means that officers must set priorities, they have to answer to the most pressing needs in the borough. Funding for campaigning and political work is the first which will be withdrawn:

“We still want that politicising of the voluntary sector to be there (...) I do think that it is difficult because when you've got immediate need and that is a crisis need, and to balance that against the unseen need which is the political need, but it is, as soon as you've not got adequate resources that's the need that goes.”

The situation in this respect is getting worse, not only at local government level:

“But it is hard, it's hard in small organisations and it's very hard in the Voluntary Sector and there was once more money around, or in the political area for your work where you're campaigning, a lot more [charitable] trust funding.”

In the women's sector in B2, there is a real threat of losing further funding under future LAAs despite the established support network and the goodwill of some sections in the LA to protect local organisations. The situation is even more precarious due to the fact that these organisations depend on a whole cocktail of funding sources. Under current conditions in which local government funding does not cover all their services, women's organisations can become very unstable when they lose other pots of funding. Several projects or whole organisations have had to close. In this situation, local government would need much more funding in order to save further women's organisations from closure.

Nora vehemently deplored the current conditions by indicating the negative outcomes in terms of service provision for 'hard-to-reach communities'. Although the women's sector has received support and training through the established women's network in B2, and is now ready for collaborative consortia bidding, the single organisations participating in it are still very vulnerable. At the end of my first interview with her, she referred to an exemplary experience in one of the network's meetings,

which displays the desperate situation in which local women's organisations have to operate and, in a certain sense, depicts also the hypocrisy they are confronted with. Organisations will lose their grant funding, are invited by Government to prepare themselves for consortia bidding and applications for (further) charitable support, but the requirements to do so include the very financial stability they are lacking in the first place:

“We [WVCS network in B2] put in a Lottery bid⁶⁷ at the moment (...) and what was interesting, we sat around the table, 'who's got the..., it says here in the priorities, you have to have a securely funded organisation to be able to make the bid'. And no one could say: 'that's us'. Isn't that...? That says it all! That says it all. (...) We know that we got a good bid, we know that it is going to work, and it will engage hard to reach communities, who aren't going to be engaged by other means. But that says it all, isn't it? And that is one of the biggest funders!”

5.1.2 'Community cohesion' and the loss of differentiation

In addition to the structural changes in funding allocation from grant giving towards commissioning under SP and LAAs, a process that has resulted in the loss of small funding pots on local government level, increased bureaucracy and sometimes confusing and/or inadequate funding requirements, central government has initiated an incisive debate around the future main principles for funding allocation at local community level with major effects on the women's sector. The neocommunitarian focus on 'community empowerment' (see section 4.3) for civic renewal and public service reform has been ambiguously paralleled by a redefined interpretation of what the term 'community' should stand for. There is a loss of differentiation in the definition of community needs and interests and how to respond to them. Gender blindness and the negligence of minorities' interests in some funding guidelines and policy papers have had a strong impact on the process of funding allocation to the WVCS at local community level.

With regard to minorities' interests specifically, since the advent of civil disobediences in several Northern towns in the UK in summer 2001, a discourse around *community cohesion* has been promoted which replaces previous multicultural agendas (Siddiqui 2008). Under this concept, a new framework for race relations policy in the UK has emerged. A focus on national identity has been promoted, under the headings of the development of a vision of a 'shared future' for local communities and common 'rights and responsibilities'. This is spelt out not only in symbolic gestures, for instance by the introduction of citizenship ceremonies designed to support the integration of migrants

⁶⁷ an application for a Big Lottery Fund grant

into British society, but also quite incisively and palpably in the promotion of principles for funding allocation on local government level: several policy documents on *community cohesion* have directly addressed and criticised the practice of *single group funding*⁶⁸ with far-reaching effects on funding allocation throughout the UK.

In 2006, the Government's White Paper for local government reform (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006) was published. It mentioned the need for “greater resident participation in decisions and an enhanced role for community-groups (...) [to] help all areas to promote community cohesion” (ibid. p. 12) and announced that it would encourage the Commission for Cohesion and Integration to “produce more detailed plans on how to deliver a step change in promoting cohesion” (ibid.). A case against single group funding was then strongly made in the report *Our Shared Future* published by the independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2007, in which “the development of shared futures” was presented as a crucial step in creating community cohesion and integration which ought to be enforced by the promotion of “a shared national vision” (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007, p. 10, note the difference between the plural futures and singular vision). This report states that the Commission's recommendations were driven by an “emphasis on what binds communities together rather than what differences divide them, and prioritising a shared future over dividing legacies” (ibid., p. 7). The report describes a “one size fits all approach” in terms of funding allocation as inappropriate (ibid., p. 10) but suggests that single group funding should be avoided⁶⁹.

While reasons for the necessity of single group funding are acknowledged and reported upon by the Commission⁷⁰, its *recommendations* do *not* take these into account. The Commission's principles regarding single group funding comprised: (1) no 'one size fits all' approach; (2) single group funding should be given *only* when there is reason for capacity building; (3) single group funding should be *the exception* and Local Authorities which award funding to those single group projects must share information on reasons for doing so to other communities and organisations in the local area; and (4)

⁶⁸ A term used by the UK government for funding allocated to organisations that explicitly focus their projects and services on specific (minority) groups based on distinctions such as ethnicity, gender or faith.

⁶⁹ See Annex D “The Question of Single Group Funding” (ibid. pp. 160-164).

⁷⁰ A consultation with local authorities and Third Sector organisations resulted in the following list of reasons for single group funding: (a) some needs are not being addressed by public services; (b) there is discrimination by mainstream providers; (c) only specific organisations which gained experience can provide appropriate services to particular groups; and (d) precedents were given by funding that had been given to single organisations so that others then applied for funding as well. It was also mentioned that there was (e) a “potential to increase insularity” (ibid. p. 161) and that (f) “single group funding (was) a hangover from old identity politics” (ibid. p. 162).

organisations which receive the funding must show progress in bridging to other communities in the future, showing the progress they make in becoming more outward facing in their reports, e.g. in offering services for other communities, sharing experience with other communities/organisations, etc. (ibid., p. 162f).

The central government's response to this report was published in February 2008 and marked the starting point (!) for a three-month consultation period for *The Cohesion Guidance for Funders*. It took on board the Commission's recommendations on single group funding, but mentioned also that the Equality Duty should be met without explaining how this should be achieved (cf. Department for Communities and Local Government 2008c). The ambiguous stance by the UK Government in regard to *single group funding* has resulted in a confusing situation for BAMER organisations and also for those women's organisations that provide women-only services. In recent years, they have increasingly been asked to justify their group-specific service provision (WRC 2007c, 2008d).

The new focus on community cohesion has been vehemently criticised as it “has enabled a de-racialisation of language” (Worley 2005, p. 484). Rather than explicitly acknowledging the effects of racism in British society, and dealing with the diverse needs and problems of specific groups and ethnic minorities in the UK – such as the British African-Caribbean, South Asian or new Eastern European communities, the discourse gives opportunity to speak of undifferentiated 'local communities'. A discussion of possible reasons for social inequalities and differing needs in communities in the UK is pushed into the background. With an “assimilationist tone of much of the rhetoric” (Worley 2005, p. 491) the community cohesion debate has been judged as a framework reviving older concepts in race politics in the UK (Lewis and Neal 2005), in which emphasis is given once again to conformity and the efforts for 'integration' expected to be achieved by minority groups. Worley (2005) analysed some slippages of language in government documents from 'social cohesion' to 'community cohesion' and from 'community cohesion' to 'national cohesion'. He suggests that New Labour's narratives stand for a change of priority setting from directly naming and tackling social and racial inequalities towards the establishment of common values for local communities and the nation as a whole.

Helen, who works for a large women's organisation specialising in refuge accommodation and campaigning against VAW, spoke in more detail about the characteristics of recent reforms and the ways in which the representation of interests of minorities and also of women have been inherently weakened. She pointed at

incongruent aspects of the neocommunitarian agenda and deplored the lack of a solid plan for reform and policy implementation (see Appendix 6 EI 2).

I want to stress and build upon the following four points made by Helen: (1) Minority interest groups and service providers are structurally disadvantaged under the ongoing local government reform. Only the strongest voluntary organisations and statutory agencies have the infrastructure and resources to make their case heard for priority setting by LSPs in LAAs. Organisations focussing on single-strand equality issues are by their very nature small(er) and face difficulties entering these local decision-taking bodies. (2) Women's organisations face difficulties as they offer highly specialised single-group, i.e. gender- and/or ethnic-minority specific services. Current reforms are mainly driven by the objective to make savings rather than to achieve real outcomes in terms of community or service user 'empowerment'. Confusing recommendations regarding community cohesion and single group funding have given commissioners a platform to question the adequacy of the services being offered by women's organisations. (3) Many women's organisations build upon a tradition of solidarity between women along *and across* local communities to best meet women's interests. They do not operate in New Labour's idealised terms of 'community' bound to locality and the nation. Under current pressures for savings, local Councils are described as being reluctant to continue their support for these services.⁷¹ (4) Helen reflects upon incongruous aspects of recent reforms and their confusing implementation in funding practice. A well “thought-out” plan is lacking and the aim to make savings predominates overall priority setting. She is doubtful about the achievement of government's objective to put people back in control of their care.

Helen mentions the interesting case of Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a women's organisation strongly involved in campaigning for the rights and interests of Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee women by challenging domestic and gender violence. SBS has been politically active and has provided accommodation and support for women since the 1970s. Ealing Council cancelled its 2007/2008 funding (£100,000 pa) to SBS, arguing that SBS focussed its front-line services on one ethnic minority (South Asian women) and would at the same time not confine its services locally, i.e. to women with residence in Ealing. This case shows that the discourse on community cohesion and the published recommendations regarding single group funding had immediate implications at local government level, before the government's consultation period for the very Guidance had been concluded (WRC 2008b).

⁷¹ For a further discussion of this point see subsection 5.2.3.

With financial support from ex-service users and another charitable organisation and a strong solidarity action by other women's organisations SBS was able to launch a campaign on its own behalf and made an exemplary plea on behalf of BAMER women's organisations throughout the UK. This campaign was rewarded with a triumphant success: in July 2008, a couple of months after the recording of my interview with Helen, SBS won the case against Ealing Council in the High Courts of Justice in London. Ealing Council was judged as having failed to show proper regard in its duties under the Race Relations Act. For commentators, this case has revealed the structural and inherent ambiguities in New Labour's policy reforms that have led *in practice* to potential conflict lines with British equality law (Jump 2008; WRC 2008d).

However, it has to be stressed that despite this success by SBS, the government's reform has already left a devastating impact on the range of service provision in the women's sector. Imkaan, a prominent second-tier organisation that campaigns in the name of BAMER domestic violence refuges, outreach and advice services across the UK, has highlighted the detrimental effects of the community cohesion discourse on its members. In 2008, it had to register the closure of 50% of the independent specialist BAMER women's led organisations across the UK that had existed in 2003:

“Despite the fact that the guidance [*Cohesion Guidance for Funders*] is not a statutory requirement yet, BAMER services are already asked to rationalise their existence and contribution. Most localities have developed cohesion strategies as part of the Government's national cohesion agenda and these are being used to support arguments towards eradicating community-led services delivered by BAMER communities which have been in existence since the 1970s. Imkaan's members tell us that Commissioners are basing their funding on crude uninformed assumptions that view BAMER communities as homogeneous groups rather than those with different backgrounds, languages, and service needs. (...) The cohesion guidance fails to acknowledge the historical and ongoing contribution of BAMER and other specialist groups in empowering the most vulnerable sections of society who lack access to services for reasons linked to poverty, gender and race discrimination, poor housing, immigration status and poor responses from mainstream services” (Imkaan 2008, p. 9).

In a recent report by members of SBS, the *social cohesion agenda* is seen as having replaced *multiculturalism* in race relation policies in the UK, and with it the first steps that had been taken under the New Labour government to recognise and address at least some forms of institutional racism. Both conceptual policy frameworks are commented upon, however, as misrepresenting ethnic minorities as if they were homogenous and static communities, not grasping and addressing divisions along class and gender lines, and ongoing transformations (Patel and Sen 2010).

During my fieldwork, *The Cohesion Guidance for Funders* was named as just one example of increasing or continuing neglect of minorities' interests and gender blindness resulting from the ongoing reform of local government and public service funding practice in the UK. Women questioned for the most part the 'community empowerment' aspect of the neocommunitarian agenda, referring to the non-comprehensive and unbalanced interest representation practice in local authorities, further cemented with the advent of LSPs.

Despite the Gender Equality Duty that came into effect in April 2008, women are still under-represented in local government decision-making bodies. A survey in 2007 (Urban Forum et al. 2007) on women's representation in LSPs in England revealed that indeed only 28% of all people participating in LSPs (including administrators) were women. The study highlights also the fact that, while 7% of organisations in the VS are women's organisations, only 1.8% of the VS representatives in LSPs were sent by the women's sector (ibid., p. 2). Even more troubling, it has been repeatedly reported that the Gender Equality Duty has been misinterpreted by some local authorities, who have asked women's organisations to open their doors to men as well, and named this as a condition for further funding (WRC 2008a; WRC and Rape Crisis England and Wales 2008).

In the following, I will refer to an interview with Marta, a prominent champion of services for women and expert in British policies regarding domestic violence. She leads a second-tier organisation in central London, specialising in policy work. In addition to the lack of funding allocation and disregard of minorities' interests depicted above, Marta commented upon the general lack of a politically informed gender analysis in the ongoing attempts to mainstream DV services in the UK.

While some issues that have been highlighted by the women's sector for decades are now being picked up by government, the newly formulated policies lack important detailing. Marta criticises the conditions for policy implementation and the half-hearted nature of the policies themselves, meaning that the rich experience of and expertise on DV gained mainly by women working in the women's sector is not being valued. The requirements for statutory jobs in the field of DV are, for example, predominantly separated from a specialisation in DV in terms of a political understanding of the issues involved and/or a practical background in the field. This lack of political understanding and expertise at local government level aggravates a situation in which the necessity for effective service provision by BAMER organisations is not acknowledged and sufficient funds are not provided for by central government. She gave the example of the Borough

Domestic Violence coordinator, a post that became obligatory for each Council in London to assign under Mayor Ken Livingstone:

“[In London there are] approximately 30 domestic violence coordinators, 31 I think, and I would say that less than 10 of them have any background in domestic violence prior to that job, and yet they are the strategic lead for their entire borough on DV. Because our specialist knowledge isn't valued, so when you're appointing somebody to work as a domestic violence coordinator, the fact that they have policy development experience, they have got research experience, they have got experience in partnership working, is seen as enough, *without any knowledge of the sector, and certainly knowledge of the politics is considered irrelevant*”.

British government has also favoured a “gender neutral” use of language, a development that is seen by Marta as not merely coincidental but standing for its current agenda, judged by her as being characterised by “wilful blindness”. There is a loss of political awareness and missing acknowledgement of the conditions leading to violence against women and the realities and suffering resulting from it. While in the field of DV the main offenders are men and the vast majority of the victims are women and their children – and it is therefore they who are in need of attention, services and support – there is a missing differentiation in terms of gender in the detailing of New Labour's DV policies, one factor which still produces insufficient results.

The missing gender analysis and the loss of a feminist reading in the process of mainstreaming is displayed for Marta in the very details of the Government's framework for local priority setting for funding allocation under current LAAs. Out of the set of 198 National Indicators (NI)⁷², two deal directly with domestic violence: NI 32, with regard to the reduction of registered case numbers of repeated incidents of DV and NI 34, with regard to the reduction of registered cases of murder related to DV. Marta deplores the fact that these NIs are neither gender specific nor compulsory, nor do they relate to the provision of specific and specialised services. There is thus no binding requirement for local authorities in England to allocate public funding to women's refuges, nor is there any mention of the necessity for prevention programmes, etc. A mere listing in the NI set is not enough to secure an adequate allocation of funds for local service provision.

“There is no requirement, we are entirely dependent on the goodwill, and political leadership (...) and there is no requirement to even have the 2 indicators that do exist on domestic violence, and hardly anybody would have more than one of them in your 35 targets. There are 198 altogether, and local authorities are assessed, this is what government keep telling me, and I just keep laughing at them. And it doesn't matter if it's not in there,

⁷² cf. subsection 4.3.1

because they have to pick 35 which represent their local area, and they are the ones that money is attached to. But they are judged on all 198, so government keep saying to me it doesn't matter if it's not in their local LAA, because they will still be assessed against all 198. But I'm like, 'please there is no money, you're having a laugh, if it's not in your 35 they won't care', and there is no requirement for them to pick a domestic violence to be in that 35 at all. So yes, *there is a huge kind of wake-up call coming around domestic violence and we are seriously on the brink of being decimated like the Rape Crisis Centres.*"⁷³

She then continues and reveals the technical details in the definitions of the single NIs and their potential detrimental effects on working conditions in front-line services. She deplores the fact that the assessment of local government regarding the DV specific NIs is based on police recorded cases. This is going to deeply affect the ability of women's organisations to support women who experienced rape or assault a long time ago and/or might not want to report the offences to the police. She predicts that organisations in the DV field will be increasingly under pressure to alter their way of working to deliver on the expected increase in police reported case numbers in order to keep government funding (see Appendix 6 EI 3).

Research on Rape Crisis Centres in England and Wales (WRC and Rape Crisis England and Wales 2008) documented that these centres work predominantly with women who do not fit into the new requirements for achievement under government funding. A survey conducted amongst 35 of the remaining 38 centres in England and Wales revealed that 61% of the women who asked for support by these centres came for experiences of sexual violence which happened three or more years ago and only 10% wanted to report these experiences to the police. While the demand for the services offered is extremely high, with an average number of days on waiting lists of 1,929 days equivalent to 5.3 years (!), only 21% of the centres were fully funded.

Marta is ambiguous about the further mainstreaming of DV services under current conditions, as it has created new challenges for the women's sector on practical and policy levels due to the rise of the unpaid workload, acute difficulties in securing the survival of highly specialised services, and the loss of funding to inexperienced generic service providers. Still, claiming *public* funding for services that meet the needs of women is seen as a quintessential political objective:

"I mean it's difficult to know, if that's a good idea or not really, the mainstreaming, because on the one hand you lose all the politics of it, but on the other hand, I mean for God's sake, *women are the majority of the*

⁷³ Marta refers here to the closure and difficulties faced by many Rape Crisis Centres (see section 5.1).

*population, this is our state, these are our public services, we pay for them, they should be meeting our needs. And they shouldn't be, I mean women should not have to rely on safety and protection from charitable institutions. This is the state's responsibility and we are the state. So they, *there is that kind of tension I think between kind of 'what happened when we mainstream, it's horrible let's keep it out here', and the righteousness of our rights to claim services from our money, meeting our needs.*"*

In 2009⁷⁴, central government released a new cross-government strategy to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) (HM Government 2009). The included action plan lists further efforts in mainstreaming DV services, promises more cross-departmental action, VAWG champions on local government level, and the introduction of prevention and awareness programmes in the media, schools and by health and social care professionals. For 2011, new and more comprehensive NIs in regard to VAWG and the mainstreaming of VAWG into existing ones are planned. The publication of guidelines for the commissioning of VAWG services is to be announced which will include a plea for three-year funding.

While women's organisations from the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition welcomed this strategy paper and commented positively on the Government's acknowledgement of the work of non-statutory agencies in the field⁷⁵, they fear that although the proposed action plan might lead as planned to more awareness and referrals to front-line services, it does *not* secure an increase of financial resources for service provision to the women's sector.

Again, it is the specialist service provision by BAMER and gender specific organisations which has not found the explicit support that is urgently needed to give a signal that further closures of local providers that have built up experience and expertise in specialist service provision over decades should be prevented. While the strategy paper has been welcomed as a decisive step forward in terms of gender awareness in crime prevention and victim support, it is quite telling that it speaks of the need for specialist services in the field but does not specify this need any further. While it mentions that "the way in which services are provided is as much important as what services are provided" (ibid., p. 43), and it is acknowledged that services have to answer different needs in rural and urban areas, minority groups/interests are only mentioned twice in the

⁷⁴ after my interview with Marta

⁷⁵ For WRC's statement on the Government's strategy paper see:

http://www.wrc.org.uk/news/wrc_news_releases/violence_against_women_strategy_nov_09.aspx?Ref=enews&dm_i=4DW,2O9O,BQJM9,8GJS,1, access date: 16/10/2010. For the EVAW response see: http://endviolenceagainstwomen.blogspot.com/2009/11/evaw-coalition-urges-funding-for-womens.html?Ref=enews&dm_i=4DW,2O9O,BQJM9,8H13,1, access date: 16/01/2010.

overall 79 page document: once acknowledging that BAMER women and girls are more likely to be affected by female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour-based crime (ibid., p. 15) and once referring to a BME organisation as an exemplary local provider (ibid., p. 43). There is still no sign of a palpable commitment for *structural* policy adjustments sensitive to issues of ethnicity, race and the immigration status of women, and thus a reform that could secure sufficient funding for specialist VAW service provision by women's organisations along their clients' needs.

5.1.3 Localism, case-related funding and the delegation of the duty to care

The neocommunitarian agenda places an emphasis on service provision along 'local community' needs. At first sight, this focus on *locality* sounds promising for a women's sector in which many organisations grew out of local community projects and initiatives. And it also suggests that local government would be able to react to emerging needs resulting from demographic change. However, this principle has been shown to have questionable outcomes for the quality and mere existence of services on offer to women.

In Britain, it depends first of all on the area a woman lives in as to whether she has potential access to VAW support services: one in four local authorities in the UK still do not provide *any* specialised VAW service *at all*. And while there is an increase in services by statutory agencies, the services offered by the women's sector are in decline. This has been described by professionals as problematic, as it is feared that the newly installed statutory services, like Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)⁷⁶, are restricted in their focus and therefore do not cover the full range of services and culture-sensitive support which has been provided over decades by long-existing women's organisations (End Violence Against Women and Equality and Human Rights Commission 2008).

One instance in which SARCs can be seen to be inadequate to many women affected by VAW is that these centres restrict their services to women who experienced an assault not longer than twelve months ago. Women who experienced assaults or abuse during childhood and youth, for instance, are thus not eligible for direct support by these centres. With the well-known fact that it often takes victims of VAW years to ask for advice and help, many women's needs might thus remain unanswered.

⁷⁶ There are 28 SARCs throughout England and Wales with 3 centres in London, all three located in hospitals. "Referral centres bring together all of the different legal and medical agencies and departments in one place, which helps both the victims and those investigating the crimes" (Home Office website on SARCs, see: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/sexual-offences/sexual-assault-referral-centres/index7fb8.html?version=3>; access date: 22/01/2010).

Second, there is case-related funding throughout the UK, which causes structural problems for an adequate service provision to *all* women in need who do address or are referred to women's organisations. Many of the remaining services regarding VAW are financed via case-related funding schemes. In regard to the income of DV refugees in London, for instance, over 75% is derived from SP and other case-related statutory funding. This form of funding is calculated by unit costs per bed-space/client which covers the salaries and management expenses of the providers, and case-related housing and income support from Social Services for each service user (WRC 2007a, p. 9). Case-related funding is problematic for providers as it links funding to the citizen status of their clients and can be used by local authorities to be subjected to additional conditions, for instance to the local residency of the service user.

As mentioned above by Helen (see subsection 5.2.2), most women's organisations and especially the highly specialised BAMER ones developed out of community needs, but those community needs were not necessarily linked by women's organisations to a local area defined by an administrative borough, nor to an investigation of a woman's citizen status. Thus, organisations in London especially have been operating their services accepting not only 'local' women, but also women from other boroughs and regions. With local government asking to restrict and focus on services for users with local residency and cutbacks on grant funding, these organisations enter a zone where responsibilities for the care of people in need of support are relegated once more.

Conditioned case-related funding aggravates the existing difficulties women's organisations are confronted with due to the no recourse to public funds rule. People affected by no recourse to public funds have no right for support via social benefits and other public funding in the UK. Women's organisations have addressed the devastating outcomes of this rule in the name of their clients for decades (Southall Black Sisters 2007). In regard to VAW services, this rule in welfare law predominantly addresses women subjected to immigration control. Without going into the details of British immigration and welfare law, I want to make the important point here that the rule concerns a wide range of women living in the UK.

It can affect women from countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) like:

- asylum seekers;
- women who came to the UK as visitors or on student or temporary working visas;

- spouses or unmarried partners on limited leave to remain who came to the UK to live with/marry a British citizen/partner on indefinite leave to remain;
- women regarded as 'overstayers' (whose valid visa has run out); and
- women who have entered the UK 'illegally'.

In certain circumstances, it may also affect women with passports from the 'new' EU member states that joined the EU after 2004. Women from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia count as A8 nationals. Since 1994, the right to social benefits in the UK is linked to passing the *Habitual Residence Test*, also known under *Right to Reside Test*. For nationals from the A8 Accession States, the right to remain is linked to their working status or the working status of their partner. This means that some women from these states lose their right to certain social benefits if they or their partner are unable to work or haven't been working long enough, which means for twelve continuous months.⁷⁷ The no recourse to public funds rule can thus affect a wide range of women without a UK passport, coming from a diverse range of backgrounds regarding their nationality, citizen status, socio-economic status and cultural background.

Women's organisations have highlighted the fact that an insecure immigration status can render women extremely vulnerable to abusing partners or spouses. With no right to professional support and financial help, these women can be faced with the unbearable choice to confront further abuse or destitution. Organisations that are addressed by these women have no right to claim reimbursements from government for any support given. BAMER organisations are again more affected by these restrictions around 'locality' in funding than generic women's organisations. Given the very nature of their specialization, they are addressed disproportionately by higher numbers of women with no right to access social benefits in the UK, as well as by women who reside outside the local area (WRC 2007b).

Under these conditions, women's organisations face increasing difficulties to keep or build up the capacities needed to offer adequate support to all the women in need who address them. A WRC report on DV refugees in London reported that both the providers and the boroughs consulted listed a "plethora of unmet needs" in the area of service provision in DV refugees. For refuge providers, the constraints due to a lack of resources and bed space was most daunting: in 2006/2007, just those surveyed providers reported

⁷⁷ See HM Revenue & Customs website on 'Right to Reside in the United Kingdom: http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/ntcmanual/eligibility_residency/ntc0350090.htm, access date: 23/01/2010. See also: <http://www.multikulti.org.uk/habitual-residence-test-and-right-to-reside/english/index.html>, access date 23/01/2010.

in total on 2,300 requests for accommodation that had to be turned away (WRC 2007b, p. 10).

As funding is cut and increasingly case-related, bed spaces are restricted and waiting lists for a refuge space are long. The leeway for service providers to assist women regardless of their citizen status and specific circumstances is correspondingly small. The WRC report already mentioned highlighted this dramatic situation: while in 2006/2007 a total of 238 women had been supported by refuges in London in spite of having no recourse to public funds, mostly via their community services (advice and outreach), only 20% of these women could be accommodated. Another 222 requests for support by women with no recourse to public funds had to be turned away (ibid.).

The no recourse to public funds rule not only denies support to many people living and working in the UK, it also prevents those with an insecure immigration status and new immigrants from building up their own community projects and groups that would answer their specific needs. A recent research paper on local government reform in the UK (Blake et al. 2008) reports on the fact that central government policies are sending out confusing messages to local agencies. The resulting cuts for single-strand equality groups at local government level have mostly affected BAMER organisations that represent ethnic minorities and refugees. The research highlights that of all immigrant groups, new immigrants from outside the EEA and from the A8 states face most barriers to making their case heard, as they are not eligible to apply for any public funding, neither as individuals, nor in form of grant aid to build up new or improve the existing community projects and services.

The loss and denial of funding stands in stark contrast to the continuous need expressed by women and the actual demand for BAMER specialised services with which women's organisations are confronted on a daily basis. Also, government agencies continue to count on the services offered by BAMER organisations. Southall Black Sisters is not an isolated case here, even if it is the most publicly known. After many reported closures, the remaining BAMER organisations are struggling to keep their services running. At the same time, they are overwhelmed by referrals and requests for specialised support (Imkaan 2008; WRC 2008d).

Black women's groups like Southall Black Sisters have therefore been shedding light on the feared outcomes of public service reforms in terms of a further circumscription of *rights* for BAMER women in the future. The necessity has been addressed of building up stronger alliances with anti-racist and human rights activists to address discriminatory migration regimes and blank spots in needs adequate support to

women regardless of their citizen and employment status. In 2007, BAMER women's groups initiated a "campaign against the no recourse to public funds rule", in alliance with 30 other not-for-profit organisations like Amnesty International, Rights for Women and WRC. They started by pressing for an exemption to be made at least for victims of domestic violence and trafficking, to enable these women to seek refuge and professional support in the UK (Siddiqui 2008)⁷⁸.

In my research, I came into contact with MOSA⁷⁹, a larger medium community-based organisation specialising in services for Asian women who experienced DV. I had the chance to speak to Rohini, the project manager for MOSA's legal advice services. The interview conveyed very well how BAMER women's organisations have to argue their case on several fronts. While responsibilities for specialised services and advice continue to be delegated from statutory agencies to the VS, financial compensation and acknowledgement is denied.

The organisation had its legal advice services running with the help of the local authorities for more than 15 years until 2004. When the competitive funding regime set in, priorities changed and all local government funded organisations in the area were asked to evidence that they provide 'value for money'. Funding for the advice service at MOSA was cancelled, and could not be replaced by other means for a couple of years⁸⁰. While MOSA receives less and less funding by local government bodies for its services, statutory agencies and the police continue to refer people to MOSA and to other women's organisations in the borough, and count on their work and engagement in consultation processes and on local advice boards.

There is apparently a discrepancy, not only between local community needs, service user demand and provision, but also between the need by statutory bodies for highly specialised and community specific voice and advice-giving, and the capacity to either develop the ability to do so internally (in public sector bodies), or to allocate the much-needed funding externally to those existing single-strand equality groups which have the experience in doing so (see Appendix 6 EI 4).

⁷⁸ See also Southall Black Sisters' webpage on its recent legal aid challenges and their outcomes: <http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/legal-aid-challenge.html>, last accessed: 28/07/2011.

⁷⁹ Name changed to secure the anonymity of my respondents.

⁸⁰ See subsection 6.2.3 in which the effects of these circumstances on Rohini's working conditions will be discussed.

5.2 'Seismic shifts' in the WVCS

When I started doing one-to-one interviews in the women's sector in London, the contrast of impressions could not have been more pronounced. The huge differences between women's organisations in terms of available funding and encountered difficulties to keep on operating were immediately palpable. Even the differences in setting and equipment in which the organisations operated on a day-to-day basis were telling. My first interview within a women's organisation office brought me into an unheated room in a shabby building in a neglected industrial area on the outskirts of London; the second took place in a shiny, bright and security-protected office space close to the City; for the third I was welcomed into a well-equipped and spacious open-plan office in a newly converted industrial building in central London.

There, I had a first sample of three women's organisations in London, which in retrospect could not have been more exemplary. The first, a nationally renowned project supporting Black women, had just had its funding cut by the local authorities, had frozen all its front-line activities and was struggling to survive. The second was a thriving second-tier organisation involved in policy work and the development of new projects and strategies in the Violence Against Women field on renewed contracts with a government body. The third was a recently expanded organisation providing housing and support for vulnerable women in various boroughs of London, also highly engaged in campaigning and advocacy work regarding VAW issues, funded through local, regional and central government funding streams.

My initial impressions were indicative of the wide range of differences in the conditions for women's organisations and their employees to which I was witness and about which I was told throughout my research. This was a huge variety of experiences in which, notwithstanding, a trend towards a particular pattern in the restructuring of the women's sector could be delineated. On the one hand, there are local front-line organisations, some of them even with a national reputation for innovativeness, rich experience and fruitful contribution to expertise, campaigning, and current debates in the women's sector, which nonetheless depend for their day-to-day work on the decision-making of local authority funding bodies. Most of these micro, small and medium-sized organisations face major difficulties in the current funding climate as they find it difficult to influence local decision-making bodies, to bid for service contracts for their front-line services, let alone to win them, and cannot find other sources of funding for their work. This is especially the case if they have been focused on projects for Black and Asian

women, ethnic minorities and refugees. On the other hand, there are a number of large organisations successfully providing front-line services in several boroughs, and second-tier/umbrella organisations in a coordinating and path-making role which deliver infrastructure, support, advice and policy work for and on behalf of front-line organisations and/or government. These two latter types were more likely to survive under the neocommunitarian funding regime; in my study some of them had even been able to extend a number of services.

5.2.1 'Super-providers' and the shift of funding towards agglomerates

The loss of grant funding and the competitive and regulatory funding regime under service contracts have resulted in a high number of reported closures, not only of single projects and whole organisations in the WVCS (Imkaan 2008; WRC 2008d), but also in mergers of single women's organisations and the take-over of some front-line services by bigger organisations. So while funding for certain services has been completely cut or given to generic service providers, there is also a gradual shift and organisational change *inside* the women's sector (WRC 2008c).

Similar to the overall trend in the UK's Voluntary and Community Sector, the income of organisations in the WVCS in England is increasingly unevenly distributed. A study on funding to women's organisations published in 2009 (WRC 2009) reports on the uneven share of funding and the differences in the degree to which organisations of different sizes are affected by the volatility of income⁸¹.

For a discussion of the study's findings⁸², it is important to consider how the dataset was produced. WRC identified overall 1,348 women's organisations registered as charities in the financial years 2004-2007 in England via GuideStar UK, an online data bank on Voluntary and Community Organisations. Only 751, just over a half of these registered organisations (56%), were included in a set for further analyses of financial data. For the remaining organisations, there was either no data available on income and expenditure at all (18%) or not for all three consecutive years (26%). The annual publication of financial data is, however, an important requirement for maintaining the charitable status of an organisation. WRC interpreted the high rate of missing sets as a sign of the difficulties the sector is confronted with (WRC 2009, p. 14). When results

⁸¹ Income in the (W)VCS includes reimbursements for services and grant funding from government, support by other charitable organisations, donations, interest on savings and returns on own investments or services provided for other organisations. Sources of income were not analysed further.

⁸² I refer to this study and the difficulties in providing statistical data on the WVCS also in other sections of this thesis; see subsection 3.1.2 and Appendix 5.

from this study are discussed in the following, it is important to keep in mind that the sample it was based on was thus highly selective.⁸³

For the 751 organisations that were subjected to further analyses, the annual growth rate in real income after inflation was approximately 5.5%. This is lower than the 9.4% calculated by NCVO for the whole charitable sector for the same period of time. Moreover, the average expenditure increased also at a higher rate than the organisations' average income. Of great interest are the differences in the share of income between women's organisations of different sizes. The study states that “the largest organisations received most of the total income” with 6% of women's organisations in England having an annual income of over £1m “account[ing] for half of all income in 2006/07” (ibid. p. 23).

While the average income for the largest organisations remained stable, and the one for medium-sized organisations slightly increased, the study documented the repeatedly reported loss of funding for micro-organisations in the sector, indeed by -32% from 2006 to 2007. WRC also traced the highest income volatility for organisations with an annual income between £10,000 and £100,000, thus the second smallest category, over the three consecutive years under consideration, 2004-2007.

The trend towards agglomerates is even more noticeable in London. The study provides a separate analysis of financial data for 448 charitable women's organisations based in the capital (see its London Appendix). Only half of these (225) had the financial data available for the required period of three consecutive financial years, 2004-2007, and could therefore be considered for further analyses. In 2006/07, 27 of these 225 organisations (12%) had an annual income of more than £550,000, the top 13 organisations (6%) an annual income of £1m-10m, whereas 113 organisations (50%) had less than £100,000 of average income available⁸⁴.

The analysis of the changes in the funding to WVCOs in London shows that again it is the smallest type of organisation which is affected by a loss of income: while there was almost no change for organisations with an income over £1m, and slight increases of average funding for organisations with an annual income between £10k-

⁸³ One could argue that the criteria negatively selected organisations with missing capacities to comply with the administrative requirements to attain and/or comply with the requirements for (keeping) charitable status, in other words micro-organisations (not enough income to pay salaries) and potentially all those small and medium-sized organisations that have been most dramatically affected by spending cuts.

⁸⁴ There were 13 large organisations with an annual income ranging from £1m-10m, 99 with an income between £100k and 1m, 65 with an income between £10k and 100k, and 48 organisations with an income of £10k or less. However, a breakdown of the £100k to £1m income band showed that out of these 99 organisations only 14 had more than £550k available (see WRC 2009, London Appendix).

£1m, there is a sharp negative trend for organisations in the lowest income band. Micro-organisations in London faced a dramatic loss of average income of more than 50% in three years. For a discussion of the outcomes of this study, it is important to keep in mind that the average income and expenditure was analysed along *groups* of organisations, grouped according to their average income. Although WRC's study is longitudinal in outlook, it did not trace single organisations and therefore cannot tell whether single organisations moved up or down the scale or remained in the same grouping.

However, what has been documented by WRC is the fact that the quite complex shifts in funding, ranging from complete spending cuts to the diversion of funding from the WVCS to generic providers, and internally to bigger organisations, have resulted in a shrinking diversity of the services on offer to women, a fact which has been repeatedly reported upon by my respondents and which is well-documented for the VAW subsector in London. In its research⁸⁵ on DV refuge provision in the years 2003-2006, WRC found that, while the VCOs that run DV refuges in London increased their annual income (when pooled altogether) by about 12% in one year alone to overall £20.4m in 2006 (WRC 2007b, p. 92), this overall increase in pooled funding for DV refuge services was paralleled with a reduction of services: the refuge providers that answered the additional questionnaire (23 out of 39 identified refuge providers) reported on having been forced to reduce the range of the services provided, with many single community, outreach, children's, counselling and advice projects being lost.

The report also highlights the fact that funding in the VAW subsector was increasingly lost to organisations outside the women's sector. Only 69% of the refuge providers in the study could still be identified as being part of the WVCS (ibid., p. 22). Takeovers of single refuge spaces by larger organisations were reported on: in the period of the three years covered by the study alone, seven refuges previously run by women's organisations had been taken over by larger providers, “two by larger women's organisations, one by a BME housing association, and four by general housing associations“ (ibid., p. 92).

Many respondents I interviewed, be they the women working for the WVCS or the local authority officers, reported on these closures of VAW services and mentioned (1) Refuge⁸⁶, (2) some large organisations in the federation of Women's Aid⁸⁷, and (3) two

⁸⁵ also referred to in subsection 5.2.3

⁸⁶ Refuge is the largest refuge provider under women's organisations in the UK. The organisation's annual income grew from around £8m in 2008 to £9.5m in 2009. Its expenditure though was much higher at £9,673,876 and £9,750,772 respectively. See:

bigger organisations that resulted from mergers and takeovers as the current and future winners among VAW service providers *inside* London's WVCS. For some of my interviewees from the WVCS, this development towards larger organisations was depicted as bearing a chance for 'professionalisation' and a more effective use of resources (4 out of 31). The vast majority of my respondents (27 out of 31) saw it as a result of a dissatisfactory form of mainstreaming with rather disputable, if not devastating, outcomes.

Marta, for instance⁸⁸, described the current funding allocation to DV services as “short-sighted” as it restores decision-taking power within local administration bodies that lack the required understanding and expertise:

“Commissioning is going to kill us, because effectively it's removing that autonomy for us, to develop services actually geared towards the needs of the people we have been seeking to serve, and puts the power for defining what the people need in the hands of people that never understood it in the first place! So yeah it's killing our sector, really killing it.”

She is worried about a loss of autonomy and the emerging “funding clusters” around a few organisations and inside these organisations around a handful of services, mostly around high-risk management. The once existing plurality and variety in DV services, the professional expertise that had been developed over decades, nurtured by feminist engagement and a political understanding of women's needs, would have already been lost to a certain degree. She predicts that many more single services are in severe danger of being extinct by the next funding rounds. She is concerned about the fact that early intervention and prevention programmes in particular would not find their way through the funding jungle.

Marta deplores the fact that there is no continuity, either in the government's funding strategies for VAW services or in the main charitable funding programmes on which small and medium-sized VCOs could build and which would guarantee some

http://www.guidestar.org.uk/gs_financials_simple.aspx?CCReg=dqt6tMyD0HjgrSlcF6HM4g%3d%3d&strQuery=refuge, access date: 26/07/2010.

⁸⁷ Women's Aid “is the national domestic violence charity which co-ordinates and supports a network of over 370 local organisations, providing over 500 refuges, helplines, outreach services and advice centres”. It had an annual income in 2009 of £2,7m. The local organisations operating in the Women's Aid federation are independent charities; however, they receive some infrastructural support in terms of fundraising, advocacy and financial administration from this national charity. Citation from the organisation's [datablog on GuideStar UK](http://www.guidestar.org.uk/gs_summary.aspx?CCReg=1054154&strquery=women's%20aid%20federation), see: http://www.guidestar.org.uk/gs_summary.aspx?CCReg=1054154&strquery=women's%20aid%20federation, access date: 26/07/2010.

⁸⁸ Marta is campaigning as director of a second-tier organization for and on behalf of DV services in London, I referred to her interview in subsection 5.2.2.

stability for their projects and service provision. Organisations are asked to adjust to government and charitable funding rules, spending cuts and priorities, apparently for better accountability, efficiency in service provision, and for better support of 'innovative' projects.

However, while funding requirements are continuously transformed, the necessity for adequate service provision is well known and remains more or less the same. Small and medium-sized organisations have a limited capacity to comply with all these changes. And among these organisations, those providing BAMER specific services are worst hit as due to their very nature it is more difficult for them to find adequate partners for partnerships and mergers which would enable them to bid for service contracts.

Alisha, a senior worker in an organisation providing a DV refuge that originated from a grassroots project, reported on her impression that many of the women's organisations that survived the move towards commissioning have undergone incisive organisational change in order to do so. There are fears among some organisations about losing their projects' unique character in order to remain in the game any longer, or having to close (parts of these) because particular services and activities might – despite all the adjustments made – no longer be on the local or central government's agenda from one year to the next. Alisha describes this as a grotesque reality in which the provision of women's services has become “a business”:

“You can't maintain it (...) because you can't tell. So you might do all that because it is a massive thing to do, cause it is a total re-structure, and then a year later, like, SP came and is going, LAA might come and go, someone else will come in and do something else, new government will come in, and then you disbanded [sic] your organisation, and then that organisation could crash, for whatever reason – you don't know! So, I mean, it's no different probably to any kind of business, I think. That's business at the end of the day and it can happen, but you know, if it is that you are doing your research on, that's the reality of where women's services are at.”

5.2.2 'Fitting the boxes' and the shift of decision-taking power

Some of my respondents who have worked in different positions for organisations providing VAW services reported on these organisational changes in more detail. For Sita, manager and co-founder of a medium-sized BAMER organisation, the decisive aspect of this transformation is the way in which services are developed over time. Comparing the current situation with the situation under previous grant-funding schemes, she describes a loss of decision-taking power and room for manoeuvre in the

development, handling and crafting of services not only for her and her staff, but also for the service users taking part in the organisation's projects.

Under contracts there is less flexibility for women to decide on which services and projects to provide, and how to develop and manage them. There is less leeway for grassroots work that requires openness and adjustment to service user needs. Women's organisations have to align their operations according to the strict requirements set out by central and local government and must adjust their projects and services accordingly so that they fit in the boxes that are on offer by local authorities:

“I tell you what the difference is. With grant aid you apply according to the needs of the women, you can be innovative, it's grassroots work, you find a need, you find something, there is a gap and you can apply for it. But grant conditions can also be slightly loose. So if you find that one thing isn't working and you want to go back for something and say 'can we change this slightly to this, because when we applied for it we thought this, but however it's this', there is room for that. So there is room for growth, room for movement, room for meeting the needs. What happens with contracts is: it's the LA who says, 'this is what they want', and you have to fit in those boxes. And if you fit in those boxes you can apply, if you don't that is another thing. And I find that is the biggest difference: you have to fit in those boxes” (Sita).

Local commissioners decide in advance of the tendering process on the specific services and planned outputs for particular projects and confine organisations to operate in their specific regulatory corsets. In practice, they decide, by the particular wording of the tender, on which particular providers they would like to see to get the different contracts in the borough. Sita's organisation had started out as a community project offering a wide range of activities for women but has been forced to mainstream its operations over the years to a mere DV service, with the consequence that a smaller range of help and advice is now on offer to women and their communities.

Evelyn, a director of a successfully merged large organisation that provides various DV services across several boroughs in London, describes the transformation from grants towards contracts as a major shift that has far-reaching implications for the ways in which decisions on public services in the UK are taken. Contrary to the government's pronounced intentions, she sees it as a further shift of power *away* from local people, vulnerable groups, and specialised organisations *towards* the various commissioning bodies of local authorities and the big players in social service provision. This is seen as having serious implications for the ways in which the needs for public services are identified, assessed and finally addressed.

The consultations with the Voluntary Sector that have been implemented under New Labour's reform for a more community-based assessment and response to local needs and priorities on local government level are experienced by her as “completely useless”. They would neither give the participating organisations access to the people that are in real power over the allocation of funding, nor would they provide sufficient opportunities for small and medium-sized groups to make themselves heard. Commissioning bodies were described as male-dominated and as requiring a lot of commitment from the participating VCOs, forming just another hierarchical body in the decision-making process of funding allocation. The announced – and much needed – platform for community work and interest representation has not been established.

Organisations that attend the consultation meetings and make contributions when requested to do so by government are not compensated for their work and expertise. In times of increased referrals and tight budgets, only the already influential big players in the VS can afford to participate and can thus make *their* case heard. The whole process is described as too work-intensive, mostly without any positive results for those who need it most, the smaller and highly specialised organisations and community projects. Even her organization, one that belongs to the few larger organisations in the WVCS that provide front-line services in London, cannot profit from the institutionalised forms of consultation and common decision-taking in and for LSPs and LAAs.

5.2.3 The 'facilitation' of services – a shift towards super-structural support

While my respondents were reporting on the shrinking of women-only front-line services and community outreach projects that provide direct care and support for women in need, as previously suggested I came across some blossoming second-tier organisations in the WVCS on renewed and extended contracts from central government and charitable trust funding for policy work, capacity building and the provision of training for front-line organisations. The Women's Resource Centre, for instance, has just achieved the status of a large second-tier VCO with a £1,153,737 annual income in the financial year ending in March 2009⁸⁹.

⁸⁹ Data retrieved from online data bank provided by GuideStar UK. See: http://www.guidestar.org.uk/gs_financials_simple.aspx?CCReg=TotAD%2faWwB8k1uf3cu%2bElQ%3d%3d&strQuery=WRC, access date: 26/07/2010. WRC however lost substantial funding from central government under the Coalition government (cf. subsection 7.1.4).

There were also a handful of new initiatives for which larger women's organisations or local networks and projects had been able to attract funding under the auspices of partnership working, consortium bidding, capacity building, and/or the 'innovation' of public services. In the following, I want to refer to some of these projects that show some common characteristics. As some of them gained national reputation and won awards by the UK government, these projects might be indicative for future trends in funding allocation, which it would be interesting to outline further.

The 'facilitation' of services through support for coordination and cooperation

It is increasingly difficult for smaller women's organisations to attract funding for the direct and secure staffing of their front-line services, funding that would guarantee the continuation of the existing projects and services *in house* or the building up of *new* front-line and outreach services. However, some larger organisations I came across were successful in doing so, and retrieved additional infrastructural support for the facilitation and co-ordination of front-line services and 'capacity building' in front-line agencies.

Furthermore, several new projects, proudly presented as 'innovative' and a step forward, could organise only funding for posts in management and administration if any salary for staffing at all, and thus relied heavily on continuing or newly organised voluntary commitment by front-line workers and/or front-line organisations. An emblematic example here is a partnership project between statutory services and the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector in one of London's boroughs. After years of combined efforts by women from voluntary sector organisations in that borough, the local authorities finally supported the creation of a coordinating advice and referral centre for victims of domestic violence (hereafter referred to as Z). The project has attracted funding from various central and local government schemes, has increasing numbers of referrals and has built up a national reputation for its realisation of partnership working⁹⁰.

The centre is part of the statutory sector, in the sense that it is not organised as an independent VCO: the local authorities provide the infrastructure in terms of premises and have directly employed an administrator, a senior worker and a centre coordinator. Expertise and staff for the actual advice and front-line services are contributed by local women's organisations, some statutory bodies and private law firms, which were all asked to contribute and participate by allocating some of their activities to the centre. These agencies, however, do not receive any compensation for their commitment.

⁹⁰ It won central government awards and was positively mentioned in a report by the National Audit Office.

While seeing some advantages for the women seeking advice through the centre, some managers of the local WVCOs that agreed to cooperate were openly critical of the project's impact in terms of the signal for funding bodies, their organisations' future and the working conditions for their employees. Despite the long work experience that has been collected over the last decades and the continuous support given in terms of consultation and unpaid management work for the formation of such a coordinating centre for DV services, women's voluntary and community organisations have not been acknowledged for their efforts, neither in terms of agreements on secured funding for their projects or specific posts for the front-line services such a centre offers, nor in terms of any official recognition of their contribution of expertise. There has been a lot of input by single voluntary sector organisations for the conceptualisation and realisation of the centre, but the credit and money it is and could be attracting are not shared:

“We feel that the LA are taking over. We really do feel that ... all these years we've helped the LA a lot, in terms of consultation, gaps, support, all of that, but yet when the services happen, at the moment the DV money that might be coming into the borough, is going for council organisations like Z, money isn't coming to the VS. So when they are putting money, it's for their projects. Whatever new money that is coming in, it is the Council which is employing. (...) All the resources will be going to this amazing centre, but no one of us will be there! (...) That is what is happening, that there is a lot of work being done, a lot of support, yet we do not see the resources, we do not see credit given to us or acknowledgement that we've been working in this area for years.”⁹¹

When I spoke to the coordinator of the centre, she highlighted its success in terms of the referral rates and the awards and acknowledgement the project has attracted by various government agencies. She made the point that the centre has resulted in a better coordination of the (still) existing DV services in the borough and thus better service provision. The success of the centre relies on support by all the different statutory bodies and voluntary agencies. The response of these service providers was “generally very positive” as she was able to convince them that the participation would bring various benefits, not only for women affected by DV, but also in terms of its contribution to the achievement of the single agencies' targets. So, for instance, she made the point that coordinated advice and information to local women in need would help to reduce the number of homelessness applications in the borough and thus support the housing department in meeting its targets. She acknowledged, though, that providing

⁹¹ Pseudonym omitted to secure anonymity of my respondents.

staff for the required advice services has been difficult for some of the participating VS agencies, including the women's organisations of the borough:

“I think the main hindrance why people can't commit is around staffing. If they don't have the capacity in the first place to staff their own agency, they then can't say 'we will work here an afternoon a week'.”⁹²

The 'facilitation' of services through support for joint bidding, subcontracting and professionalization

If one pays attention to government initiatives for infrastructural support and capacity building in the VCS, providing support for joint working and consorting bidding seems to be the way to go. Exemplary for additional support to the local women's sector is the borough B2, where the building of a local network of women's organisations had already been initiated under the lead of the Equalities Section in the local administration in the mid 1990s⁹³. Local government funding had been successfully organised for capacity building and management training for local women's organisations. The project then also attracted central government funding under the *ChangeUp* programme with the aim to build up a consultation body for the local women's sector, to make the participating organisations fit for consortium bidding in the upcoming commissioning rounds under LAAs, and to support the single agencies in widening their funding basis. There was the hope that the network could facilitate partnership working, that by joining forces and investing in the organisations' management skills, organisations would be able to attract further trust funding for their local community projects.

While the project is unique in its character, it remains to be seen whether it can really attenuate the situation in terms of the sustainability of the participating organisations. The network relies on the voluntary commitment of single organisations. Participants do not get any compensation for their activities as a consultation body. It remains to be seen how future commissioning rounds under LAAs will affect the small and highly specialised organisations participating in the network, whether the network will be successful in achieving its objectives and thus able to attract (non-)governmental funding via consortium bidding and continue its activities in the future.

The participation in joint bidding has, however, not shown the overall expected positive outcomes for the participating organisations when judged against the allocation of secured funding for local front-line services. Nora, the community development

⁹² Pseudonym omitted to secure anonymity of my respondents.

⁹³ I referred to that centre in subsection 5.1.1.

officer who supports the network, and Gil, the manager of one of the remaining women-only worker-cooperatives in London participating in it, both reported independently of each other on several incidents in B2 alone, in which local WVCOs that had taken part in joint bidding in the role of subcontractors had provided the required services but had in the end not been paid for their work because the leading partner organisations went either bankrupt or just refused to pay. The local and regional commissioning bodies neither took any notice of this and changed their handling of joint bidding accordingly, nor did they stop their funding for that particular service provider which had failed to pay its subcontractor(s).

Gil questioned quite radically whether women's organisations were in need of additional capacity building. Better coordination among local women's organisations and support for interest representation is welcomed, yet how much is support for the development of management skills in micro and small organisations in times of commissioning really needed? Women's organisations would not miss out under the current funding regime because of missing skills. The emphasis on training and capacity building would cover the real hindrances in the process of funding allocation for single women's organisations, which would rather be of a structural nature of the imposed requirements: future opportunities for winning local borough and London-wide government contracts will be overwhelmingly a question of *scale* and not of *quality*. She predicted that the scale needed to win funding by local and regional government bodies will be well beyond the capacity of all the local women's organisations put together.

Gil reiterated her observation that, under these conditions, women's organisations are increasingly lured into highly problematic forms of collaboration. Private companies and larger generic charitable service providers, lacking the connection to the local communities, would invite micro and small voluntary front-line organisations to take part in projects under their guidance. The leading organisations with capacities for professional fundraising and a 'lean' service provision would organise the funding, the micro and small organisations would provide the receiving ends: the 'clients'.

Her organisation was approached several times and always rejected this kind of offer. According to Gil, organisations are trapped if they accept: although they gain some form of support for their communities and the groups of vulnerable people they stay in contact with, they lose control over the form and content of support. Furthermore, they do not profit from the funding for overheads that could be used for the building up of their own infrastructure, for better fundraising and campaigning on their organisation's and their service users' behalf. Most importantly, they are not involved in and/or paid

(enough) for the actual service delivery they are interested in, in order to retain their qualified front-line staff. Their actual contribution, all the organisations' activities in and for the various communities, all the necessary and much needed support and community work for women that is involved, remains unpaid. Moreover, although the local community organisations were crucial in bringing about the positive results of this kind of project, the success would be listed as better output figures for the leading organisation. This larger organisation would then again be in a better position to bid for further funding in the next commissioning rounds.

Other respondents from small and highly specialised organisations also referred very negatively to the request by funders for collaboration with bigger generic VCOs. Some had seen their input being used by these big service providers to offer projects under their roof without giving them any chance for further participation. Their ideas had been picked up, marketised and formed into sellable projects to funders. The realisation of these projects, however, then lacked the qualities and detailing that these respondents had been looking for (Dora, Saskia, Maren, Farida, Jasmin, Agatha).

Gil also mentioned that funding for capacity building has often resulted in support for umbrella bodies that, in order to 'protect' their member organisations, would introduce additional quality marks and standardised quality assessment frameworks. There are increasing numbers of umbrella bodies in the Voluntary Sector with increasingly distinctive quality marks. This situation was also negatively mentioned by the LIO consultant Tania and Barbara, an officer in a smaller medium second-tier organisation. The participation in various assessments against those new standards, let alone the organisational adjustments necessary for achieving them, is very cost- and work-intensive⁹⁴, resulting again in a negative selection of organisations that cannot afford investments in this area and who therefore do not profit from these developments. The introduction of quality marks has often been mentioned as a sign for the 'professionalisation' of Voluntary Sector service providers. It would, however, be accompanied by a decimation of highly qualified micro and small organisations and is thus, in a sense, connected to a loss of quality in the services provided. My respondents explicitly exempted WRC from this development and described their engagement as very helpful in terms of the training, support and policy work provided.

That smaller organisations lose out on infrastructural support for the VS financed by government bodies was also reflected in the interviews I conducted with women

⁹⁴ Gil's organisation maintains five quality marks. They cost the organisation "several thousand pounds just to get them".

working for a second-tier women's organisation. Liliana, development officer, and Clare, policy officer, described their organisation's difficulties in attracting funding for particular development and training programmes: while training around the upcoming commissioning of services can easily be organised, it is increasingly difficult to retrieve funding for the development and support work that has been asked for by micro, small and newly created organisations, thus for activities which cannot be directly linked to the preparation of organisations for contract bidding in service delivery.

Some second-tier organisations have been able to extend the number of policy officers on government contracts and have thus intensified their campaigning and advocacy activities on behalf of the WVCS at national and regional level. There remain structural difficulties, however, capacity-wise and in terms of the intricacies of local decision-taking processes, in organising the much needed support for women's organisations at *local community level*, where some crucial decisions on the future of the women's sector have been and will be taken (cf. WRC 2010).

5.3 Neocommunitarian reconfigurations

In the neocommunitarian phase of neoliberalism the innovative role and importance of the delegation of power towards service users, local communities and local government for the improvement of social care provision is emphasised. Voluntary Sector Organisations are addressed as partners for innovation. Under New Labour they had been promised, in the various COMPACTs, increasing inclusion in the direct provision of services, consultation for expertise and involvement in the various processes regarding public funding allocation. From the perspective of women's organisations, however, a more prescriptive and highly selective funding regime has emerged.

In this chapter, I have given an insight into the intricate outcomes of this transformation in public funding allocation and local government reform for front-line women-only service providers. From the perspective of women's organisations, neocommunitarian reform has led to the agglomeration of funding, a loss of services and organisations, and a delegation of the duty to care. There has been a decimation of the range of services provided to women and a dramatic loss of public funding for women-led projects. I have drawn mainly on examples from the VAW subsector. Projects in this field became dependent on commissioned contracts relatively early on, compared to other women's services, due to the centrally imposed allocation of funding for refuge accommodation under Supporting People. It has been argued that government's stated commitment (HM Government 2009) to improve the provision of services to women affected by violence is flawed by the very implementation of its overall public service reform. This is seen to rely on a strategy of 'facilitation' of service provision and the objective of cuts in public spending covered under the term 'efficiency gains', rather than on a guaranteed allocation of adequate funding to front-line organisations.

5.3.1 Unequal, selective and flawed working in partnership

New Labour promoted working in partnership with the Voluntary Sector as a new perspective under its neocommunitarian agenda for public service reform. The promised fairness for this working in partnership under the COMPACT has, however, not been met in practice for the vast majority of organisations in the WVCS. While second-tier organisations and larger organisations are directly consulted by central government and have extended their activities and influence, the majority of women's organisations, the micro, small and medium-sized organisations, are confronted with huge structural difficulties. These women's organisations face severe difficulties when making their case

heard at local government level, where most decisions on centrally reduced public funding for direct front-line services are made. I will discuss the following points that contribute to this state of affairs:

(1) Incentives to cut spending and to establish new and more competitive commissioning frameworks on local government level have led to an increase of public funding allocation under service contracts and a reduction of local grants. There are also increased pressures to meet efficiency targets under Supporting People and the Best Value framework. This has led to a restructuring of local authorities and has resulted in new commissioning bodies that need to specify in great detail the service provision they would like to see realised and an agglomeration of funding under increasingly bigger contracts. In comparison to earlier grant schemes and service level agreements, there has been a shift of decision-taking power in terms of the specification of service provision from local service providers to commissioners.

(2) Women's organisations report facing difficulties accessing and making an impact on the newly created decision-making bodies and procedures at local government level. Newly created partnership bodies for strategic orientation of local government spending, such as LSPs, are reported as not representing women's organisations' and minorities' interests. They are neither easily accessible nor democratically accountable.

(3) Commissioners to these bodies have been invited by local government reform and centrally released social cohesion policies to focus on *local* service user needs and to favour generic service provision over single-group funding. While women's organisations are mostly based in local communities, their services and campaigning remit is clearly beyond local residents and interest representation. Women's organisations have mostly focused on *women-only* services, and many organisations have answered communities' needs by organising *minority-specific* projects. As such, they face structural difficulties when making their case heard under the new commissioning frameworks.

(4) Centrally imposed performance indicators for VAW related issues and social care funding programmes have been criticised as insufficient in guaranteeing adequate service provision, and *any* centrally secured funding at all to women's front-line services. While the creation of *statutory* services like Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and local partnership projects have been pushed, these do not cover all the support needs by women's organisations' clients and victims of VAW, or rely in their direct support work on the further contribution of women's voluntary and community organisations that receive no (adequate) compensation for these (additional) efforts.

5.3.2 Denied responsibility for needs-adequate funding

Women's organisations are confronted with denied responsibilities for the allocation of sufficient funding for their services by central *and* local government. There are conflicting messages: local government should meet certain criteria and provide sufficient VAW services; at the same time, savings are expected to be made. There has not yet been any effective implementation of specific commissioning guidelines for VAW services at local government level that would secure adequate and stable funding under current and future commissioning rounds, neither for the wide range of existing services for which expertise has been developed over decades in the WVCS, nor for the much-needed formation of new services in under-provided areas.

SP increased the administrative burdens and reporting requirements to be met, for both the local authorities and the handful of providers selected for SP contracts. It introduced a more competitive tendering system in a step-by-step process. The loss of grant-funding schemes, the rise of low-cost commissioning and lack of representation of women's organisations in local government commissioning bodies have led to a dramatic decimation of the available range of VAW services provided on statutory funding.

The situation of under-funding for VAW women-only service providers, and in particular for those providing support for BAMER women, is aggravated by the fact that many women who address women's organisations are still or newly excluded from the list of clients for whom these providers would receive (sufficient) case-related financial reimbursement, be it on the grounds of their particular exigencies and needs (e.g. regarding drug abuse, dis/ability, language requirements), the actual period of time when they experienced abuse, or their particular residency or citizen status.

While additional government and charitable funding schemes have been supportive of coordinating projects and also some new initiatives in the WVCS, and the New Labour government has increased super-structural support in the form of contracts for capacity building and policy work (mostly provided through second-tier bodies) the continuation of the existing front-line VAW services for women, including counselling, advice, community and outreach work, is reported to be increasingly difficult due to a lack of stable and secure funding for the staffing of these projects. The new partnership projects with statutory bodies in the WVCS I came across and the examples of joint bidding in consortia reported upon by my respondents required the participating front-line agencies to provide additional commitment and resulted in insufficient financial reimbursements for the staffing of the actual services being delivered.

Women's organisations that have seen funding for their services cut are confronted with a dilemma: the services are still requested, firstly by the continuously high, even rising numbers of women in need of support, but also by statutory bodies still directly referring cases and asking for advice. There is an explicit and implicit selection in funding taking place that is resulting in a delegation of the generally promoted duty to care for *all* women in need: from national to local government and vice versa, and from government agencies and statutory services to the Voluntary Sector. What does this imply for the remaining organisations in the WVCS?

5.3.3 The loss of funding for BAMER women's organisations

Current conditions are putting increasing pressures on organisations in the WVCS. Providers are forced to rely heavily on additional non-governmental funding to keep their services running. Closures, subcontracting, the takeover of services by larger organisations and mergers amongst WVCOs are taking place. Long-standing community-based women's organisations are confronted with competition for reduced service provision contracts, from inside the women's sector as a result of mergers, and from generic providers. Housing associations have entered the scene, taking over refuge services that have previously been run by women's organisations.

Specialised BAMER WVCOs are reported as losing out in this development, as they are denied single-group specific funding *and* face difficulties finding adequate partners with whom to adopt similar strategies. This situation has been shown to have implications on the range of services and spaces being offered to women and, in consequence, on the selection of women being heard and provided with adequate support: there are less highly specialised publicly funded social care services for BAMER women, and many grassroots projects and community services have vanished.

There has been a lot of discussion around the so-called 'tescoisation' of the Voluntary Sector (see for instance Backus and Clifford 2010), and whether organisations in the VS might become increasingly big. With reference to the reported developments in the VAW subsector of the WVCS and the especially detrimental effects on BAMER organisations, I would like to argue that public concern should be directed to this issue, but should reach beyond the question of size and externally distinguishable organisational features. Of central importance is the question of what the changes in public funding allocation imply for the quality and characteristics of support work being publicly funded and thus, in this case, for the quality and division of labour in the provision of highly specialised women-only services. What does it mean when smaller voluntary

organisations and women's projects are losing out? This is concerning the questions of what kind of support work, for whom, under which conditions and in what kind of projects and cooperative constellations support is given under the upcoming commissioning of services.

In the next chapter, I will present my reading of the experience of precarity in social care in the neocommunitarian phase by focussing on women's experiences of formal employment and working conditions in women's organisations. I will address the issue of how women's organisations are dealing internally with the imposed changes under commissioning and the more-than-obvious spending cuts. How do women working in the WVCS experience and – more importantly – deal with the ongoing transformation? The women's sector has always been characterised by high amounts of unpaid labour as most projects were initiated on a mere volunteer basis and are carried by women's commitment to projects. How is the current transformation experienced under continuously precarious conditions? What is the impact on front-line support work and services for women of the rise of contract funding? I will argue that an analysis of the affective resonance of the current shifts in the WVCS in terms of women's everyday experiences of change regarding their working conditions can give an important contribution to a political reading of the ongoing public service reform in the UK.

CHAPTER 6: Working experiences in the WVCS unravelled

The precarisation of work has often been described by using an analysis of formal employment conditions and a documentation of working environments in their 'objective' characteristics (Allen and Henry 1996; Gallagher 2008; Rodgers and Rodgers 1989; Vosko 2009). Studies on precarity aim to contribute a political reading of ongoing social transformation processes by focussing on people's experiences and strategies to deal with their working and living conditions. The productive sites of everyday working and living environments are accounted for by offering clues as to how to address and unravel subjective experience. Social transformation processes are rendered palpable in the everyday of workers' lives. The subjective definition and accounts of the transformation of work, including its experienced burdens and qualities as well as the tracing of ambivalent configurations in the interplay between subjective desire and need, are paramount ingredients in this political reading of precarity. Efforts to overcome and deal with unfavourable everyday situations are addressed and inserted into the bigger picture of current attempts and collective achievements in challenging precarious working conditions.

Employment in the WVCS is rather precarious, as funding for women's organisations and social care and community projects continues to be short-term and insecure. Most women's projects were initially established from the 1970s onwards on the mere commitment of volunteer labour and only slowly received financial support by government. For decades, women's organisations have fought for more secure funding for their projects. However, workloads are still very high and the remuneration of work is usually scarce. So what is perceived by workers in the WVCS in this situation as *palpable change* in terms of their working conditions when it comes to recent public service reforms? And what does this mean for my reading of precarity in the (W)VCS?

This chapter draws on my discussions with women working for women's organisations that evolved from encounters for formal interviews on everyday experiences of working conditions in the WVCS. These took place in the period autumn 2007 to early summer 2008. The presentation of my analysis of these accounts is focused on providing illustrative examples of the variety of subjective experience of working conditions in the WVCS and is divided in two sections. In subsection 6.1 I introduce into the multiplicity of the expressed desires and needs that women reported upon when we explored their motives and the enjoyments and burdens implied in working in women's organisations. A common feature here was that my respondents perceived seeking

employment in the women's sector as a precarious balancing act between formal employment conditions and more informally organised aspects of work in the WVCS. By providing thick descriptions of these subjective balancing acts, drawing on accounts of respondents who worked in different positions for different types of organisations, I delineate the apparent qualitative characteristics of the WVCS as a work environment and present some of my respondents' exemplary ways of dealing with the ongoing transformations in social care.

An increasing disparity regarding working conditions in the WVCS can thereby be traced – despite the common reference to widespread job insecurity *across* the VS. Women reported front-line support workers as being most negatively affected by recent public service reforms. Subsection 6.2 provides a closer analysis of subjective experiences of working conditions in direct support, drawing on accounts of three interviewees who worked in the position of project managers in three different front-line support projects for women affected by VAW. The chapter ends by drawing some analytic conclusions regarding the experience of precarity and the role of practices of care in the WVCS.

In analysing my collected impressions and the interviews conducted in the sector, I focused on clues to women's subjective definition of work, including their motivation to work, their description of the perceived qualities of their work and their experience of burdens and tensions. Throughout, I have elaborated their *experience of change* regarding these aspects. As delineated above, I start with a closer elaboration of my respondents' endeavours in the WVCS, as these convey a first-hand impression of the diversity of situations women are coming from and are confronted with in the WVCS.

6.1 Seeking employment in the WVCS: a precarious balancing act

Throughout my respondents' accounts, a difference was made between the quality of *formal* employment conditions and the *informally* organised qualities of work they seek to enjoy in women's organisations. While remuneration is mostly scarce and employment benefits and allowances above the statutory requirements are rare, women emphasised that their additional, sometimes foremost, consideration was looking for qualities of work regarding its content, direction and impact, flexibility in work time arrangements, and the creation and experience of peer-to-peer support at their workplace, all aspects of work which were randomly formalised in any agreement with their direct employers. Weighing up the impact of the formal employment conditions versus the encountered and created everyday realities of work in their everyday lives and overall experience of the quality of work in the women's sector was crucial in each of the employees' accounts of individually and collectively experienced burdens and tensions.

6.1.1 Affording a job that you can really believe in

Sarah works as an information officer for a generic second-tier women's organisation where she is also engaged as a shop steward for UNISON. She described facing employment insecurity as being “part of the deal” in the (W)VCS. Job insecurity is a reality, *regardless of* the formal conditions you agree upon in your particular contract. People face insecurity, as funding for the sector and women's organisations' projects is just not reliable:

“Part of the deal when you work in the Voluntary Sector is that you know that your employment is insecure, because even if you didn't have a fixed term contract, even if you had a permanent contract, *it's so – so normal, you know, if the money goes, that you lose your job. It's just that, the funding is just not very secure.*”

Sarah did describe a difference between working for successful larger organisations like hers⁹⁵ and for those smaller ones which struggle to survive, as bigger organisations have more financial leeway when it comes to sudden funding cuts. There is normalised employment insecurity across the VS that only differs in degree, here directly linked to the status of endowment of an employing organisation and not necessarily to the formal contract arrangements a worker has with their organisation.

⁹⁵ Her organisation can be categorised as larger-medium.

This condition of a generalised vulnerability of the workforce has also been reflected upon in the debate around job insecurity in Britain. It is argued that public sector reform and the flexibilisation of labour markets has resulted in increasing levels of job insecurity which are however no longer necessarily reflected in an increase of fixed-term or atypical employment vis-à-vis work under permanent contracts, and thus difficult to portray in studies that merely focus on quantitative analyses of changes in terms and conditions regarding the temporary mode of particular forms of formal employment contracts. As discussed in subsection 1.1.1, this phenomenon has been interpreted as an outcome of the generally weakened protection against dismissal in Britain (Burchell 2002; Burchell et al. 1999; Hudson 2002).

Like many of her colleagues, after her degree, Sarah had started work on a one-year contract, based on a particular charitable grant her organisation was able to attract for a particular project. Since she started working in that post, the organisation underwent major structural changes, with her work being continuously transformed without any formal and written accordance. She welcomed these transformations, as she was actively involved, participating in the re-structuring and the increasing success of the organisation. Participatory processes at work feature here as important aspect in the overall valuation of employment environments (cf. Cunningham et al. 2010). It was, however, very difficult for her in her first year in the organisation and she worried a lot about her future employment, being told every three months whether she could continue to work. She had in fact endured working in these conditions over two years without any written confirmation of her status of employment, because she felt supported: by the team she was working in, the director and the board of trustees. The job she did for the organisation was quintessential for its survival and there was trust that her director would find ways to pay her, which is what ultimately happened.

Sarah was looking for other jobs during that time and went for two job interviews, so she had contemplated about refusing to work under such precarious employment conditions, but nothing really had attracted her more than her current job, where she enjoys being inserted in a stimulating and supportive environment, in which women can contribute to projects and campaigns that they care for, in an organisation which has a direction she can fully agree with. The quality of work in terms of its content and direction is consciously weight up against the insecurity it might involve.

Sarah mentioned explicitly though that she was in a lucky position as she could take the risk of losing employment and was working in an important post for an organisation with a promising future. She has some savings, has no family members or

children to take care of, is young and healthy and would have been able to move back into her parents' house in the worst case. Precarious workers' personal background in terms of class, also in terms of age, health and family status, give different degrees of leeway to juggle the imposed strains at work.

Sarah does not earn a lot of money, but her job fits into her life in terms of working hours and work content, so that she has time to enjoy her life with, and even during, the job she does. This is displayed as a rare chance with many people in London working very hard, very long hours, in jobs that might bring (a lot of) money but give them neither freedom nor fulfilment. Women start working for women's organisations, knowing very well that they will not necessarily have either the job security and salary, or the formal employment benefits that equivalent jobs in the private or public sector might offer.

Sarah emphasised, however, that one normally can expect flexible worktime arrangements and that this flexibility is highly important to her as it is to many other women, especially when they have children or relatives to care for. It might be hard for employees in the WVCS to fully profit from that flexibility whenever they like, due to the immense workload most organisations are confronted with, but, generally speaking, offering flexibility would be recognised as being an important aspect of how you plan to organise work. It is suggested by Sarah that a difference exists in organisational cultures of work:

“I mean it is difficult because you obviously have, you may have very high targets to meet according to your projects, *and often people do have to work long hours even if technically you have flexible time*, you know, your project has to do X, Y and Z and that means you have to work to seven, eight in the night. *Well, sometimes you have to do that, but generally charities don't plan to work that way.*”

However, this difference in organisational culture of work is not necessarily a *formalised* feature in the WVCS, as it is randomly laid out in any written accordance between employer and employee. Her colleagues in the women's sector had had similar experiences regarding formal employment; most had even been working for longer periods of time without *any* formal agreement. Sarah described this as common practice in the WVCS as funding is short-term, jobs are mostly project-related and thus linked to the whims of external funders, despite the actual work that people are involved in being long-term projects and continuous service provision for longstanding organisations.

However, not everyone is in the same position and coping in the same way, not even in Sarah's organisation. Many colleagues who have children to look after were

forced to do additional freelance and service jobs on top of their commitment in order to make a living in London with a family. Some of them left during the recent re-structuring period through fear of suddenly being made redundant. A high turnover of staff is very common in the VS, as workers are facing both employment insecurity *and* low remuneration:

“People do move around a lot and often I think when people do they just have more responsibilities. They make a very rational decision and say: 'well okay, I need a job that has more security and/or must be better paid', because the problem is *no job is that secure but if you're reasonably well paid then you can afford a bit of insecurity, I suppose*, whereas with a lot of the Voluntary Sector *you're not very well paid and insecure* so it's kind of the worst of both worlds.”

This situation has been discussed as being a major problem for organisations in social care (Barnard and Broach 2004). Sarah reflects on the reasons *why* workers leave: the Voluntary and Community Sector is depicted as having the reputation of offering interesting projects to work on and flexible work arrangements, though it is immediately acknowledged that worktime flexibility can crumble under high workloads and that jobs – that are anyway not paid well – then lose their attractiveness in terms of offering suitable working environments, especially for carers.

Caring responsibilities feature here as a crucial yet paradoxical aspect in the experience of precarity: both in the description of the experience of a positive quality of work in the Voluntary Sector despite precarious employment conditions, and the experience of confronting and enduring these employment conditions. Women with caring responsibilities chose to work for women's organisations as they are offered attractive worktime flexibility and interesting part-time employment. But they are also the first to leave when an organisation gets into trouble as they can afford neither the subsequently higher workloads, because of their other caring commitments at home, nor the increased risk of losing their source of income. The everyday experience of dealing with precarity in social care is described as walking a tightrope, with precarious labour balancing various different, often conflicting, needs and desires, facing the necessity to juggle various commitments at the same time (cf. Fantone 2007; Lorey 2010).

Sarah's story was a story of success for the enduring team in her organisation. When they realised that the organisation was in a better financial position, they decided collectively to take action, got UNISON on board for advice on contracts and put pressure on the board of trustees. They were arguing that the organisation should be worrying about future funding and not the single employees individually, and that the

organisation should take a lead in the women's sector in terms of the implementation of better working and employment conditions.

In the end, the remaining workers were given new, permanent contracts with better terms and conditions, and even a small pay rise, so that with the rate of inflation they were actually not facing payment cuts in real terms. The period of paid maternity leave was extended, and also those women whose female partners were expecting a baby were allowed to take two weeks' paid leave in lieu of paternity leave. Formal improvements to precarious employment have thus been successfully established, despite precarity, by the collective efforts of those workers who could previously keep up with the pressures imposed by prolonged job insecurity and low remuneration in an organisation that was able to profit from the shifts in neocommunitarian funding arrangements.

However, despite these recent achievements in their formal employment conditions, Sarah reported finding it difficult to think and work on long-term projects. She plans ahead only in three to six month periods as she knows that the financial situation of her organisation could change at any time and that these formal improvements might then not hold. The uncertainty about her and her co-workers' employment and the organisation's future is undermining her efforts to establish a smooth working routine:

“It's very disruptive. It makes it more difficult to work efficiently and effectively because you kind of think, well, I've got to do short-term goals, really, because I don't know.”

This is what has been depicted elsewhere as the particular temporal mode of work for precarious labour: being deprived of any foreseeable future is a constant feature and undermines labour's productiveness in the present. At the same, it can be a resource for instigating social transformation processes through the active refusal of other more restrictive and monotonous forms of labour (Hardt and Negri 2009; Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

6.1.2 The feminist work ethos is not for everyone

When I asked Marta, director of a second-tier organisation in the VAW subsector, about the employment conditions for the women working in her organisation, she reported on a very complicated funding mix upon which her and her six staff members' salaries and individual contracts were based. This funding basis was the best she personally had ever experienced in more than two decades of her career in several voluntary organisations:

precarious employment here is a constant, not an exception. She had recently been able to win and then renew a contract for policy work with a government funding body (T), extending the secured funding period for at least one project. This contributes to the overall mix of funding her work relies upon lasting around two years, which was perceived as quite extraordinary:

“Each member of my staff is multiply and differently funded, so it's not possible to say how long our contracts are. Maybe they have got full funding for 18 months. With one of them I am about 30% of her salary short and I need to find that from somewhere else. With mine, the contract with [funding body T] pays for 2.1 members of staff, so that's 80% of me and 80% of someone else and 0.5 of another, so it's all over the place. This is though the most secure situation I have ever been in 23 years in the Voluntary Sector, so I am not particularly worried (...) Up until I entered this contract with [funding body T], I have never had more than probably about 18 months funding secured ever.”

Although this funding was ending in three months' time Marta was “not particularly worried” for herself because of the work experience she has gathered over the last two decades of work in the VCS. But she knows about the difficulties her employees would face if she fails to access new funding pots:

“After 23 years you learn to get a bit blasé about it, I am not un-employable. If all my funding went tomorrow, I could be employed by the end of the week (...). I am fine, but my staff wouldn't necessarily be fine if the money suddenly went.”

She recognised that the formal employment conditions in her organisation in terms of the individual contracts and employment benefits were not especially good, as they could only afford statutory deals, had no pension schemes and employment remained short-term and highly insecure. However, they could offer all the attractive conditions that would not necessitate extra spending: women could work in flexible ways, in a stimulating and supportive environment.

While Marta emphasised that she was looking after her team, that they were not being overworked, and that they could take time off or work part time to engage in training and further education for longer periods of time, she herself puts in a great effort to keep the organisation running. Having no children and a supportive partner, she saw herself being in a position to do this. She described herself as being very lucky to live with a partner who cares for her, rather the other way around. He takes on most of the domestic workload and supports her in what she does.

Work in management positions in the WVCS means long working hours and involves continuous consideration. It takes place beyond the workplace and requires self-

management as it is difficult to stop thinking about it even in periods of non-work. Work in leading positions in social care thus becomes part of a life project, in which it is hard to keep a proper distance between the two. Enduring engagement in campaigning, policy and networking for the women's sector and VAW issues is, however, experienced as fulfilling needs for interesting and stimulating work content; it enables one to bring issues politically forward.

Marta saw her job as fitting her personality, as she would become “self-destructive” when bored. Doing her job keeps her “intellectually stimulated, interested and engaged” and prevents her “try[ing to] create some drama to entertain [her]self with”. In describing herself as a “sad obsessive geek” and saying that she would be ready to “slit her wrists by February” if she did not take time off over winter she hinted, however, at the downsides of the constellation she finds herself in (see Appendix 6 EI 5). The working routine that is taken on is seen as out of the norm and on the borderline of becoming self-destructive as in the long term this 'obsessive' way of working is exhausting her.

In an ostensibly self-deprecating description, continuous efforts to bring violence against women onto the agenda are described as an abnormal phenomenon, alluding to discourses in the psy-sciences about obsession, rather than relating this behaviour directly to the content of work and the employment conditions policy workers in leading positions in the WVCS are confronted with. Marta's way of working is 'abnormal' and she perhaps needs to engage in a different form of 'taking care' of herself and her working habits. I referred to this pervasive phenomenon of individualising regarding affective efforts in section 2.2., where I discussed and criticised the isolating effects of the framing of affective efforts as emotional labour/volunteering. The related pervasive application of psychological discourses, a focus on individual efforts and the dedication of personal commitment in the analysis of subjective ways of dealing with strenuous situations then leads to a mere focus on success or failure in individual coping strategies.

At the same time, previously successful undertakings to find ways of dealing with '*her* obsession' give hints as to how one could twist this pervasive discourse on psychological pathology and 'failure' in (self-)care in precarity. Longer breaks of six weeks to three months every winter have stopped Marta's brain thinking about the issues she is involved with in her job, and in previous years brought about the needed recovery for keeping the constellation of hard work, she finds herself in sustainable in the long term. Whereas precarious, project-related employment can potentially give workers in social

care that flexibility, these arrangements become more difficult to realise under conditions of contract funding.

Marta's discourse is thereby framed by the use of 'slitting wrists', which alludes to the pervasive practices of self-harm and high suicide rates among women who experience(d) violence. This reference to 'unsuccessful coping strategies' that are more often applied by victims of violence when support is missing brings to the fore the constant confrontation with an urgent work content and the continuous efforts that jobs require in these areas of social care work.

Further, as the structural conditions for WVCOs and precarious labour in social care become more restrictive and blind to issues of gender and race (see subsection 5.1.2), and work therefore objectively difficult to organise in sustainable ways under the commissioning of services, Marta puts it down to an effort of management in WVCOs being ultimately responsible for establishing good working environments for employees despite the externally created meagre conditions.

Good working conditions were thereby defined by: (a) flexi-time and giving people time off when needed; (b) a flat hierarchy with explicit definition of responsibilities; (c) a welcoming, nurturing and supportive atmosphere; and (d) a stimulating environment providing workers with opportunities for training, networking and participation in collective and mutually supportive campaigning activities. These aspects are discussed as the good qualities of work offered in the women's sector, which stand for the specific collaborative work ethos in women's organisations. These conditions, however, are (as yet) randomly formalised in employment agreements and can thus be described as informally organised working conditions in the sector.

These arrangements – even if formally acknowledged in contracts, e.g. in flexi time – are described as being easier to implement and safeguard in practice by those organisations that are *not* confronted with the pressures and the “sense of urgency” (Marta) that arise when you are dealing with immediate support needs by service users. Marta acknowledged that it is easier to postpone a deadline for a policy paper in her organisation than to deny a request by a service user in a front-line organisation – for workers themselves and also for their managers. People might struggle not to provide support to others in a face-to-face situation, when the latter are in desperate need of help.

As this has always been a constant feature in front-line support services and is now becoming more acute than ever under more competitive and meagre conditions, women's organisations need to pay extra attention to the creation and preservation of supportive work environments. Here, Marta reflects in similar ways the needed *attention* to

issues of care and to the creation of supportive environments as referred to by Precarias a la deriva, whose position I discussed in section 2.3: “A politics of care calls for practicing care itself in everyday life (...) taking care of each other was part of this politics” (Casas-Cortés 2009, p. 474). Precarias frame these practices of care as collective endeavours and as part of a broader *politics of care* which involves becoming aware of each other's responsibilities, inter-dependencies and needs by creating alliances across different groups of workers, creating places for political action in which these can be explored and practiced in the everyday. A supportive and caring working environment is depicted here as a crucial component in resisting precarity (Casas-Cortés 2009; Precarias a la deriva 2004b).

Marta observed that efforts to keep the implied feminist work ethos alive were no longer perceptible in all organisations she comes across. Flatter hierarchies make it easier to create supportive working environments and this is *in principle* easier to organise in smaller second-tier and front-line organisations. Big providers are challenged in this respect because of sheer size, number of employees and regulatory requirements. In her view, only a handful of medium-sized to large front-line women's organisations in London with strong political analysis have succeeded in keeping their critical impact by engaging in a sustainable politics of care, and work on their own feminist practice in the provision of social care services. She directly attacked the two big players Women's Aid and Refuge for not doing enough to secure good working conditions for the women working in all their various affiliates and front-line projects, despite their success in attracting funding.

This situation was further illustrated by Evelyn, manager of a large front-line organisation in the VAW subsector that recently emerged from mergers of previous separate organisations. Evelyn emphasised WVCOs' need to redefine their position under current shifts in government funding streams. She saw, however, her organisation as being in a better position now to provide good employment conditions for workers than ever before. Workers could concentrate on their specific tasks according to their qualifications, and were no longer permanently co-involved in administrative and fundraising tasks for their own posts and the organisation's services, as they could now afford administrators and professional fundraisers. Organisations like hers, that combine generic services with some specialised ones under one roof, would be in a much better position to do this because of more funding opportunities than organisations focussing on specific ethnic minorities and/or services for refugees.

Evelyn also spoke about the new burdens for women in her position being left alone with the new challenges in management, especially after mergers. She still perceived mergers and the growth of single women's organisations as being the only opportunity to safeguard the quality of direct support work *and* a feminist impact on creating supportive working conditions in the remaining field of VAW service provision. The competition over SP funding with generic service providers outside the sector, like large housing associations, is becoming ever more acute and daunting. I showed in chapter 5 how these competitive pressures have already resulted in an ongoing reconfiguration of the WVCS with take-overs of smaller highly specialised projects, the transformation of workers' collectives into hierarchical organisations, many closures of autonomous BAMER women's projects and the loss of refuge accommodation to generic providers outside the sector.

A similar impression was given to me by Helen who works as a project coordinator for a large organisation providing a mix of generic front-line services and policy and campaigning work in and on behalf of the VAW subsector in several boroughs of London. She saw her organisation as being in a good position to provide very good working conditions, but highlighted the continuous efforts of her managers in establishing these. She said that she was enjoying quite exceptional formal employment conditions, having recently been put on a permanent contract. Even though most people in her organisation still worked on short-term contracts, the workforce was portrayed as being very well looked after:

“Oh God, we have fantastic terms and conditions! Our director believes that women shouldn't be underpaid because they are women, because they are doing caring work. We are well paid, we get thirty days annual leave a year, we get a 7% pension, and we have unionised staff. We also have a flexi-time system, so if a client calls you at 5:30 and says: 'I need your help now', you can get back that time the whole next day. If you work on a Saturday you can take off a day in the next week. We also have a 24/7 counselling company's care-line, we can call up telephone counselling support at any time. The whole organisation. Everyone in the organisation. And all staff and volunteers can have five sessions of face-to-face counselling a year. (...) It means in the long run we keep workers longer. Our workers are happy, our workers don't burn out, and we fulfil the duties of care to our clients. I wouldn't dream of leaving my volunteers unhappy, miserable and un-cared for. And our director does the same for all the staff, and she takes care of us and we are very well trained as well. We have the 'Investors in people' mark.”

This said, it must be mentioned that Helen reported on the fact that her organisation had experienced an exceptional growth of about 125% over the last 10 years (1998-2008), during which it had not only increased its staff numbers but also the

number of volunteers operating in its services. From no volunteers in 2000 they had by 2008 engaged thirty volunteers versus a growth from 30 to 100 members of paid staff. Even more volunteers were expected to work for the organisation in the future. Moreover, whole areas of newly offered services supported by funds from a government body were based on volunteer labour in the direct support provided. While being offered some counselling, good supervision and a small allowance for lunch and travel expenses, these volunteers can obviously not benefit from the above mentioned improvements in formal employment benefits.

The high workload for workers in the women's sector remains a big problem. It stops organisations thinking about ways to establish better working conditions in their *everyday practice*. There are huge difficulties and fewer opportunities for smaller organisations providing front-line services. Being chronically underfunded and understaffed, they struggle to merely survive and keep their range of services running. Many counselling services concerning VAW in community-based projects have already been cancelled or outsourced to freelancers and students who volunteer unpaid. However, Helen highlighted her impression that respectful treatment would still make a big difference in the overall quality of working conditions in the WVCS, if you compared them to conditions in the private sector:

“We are very very very heavily over-worked. It is always busy in the women's sector. And you keep thinking 'when it is quieter I do so and so'. And it never does get quieter; it is always non-stop heavy going. But we are very well treated, and treated with respect as human beings. Which you don't get in the private sector, you just don't.”

One aspect of the ongoing division of labour in the WVCS might thus be described as the following: there is an increasing disparity regarding working conditions in the WVCS despite the reference to common experience of insecurity. Employees of some growing organisations have been able to extend their employment-related rights and benefits and improve their working conditions. This development is unfortunately framed by the worsening of working conditions in other organisations. There is loss of employment and redundancies due to the closure of smaller autonomous and more collectively organised projects, and a general loss of (funding for) highly specialised (BAMER) services, which is putting pressure on working conditions there, as well as the increased use of unpaid volunteers. Volunteer labour is taking over important support work under the 'facilitation' of services described in subsection 5.2.3; they are at best offered caring environments, but no remuneration. Informally organised aspects of work in the WVCS that were highly valued by the women I interviewed (e.g. flexible work

arrangements, supportive environments, organisational structures that offer opportunities for work participation) are put at risk due to high or increasing workloads.

The burden of high workloads and the negative outcome of having superproviders in social care was contextualised again by Marta. She perceives an enormous increase of workloads for women across the VAW subsector that she relates to the attempts of some players in the WVCS to get these services mainstreamed:

“It is a kind of weird time, I think, because there are really quite some seismic shifts going on. There is all that kind of pain that comes from what was a previously radical feminist issue, being mainstreamed, and how painful it is to have your issue mainstreamed. (...) But every time we kind of like get into the mainstream, we go up the agenda, we just create a whole new load of battles for ourselves that we have to fight (...), *so the more DV goes up the agenda, the more work it creates for us.*”

The perception of constantly high workloads is pervasive and an increase of workloads is linked to the accelerated pace through which women's organisations and their employees have to adjust to external funding requirements and the related administrative demands and organisational re-structuring. There is work intensification due to cuts in, or complete loss of, previously attracted government and charitable funding and the restructuring processes these necessitate, or quite the contrary, due to the inclusion into new government and charitable funding streams which impose new and different work tasks or working routines. This is a difficult phase which women working in the women's sector have to struggle with, full of ambivalences and tensions. Claiming more government funding for projects that address VAW goes along with more battles to fight in order to keep the political analysis of VAW in these newly commissioned services alive. Working conditions suffer under these strains.

Claiming the necessity of getting DV services commissioned, and thus publicly funded, means that you accept a certain degree of regularisation, with particular aspects of your work being difficult to quantify, monitor and measure. You can fight for full cost recovery for certain forms of support work, and that is the reason why it is so important to get involved in the nitty-gritty of things in the very definition of quality in public service provision and their formalisation into commissioning guidelines and policies. Under the current shifts in funding allocation it is, however, increasingly difficult to keep the feminist work ethos alive, let alone get it on the official request list.

6.1.3 Urged to answer unmet needs

Ayan works on a one-year contract for a middle-sized organisation that provides health and advocacy services to women from different BAMER communities. I met her by chance together with other front-line workers in their office after a previously arranged interview with their project coordinator on a late Friday afternoon.

Ayan immediately asked me about my impression of the organisation's office space and described her astonishment when she first came into the building. Having had just left a well-paid job as information officer for a local government body located in a “shiny, warm and cushy open-space office”, she was shocked by the poor equipment of her new workplace. The organisation has been operating its services for three decades, but still faces difficulties providing enough computers and new furniture to its employees and is only able to afford a small and crowded office space in a poorly insulated community building, where it is cold in the winter and hot in summer.

Ayan had left her old job on a permanent contract as she felt the urge to contribute in a more direct way to better services for her African community⁹⁶, for people who are less fortunate than her. This is also a job in which she can finally make use of the specific expertise she gained during her university degree in health promotion. While the situation she finds herself in is “very precarious for [her](...)self, for the project, for the clients” because of insecure and insufficient funding, she highlights the direct satisfaction she experiences in doing front-line support work in comparison to her previous job:

“There wasn't instant satisfaction. *This is very close, very personally here, because you are dealing one-to-one with people.* In the office it was planning, with the environment and a good building, but you don't see it on the ground. Here it is about the basics. I am actually enjoying this a lot more, what I am doing now. (...) *It is a good thing when you are immersed. When you are doing one little thing, you are getting instant satisfaction.* It is more personal here, whereas there the boss says 'thank you' and gives you a birthday card, it is not the same, is it.”

Working in isolation at a desk, with a foreseeable set routine, preparing reports and presentations is contrasted with being involved in different activities together with local people, constantly confronted with new challenges as Ayan's current projects evolve. Many women in the WVCS reported on such an active refusal of work under isolating, and in their eyes less meaningful and thus unsatisfactory, work environments which they left for a project-related job in the WVCS to get directly involved in actively changing service provision on the ground. This could be read as a refusal of work as understood in autonomous Marxism, as it frees resources for other commitment and

⁹⁶ Not specified to secure anonymity of my respondent.

implies an active stance and political demand for change. (Weeks 2005, see also subsection 6.2.2).

Ayan's health promotion project is supposed to run for three years. Funding is dependent on a charitable grant that has to be renewed from year to year. Being yearly re-evaluated along the grant-specific aims and objectives poses her difficulties as “the reality of the grant is different from the reality of the project”. There is immense and overwhelming need for direct support and information she encounters in local communities, which stands in stark contrast to the available funding opportunities for projects that would address these.

Ayan described the urgent support needed by BAMER women and their families which she is experiencing in her everyday life on a daily basis. She is often urged to support women from her own community and also local health and social service staff in communication and mediation matters. Health advocacy like the service her organisation is offering, and even interpreter services, are completely missing in the borough of London she is currently living in⁹⁷, an area that has attracted many new immigrants from her country of origin since the 1990s. When she passes schools and the social housing office in the morning, she is recognised by people she has never seen before by her colour and appearance as embodying a certain ethnic background, and is directly asked for help:

“The chances that I pass there at 10 o'clock in the morning and don't get dragged into the service are very very slim. It is very harsh.”

Even in the borough Ayan is working in, which is renowned for a relatively good presence of BAMER VCOs and shows a high density of new residents from her country of origin, there are only two women with that cultural background on part-time posts working in translation and advocacy matters for *all* the hospitals, GP practices and social services together. At the time of the interview, Ayan had been working in her current post for over a year and had not yet had the chance to meet these two women, as they are too busy and overworked in their jobs.

The situation in local hospitals is very acute and she misses acknowledgement by government of how health advocacy and translator services would immediately help in organising and providing public services more efficiently. When Ayan was visiting a client of her who was recovering from a broken leg in a hospital, she realised that this woman had been lying there already for three days, ready to go home but still waiting for her

⁹⁷ different to the one she is working in

discharge, as hospital staff had no sufficient means of communicating with her. When the doctor came, she was immediately asked to help him as interpreter also with a number of other patients. She reported on being dragged into a translating job in that incident alone for over two hours, unpaid. Her aunt was once even asked for help with translation in a hospital while she was already in labour, ready to give birth to her child. Being dragged into 'volunteering' is depicted here as an everyday aspect of life for members of BAMER communities in London, as specialised services or even translator services are missing. People from different cultural backgrounds are differently addressed and confronted with these urgent needs of care and the insufficiencies in public service provision.

Ayan and her colleagues are urged to volunteer, but the extent to which support is needed and to which they are actually directly asked for in their everyday lives goes beyond her and others' capacities. Women come spontaneously to the organisation's office to seek help and support on a daily basis. Although this is disruptive, workers find it hard to tell them to leave as they know about – and experience directly – the stress these women are facing. This is the direct confrontation and acknowledgement of existing necessities of care, which is here framed as being marked by issues of class and race, thus it creates embodied knowledge and understanding about different communities' needs. Ayan observes an increasing segregation in this sense amongst London's population, which is troubling her. And yet local government still say to people and her organisation that there is no demand for this kind of service.

In the following paragraph, she explains the urge and sense of responsibility in providing support despite and because of this official neglect of need. The broader socio-political dimension of her everyday experience, of society becoming increasingly segregated in terms of class and race, is directly added to explain this sense of urgency:

“I could be working on a report and if a client comes in, she would ask me to read their post. It's not only language issues, there are literary issues as well. She would be upset if I would not do it, she can't look at the paper and tell whether it is important or not. She can't. I can't tell her to come back; I have to tackle it then and there. I don't mind doing it, but I would love her to come back, *but I know when I tell her to come back, it increases the stress on her, whether for me it is only ten minutes of my time. It is a different world we are living in. We are getting segregated, rich and poor, white and black, we will keep on being segregated; it is a very bleak picture.*”

Ayan was ashamed and furious to see that her colleagues, many of whom have worked hard in the organisation by providing much needed services to local people for a period of over twenty years, are not acknowledged and treated with respect by government and the public for the important job they do. And their commitment to

keeping and building up better services for local communities is immense: when some funding was suddenly cut some years ago, the whole team continued to work on their projects over a period of six months – without being paid. Thereupon they even had accepted going down to part-time employment in order to keep the organisation running and continuing their projects. There had been no drop-out from the team. How could they worry about pensions and additional employment benefits when their small salaries and the survival of the projects they work on are still not secured?

This reflects how the precarisation of work is advancing in some areas of social care, especially in specialised BAMER front-line support. As the situation is getting worse for BAMER communities under neocommunitarian neoliberalism, the claims of workers in the Voluntary and Community Sector are seemingly delegitimized. Employment in direct support work becomes a matter of accepting ever more precarious conditions and thus self-abandonment, degraded to answering a plethora of needs under increasingly insufficient and volatile funding arrangements. Need continues to be neglected, not only by government but also by charitable funders who stress the need to meet preset targets and measure high-flying outcomes of service provision, often not fitting the actual requirements of work in the everyday of Voluntary Sector front-line support workers. Their daily work is becoming increasingly an issue of meeting the most immediate and urgent needs first, which might be simple acts of daily, however crucial, forms of support (like reading letters) to avert stress in the lives of others.

The missing acknowledgement of the workers' commitment, expertise and the wide-ranging contribution of organisations like Ayan's to the wellbeing of local communities and the improvement of public services are experienced as

“insulting and embarrassing, for government, women and trade unions, everybody who works with employment. Over twenty years this organisation has been around and they still have to be proving themselves! [The borough] should be kissing their feet, they have done so much for the community!”

Sahira is one of the long-term health advocacy workers in that organisation. Sahira displayed her strong commitment to the project as being part of her community's *collective* effort to improve their living conditions in the borough. Poverty amongst her community is much higher than in other areas of London and housing is very poor, as flats are damp and overcrowded; both reasons why health problems are much more acute. Her short comments transmitted the urgent support need she experiences and the pride she takes in being part of the collective efforts to improve the situation in her borough, efforts that she describes as exceptional:

“We raise our voice. We need this project! We are all years shouting and raising our voice. But other boroughs: nothing like this. The system is so much depending on where you live.”

Mona, the project coordinator, reported on her own initial reluctance and doubts when she took on her post. The reason was that she has a British White background and had no experience in working with BAMER communities but was asked to lead the organisation's multicultural team, women who have been working in the area for much longer, and are more experienced than herself in what they do. She said she grew slowly into her role, being asked to be, and seeing herself as, a mediator between charitable funders, government bodies, health agencies, the women of her team and the local BAMER communities.

Listening and learning from each other's experiences and different cultural backgrounds, and above all working together as a women-only team is celebrated and appreciated by Mona as a highly valuable quality of work. Confronted with objectively precarious conditions and inequity, these are the informally organised qualities at work that she, her colleagues and the organisation as a whole are benefiting from. As women, they are caring for each other and have a pragmatic practice of mutual support. There is an understanding for the need for flexible work, which means that they are covering for each other if necessary. This particular nurturing atmosphere in the organisation helps them to overcome difficult times and keeps them running. It forms an important aspect of their working conditions, which further attracts them to this kind of work, in addition to the high motivation they find from being involved in the various support projects for local communities they strongly believe in, in political terms. This nurturing and supportive environment, sensitive to the necessities of care under conditions of deprivation and racist segregation, is often undervalued:

“It is almost like, being women, that you are a bit more better to weather the storms, out all together (...) there is certainly something extra that women are bringing to an organisation, the support, people help each other out. One woman is not well, and the group went out to visit her on a Friday afternoon. It has not to be prompted. People want to do it. All that is about working as women together and caring for each other, it is all real, evaluated stuff, but this is not acknowledged as being part of the gluing, in a way, I guess, as that what holds the organisation and makes it stronger, and in a way that is the reason why we are all here, as well. And then there is also the pragmatic part: there is an understanding for more need for flexibility, for caring for children, for caring for older relatives, not to take advantage or anything else, but there are times where we do need to cover for others. The women-helping-women.”

Here, *practices of care* are presented by Mona as a characteristic feature of *being woman*. The background of these highly gendered activities is not explicitly reflected upon. The

organisation is building up its strengths on the strong commitment and the activities that its workers are contributing to it informally. These could be depicted as non-remunerated affective efforts, and thus exploitative practice, which is being contributed to by perceiving these activities as a feature of a quality of *women's work* and women as essentially altruistic beings (cf. Baines 2004). However, this practice of caring is also framed here as a necessity to be collectively embraced as precariously positioned women 'to weather the storms out all together'. It shows how this caring commitment in precarity contributes to a positively experienced atmosphere and a practice of exchange for apprenticeship and thus finally to a highly productive working environment, from which not only the organisation and its service users and the general public is profiting from. It also provides a collective form of self-help and mutual support. This overall situation is, however, framed and made necessary by highly adverse working conditions and funding allocation for social care practices in a patriarchal, capitalist and racist society. In this situation, it attracts individuals to get involved as *caring women* to enable them to continue the precarious work whose content they strongly believe in, despite and because of the ongoing precarisation of their employment and their still unrecognised and informally organised activities in social care settings both at work and in the domestic sphere.

6.1.4 Working at the limit in informal environments

I first met Monica at a women's conference in London. She only had recently been informed by her organisation (Y) that it would close down the DV outreach services that she had been coordinating. Grant funding had been cut by the local authorities and her employer saw no other way than making her redundant. She agreed to meet me to report on her experiences.

Monica has gathered over a decade of work experience in various roles in frontline support services for women in the VCS. She had accepted employment on a one-year contract with Y, a medium-sized generic women's organisation, attracted by the opportunity this particular job had offered her: it was a management job in an area of DV service provision she feels strongly about. She had experienced domestic violence herself when her two children were young, and had been able to overcome the existential difficulties she then faced with the professional support of other women. Previous to her engagement in various roles in the WVCS, she worked as a qualified front-line support

worker and counsellor in other areas of social service provision⁹⁸. There she had faced difficulties moving into management positions, as she could not afford the extra qualifications she would have needed in the public sector for doing so. At the time she joined Y, Monica said she wanted to face the challenge of working as a project manager in the Voluntary Sector, as her children had left home and she could afford working harder and longer hours.

She looked for a challenging role and was drawn into it. Monica describes this condition as very common in a sector where women are willing to contribute more than they are asked for, as they perceive the immediate positive impact of their work on other women's lives and this exactly responds to their strongly felt *desire for social change*. Most women working for women's organisations have worked very hard over many years and sometimes decades without making much fuss about it. Adding requests on top of their current workload brings them to bursting point. Many of her colleagues were at the edge of being “burned out”. She described how this overworking very easily becomes an everyday reality when you are involved in organising front-line support to women in urgent need of support.

“You have to be the Jack of all trades and the master of none, because you have to have an insight into every area of your project. You do more than said in your job description and you tend to get people to do more actually than they are asked to do. Women will benefit in the long run, for yourself it is not so much more to do, so you just do it.”

She praised the informal and very personal relationship she had with her director and the board of trustees of Y. However, when problems with local government funding came up, this previously enjoyed informality was transformed into threatening uncertainty.

The experience of precarity is here characterised by both the desire for fulfilment and the experience of it, by being involved in direct support activities with others on challenging tasks in work that is perceived as quintessentially important and necessary, politically attractive and meaningful; but also by the experience of being under constant pressure to give full commitment, and so to accept working under high pressure and the risks imposed under informal and often highly insecure working conditions. This is creating a hyperproductive working environment through extra commitment in mutually supportive activities *as well as* through the fear of losing employment, the meaningful job and affective support at work that you receive and give. This constellation is easily

⁹⁸ Not specified to protect the anonymity of my respondent.

interrupted and converted into the very opposite: the loss of productivity and of everything you care about; the supportive relationships; a job that pays you; and opportunities for a meaningful contribution in social care.

Monica and the other workers on the project were made redundant from one month to the next, although they were working on contracts that would have secured them employment for a further four months. She immediately needed to look for another job; no help or support was offered by her organisation. In Monica's view, it was due to the failure of the board of trustees that no other solution could be found, one that would have saved the project *and* her job. In this situation, she was not involved in collective decision taking and strategic orientation of the project as before: all informally organised mutual support relations were suddenly cut. When I met her she was still outraged by this treatment, furious about the loss of an important support project for women in need, worrying about what would happen to the women she was supporting and working with, and anxious for her own situation as she could be soon dependent on Job Seekers Allowance.

Monica was considering suing the members of the board of trustees personally, an option that she described as not being an easy choice as she had been working with them very closely beforehand. She also felt ambivalent doing so, as she did not want to risk negative outcomes for the rest of the organisation and its core projects. She had found, in a previous job, that losing a trustee and not finding a suitable replacement can put a whole organisation in danger of losing its charitable status⁹⁹. She felt left alone and burdened personally with problems and tensions that were not merely hers.

Asking for support from unions was not an option: Monica had lost faith in their work and had been disappointed by unions' lack of support of workers for a long time before she came to work for Voluntary Sector organisations, where union stewards and a unionised workforce are rare anyway. Although a lot of precarious workers in the WVCS had a certain relation to unions or were even members of a union, these were not trusted or deemed to be in a position to help confront the problems faced in social care. This shows the weakening of the organised labour movement in Britain, based on restrictions in taking collective action in bargaining, and shortcomings of the unions to engage with the interests of precarious labour. As I discussed in subsection 2.1.1 and section 4.4,

⁹⁹ Charities need to appoint a board of trustees with at least three members. Trustees work on the strategic orientation of the organisation and are ultimately responsible *and* financially accountable for it. Although having these high responsibilities, trustees can by charitable law not receive any salary or payment for their work. Unpaid workload is thus structurally embedded in the management of charitable organisations.

unions face major difficulties organising workers in the Voluntary Sector, particularly in small workplaces.

What at issue here is that there are structural hindrances for the application of traditional strategies in unionisation, because of the intricate organisation of social care projects in the sector, with (1) workers dependent on various funders; (2) workers having individual project-related contracts with external funding bodies, sometimes not being directly employed by the organisation in whose realm they are working; (3) the structure imposed through charitable law with *personally* liable members of a board of trustees, often distant from the actual workplace, who take on management roles; and (4) direct managers who are dependent on the decision of this board. The workforce, inclusive employees in management positions, are dependent on the decisions and good functioning of the board of trustees, with no proper procedures and structures in place to represent and protect workers. Monitoring and transparency in the decision-making processes in these organisational settings is a difficult endeavour, with workers having various, sometimes conflicting loyalties, and especially in small workplaces often also highly personal ties to deal with (cf. Gallagher 2008).

Two months later I met Monica again. She had made the decision to leave employment in the VS altogether as she was too worried about her pension and was conscious of the deterioration of working conditions in the WVCS under the ongoing commissioning of services – “Government just wants to get services cheap!” – and how this would result in the worsening of working conditions for employees in the sector. She had started a job in a public sector body instead, in a different field of social care provision to the one she had worked in before, accepting work on a lower position than her previous job but under better formal employment conditions.

She was still determined to continue to work for the case of better services for women who experienced violence – but in a different role. Monica was planning to take on work as a trustee for one of the women's organisations whose projects and strategic orientation she strongly believes in. Monica refuses to further contribute any work from the position of a precarious employee. In order to follow her ambitions, she leaves employment in the WVCS altogether; takes on a job for a public sector body; is planning to volunteer, to work unpaid for what she cares for on top of this workload; in a reduced and not remunerated (but at least more self-defined) way, with the considerations and objectives she has fought for and during which time she has gathered experiences together with other women over decades of hard and often unremunerated work.

6.1.5 Accessing resources for stemming discrimination and neglect

I would like to add an aspect to these accounts of precarious balances in *seeking employment* in the WVCS; one that gives further insights into the ongoing division of labour in social care. There is an apparent split in focus in the sector between those who can give thought to improving the employment conditions of waged labour and those whose focus is reliant on mobilising and organising *any form of resources* for their work.

There was, for example, Jasmin, the project initiator, director and (once) only paid member of staff of a BAMER women's organisation that organised community-based support to Black women through autonomous practice and campaigns¹⁰⁰. The project is built on mutual self-help and alternative knowledge production, and radically questions institutional practices in health and social care. Jasmin's commitment to making a difference to Black women's lives in self-empowering ways was extraordinary and characterised by a fierce struggle to organise for herself and others the support denied under institutionalised racism and persistent insufficiencies in public service provision, to enable her and others to confront the damage.

She referred to experiences in her youth to explain her determination to confront the ongoing racist discrimination against Black women, particularly acute in the field of service provision she is working in. A BAMER community project had helped her to overcome existential difficulties when she was young and had enabled her to accomplish a degree in social work. Jasmin reported having faced major difficulties in finding a job in her area of work back then. She then decided to start her own project and endured six years without being paid from the time the organisation was set up. For the previous three years, she had been able to organise short-term local authority grant funding that was paying her a small salary on a part-time basis. When I asked how she had managed to make a living during the times of these prolonged periods of mere volunteering, she reported having lived with her child in free community accommodation and on benefits amounting to as little as around £110/month for living expenses. Additionally, she was able to get travel expenses reimbursed through the project.

When I met her for the interview, Jasmin's organisation had just lost all forms of public funding, with grants and contracts given in that year to projects of large generic charitable organisations in her borough. Her project had to stop all front-line support activities and Jasmin confronted a very uncertain future. Jasmin was furious, as she did

¹⁰⁰ Not further specified to secure anonymity of my respondent. As the organisation is no longer traceable on GuideStar UK (August 2011), it might already have lost its previous charitable status; its webpage was at the time of writing no longer active but I found various entries on the project's contribution and legacy.

not see how these other organisations would ever be supporting BAMER women. She saw the project being punished for being 'the troublemaker', as they had always spoken out about the outrageous conditions in social care and the corrupt structures in local government that were impinging on health and social care provision in her area. As were many other precarious workers I interviewed, she was busy writing charitable grant applications, determined to continue her work as long as possible also on a merely voluntary basis. New funding would be quintessential this time around; however, as Jasmin was no longer eligible for any unconditional benefits she would be forced to look for a paid job.

Jasmin was still not ready to give up on the project, and praised the value of all its efforts in mobilising resources because they made “a difference” that would last through the organisation's contribution to collective support, alternative knowledge production and its documentation. However, the changed objective restrictions would this time impinge on the project's continuation:

“I mean, I am not worried, *if it turns around and they say, well, nobody is prepared to fund your kind of work anymore, then that's it, that will be that!* I mean I am not going to lose sleep about it, considering all what was happening. We had a good 12 years running in it. It is there, it has been recorded, it is on paper, it is on the internet, it is everywhere. *We were there and we made a difference*, and I think *anything that anybody can get up to do in this day and age, it is marvellous.*”

Precarious workers in social care are enabled to organise themselves a way to resist precarity and commit themselves and others to practices of care under harsh conditions, because of incredible personal sacrifice and collectively nourished feelings of responsibility and obligation; the mutual affective support in their projects; but finally also because there were at least a very minimal but still existent form of material security provided for making a living and a certain amount of resources to provide accommodating environments for volunteer labour.

This is an example of how in precarity not only the very employment conditions in already recognised fields of work and the conceded public funding to social care projects, but also the granted entitlements to welfare benefits, imply flexible but at some point strict demarcations for the very embodiment of social care work. These multiple and interrelated dependencies have been emphasised by Federici (2009) for social care activities in general, by Folbre (2001, 2003) with focus on caring in professional work and domestic settings and by scholars who focussed on the experienced pressures and capacities of people to take on work in the Voluntary Sector (cf. Rochester et al. 2010; Taylor 2005).

The focus can then be shifted to reflect the consequences of these interrelated settings on the very embodiment of practices of care in collective and autonomous projects that try to shift the relations of power along the lines of class, race and gender (cf. Mirchandani 2003). Here, I want to argue that we must make these settings more explicit, tracing the support offered and the hindrances implied under current employment conditions in social care *and* welfare state restructuring, to turn situated and ethically driven political commitments into concrete practices of care (cf. Casas-Cortés 2009; Puig de la Bellacasa 2010).

What pressures are experienced and what resources are required to turn a commitment to *politics of care* into concrete projects, and what conditions need to be created to support women to empower themselves, to keep these projects going? A focus on the improvement of formal employment conditions *alone* might thereby potentially lose its critical impact. In Jasmin's case the charitable organisations that had in that year been given grants and contracts by local government were probably providing better formal employment conditions for their waged workforce than her project would have ever been able to, but – and this is of crucial importance – those organisations offer services with another focus, impact and content of work. Her project was predominantly based on unpaid work by volunteers but provided space, material resources, scope and mutual affective support for Black women who had not yet been addressed by any other social body, and as such made a different, indeed radical, political intervention.

6.2 Dealing with the exigencies of support work under current restraints

In the following, I refer to some of my respondents' more detailed accounts of how social care in front-line support work is affected by the ongoing precarisation in neocommunitarian neoliberalism. These are accounts of subjective experiences of the changed reality for direct support work in highly specialised projects organising support for women affected by domestic violence. I address and reflect upon the ambivalent positioning workers find themselves struggling with, from which they try to keep their own work ethos and ambitions for women's projects and services alive, thus in their sense 'productive'. All three respondents were working for medium-sized front-line organisations in the role of project managers.

6.2.1 'Work has become cerebral': disempowerment and harm

Alisha is an experienced front-line worker in the field of domestic violence. She has worked as a counsellor and direct support worker in various women's organisations. When I met her in May 2008 she was employed on a two-year contract that was to expire in three months' time. The organisation she works for is a generic medium-sized women's organisation with long experience in the field of DV refuge accommodation.

Alisha described with vehemence the worsening of working conditions under Supporting People, the funding programme for housing-related social care services under which refuge projects have been more closely bound to centrally guided regulations and more competitive commissioning practices (cf. subsection 5.1.1). There is more workload imposed on organisations like hers across the board, without adequate remuneration for new tasks and burdens. Insufficient funding results in understaffing with the consequence that all workers in her organisation have "dual roles": the role that is laid out in your contract is different from the one you are expected to perform.

While Alisha is officially employed under SP as a Senior Project Worker and paid only a bit more than a front-line support worker, she is doing the job of a Project Manager, supervising and coordinating all the support workers and the administrative tasks related to SP. This is on top of doing front-line support work when needed, which is often the case, as the caseload in the organisation is very high. She is responsible for funding reports; she answers to requests for information from local authorities; and she attends external training related to changes in government funding and organises internal training, without any formalised agreements about this workload.

This is a very classical description of work intensification and a recurrent feature when redundancies are made due to downsizing in public services under efficiency pressures, after which the remaining jobs get redesigned (Burchell 2002). Organisations shift tasks among their workers and add new ones, others are lost on the official request list but need to be done to keep projects running (Hudson 2002). However, what is remarkable here is that changes have been informally organised without any written agreement.

Alisha pointed out that formal employment in the sector has always been short term and therefore insecure but that her experience of insecurity and job-related pressures “got worse” with the introduction of Supporting People. Funding is related to the following of external rules and the organisation's overall performance in yearly held quality assessments along external standards, which are both, however, under continuous transformation. Under conditions of constant change and unclear definitions of requirements, workers feel more pressure than before to conform to all additional requests by their organisations: requests for efficiency and the reference to external standards could and have been used by the organisation to “push” her.

Here the particular mode of how work intensification in social care is currently imposed on workers is displayed. Insecure employment *and* continuously transformed, externally-set requirements and regulations for the future funding of projects on which the organisations depend make precarious workers vulnerable in the present, in terms of the experienced pressure to adapt themselves to additional requests and the internally arranged changes in the division of labour and working routines. The organisation as direct employer can defer to a distant authority/instance, which is, however, difficult to grasp due to the ongoing changes and the mix of government priorities, legislation and regulations. This creates a situation of increased uncertainty and nebulous complexity which pressurizes workers in social care to become ever more productive without financial recognition:

“It puts you under pressure in the organisation that you are working for, because it is almost like you are having the finger pointed at you. They can keep increasing my workload, and keep on saying: *'well, you need, you have to, they said, you have to, they said', and nobody can actually prove what anybody said*. So you've got pressure from the organisation, to keep on and producing and producing and producing, and going with the constant changes and legislation. Yet, your money stays the same, your hours stay the same, but the organisation can get the hands behind your back and push you, saying: 'well you won't get your contract renewed'. So they've kind of got that on their side, to say: 'well, if we don't see X, Y and Z results, we can have a meeting when that time comes with the

management committee, and decide whether we were really happy with it or not'. It is not to say that this is happening, *but that is where I am vulnerable, cause – I don't know!*".

Vulnerability for Alisha as an employee is resulting from these unclear and multiply defined working conditions and the continuous threat of losing her job. Not knowing exactly what the funders have asked for and might be asking for in the future is making her vulnerable in the face of additional requests from her organisation. Workers become multiply dependent without any fixed reference as to which requests would be in any form legitimate.

The very content of the already established regulations for direct support work that SP introduced for evaluation and monitoring purposes is strongly criticised. These are experienced as very negative, as they not only increase the administrative workload for women's refuges but also result in an overall imposition of a different way of working in front-line services for women affected by DV, even in areas where SP is not providing (sufficient) funding. It was emphasised that this impression reflected the experience of many of Alisha's colleagues and was not something specific to her organisation alone.

Alisha described in great detail the outcomes of the current form of bureaucratisation and inadequate regularisation of the organisation of social care in women's refuges. Under SP you must show evidence that you support your service users along preset categories. You must also conform to standardised procedures in a preset timeframe. There is thus less flexibility in organising and providing direct support. This is creating a work environment which is experienced as highly inadequate for accommodating women who have experienced domestic violence. Far from creating 'only' additional administrative tasks, SP reporting requirements and regulations are thus damaging the workers' flexibility to organise their work according to the needs of the individual women: flexibility that in the past enabled them to provide the necessary emotional support:

"You were used to women coming in and if they needed to cry for two hours, you could sit with them for two hours and let them cry. Whereas now it's: 'Here is the housing benefit – you have to sign it; where are the house rules? – I have to read you the 52 house rules'. Because it is all about – *in the mind it's like flashes that are going: SP SP SP! Monitoring, monitoring, monitoring! All the time, all the time! It's relentless!*"

Alisha depicts the spontaneous taking time for affective support as an important side of a professional way of working in the field of DV. The newly imposed work routine under SP neither addresses the needs of the women you are supposed to provide with support, nor does it address the needs of the workers by enabling them to deal in an

emphatic way with women who have experienced atrocities and harm. Front-line support work becomes predetermined, redefined by preset time frames and procedures to follow. Having flexibility in timing support activities is, however, quintessential to the process of caring. Social care work involves an empathetic responding to subjective needs and thus interaction, which both require resources and take time. It does not only involve active intervention but also the creation of a nurturing atmosphere; a presence, providing sensitive openness like a listening ear. The *necessities of care* in terms of the required space and flexibility in timing support work for dealing with the flow of affectivity in very particular situations are not acknowledged. Many support workers have left employment in the area of DV refuge services, as work “just became so mechanical and harsh”:

“So you are not showing real feeling, or humanitarian sort of feelings towards the women, because – that is also part of the profession! It is not counselling, but it is: alright (pausing) you know. You cannot even say: 'Can I go through this tomorrow?' or 'Can I get you a cup of tea?'. It's like: 'Sorry, but this is what I have to do even that you've just arrived.' And they [the women] are just really bewildered, and the kids are going mad, and they might not have any shoes, and they have left glass in their feet, all kinds. But you are still going: 'But I have to fill in this form'. And that is why a lot of people were driven out of this field. And you have different kind of people working in this field (...) And the poor women. You are trying to say: 'I'm really sorry, I can't listen to you about this, because it says on my key-work session I have to ask you about house, housing benefits, schools (...)’ but she might wanna tell you a heap of other stuff, which has to do with DV!”

SP regulations are depicted here as impacting heavily on the setting of priorities at work in women's refuges. Current conditions are taking away opportunities for workers' “own initiative” in giving support to women and reduces them to administrators of a regulated and highly restricted form of service. The pressure to conform to external standards also affects the collaboration amongst employees. Alisha depicts these developments very interestingly as work becoming *cerebral*, as a rationalised form of imposition on their way of working:

“And people have become quite bitter, even the most caring, because you can't do anything on your own initiative, whatsoever, at all. And even the staff team would say: 'So why have you been so long in her room when she was like that? You should have done this, you should have done that!' Because it has become so... so cerebral, you know, it is all in the head. So you've got that, combined with your constant worry – are you gonna get paid, are you gonna be re-funded?”

Work becomes structured along the preset targets and processes for direct support work which are externally imposed and need to be administered and documented and thus internalised by direct support workers for application in daily work routines. These

preset processes are taking away leeway to react to service users in spontaneous ways; workers are constantly reminded about their administratively defined duties. *Cerebral* stands here for non-intuitive interaction, and the pressure put on the individual worker to deal with the loss of flexibility and time for setting priorities and responding to subjective needs at work.

Organisations are asked to provide evidence of the support being given and to follow certain procedures in order to receive further funding. The degree to which evidence for support is requested is experienced as unnecessary. There is resentment that the very assessment frameworks and regulations show neither trust nor acknowledgement of the necessities of support work being provided in women-only refuges, pushing them to evidence and 'improve' their work along preset scales and constant new reformulations of 'quality'. Administrative tasks are taking over staff members' time:

“Quality Assessment Framework is a SP yearly review, so you only do it once a year, but it is 33 pages long, and the print is tiny, there is millions of questions over 33 pages, *and you have to evidence every single one of them*. So what happens is, once that this is done now I have to start again and I have to keep every move I make, and every staff member, 'can I have a copy of that?', 'can I have of that for the QAF?', 'let me know that'. *And I constantly have to pile it* so that throughout the year coming up to when it is due I can evidence. – Because you are going from a great D, C, B, A, so you are constantly working up that scale. *It sounds good on paper – but the pressure! That's just one of their forms!* It's just endless, because no matter how much you do what they ask, they come and give you a whole load of other tasks. *So that is how I spend my time: evidencing things [laughing], you know, it's like proving that you can breathe or something! Like you are going to really steal their money and run! I don't know, it's really tough.*”

This builds up a pressure that trickles down to every employee and infiltrates the relations, be it amongst colleagues or with clients. The survival of the project and everyone's post in the organisation is linked to the adjustment to SP regulations that are widely experienced as *inadequate*, leaving insufficient time to do the support work in a caring and thus flexible and interactive way, which is so strongly needed by the women they deal with. This is reported upon to be turning into a form of peer-to-peer and self-control against better knowledge and intuition, which is experienced as intrusive and potentially very harmful for both the workers and service users. Women work increasingly isolated from each other, overwhelmed by the administrative tasks on top of their increased caseload.

Alisha pointed out the fact that under these adverse conditions there is no structural support for employees provided in her organisation, e.g. via professional

supervision. While SP improved some formal employment standards for refuge workers that have to be met by SP service providers like statutory annual and maternity leave, not even the most basic forms of support for front-line workers to help them bear the affective burdens in the field of DV have been addressed by SP regulations whatsoever. For her it is shocking to see that it is still not a funding requirement that organisations provide support and advice for their front-line workers who deal with potentially highly traumatising experiences on a daily basis.

In Alisha's organisation there is group supervision with the director once a month, but no provision of one-to-one support when needed. There is not even a common room where staff members could meet spontaneously as a team. The provision of a welcoming atmosphere and space for workers to engage in mutual support on a daily and informal basis is not perceived as necessary, either in her organisation or by those agencies that are supposed to monitor it. Mutual support and how it could be enhanced is not acknowledged as a quintessential aspect of organising social care work in a sustainable way; it is *not* seen as a requirement. What is imposed instead are bureaucratic undertakings and administrative checklists to follow which result in an abstract formalisation of interaction and thus in the very opposite. Spaces and proven ways to convey mutually informed encounters between women are thus neither acknowledged nor facilitated.

Alisha sees this as highly problematic, as it undermines the organisation's own aims and objectives: namely, to empower women. It is isolating the support workers, leaving them to deal individually with the problems they are confronted with. This is not only against the work ethos of the women's sector and counterproductive for the objectives in terms of service provision, but potentially very harmful for the members of staff:

“Our mental health is not looked after; it's really not looked after. Everybody needs a de-brief, it's the most normal thing, just speaking. And you are dealing with women that commit suicide. I mean we had one woman – her face had been cut with a plate, I mean you are talking serious! Things you can't tell anybody else. *I can't go home and say: 'dadadad'.* All the stuff is in my head! Hundreds of cases are in my head that I can just play out. And in the normal world people can't bear it, they can't hear it. So you need clinical supervision, because you know you can't put that into somebody else, so you need that professional person that can hear it, and help you, you know. And we don't get that. And I think that is pretty true to most of these organisations. And then *you are monitoring and doing this, and admin, but not the single most basic support!*”

Being enabled to deal with affective burdens when confronted with structural violence is a specific requirement of work in refuges, especially in the field of DV

workers needing supportive professional *and* nurturing environments. It enables women to deal with their experiences and become supportive themselves to other women. Supportive environments are crucial for this kind of work, which cannot be done without them. Alisha describes these as enabling a flow of receiving and giving support which is undermined and suspended by current conditions:

“We don't even have a kitchen, you know, we got a kettle, that's it. *We don't even have anything in work to nurture you, you know, and then you are supposed to nurture the women as well.* And then you are trying to say to the women, 'oh we will help you get counselling', when we can't even get it for ourselves! *It's mad! Cause we are women helping women, aren't we? So we are stuck.*”

Whereas some precarious workers might be better equipped and supported by their surroundings to deal with the increased workloads, isolation and non-nurturing environments, there are many who cannot, or are no longer willing to do so. Alisha highlighted the fact that she was only enabled to deal with the potentially harming experiences in her job because of the other experiences she had had in her life before she came to work for this organisation and because of the professional supervision she organises and pays for herself. Others might not have that. Others again, like her manager, might go on and work very hard without feeling the need for additional help by professionals, as they are personally better positioned – financially and affectively – to convert potentially harmful experiences. However, not everyone is so lucky to have a well-structured, stable and supportive environment in their 'private' lives and thus enabled to give more at work and cope with extra burdens.

There is a new requirement for precarious workers in social care: to provide the affective efforts and supportive surroundings that are needed for dealing with the potentially traumatising experiences in the field of service provision in DV by themselves and on their own. This individualisation through isolation is opening the door to the creation of highly unsustainable and unproductive work environments. It is also building up new barriers to entering and/or enduring precarious employment in social care. As support is not (any more) provided at the workplace through formally organised professional support, and/or informally organised through mutual peer-to-peer support, only those who are equipped with, can afford and organise extra support by themselves will be able to manage to take on these burdens, or otherwise be potentially harmed themselves.

The worsening of conditions has led to many support workers leaving their jobs. Alisha herself had not (yet) done so as the organisation was located in the same area she

lives in, which helps her to organise her everyday life and to take care of her children. People may think that leaving the sector was due to merely personal issues, but Alisha emphasised that workers were leaving “because of the organisational dynamics at work”. These women were now replaced by a “different kind of people” on even lower salaries: the average salary for a front-line support job in the field of DV in London has dropped in job announcements about £5,000 to £20,000 p.a. during 2003-2008.

Alisha summed up her view strongly towards the end of the interview when she questioned the disempowering outcomes of the current funding regime, disapproving of the consequences of funding cuts, bureaucratisation and intrusive cost efficiency regulations on the organisation of direct support: “How to empower others when you are yourself disempowered at your job?”

6.2.2 'Going full circle again?' a woman's desire to escape

The role of empowerment in support work and the current contrast with the increasingly dis-empowering conditions for workers in frontline DV services were also strongly reflected in my interview with Sita, a project manager of a medium-sized BAMER organisation providing DV refuge services under SP contracts. For Sita, working under SP contracts is taking away opportunities for self-initiative and a grassroots way of working by which projects can grow, meeting the expressed needs by service users, and your work is linked to other women's struggles for better working and living conditions. I referred to her account also in section 5.2. where I described the shifts of funding in the WVCS towards agglomerates and the loss of leeway and decision-making power for women's organisations under commissioned contract funding that Sita strongly deplored.

Due to the cuts in government funding after the introduction of SP, her organisation, of which Sita is one founder, had to close down some of its community and outreach projects and its legal advice service. Funding for the various refuge spaces could be secured but is still short-term and insecure, as it is dependent on the yearly quality assessments by the Council, so that all contracts with staff are still on a one-year basis. This makes it very hard to retain people in the organisation. Because of lack of funding, they had to make three women redundant in the support workers' team over the year previous to the interview, while the work in terms of caseloads remained the same and the administrative tasks increased drastically. Recently, they decided to make the finance person redundant and replaced her by an administrator working one day per week to secure the continuation of the project. This means drastic work intensification for the support workers and more administrative work also for Sita on top of all the additional

reporting requirements introduced under SP and the need to contribute to consultations and feed into policy work.

When I asked her what supported her in her job, Sita emphasised the importance of getting energy and support through the collaboration with and connection to other women. She – like many others – drew that energy and support from collective political commitment and the connection to other women's struggles. These enabled women to give the additional efforts needed in the VS, to work very hard under insecure employment conditions. Nowadays, the links to the feminist movement and the opportunities for grassroots and community work and active campaigning were less apparent in the area of DV services, as a lot of effort and time went into meeting contractual obligations. Time is missing for the *politics of care*. It requires *extra* effort and attention in the management of work, the distribution of tasks and overall organisation of the project's activities not to lose this dimension of work. High workloads impede workers in finding the time for being involved in collective activities, becoming connected to other practices and realms of knowledge production in terms of the women's movement that are potentially highly supportive in a mutually empowering way:

“When you look at young new staff members joining, their experience of the Voluntary Sector is very very different now to what mine was, you know, mine actually allowed us *to be tied into a bigger picture*, not just the picture of what is going on locally and nationally, but also around the world, *in terms of the women's movement*. *They don't really have that time*. And there is a BAMER women's conference in a couple of weeks, and I was really surprised because they all said to me they all want to go, and I thought: 'wow, that's really good!' So I got to be committed to say: 'OK, for one day everyone can go', because recently when I've been saying 'what about this, what about that' – 'oh we are so busy', 'I haven't finished this and I need to finish this'. It's become more about contract compliance, and doing our work than about the whole picture.”

Sita strongly emphasised that the quality of support given to women in DV services cannot be separated from the form in which it is provided. Collectively taking responsibility for and supporting women in taking responsibility and control over their and their children's lives is described as an essential tool in dealing with structurally embedded violence, racism and the individually experienced consequences of DV.

The competitive confrontation with larger generic service providers like housing associations endangers this way of working in DV services, besides threatening the mere existence of women-only refuge spaces. This is a fact that delineates a structural embedded difficulty, which Sita as a project manager has to deal with. The future perspectives are rather grim. The growth in size that would be needed to attract further

funding is difficult to achieve when you want to keep your BAMER speciality and grassroots way of working. The splitting of support work from collective action and campaigning because of everyone being overburdened with the imposed workloads could torpedo previous collective achievements and the necessary empowering way of working that made everything possible.

Women in the WVCS are ambivalent as to whether they should continue their jobs under these conditions. It is hard to deal again and again with the various forms of violence women experience, with many things that haven't changed in terms of the everyday reality for women in British society. While women can see that their projects have a direct impact on individual women and their families and this direct feedback is rewarding, their motivation to start with and work hard for the case of BAMER specialised women's services was to bring about change to women's lives through the connection and collaboration with other projects and the wider women's movement. But social change is not immediately palpable and the mutually supportive connection to others is difficult to keep alive under the increased workload and imposed competition.

Current conditions are experienced as divisive and splitting. The question is posed as to how women should be able to keep their ambitions and efforts strong when the conditions in which their commitment could grow and be rewarded with success are undermined. There are strong unequal power relationships, in which women and women's organisations are compelled to compete against each other, instead of working together for the common cause. Sita emphasised that these conditions are created, that they could be overcome through being committed to change, which would need additional efforts, probably over a long period of time.

While her commitment to feminism is still strong, she is tired of being urged again and again to prove the necessity of the organisation's services. She has repeatedly been asked by funders why there was a need to provide specific refuge space and services for BAMER women, and for women only. They have fought for the creation of these highly specialised services and spaces for women since the 70s, and spared no effort to keep them running all those years. It is very frustrating to see these services being questioned under these circumstances. Being confronted again with similar questions that show a complete lack of understanding of the issues involved three decades later feels like being asked to "go full circle again". This situation is even more discouraging when you consider how the necessities for effective political campaigning in the VS have radically changed.

Whereas previously women's organisations would have organised direct action together with their clients to put local authorities under pressure, expressing rage about unfair conditions and unmet needs directly and collectively, the current funding regime asks them to evidence need on paper, feeding data into various consultation processes on local, regional and national levels. This increases women's organisations' administrative workload even for campaigning aims and objectives:

“Before you could demonstrate and go, and now it's – everything is to substantiate and evidence, do you know what I mean? You have to evidence, you have to substantiate, so we are collecting stories, we are collecting evidence. So we ask women about their experiences with local authorities, going to the police, to other organisations, so only that we can provide the papers when the need comes.”

Evidencing through administrative and reporting activities is depicted here as isolating and a suffocating way of doing politics, with motivating and empowering collective actions becoming rare. It results in affective exhaustion. Direct action for particular areas of social care is described as being no longer 'functional' and appears inadequate. This poses new challenges for mobilising resources in the WVCS. The reactionary political atmosphere, displayed in spending cuts, the commissioners' attitude and local authorities that question the need for specialised DV services, shows a lack of acknowledgement of women's needs, and the organisations' contributions to answering these needs. After having fought to bring the services into existence and care for their everyday running for such a long time, this puts Sita off. She is considering leaving her current role in the field of DV services. While her commitment to women's issues is still strong and she sees herself continuing to contribute to women's struggles, she questions whether she has the energy to continue to give the extra amount of effort that would be needed now, for she has already given a lot over the last decades (see Appendix 6 EI 6).

What I find interesting in this is that you could interpret Sita's story as merely reflecting exhaustion and frustration and therefore a certain exposure to 'giving up', as Sita's and her colleagues' desire and collective force being broken by the current circumstances. I would like to point out other aspects of this account. Sita emphasises her commitment and hints at her inner driving force that will push her to find a different field of action, where it takes her less alignment to become proactive. She describes weighing up whether the personal efforts that she would need to 'start off again' in her current role would bring about the change and the move forward she is interested in, which was the force that drove her in the first place and caused her to accept that this was also “at the expense of other things”.

The very drive she had all those years might be exhausted if she continued in the same role under more isolating conditions, so she is ready to take her commitment somewhere else, not yet knowing the clear direction and when, but still already being pushed by it somewhere else. This describes a flowing with desire to escape, a desire which is not merely hers. Sita is being driven by a collectively embedded and consciously experienced refusal by women in the women's sector to merely accept working under increasingly restrictive requirements. This could then be framed as a *refusal of work* in the autonomist Marxist sense (Virno 1996; Weeks 2005) which implies, next to its moment of disobedience and refusal of authority, a constructive element that focuses on exit out of wage labour under precarious employment for the initiation of a creative process that aims at the building up of new collective forms of social relationality. Sita is ambivalent, but liable to take on that centrifugal force that might guide her on a different path. This might be the anchor point for addressing and mobilising precarious labour in social care settings to initiate a new round of mobilising efforts, by displacing the focus of commitment to areas where change can be achieved in more collective and self-empowering ways leading to a spiral movement and not a circle which might suffocate in the end.

6.2.3 'You can't just close the shop': working against impending devaluation

A similar situation of ambivalence and the question of whether to continue the job under current funding conditions arose also in my interview with Rohini, a lawyer and project manager for the legal advice service of MOSA, a medium-sized women's organisation providing services for South Asian women affected by domestic violence¹⁰¹. I want to refer to her account to point out the structural conditions for the affective embroilment that labour needs to juggle with when it comes to dealing with precarious conditions in social care.

The project Rohini works for had been financed via local government grants for over fifteen years. Some years ago, all employees in her project were suddenly made redundant when that funding was stopped from one month to the next. She was offered the chance to continue working on her project by accessing funding reserves of the organisation until she raised new resources for it. So in this case management offered a precarious worker at risk of losing employment (due to the loss of public funding for a project) the chance to keep her employment on the basis of taking risks as an

¹⁰¹ See also subsection 5.1.3 in which I referred to Rohini's account of the structurally embedded delegation of the duties to care from statutory bodies to BAMER VCOs.

organisation. Rohini, however, rejected this offer by her management team. She did not want to endanger the organisation's existence and the long-term sustainability of its services. She found it incorrect that the organisation, and ultimately other women in need, should pay for a short-sighted decision by local commissioners.

She decided to quit and took on a part-time job for a public sector organisation. This enabled her to continue her engagement on the project on a volunteer basis for the rest of the week. She did so for a period of two years and managed to convince others to contribute as well, so that the legal advice service of her organisation was continued, though at a basic level and *entirely* based on volunteer work. Here again, a strategy by labour in organising any possible resources to deal with precarity in social care is displayed: workers are taking on jobs in other areas, to then bring about extra unpaid efforts for the continuation of previously publicly funded projects in the women's sector. Burdens imposed through lack of funding are individualised; services are run on the shoulders of unpaid volunteer labour.

During these two years, Rohini applied for various pots of charitable funding. She finally was successful with a Big Lottery grant, on the basis of which the project was secured for a further three years. At that point she immediately quit her other job. At the time I spoke to her, she had two and a half years to go on her contract, based on that three-year charitable funding. Employed merely on a part-time basis she was working far more hours; she had no pension scheme and if she became pregnant would get only statutory maternity leave.

Rohini strongly identifies with the work she does and the organisation she works for; she does not perceive the organisation as an employer but as a political collective she is part of that organises projects she cares about. She derives her motivation from the impact her work has on women, and what she gets back from the women she has given support to and their families, advice that these women would otherwise not have had access to. She acknowledges that, in comparison with jobs for lawyers in the private sector, her job offers worse employment conditions and a much lower salary. She pointed out, though, that for her the job was very rewarding, describing it as “personally satisfying”, with the “happiness” she gains from her job being the reason why she sticks with it:

“My brother constantly says to me, he works for the private sector, and he says: 'you are mad, I earn much more than you do, and I work less hours, and I have less tension'. That's true. *So apart from the fact that I get my happiness here, there is no justification for what I do, why I do it.* So yeah, if I were to have children I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't work in the Voluntary

Sector, because you know, *it's a personal thing, you have to be really motivated to continue to do the work that you do. It's very rewarding, I mean personally satisfying.* There is no doubt about that. At the end of the day you feel like you have really done a good job, because you touch people's lives and you actually deliver things that they wouldn't have got otherwise. And if you do that with empathy, many clients are so thankful to you.”

She continued by giving examples as to how the direct contact with and feedback from her clients have nurtured her over the years and contrasted this with the rewards you would get as a lawyer in the private sector. A job like hers is rewarding and motivating – despite all the difficulties she currently faces – as it is at the same time touching her and other people's lives. This is a reward she cannot get anywhere else (see Appendix 6 EI 7).

While she describes the non-monetary rewards she is experiencing in her job as exceptional and highly energising, she also stressed the importance of a strong personal motivation in order to continue doing her job. This requirement for doing her job in the WVCS might become problematic in the future, as her strong motivation could be compromised if her personal conditions changed, so that she would probably not continue to work in the Voluntary Sector if she was to have children (see data extract above).

Furthermore, these strong affective ties are very strenuous to deal with when precarious workers are forced into competitive conditions where they need to struggle to secure funding for themselves and their projects in situations that force them constantly to make compromises. Rohini emphasised that she found herself in a very difficult situation when her project lost its local government grant some years ago and she looked for an additional part-time job. She knew she could not seek employment in another women's organisation, as this would have created a conflict of interest when she had to raise funding for them that she would probably have also needed to apply for in the name of MOSA. That was the reason why she chose to work for a government agency instead. She emphasised that she finally did enjoy working there, as she learned a lot and she was treated well. Rohini's post was related to what she does for MOSA, and her contributions and specialised knowledge about BAMER women's organisations were specifically asked for. Still, these two years of having two jobs caused a lot of personal tension, not explicitly because of the high workload, but because of the imposition of conflicting loyalties, with the tension impacting on her motivation to keep going.

Precarious workers in social care face difficulties when dealing with affective tensions, reflected here as conflicts of loyalty, and the related efforts needed to sustain supportive social relations which are crucial for them to survive in precarity: the support

networks they have established collectively with others to confront precarity, and that are perceived as essential for their work, are crumbling. Nourishing the very forms of sociability and personal relations to peers and service users is highly relevant for keeping themselves and their projects going, as these forms of sociability safeguard the support needed for their activities. This is the mutuality of caring relations which is not a pre-given constellation but needs to be sustained by effort. At the same time, precarious workers are forced to compromise in this realm to enable themselves to continue their work and make a living. The conflicts and relocations that arise out of these conditions are turning around the question of how to keep alive loyalty to an issue *and* to collectives of individuals in the context of sustainable management and mobilisation of resources.

In the case of Rohini, the negative impact of taking on a job for a government agency and on her feeling of being connected to other women in their collective struggle to bring about better services for BAMER women troubled her deeply. She referred to several incidents at public meetings regarding DV service provision, where she was asked to participate and give presentations on part of the government agency, after which she was questioned by women working for other WVCOs as to her credibility and loyalty. Her own personal efforts, which she made to continue the services for MOSA and the women they provide advice for, were not recognised:

“People would look at me and say, 'what are you saying?', like, '*we have known you for years, and you are changing loyalties*', and *people were actually questioning me*, and I know a lot of people didn't agree with the choice I made.”

The interpersonal rewards, support and understanding from others and the high motivation she gains from doing 'a good job' via being collectively engaged with other women for specialised BAMER services is crucial to Rohini for dealing with the stress and the high workload she is facing. She sought a solution to save MOSA's advice services by making a compromise in terms of her own employment and remuneration, but was then confronted and had to deal with the resulting negative consequences in this affective realm. The tensions created in this constellation were experienced as highly disruptive and problematic. These affective burdens and conflicts come on top of and thereby reshape the overall experience of increased workloads she is facing anyway as a project manager in organisations like hers. Rohini gave a list of activities she needs to be involved in in order to keep the project running, resulting in a situation in which she always works more hours than she is actually paid for:

“There is tremendous pressure to get the work done, to deliver, to apply for funding. People in my position are constantly working many many

extra hours which we can never get back, because you still need to manage your team, you need to do the work. And you need to be able to feed into different levels of organisation, to the management committee board, to the senior management team, make sure your staff are not under stress, make sure you are delivering to your clients, you are applying for funding. And if you were a political organisation like ourselves, we still need to feed into the policy work, we still need to liaise with the government, ask for changes in the law, whatever it is, do the awareness raising. I would still go out and do trainings, I go out and speak at conferences, there is a whole level of things that happen.”

She describes having to deal with heavy workloads as a very common condition for project managers in (W)VCOs. Interestingly, this is *not* seen as creating a tension in itself for her, which would push her to refuse to do the job. This is because there have been these other affective rewards related to 'doing a good job' in terms of acknowledgement and support of peers that have in a way 'compensated' for her scarce remuneration, the stress and the pressures she faces. In neocommunitarian conditions this is the point where the role of *affective conflict* emerges. Current conditions are disturbing previous arrangements and self-locations of precarious workers in which informal support had been created which had made their precarious employment bearable.

When Rohini had to reduce the time she spent on the project, it was hard for her to communicate the changes to other service providers and to confront her clients with the reduction and new quality of the legal advice project. She realised *then* how important it is for her *and* the clients *and* the project itself to have sustainable funding, as she could not deal with the disappointment caused. It is the uncertainty about whether she will be able to retrieve sustainable funding in a meaningful way for the project in the future which is impacting on her drive to continue today in her everyday work; to bring about all the extra effort which would be needed. Rohini highlighted the need to be confident that the situation will improve and about how the current conditions put her into a strongly ambiguous position. A sustainable long-term perspective is the *sine qua non* for her project's useful operation, a condition she sees as increasingly less likely as government does not seem to show any interest in providing further funding, and charitable grants are project-based, scarce and always short-term.

It is crucial, however, to offer legal advice services for women affected by DV in a continuous and reliable way: service users need to be able to refer to their files and documentation when they decide to go to the police or to lodge an appeal or complaint later on. WVCOs often have women addressing them ten years after the first initial contact, only then being 'ready' to bring their case any further. If you suspend your service, all that information and support might be lost. The work you have done would become useless,

devalued. This continuity, which is needed in the field of DV, stands in contrast to all the discontinuity experienced in organising funding for these projects. Care needs a long-term perspective and the process of precarisation is disrupting, disconnecting and suspending this continuum, devaluing previous efforts.

Doubts stemming from Rohini's own need for security and a long-term career perspective are intermingled with worries about the long-term perspective for the project itself, and the connected effects this insecurity has on her and her colleagues' motivation, and on the women she wants to support. On the one hand “you can't just close the shop and go home” because “there is no alternative” for women in terms of the services you have on offer. On the other hand “you don't know if it is sustainable” and therefore fulfilling the very project's aims and objectives. How meaningful are your own efforts then, today, if you cannot secure the longterm sustainability of the project and your own work? (see Appendix 6 EI 8)

I want to emphasise here that Rohini relates her difficulties with short-term funding not only to her own and her colleagues' personal employment conditions, career ambitions and material needs but to their perception and experience of the very content, the sense and usefulness of their work and the services the project provides, and how this directly affects their experience of working conditions and motivation to continue. In her case, the current funding regime for VAW services is undermining a long-term perspective for the project, and thus for providing 'a good service'.

The perspective of constantly having to deal with new and potentially conflicting requirements for the operation and continuation of the project and the related “battles on various levels” for only short-term and project-related funding is getting Rohini down. This precarisation stands in sharp contrast to the high numbers of support-seeking women who are addressing her organisation and get referred to it. The organisation's experience gained in over 20 years of providing services in that area is completely devalued under these circumstances (see Appendix 6 EI 9). In this respect, highly specialised BAMER organisations are particularly hard hit, as argued in subsection 5.1.2, as they are confronted with increasing barriers to organising group-specific funding for ethnic minorities and knowledge of the fact that there are no other providers who could do their job.

Women in the WVCS are increasingly involved in efforts related to competitive tendering, the organisation of additional charitable funds, and thus the securing of the continuation of the projects and their precarious jobs, while lacking time and space for actual service delivery. This creates tensions that are difficult to deal with, not only because of people's attempts to overcome their own precarious conditions and search for personal

progress, but also since people started working in the VS because of their commitment to a particular cause.

There are tremendous efforts going into fund-raising and adjusting to the various requirements of changing funders, a situation that creates frustration and ultimately resentment. The missing perspective, not only in terms of women's own employment conditions and interest in forming a career – which would give them acknowledgement employment-wise – but also for the very projects they are working on, is the reason why workers are leaving. Rohini explained the outcomes of short-term charitable funding for the operation of projects by referring to the experience of a colleague who is working for MOSA on another project. Her colleague not only had to raise new funding under constantly changing charitable funding programmes every year, four years in a row, she had also to apply for her own job each time, as this was a requirement by every new funding body. While she knew that her organisation would most probably re-employ her, the whole work-intense procedure and the missing perspective for improvement were experienced as so tiring that this person ultimately gave up (see Appendix 6 EI 10).

Under current conditions, people are thus facing difficulties to “keep it all together”. Women are starting to doubt more fundamentally the fruitfulness of their current affective efforts. The driving force of 'doing a good job', crucial for hard and underpaid work, is weakened and called into question as they see no progress, neither for themselves nor the projects they are working on, no future scenario where their own career ambitions and needs could be held in a healthy tension, without themselves or their projects going down the drain. The high level of mobilisation needed to do the required extra hours, to contribute to the caseload of specialised women's services with a large amount of volunteering on top of their job, might be ultimately corroded by these undermining forces.

Unbearable tensions arise when precarious workers realise that their current affective efforts might be senseless, as their service or project might be suspended soon and/or they realise that their efforts in organising funding are taking over the time they actually spend delivering the service and the projects they are interested in. This is creating tensions that most cannot deal with for long. The lack of acknowledgement and the loss of opportunity for doing a meaningful job in collective and nurturing environments is making them look for other forms of commitment and thus ultimately also for other forms of employment to make a living.

6.3 Everyday politics and the attack on the perceived qualities of work

It could be argued that there is an ongoing division of labour which is splitting and isolating particular tasks in and among women's organisations in which the realm of direct support work has been most radically negatively affected, with front-line organisations being asked to adjust constantly to highly specified and often inadequate funding requirements under cost-cutting pressures. Public funding cuts combined with new administrative burdens under contract funding have led to a loss of resources for crucial aspects of direct support and campaigning work in most front-line organisations. The constant need to find and mobilise new resources and adapt to constantly changing funding requirements is thereby increasing the pressure on women working in this field.

While front-line workers are confronted on a daily basis with requests for immediate support, they feel less supported to deal with these. Unpaid volunteer labour fills some of the gaps in funding and keeps on contributing to the projects that organisations could otherwise not afford. This has, to a certain extent, always been the case and originally brought the sector into existence. Direct support work though has become more regulated and formalised and leaves less freedom and flexibility for labour, both for the employed workers *and* those volunteering, to work in self- and user-defined working routines and for involvement in mutual support activities, collective projects and campaigns.

I have argued throughout this chapter that labour in women's organisations has to deal with a constant re-balancing of different, often conflicting, needs and desires and the loyalties to issues, individuals and collectives generated thereby. Formal employment conditions in the WVCS are weighed up against the opportunities a job offers for establishing collective and self-empowering forms of work in social care and enjoying the often informally organised qualities and rewards a particular working environment has to offer.

The reliability of the terms and conditions *formally* agreed upon (if formalised at all) in the WVCS is reported to be further undermined under neocommunitarian neoliberalism. There are disparities between the formal agreements that my respondents had with their organisations via their employment contracts, or the requirements by funders to be met for (re-)employment and the direct support, coordinating, information, accountancy, counselling, policy and campaigning activities they were actually involved in and which were deemed to be necessary by their organisations and/or themselves in order to do their work. Additionally, there was the widespread experience that the formal

employment conditions agreed upon are not reliable anyway when your organisation or project faces funding cuts and comes under increased pressures.

The constant necessity to organise and mobilise resources due to the withdrawal of public contributions to particular aspects of their projects under the newly imposed regulations and restrictions on direct support work diverts women from the support work they were initially interested in. The ongoing formalisation of campaigning and the necessity to feed data on the outcomes of their projects into consultation exercises, providing quantifiable evidence for policy work, is experienced as adding to this transformation of the quality of work in front-line support.

This qualitative transformation of work content has been reported as having a negative impact on women's everyday experience of their overall commitment in the WVCS, as it takes away the previously experienced informally organised positive qualities of work at their workplace, in most cases without offering any compensation. The benefits and rewards in terms of work content, work ethos and thus perceived political impetus that my respondents have been looking for seem, in most front-line support organisations in the WVCS, to be drastically undermined by the sheer loss of funds for services and projects, the rising caseloads for the remaining workers and the ongoing imposition of new workloads and working routines in dealing with services users.

Alongside the loss of funding for projects, and thus the income generated that is and could be redistributed to front-line workers, there is a shift in the content, focus and therefore experienced challenges of what needs to be done. There seems to be differences among front-line organisations in the efforts made for the establishment of better formal employment conditions and the creation of supportive working environments in front-line support, with only a couple of London's larger women's organisations reported as having established better conditions – at least for their own employees inside their own organisations. This development is, however, framed by an increased use of volunteer, thus unpaid, labour.

There is an ongoing split in the labour force of women's organisations, with some workers in more established generic organisations being enabled, through the agglomeration of funding under bigger contracts, to organise for themselves improved employment conditions, and those mostly BAMER and highly specialised organisations struggling merely to survive, thrown back on the mobilisation of all sorts of resources.

Unpaid commitment has always been an everyday reality for workers in women's organisations. Voluntary work is seen as a *sine qua non* for shifting conditions of institutionalised forms of discrimination, the boundaries in the recognition of work and

thus for the creation of new social care projects. Volunteering was seen as a requirement for keeping or building up access to paid employment for themselves and other women in these areas and informed my respondents' political agenda for social transformation. Women referred to their genuine interest in and commitment to (creating spaces for) caring support work, grassroots community development and feminist campaigning work, often seen as inherently linked. This has been depicted as a desire to position and commit themselves in reciprocal structures of care and support: having a lasting impact through touching people's lives, and exposing themselves to being touched by the lives of the women, colleagues and communities they are working with and providing with support. Knowing about and experiencing the difference you can make in your everyday working environments was seen as a crucial reward.

The point of doing 'useful work', making a contribution that 'makes sense' and the perceived support and reward by peers and service users, was paramount in all my respondents' accounts of their interest in and motivation for their 'volunteering for the cause', for working extra amounts of time on their jobs. Working consciously under- or unpaid was seen as necessary for building up a better future environment for specialised women's projects and services. It is this mutually affective realm created by and among women's projects which is being heavily attacked under current public sector reforms: the perspective of being able to retrieve and successfully campaign for sustainable funding for a variety of women's projects in the future, for just keeping single projects alive, has become more than precarious.

This is creating a situation in which additional affective efforts and new forms of mobilisation are necessary: for any form of escape that would entail an inherent productive element in terms of an autonomous *refusal of work* – thus as an escape from their current roles leading to new forms of work and collective commitment in other projects – and to endure further their current precarious and isolating forms of employment. Such a refusal would, however, keep them going, through additional commitment in collective self-empowering modes of work in social care.

Some of my respondents described in more detail their current efforts in dealing with ambivalent experiences regarding the continuation of their commitment, and related these to the structural hindrances with which they are confronted. Interviewees described how they live in and create situations in which it is crucial for them to deal with different needs and desires in a wide range of constellations. They also reported upon how support by others, and mutual exchange between organisations and colleagues was essential for them being personally enabled to continue their work. In spite of being very different in

terms of age, experience of racial discrimination, qualifications, work experience, financial background, and individual caring responsibilities and experienced affective support in and besides their jobs, they described (all) women working in the WVCS as more or less threatened by job insecurity, the loss of income and the increasing isolating and inadequate working conditions in social care.

Women working for BAMER organisations are under particular pressure, most directly affected by cuts under neocommunitarian restructuring of public funding allocation, *and* concerned about decreasing chances to get their projects sustainably funded. They know about the lack of alternatives to their services and the accentuated need for change in terms of the accessibility and adjustment of public service provision for BAMER communities. Women working for BAMER organisations reported long periods of unpaid labour and high amounts of volunteering invested to secure the continuation of specialised direct support services. Being directly exposed to the pressing needs of the women and communities they work (and live) with was reported as putting pressure on them to give even more and keeping up the level of support given in *and* beyond work.

Despite the many differences among the women I was interviewing in the WVCS I would like to emphasise, however, my respondents' active and collective stance regarding the ongoing transformation of their work. What unites them despite the myriad differences in salary, formal employment conditions and their embodied history of different socio-cultural identities and discriminatory experiences – in terms of their particular and transformative embodiment of class, race, gender and age – and their current practices of re-location, is the fact that resolving their ambivalence in terms of their experienced needs and desires was not even an option. This is not because they are constrained to live with ambivalence, but because they have chosen to do so for various reasons and can – at least partially – realize in their way of working and living differently various, for them highly political, projects: *confronting precarity is their everyday politics*. Dealing with ambivalence is part of their everyday struggle to imagine and construct alternatives to traditional forms of service provision in social care, creating alternative forms of work and production. They have thereby been able to overcome – in their view – more restrictive forms of labour.

It is this affective realm, stemming from the need to balance their own position and embodiment of efforts in relation to the transformation of their working conditions, which is paramount in their accounts of the ongoing shifts in the WVCS. I traced some of my respondents' ambiguities in doing so in the jobs they are currently working in and a

desire to escape. Women's subjective experience of their working conditions and concerns about the future sustainability of their projects and their own role and commitment in them show thoughts about and actual decisions around a refusal of work under increasingly restrictive environments, which would still not be the end to their desire to transform their and other women's conditions in collective endeavours. This is the remaining hope in precarity besides the cuts, the loss and the overall harm caused.

CHAPTER 7: Precarity in social care

This research project dealt with two main concerns in the further exploration of the transformation of social care in the UK. It addressed (1) the structural changes under the contracting out of public services in terms of an investigation of the outcomes for social bodies that operate in this field and an analysis of the implied consequences in terms of the division of labour in social care. In a second step (2) it interlinked this structural analysis with a further exploration of the issues at stake *for labour* engaged in front-line support work by tracing and analysing experiences of change in terms of everyday enjoyments, tensions and ambivalences at work, as reported upon by workers in front-line support. In the reminder of the thesis the findings presented above will be summarised and discussed.

The chapter starts with a characterisation of the neocommunitarian turn in neoliberal policies by recapitulating its structural features. The ongoing pseudo-marketisation is delineated as resulting in a dissection of public services. The concomitant retrenchment and redefinition of publicly recognised interests and needs is traced in its characteristic forms. As a crucial component in the neocom neoliberal project, a new activation discourse is revealed in a particular combination of the further enforcement of entrepreneurship enriched with a strong volunteering ethos.

In a second step the implications for labour are traced. In the neocommunitarian phase of neoliberalism, government reform and the resulting restructuring of social care have undermined control over the organisation, definition and direction of work and resources in social care front-line services. Through the ongoing withdrawal and re-direction of public funding and the concomitant worsening of working conditions and loss of employment in many areas of service provision, precarisation is re-organising the very definition of paid work and the process of social reproduction (cf. Bakker 2003). The effects of precarisation on working environments in social care concerns the question of what activities and projects are included under formal and paid employment, and what endeavours and forms of commitment are excluded (cf. Baines 2004).

The institutionalisation of volunteering is here presented as a characteristic feature of the neocom neoliberal project which is building up on the longstanding precarisation of employment in social care in the UK. The consequences of this form of precarisation in terms of the inherent contradictions and conflicting demands for workers are discussed. This paves the way for an exploration of the implications of precarity at work in the creation of inequalities in social care. The loss of resources for the provision

of needs-adequate support in professional social care has resulted in a loss of spaces and means for the sustainable organisation of social care. This loss and the implied redirection of public funding and resources is hitting women – especially those from/dealing with BAMER communities – the hardest.

The chapter ends with a consideration of the intensified crisis of care under neocommunitarian neoliberalism and the implications for political struggles in and against precarity. It is argued that the ongoing form of precarisation concerns far more than a further shift in the highly stratified organisation of social care work in terms of production/reproduction along a sexualised and racialised division of labour. The experience of precarity and women's struggles over the ongoing transformation of work are not only related to the circumstance that particular support projects for often vulnerable women are already understaffed and improperly regulated or in danger of becoming so, with certain activities further pushed into an unrecognised and unpaid sphere, and work burdens therefore increasingly unequally divided. Women's personal and indeed collective struggles concerning the ongoing transformations described in this study are related to their observation and direct experience that crucial activities, informally organised qualities of work and collective forms of social relationality in the WVCS, which used to enable women in the sector to continue their work and thus strive and campaign for adequate attention to the necessities of care under whatever harsh material conditions, have ceased to exist or are at risk of disappearing.

By recapitulating the particular interlacing of post-operaist and feminist thought and analysis pursued in this thesis, it is concluded that struggles over precarity could – via a forceful debate of the highly unequal resource and income distribution – address the looming *crisis of care* and stress more vehemently the related ethical concerns about the unequal appreciation, attention to and protection of entire livelihoods.

7.1 The neocommunitarian turn in neoliberal social care policies

The neocommunitarian turn in neoliberal politics inaugurated an instrumental use of volunteering for public service and government reform agendas. Emphasis has been given to a new role for Third Sector bodies and the devolution of power to local government and intersectoral partnership projects. The implementation of neocommunitarian reform resulted in a gradual restructuring of social care services with an agglomeration of public funding around generic service providers for restricted social care provision and super-structural support, while substantial funding for highly specialised outreach and needs-adequate support in social care has been withdrawn. This new version of neoliberalism has resulted in the retrenchment and redefinition of publicly recognised interests and needs under an ongoing dissection of services which tries to harness volunteering in a corset of pseudo-marketisation.

7.1.1 Pseudo-marketisation and the dissection of services

As I discussed in subsection 2.1.2 and section 4.1, the change in government in 1997 did not see the renunciation of managerialism and business models as remedies for failures and insufficiencies in public service provision already pushed by previous Conservative governments. Quite the contrary, the New Labour government used this business rationale in new areas and created new modes for its 'effective' implementation.

It has been argued that New Labour has thereby refined the impact and reach of the neoliberal marketisation agenda on social care (Davies 2009). Its intricate reform programme for social care relies on the imposition of spending cuts and new governance techniques, which impose a systematic change in working procedures under a centrally guided definition of standards for the commissioning of services. Under the 'best value' framework, new regulatory bodies have imposed regulations and targets for service quality achievement in social care front-line organisations (Ferguson 2008). Government has thus redefined the interaction between statutory bodies, social care providers and professional infrastructure bodies at central and local government level. Second-tier organisations are called upon as co-organisers of quality standards and policy input under 'voice', 'collaboration' and 'empowerment' agendas for public sector and service reform (Glendinning et al. 2002).

The commissioning of social care services under neocommunitarian framings has been described in this thesis as a process of pseudo-marketisation (cf. Cunningham 2011; Ferguson 2008; Powell 2003) under which business principles and bureaucratic activities

have been introduced into ever more areas of social care work. Local commissioners as 'purchasers of services' are asked to set detailed targets, implement evaluation exercises and impose on all tendering processes the cost-cutting imperatives and instructions from central government and new regulatory bodies. Front-line organisations, addressed as 'providers', need constantly to substantiate and feed into these newly imposed operational systems and interaction processes for service improvement along quantifiable parameters in order to receive any further financial state support.

Throughout this thesis (and in particular in subsections 5.1.1 and 5.2.2) I have tried to show that this complex process creates a pseudo-market for social care, by which the state has extended its power in capillary and intricate ways by simulating a market regime for predefined areas of social care work. It is therefore misleading to speak of a proper marketisation or mere retrenchment of the state, as the created realm for exchange is highly unbalanced and regulated from the centre, with state power imposing extensive administrative tasks and guidelines on providers, while continuously imposing spending cuts. This combination leads in practice to a qualitative redefinition of publicly funded social care work and its confinement to 'core services'. Ultimately, it results in a loss of the range of previously existing projects and social care services on offer. Beneficiaries of social care services have no increased choice of providers or projects, but face the disappearance of whole areas of service provision.

Front-line organisations in social care that thrived on government funding are confronted with pre-set performance indicators for their activities, dissecting projects under selective low-cost driven imperatives. Under the ongoing dissection of services, social care work is subjected to an evidence-based corset under which conceptions of what counts as evidence for 'best value' and good work are imposed by commissioners and via regulatory bodies. It has been argued in this study that standardised targets and regulations have been imposed top-down in the process. This displays not only a negligence of the intricacies and professional framings of work in different areas of social care (Ferguson 2008; Seithe 2010) but imposes a re-orientation of social care work along short-term and quantifiable outcome-oriented efficiency thinking. The conditions thus created remove the perceived qualities at work which previously enabled social care workers to commit themselves under precarious employment conditions.

In regard to the women's sector, the imposed regulations under neocommunitarian framings have been reported as imposing an actual hindrance on direct support work, specifically analysed here in reference to support offered to women affected by domestic violence in women's organisations. At the same time, some equality

regulations first introduced under New Labour, if they were implemented on a local level and fought for adequately, could serve as protection against further cuts in the future (WRC and NAVCA 2009). Hence, these regulatory processes and the very definition of the quality of work in social care in policies launched by central government bodies have become important sites for political intervention. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult for highly specialised front-line organisations to engage in this process.

While the applied targets and categories for achievement have been reported in this study to be inadequate for seizing and valuing the work of women's organisations, the key problem is the fact that many projects provisioned by the women's sector, for instance legal advice, children's services and highly specialised counselling services in Rape Crisis Centres or refuges for women affected by domestic violence, are not addressed as a necessary prerequisite for service provision. Under new central government reform programmes, organisations are losing out on public funding for these aspects of work. My respondents listed here specifically the far-reaching influence of the definition of single National Indicators for the evaluation of public service provision at local government level and the setting of quality standards and imposition of working routines under the Supporting People funding regime.

Under increasingly competitive frameworks, more bureaucratic accountancy work is inaugurated and delegated to front-line workers and managers of those providers that succeeded in bidding processes and survived the imposed funding cuts. This has been discussed by other scholars as tending to result in a 'de-professionalisation' of face-to-face social care work (Seithe 2010) and diversion of the care workers' attention away from their present direct interaction with people in need (Latimer 2000, 2008): workers are bound to follow increasingly externally set processes for monitoring, delivering quantifiable input for meeting targets. Under constantly reinforced cost-cutting pressures, this results in work intensification and a devaluation of labour in front-line social care. In this sense, this research project has traced similar processes as have other studies on the transformation of working conditions in Voluntary Sector social care providers (Cunningham and James 2009) and agrees with analyses by commentators on professional change in social care (Ferguson 2008).

In this study, however, this process has been outlined as a consequence not only of increased caseload and the newly imposed administrative workloads, but also of front-line workers' various unrecognised investments in counteracting the negative impacts of inadequate (regulatory) impositions. Respondents in front-line support organisations

reported on their everyday struggles to remain faithful to their work, to answer to the needs of their service users and co-workers while also pushing for adequate support of projects and service provision through campaigns and mobilisation of further affective resources.

7.1.2 Retrenchment and redefinition of publicly recognised interests and needs

The neocommunitarian agenda with its ideological emphasis on de-centralised decision taking in 'partnership' with Third Sector bodies at local community level is thus framed by highly restrictive and centrally imposed policy and regulatory frameworks in social care. These are characterised not only by pressures for continuous spending cuts, but also by new funding guidelines which redefine the content and form of social care provision. It has been argued in this study that the very detailing and practised form of implementation of these policies and regulations are highly discriminatory against BAMER and other highly specialised organisations.

In this study, emphasis has been given to the outcomes of the complex interplay of New Labour's social cohesion agenda, its local government reform under the introduction of Local Area Agreements and specific guidelines and restrictions for social care provision under Supporting People. The imposed guidelines and created institutional settings are reported to be specifically undermining the interest representation of women and minorities. Intersectional forms of discrimination along the lines of race, citizenship, gender and age are not considered. The efforts and contributions of organisations that have addressed the needs and organised an effective interest representation of BAMER women have been neglected.

In this respect, recent reforms regarding social care can be described as *neocommunitarian*, as they redefine which interests and needs are actively addressed by state support. The initiated process is characterised by:

(1) An ideological and indeed already existing reframing of interest representation and formation, whereby local communities along geographical definitions emerge as the new focus, denominators and protectors of common interest. This happens alongside a centrally organised canon and regulatory framing for a concerted pseudo-marketisation of social care services that is created in collaboration with regulatory bodies, the emerging super-providers in social care and second-tier organisations. The latter are, however, only highly selectively supported by central government and not adequately equipped to exercise sufficient influence on local decision-taking bodies.

(2) While there is, in a sense, a devolution of decision-taking power to local government by central government, it is reduced to a mere savings and regulatory exercise, as taxation and control over the overall amount of public spending allocation in social care are kept under effective control by central government. Furthermore, local government is asked to include non-elected providers of front-line services in the decision-taking process, which results in a drastic increase of administrative workloads.

(3) Whereas New Labour has to a certain extent favoured the representation of some minorities' interests in equality law, the implementation of the stated aims has been opposed and counteracted by its local government reform and its policies addressing social care. The Supporting People programme, for instance, introduced highly bureaucratic forms of regulation under simultaneous spending cuts. This has resulted, under Social Cohesion Guidelines for Funders, in a de facto extension of generic but more restricted services that are commissioned to increasingly large providers, with a reduction of public funding for highly specialised support projects. As I have argued in subsection 5.1.1, the ringfencing of contract funding for generic services and inadequately regulated areas of service provision means that public funding that had once been allocated to particular highly specialised social care projects in the WVCS under previously existing grant schemes ceases to exist under increased financial pressures on local government and is thus no longer accessible for these areas of work.

(4) The trend towards defining communities in geographical terms favours interest representation and funding allocation along the lines of economic power and mediated social and cultural capital. A democratic organisation of the newly introduced local and regional government institutions and commissioning bodies like Local Strategic Partnerships is undermined, or not explicitly followed (see subsections 5.1.2 and 5.2.2, cf. Taylor 2004). Minorities' interests are *not* recognised in the actual funding allocation practice on local government level and can thus be potentially played off against each other.

Thus, existing conflicts of interests and institutional forms of discrimination in UK's society along the lines of class, gender, and race are insufficiently addressed. The need to address these by identifying and responding to different needs in social care is undermined by the detailing of centrally imposed policies and by the intricacies of their economic context for implementation.

7.1.3 Entrepreneurship enriched with volunteering ethos

The coup and specific characteristic of neocommunitarian policies is, however, having introduced both entrepreneurship *and* volunteering, ideologically and in practical terms, as the new solution package for potential 'quality improvements' in social care under its reforms. Professional expertise and service users' knowledge and contribution to service quality and outcome are addressed as important components, however, in an overall enterprising model for welfare and social care. This model, combined with pressures on local government to effect 'efficiency savings', has pushed necessary contributions and efforts by front-line support organisations for quality and interest representation in social care into an unpaid sphere.

Under the 'voice' agenda for public service reform, regulatory bodies and second-tier organisations have experienced a boost in terms of central government funding for policy development, while inciting them to advocate social entrepreneurship and develop their volunteering programmes. However, contributions by front-line agencies to policy making and expertise fail to be financially recognised: the everyday production of quality and professional expertise by making and collectively sustaining empowering face-to-face relationships in social care is lost in public funding. The development and provision of needs adequate support, the value of which exceeds the reduced and redefined forms of social care provision created under short-term efficiency measures, is therefore difficult to sustain. Ferguson (2008) supports this position in his research.

This shift in neoliberal politics emerged under the New Labour government. An important new component for labour relations is a new form and dimension of neoliberal activation discourse (see subsection 4.3.2). Not only is the created regime forcing 'undeserving' claimants of welfare into paid labour – under whatever conditions – and creating often rather precarious forms of employment, but it is explicitly and indirectly asking for additional unpaid engagement to strengthen 'civil society'. This is an important aspect, as it appeals to a different understanding of citizenship and participation, going supposedly beyond a mere market-led and economic discourse around entrepreneurship and self-interest in neoliberal thought.

The proactive role in social care reform is not merely delegated to the recipient of care and his/her family as under previous neoliberal reform policies under 'choice' and 'personalisation' agendas. With a massive plea for increased commitment in and for 'civil society', it is now also explicitly expected from 'communities' of voluntarily engaged individuals and enterprising citizens, self-organised in mutuals or under the umbrella of charitable organisations. The state takes on the role of enabling this (unpaid)

commitment through guided volunteer programmes and increased inclusion of Third Sector bodies in public service delivery, and additional funding streams to support the capacity and future 'independence' of the Voluntary Sector. The discourse on the *citizen as volunteer* is thereby playing on both. It is striving for a liberal form of support for civil society yet pushing ultimately for its independence from state funding, and thus the retrieval of the state from the provision and direct investments in social care, as it is also addressing – although perverting – existing aims and objectives of autonomous struggles for self-organisation 'beyond' the state.

Neocommunitarian neoliberalism thereby asks for volunteers to bring about the envisioned, more 'efficient' and 'empowering' public service reform, while it increasingly predefines how this 'volunteering' needs to take place. The neocommunitarian turn is thus marked by an appropriation and concomitant reversal of insights and concerns put forward by professional bodies (Ferguson 2008; Payne 2009) and employers' organisations in social care (Barnard and Broach 2004) regarding (user) participation and empowerment. It tries to thrive on voluntary action for the further commodification of social care.

7.1.4 *Big Society* as the intensification of the neocom neoliberal project

With the new Coalition Government, in power since May 2010, we see the continuation and further elaboration of the neocommunitarian turn in neoliberal policies, under the enforcement of an even stricter retrenchment and implicit privatisation programme for public services (HM Treasury 2010a, b). Drastic cuts have been announced, not only to local government budgets and front-line services, but also to some of the regulatory, quality standard setting bodies and infrastructure organisations that had been favoured under New Labour.

Under its *Big Society* agenda, the current Coalition Government appeals in certain ways, similarly to New Labour, to the important role of voluntary agencies, volunteering and civil society engagement for public service reform (Conservative Party 2010; Coote 2010; McCabe 2010), by emphasising the role of 'giving' (HM Government 2010). It has, however, reduced or axed funding programmes under which various quangos, second-tier bodies and infrastructure organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector, including equalities groups like the Women's Resource Centre (representing women's organisations) and Voice4Change England (representing Black and minority ethnic VCOs), have grown since 1997. Local small and highly specialised front-line organisations like BAMER women's organisations might not only be further weakened or

at risk of closure by losing public funding for service provision and campaigning themselves – a process which has been traced by several observers (see for instance Imkaan 2008; Plummer 2011; WRC 2008d) and also in this study – but will also lose support that they received for interest representation at central government level (Plummer 2011).

Early in 2011, women's organisations all over the UK reported on dramatic cuts announced to women's refuges and DV services with Women's Aid predicting up to 40% job losses across the DV sector (Salman 2011) under the announced funding cuts to local and regional front-line social care funding. As in other organisations providing projects and services to vulnerable people under Supporting People, women's organisations have not only had to take on additional burdens, but they see themselves forced to make their own workers redundant due to the inflicted cuts. As a consequence, organisations are reported as further reducing the range and quality of their services and the number of women they can support in their projects (Butler 2011a, b; Gentlemen 2011).

While the announced cuts in public spending under the austerity programme are expected to be far more drastic in their expected and already delineated effects on effective government spending for public services – specifically on voluntary and community front-line organisations (London Voluntary Service Council 2011) and the poorest areas in the UK (Toynbee 2011) – it is important to keep in mind that the radical changes and negative outcomes of the ongoing pseudo-marketisation of social care services under neocommunitarian auspices were also already evident under previous governments, just on a different scale.

Various commentators on the New Coalition's reform plans and its announced cuts to public services have delineated how women and especially mothers will be hit worst by these transformations (Rock and Boffey 2011; Sands 2012; Women's Budget Group 2010) and the ways in which the current reform plan will lead to an actual sell-out of public services into private hands instead of boosting and supporting local and vulnerable communities (NCIA 2011; TUC 2011).

Far from being a recognition of needs in social care and interest representation taking account of existing inequalities in British society, the neocommunitarian reform agenda is increasing pressures on front-line staff, especially on workers of highly specialised organisations, by its insistence on the implementation of managerial principles in the drastically reduced range of the remaining publicly funded social care services, without being able to offer adequate financial recompense. This is just another appeal to

embrace the remaining and compensating activities on a mere voluntary basis and/or with insecure support by other (charitable) funds.

In the next section, I want to expand on the particular modes of the implied structural transformations that result in splitting, contradictory and challenging outcomes for the workforce in front-line organisations by exploring the meaning of *institutionalised volunteering* for the ongoing precarisation of work in social care.

7.2 Beyond (in)secure employment: the institutionalisation of volunteering

Much of the WVCS direct support work and the creation of services for women only have for decades been contributed by women on volunteer placements, in insecure employment conditions and for scarce remuneration compared to work in similar posts in other sectors. The current wave of precarisation is further exacerbating this deplorable state of affairs for most workers in the majority of organisations in the WVCS, while some slight improvements in terms of formal employment conditions for a small minority of employees in the sector have been traced. While the experience of precarity in the WVCS reflects a transformation and split in formal employment conditions in front-line support, it goes beyond this. Precarisation in social care is basically experienced as a change in the orientation and content of work.

Many projects in the women's sector have lost any form of public funding and even those organisations that do attract funding from commissioners often do not receive full cost recovery for the support services and projects they provide and/or the established contracts do not fully cover all aspects of their activities (see subsections 5.1.1 and 5.2.1). Furthermore, even under government contracts, funding in social care is not secured for longer than 1-3 years, with its allocation depending on yearly progress monitoring and service quality reviews. Organisations depend on additional short-term and project related grants and charitable funding to sustain their work. Formal employment in women's organisations is therefore mostly temporary and project-related, and often depends on various pots of funding (see subsections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2).

Work in the women's sector was described by my respondents as characterised by a high degree of voluntary commitment, implicitly expected and made necessary by perpetually inadequate public funding allocation to their organisations and precarious employment conditions, but also as resulting from stimulating and satisfying content of work, collectively embedded within an interwoven network of organisations and its realisation in close or virtual collaboration with other women. The often informally organised collective activities and the qualities of work informed by mutually supportive action and affective rewards in their daily work environments were mentioned as the positive aspects of work in the sector.

Under neocommunitarian reform, however, women working in commissioned services under contract funding have been put into a corset by which some services and projects can only be run under additional volunteer efforts and concomitant self-alignment to predetermined and externally imposed competitive and regulatory

structures. The important aspect of this development is that these outcomes might not necessarily be reflected in a worsening of formal contracts and employment conditions for the workforce involved. In some cases, formal employment has even been improved in the sector, but not for all the projects and activities that women's organisations were previously active in, leading to a selective process forcing women to adjourn or transform the activities and forms of commitment they once cared about.

Furthermore, my respondents reported on their direct experience and observation that additional workloads are currently necessary to reverse the negative effects of the constant transformations in policy and organisational frameworks, with the increased informally organised burdens and necessity for additional fundraising.

Respondents reported on the loss of quality in formal employment, in terms of increased individual burdens and stress through longer working hours due to redundancies of colleagues; the imminent closure of single projects that they tried to avert; the appointment of unpaid volunteers for tasks that have previously been carried out by proper employees; and lower salaries for similar jobs. All these familiar and often reported aspects and effects of precarisation have been studied in social care through the lens of insecure and atypical formal employment and work intensification (see for instance Cunningham and James 2007, 2009).

What could, however, be just off the radar, if the focus is merely on formal employment conditions and work intensification, is how these changes affect the workers' experience of their work in its very *definition by content, embeddedness and socio-political impact*, and thus in terms of labour's control over the very definition, organisation and embodiment of formally and informally organised, paid and unpaid social care work.

The experience of change felt by precarious labour in the WVCS is characterised by a focus and emphasis on quality as in the definition of content, embeddedness and socio-political impact as these women have always been confronted with precarious employment conditions. They experience an ongoing perpetuation and thereby intensification of conflicts of loyalty as neocommunitarian restructuring is now also affecting women's previously established resources and informally created supportive environments in front-line support work that had previously helped them deal with precarity.

To gain further insight into these transformative aspects of the experience of precarity in social care, it is necessary to address the efforts and experienced ambivalences at work resulting from institutionalised volunteering: women in front-line organisations are being increasingly pushed into often informally organised, but at the

same time institutionalised volunteer work. Unpaid efforts under this type of work are *institutional* as they are indispensable for the successful working of an organisation and the actual quality of the social care projects delivered. Under insufficient funding allocation, this work is pushed into an informal realm and is systematically made invisible. It is important to speak of institutionalised *volunteering*, as employees are often *not formally* asked for it and can and *do* actually 'opt out', with transformative effects on work environments, service provision and the personal well-being of themselves and their surroundings, their clients and colleagues.

7.2.1 Perpetuating precarity by enforcing institutionalised volunteering

Pressures imposed through precarious employment become increasingly unbearable through the loss of the previously retained positive qualities of work. In this study on the experience of working conditions in the WVCS, the institutionalisation of volunteering under neocommunitarian neoliberalism has been traced in the following four dimensions:

Inadequate resourcing under competition and diversion of public funding

Due to increased competition for public funding and its diversion towards generic service providers, it is common practice amongst WVCOs to accept contracts that do not provide full cost recovery in order to further qualify for any form of funding for their projects and services. This has been discussed for the example of contract funding for women's refuges under Supporting People, a centrally imposed funding programme by government for housing-related support to vulnerable people. As there is no alternative to receiving funding for the aspects of work therein, most women's refuges in London work under SP contracts, even though this form of funding is not seen as adequate for DV refuge service provision, neither by the organisations' managements nor by their employees (see section 5.1).

This is resulting in employees working differently, and indeed often voluntarily, on top of their formally agreed workloads to fulfil the requirements set out in these contracts, as they seek to remain reflective of and responsible to the very necessities of their work in social care and their projects' survival. Respondents reported additional workloads and working hours that they agree to do informally under SP contract funding without receiving any – or only inadequate – payment, just to safeguard the chances of their organisations and/or particular projects receiving any form of (public) funding and therefore also the extension of their own contracts of employment. By not pushing for and safeguarding adequate funding allocation for all aspects of service provision to local

service providers under centrally imposed funding streams, this form of volunteering in social care is implicitly calculated and institutionalised by the state.

Imposition of additional and inadequate workloads

Front-line support workers are no longer paid for the work they used to be engaged in. Under the commissioning of services, their work has been framed and interfered with by highly bureaucratic and centrally imposed workloads. As argued in subsection 6.2.1, direct support work is thereby subjected to externally set routines and objectives, requiring more administrative framing. As a consequence, workers are engaged in re-organising extra efforts and volunteer labour to soften the outcomes of these measurements on their teams and service users. As funding for certain aspects of their projects, support work and particular posts is cut, many women are voluntarily involved in covering not only the lost aspects of the remaining projects, but also remedying those which would otherwise be negatively affected by these changes.

Once more, the important issue here is that workers are not necessarily asked formally to provide these extra amounts of work, but as these aspects of their jobs are (sometimes) still important to them and are also 'objectively' a necessity for effective outcomes in the actual support work they were invited and supposed to be involved in, many try to do it voluntarily on top of their previously already high workloads, or at least come under increasing pressure to do so in their work environments.

The difference between underpaid work and the externalisation of costs under previous grant funding is that this form of volunteering is newly framed, as it has been made necessary by high amounts of very restrictive and sometimes impeding administrative workloads under contract funding in increasingly competitive settings.

Institutionalised volunteering in policy development

Under the Compact agreements between government and the Voluntary Sector (see section 4.2) additional engagement by Voluntary Sector organisations for policy development has been agreed upon between government and unelected Voluntary Sector representatives. There has been an increase in consultation with the (Women's) Voluntary Sector with more evidence-based input requested for consultations initiated by various commissioners, partner organisations, government departments and Voluntary Sector infrastructure bodies. Under current funding regimes, these additional activities for policy development are not sufficiently accounted for in public funding allocation, and are thus inadequately paid.

Some workload in terms of highly formalised activities has been taken on by second-tier organisations that operate also under central government funding streams, but case input for successful campaigning via consultations is delivered necessarily by front-line organisations. The latter are not supported as before and have less flexibility in organising resources under the move from grants towards contracts. The bureaucratisation of campaigning imposes more unpaid and regularised workloads on front-line agencies, again a workload that is not formally agreed upon and does not appear in any contract. It represents a significant hurdle for smaller and highly specialised providers to make their cases heard.

Inadequately funded partnership projects

Under the 'facilitation of services' (see subsection 5.2.3), government supports and directly invests in projects in which direct support work is delivered by subcontractors or by co-operating volunteering organisations, with government agencies refusing to pay and/or face the formal responsibility for the work requested. Newly created and officially praised partnership projects between statutory, private and voluntary sector bodies at local community level have been reported to be based on unpaid front-line work, contributed by employees of subcontracting or collaborating voluntary organisations. Support work is thereby outsourced to, in this case, women's organisations, whose adequate payment is not followed up – or even more blatantly – explicitly neglected under the umbrella of a statutory social institution. Front-line workers are pushed into a contractual or statutory corset with neither their real employers (the WVCOs) nor themselves benefiting from any additional funding for the services provided in terms of paid work hours, overheads or infrastructural support.

Organisations and their workers in the WVCS agree to contribute volunteering labour to these projects for the sake of their clients and the pressure on them to collaborate to keep or attract local authorities' referrals and future funding for other projects, but they lose out on options to influence their work environments and the organisation of direct support work. Whereas many contributions by WVCOs had for a long time been made on a volunteer basis, in terms of consultation for statutory bodies and unpaid direct support work input, this is a form of partnership working by which voluntary bodies lose out on the positive aspects of volunteer labour in terms of opportunities for scope in collective self-organisation and initiative, flexibility and also public acknowledgement for their efforts, which would also support them in attracting further funding.

7.2.2 Inherent contradictions and conflicting demands on workers in social care

Under current practices of public funding allocation, this study has pinpointed a perpetuation and intensification of the experience of precarity in four dimensions of institutionalised volunteering. Informally organised, unpaid workloads are imposed so as to make efforts by workers towards the quality of social care systematically invisible. This situation hints at the inherent contradictions and conflicting demands of the affected working environments in the women's sector. It translates into highly ambivalent experiences at work that put strain on individuals and collectives. Using women's expertise and acknowledging the necessities of direct social care work in the creation of sustainable environments for mutual peer-to-peer support, women's organisations have built up accessible and emancipatory projects and life-saving services for women. While indeed resulting in often precarious and underpaid forms of employment with only low standards in terms of employment benefit entitlement, these environments still provided accommodating, highly meaningful, flexible and mutually supportive working conditions.

This emancipatory component, founded upon huge amounts of voluntary work over past decades, is currently under severe attack as women's efforts towards adequate service provision are regularised, put into inadequate framings and lost through public funding cuts. Organisations and their workers are thereby losing out in contributing in self-organised ways: my respondents reported on less flexibility in the organisation and direction of front-line services. SP, for instance, has not only resulted in an agglomeration of funding and shift of support towards generic providers (see section 5.2), but also in different workloads. Stress at the workplace for front-line support workers increases in women's refuges as current conditions under increased administrative and regularised workloads twist and redefine the issues they have to deal in their everyday work environments, while their efforts in answering to the necessities of care in direct support work are made invisible.

The experience of insecure working conditions is nothing new in this sector but is 'topped up', intensified and made unbearable by new constraints, interference and regulations on how to work under the mixture of government contracts for service provision, short-term charitable project funding and/or subcontracts under partnership projects. There are additional requests to engage in activities, which are in the workers' eyes unnecessary, un- or even counterproductive *and* unpaid.

There is ongoing pressure to bring about outcomes in 'efficiency savings' in competitive environments as new generic providers have entered the field of housing related provision of support in social care. Under these conditions, some women's

organisations are reported as neglecting *as employers* the needs of their labour force for nurturing environments in front-line support work that would help to deal with the strains involved. Respondents emphasised that this is related not only to formal employment conditions but also to the question of whether working environments and the organisation of work create space and time for mutual and professional peer-to-peer support.

In the neocommunitarian phase of neoliberalism, women's organisations and thus their workers (employees and volunteers) are forced into highly bureaucratic evidencing, proving quality of services via non-fitting quantifiable outcome measures and answering to ever new policy developments which, in their current combination, have twisted and converted their work and perspective, despite the often unchanged needs of women as 'service users' with which they are confronted on a daily basis. They need to argue again and again for the necessity of their projects' existence, although workers and organisations are overrun by users' requests and are highly supported by positive feedback and recommendations, even by those statutory agencies that are currently cutting their funding.

As the new funding regime does not guarantee full cost recovery for all the necessary aspects of their projects, workers are involved in additional fundraising and mobilisation of resources. Funding for their projects is retrieved from many sources and undergoes constant transformation, with organisations and single workers being asked to answer changing and increasingly highly specific, sometimes even contradictory, funding requirements by various (charitable) funders. The allocation of funding is reported to be increasingly bound to conditions and strict requests for quantifiable outcomes (cf. Hudson 2011 on restricted charitable trust funding) and to be becoming more insecure.

While some generic women's organisations have managed to protect women's refuge bed spaces and sometimes even extend their work with the introduction of SP, as they organised takeovers and mergers with other women's organisations, and some of these are involved in improving the formal employment conditions for all their remaining workers, these providers are affected by this qualitative change in direct support work and the imposition of volunteering for uncovered activities. Moreover, their relative 'success' is interrelated to and thus unfortunately framed by a dramatic loss in funding for BAMER and other highly specialised organisations.

The negatively affected workers in BAMER front-line support projects feel thwarted in their work efforts. Respondents reported feeling less enabled to concentrate on, push and campaign for front-line projects and support work organised in a

sustainable way, so it would support their clients and themselves. From their point of view, they are being pushed into a position in their jobs, in which increased and redefined commitment on top of more regularised working routines is inherently requested, in order to keep not only the standard and quality of service provision, but also the extra bit of *inappropriate/d sociability* (Papadopoulos et al. 2008) they were interested in when they started thinking about taking on their objectively, indeed highly precarious work in the women's sector. In a situation of *normalised employment insecurity*, these additional external impositions under constant uncertainty about the future of their projects are adding to and intensifying the workers' experience of stress, pushing them into increasingly ambivalent positions for dealing with precarity in a sustainable way.

7.3 Precarity at work means inequality in social care

Pseudo-marketisation, the dissection of services and the resulting institutionalisation of volunteering under neocommunitarian reform symbolise the ongoing restructuring of social care work. This results, in combination with workfare regimes, in highly conflicting demands and hindering impositions on social care that in many areas undermines a continuation and sustainable organisation of direct front-line support work. Neocommunitarian neoliberalism pushes women's efforts for adequate front-line service organisation and provision in social care, one which would sufficiently address a diverse set of different needs of women, increasingly into an unpaid and unrecognised realm.

7.3.1 Loss of (control over) front-line support work

While employment in the women's sector has always been precarious, recent reforms have led to redundancies and the loss of formal employment in front-line service provision in the WVCS, through the restructuring and sheer closure of whole organisations, while increasing the informal input that is or would be necessary for keeping up with the intended quality of those front-line services still provided. Highly specialised social care services and projects have already been lost or are currently put at great risk. The ongoing attack on the collective embeddedness of front-line support work in women's projects implies a re-definition of work, by loss of control over the very content of work in the women's sector. The transformation of work in social care is thus not merely quantitative, but also qualitative.

A new division of labour in social care has been imposed that is attacking the very conditions for affective efforts to take place in ethical and sustainable ways. While it is affective labour in its care-sex-attention continuum (cf. Precarias a la deriva 2004a) which makes work in social care attractive, and thus also (subversively) effective and productive, social care work is increasingly intersected and characterised by an unproductive, viz. highly *isolating*, division of labour: 'There is a remarkable shift of funding in the women's sector, away from highly specialised *direct support work* in front-line services.

Work in front-line support has intensified and changed in quality. There is a (potential) loss of activities and projects especially in the realm of prevention, counselling and outreach services, while basic refuge space provision has been brought into more institutionalised and bureaucratic framings. Being asked for help and support which exceeds their capacities, front-line workers' daily struggle to answer to the plethora of

unmet needs in social care is not recognised when it comes to reporting on the outcomes of their work in front of funders. At the same time, there has been increasing support for infrastructure, specialised policy and advocating activities by second-tier organisations, displaying a reinforced yet highly contested tendency in the sector to separate direct support work from policy work and collective campaigning.

As I have argued in chapter 6, there is not only a decrease in salary or increase in working hours, and the neglect of direct support workers' need for professional support in terms of supervisions and counselling, but indirectly a loss of time and space for more informally organised and collectively nurtured aspects of mutual support in current work environments. My respondents reported on missing out in adequate time and space for:

- the creation of nurturing environments in which peer-to-peer support and a grassroots way of working could take place. This would imply outreach work, campaigning and networking with service users and other groups on a non-competitive basis;
- being more broadly involved in collective mobilisations for the women's movement in form of direct action and collective gatherings;
- intuitive and direct face-to-face support for staff and service users to deal with the affective strains involved;
- dealing more effectively with structural violence against women by creating work environments which would help confront potentially traumatising experiences in a collective and non-isolating way; and for
- implementing worktime flexibility in practice, which would allow women to take time off when needed and thus enable them to endure the strains at work.

These are particular effects of precarisation in social care projects that operate not alone, and not even necessarily and primarily through the worsening of *formal* employment conditions, but through the *dissection and loss of services* under inadequate regularisation and pseudo-marketisation and the loss of other resources provided for example under welfare programmes, which in combination deprives labour of adequate control over its activities and increases the formally requested administrative and the informally organised input needed in the realisation and continuation of projects. My respondents reported on their experience that bureaucratic accountancy work and fundraising efforts have replaced many of their previous activities in direct support work and collective action, while the latter two were described as necessary requirements for becoming and remaining productive in social care.

7.3.2 Overlapping and intersecting dimensions of inequality

Precarisation needs to be analysed as a relational concept and phenomenon. As discussed in subsection 2.1.3, it is a process that redefines the relation between wage labour and non-waged labour (Aulenbacher 2009), and describes a shift as well as a qualitative change in the interrelation of social reproduction to the sphere of production (Bakker 2003). Precarisation is here discussed as a transformation of the interdependence between certain groups of workers and activities and how this affects the overall organisation of social care.

I would like to add a further dimension to the discussion of interdependencies in precarisation: neocommunitarian reforms impact on the highly disputed definition of and hard-fought control over what kind of work is recognised in social reproduction, not only as profitable activity but also as acknowledged and embodied in *whatever* form. I have argued throughout this study that, in social care work, production and reproduction are essentially interwoven: women reported the need for a sustainable organisation of social care work which yields mutual support activities for reproducing their labour force capacity in dealing with the strains. Precarity at work implies a redefinition of what kind of *forms of life and social relationality* are and will be further sustained by social care work. This biopolitical dimension of the neocommunitarian restructuring of social care work needs to be stressed.

Under New Labour, there has been a shift of collective responsibility for the duties to care: away from government towards the Voluntary and Community Sector and 'the citizen', under an activation discourse bringing the *citizen as volunteer* to the fore (see section 4.5), while effective control over resource allocation has been dispersed and taken away from social bodies directly involved in front-line support work. The subjugation of activities under business principles and short-term efficiency pressures in social care projects can be described by the extent and degree to which control over resource allocation, work definition and organisation in social care is kept or lost. Through both, increased competition and loss of effective control over social interaction and collaboration in direct support, social care work has been re-defined, with certain aspects of it being pushed into the unpaid realm and thereby put highly at risk of being lost altogether.

It can be argued that, in many ways, women are disproportionately more negatively affected than men by these transformations and interdependencies under public service reforms: (1) women are heavily overrepresented in the public sector and Voluntary Sector workforce (see also Appendix 1) and are thus more affected by the

organisational restructuring of public services, in terms of working conditions regarding form and content; (2) as discussed in subsection 2.1.3, women are affected more than men when public and especially social care services are transformed or cancelled due to persisting gendered divisions of labour regarding social care, as they are culturally expected to take on the burdens related to the no longer – or only insufficiently – provided services; (3) regarding the field of specialised projects for victims of domestic violence that has been discussed in more detail in this thesis, it is again women who are becoming victims of violence more often than men, and are thus more affected when social care services in the field of Victim Support are cut (HM Government 2009).

These factors lead to a *gendered* discrimination of *women vis-à-vis men*, and must be addressed *as such* in the ongoing debate on precarity when it comes to cuts in social care. However, the consequences in terms of additional burdens and the experience of loss in the ongoing reduction and redirection in public funding allocation to social care is not evenly divided amongst women, amongst various women's organisations, their workers and direct users. Far from it, there are organisations and workers in the women's sector that could attract *more* funding and gain access to *better* formal employment conditions, working conditions *and* services under the New Labour government; others, like most BAMER organisations and their users, are hit very hard.

Under Supporting People and central government's additional infrastructure programmes, a handful of growing *generic* women's organisations and second-tier organisations could extend their influence, with the former attracting more public funding for enabling and actually providing even a reduced form of support for women affected by domestic violence in women's refuges. This growth only concerns a minority of organisations and employed workers, *vis-à-vis* the reported loss of funding, the worsening of employment conditions in other large organisations and the use of volunteer labour in, and the ultimate closure of, highly specialised projects and services.

The ongoing process seems to reorganise *and* reinforce existing inequalities in control over resources, quality of livelihood, and capacity to act and influence policy making amongst women (in the WVCS) – with differences between BAMER and women from a British white background, women entitled to public resources by citizenship and those who are not, women's bodily health and physical integrity, their age and the embodied gender. The Women's Resource Centre speaks here of missing public acknowledgement of the “multiple and overlapping discriminations experienced by black, minority ethnic and refugee women, lesbians and disabled women” (WRC 2006c, p. 15).

When we focus on the subjective experience of precarisation, differences in professional status, class, job position and work content must be accounted for too. My respondents hinted at observed differences in the WVCS in terms of the experience of stress and rewards in working conditions between policy and direct support workers, managers with long work experience and new policy and front-line support workers, and along class status, which could, however, not be followed up and analysed more closely in the scope of this research project.

New divisions of labour are occurring; not only in terms of wage labour and traced employment conditions, and thus in the *paid realm of reproductive labour*, but also in terms of *unpaid reproductive labour*, be it domestic labour, caring for dependents, or as elaborated in this thesis in terms of abilities for additional *volunteering* in social care projects. I would like to stress that there are shifts in this unpaid realm that need to be accounted for, as these two realms are co-constitutive for persisting and eventually newly emerging inequalities in dealing with the imposed changes regarding precarious employment in commodified social care services and for the strains imposed by this situation on entire livelihoods.

In subsection 4.1.1, I reported that the only workers to endure the previously highly precarious conditions in a currently well positioned organisation were those who had no other caring responsibilities and/or had privately organised support against the insecurities at work in terms of savings or family background. Only these workers then reached the status of being better protected at work when the organisation experienced success, as they could then collectively organise better terms and conditions with the help of a union.

Research on precarisation has emphasised that some women can formally or informally *externalise* work burdens related to assuming caring responsibilities for others, and can thus profit from and live better with the imposed changes under neoliberal policies in social care (Jungwirth and Scherschel 2010; Winkler 2010). As I have argued in subsection 2.1.3, feminist scholars have emphasised a new sexualised and racialised division of labour, as the global market for domestic labour has been extended, resulting in shifted burdens regarding housework and caring responsibilities amongst women, along ethnicity, citizenship and class lines (Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

Precarisation has been described as *re-enforcing*, building on these already existing divisions of labour and inequalities amongst women in social care but also creating *new ones* (cf. Aulenbacher 2009). My respondents saw women as being differently

affected by the imposed changes in relation to their assumed caring responsibilities *outside* their jobs, as in caring for children, relatives, partners and/or other direct dependents *and* their direct confrontation with need by others in their daily working lives.

While it has been impossible to systematically study these emerging differences regarding commitment to and burdens through additional caring activities in the very experience of precarious working conditions of my respondents in this research project, many women hinted at their own life choices and/or circumstances in relation to unpaid reproductive labour and the obligations they experienced to commit themselves to additional caring responsibilities. In section 6.3, I traced this commitment to collective activities as women's involvement in *everyday politics*, as their everyday commitment to shift their positions and that of others in relations of power along the lines of class, gender and race.

Several respondents hinted at the fact that they were able and motivated to continue working on their jobs and/or to contribute through increased volunteering, as they felt supported by their partners and communities in doing so, as they had no children or were not yet planning to have any, or as their children already left home. Others described how they were overwhelmed by being lured into unpaid support work in their daily lives because of missing resources and public services in and for their communities. Burdens through social care and domestic work in these unpaid realms were for them related to the degree of stress in dealing with the encountered working conditions in social care and women's actual decisions around seeking (further) employment in this field.

My respondents reported also on the informal support they experience(d) by working in the women's sector, referring to rewards and satisfaction experienced in relationships to service users, and colleagues' informal covering and caring for each other in times of illness and need of care. Personal circumstances in terms of care and involvement in these informal, mutually supportive affective relations and interactions at work were described as highly influential on their experience and judgement of the quality of work *and* their actual ability to deal effectively with the precarious formal employment conditions in social care that they encountered. Withdrawal of recognition and control over work under institutionalised volunteering is thus potentially increasing the negative experiences of work and affective burdens for women assuming additional caring responsibilities under already precarious employment conditions in social care.

7.4 Precarity and the crisis of care

Under neocommunitarian neoliberalism, the imposed cuts on front-line organisations in social care have led to a radical restructuring of paid and unpaid social care work. The shifts created in public funding under pseudo-marketisation towards more regularised, predefined and restricted forms of front-line support under the commissioning of services have been traced in this study to a radical qualitative change of work content in social care. Women reported on a loss of leeway to commit themselves to sustain work environments which once built up empowering ways of addressing inequality and structural violence. The ongoing restructuring undermines a sustainable organisation of social care work under already normalised precarious employment conditions, which leads to both a loss of services and closure of projects and an overburdening of employed and volunteering direct support workers in the remaining support projects under institutionalised volunteering. Worsening working conditions in front-line support ultimately leads to a crisis of care as mutually support activities and leeway for intuitive support is lost.

7.4.1 A struggle on the field of affect: embodiment as ma(r)king (the) difference

Post-operaist literature traces current social, political and economic transformation as an ongoing social conflict in which the precarisation of labour effectively controls the subversive powers of labour and oppresses struggles for autonomous, democratic and a more equal organisation of society. Struggles of labour feature here as “the driving force of capitalism“ (Eden 2012, p. 25) contributing to its transformation by labour's given potential for building up subversive power in collective ways. Taking on board feminist analyses on the role of reproductive labour in the creation of value, post-operaist literature has thereby established an important opening in political economy analysis. The blurring of reproductive and productive spheres in the everyday experiences of labour is here addressed as a *structural* feature of contemporary capitalism. This recognises *biopolitics* as a crucial political arena and develops debate about the ambivalent ways in which processes of subjectivation are mobilised in contemporary forms of value creation. While this transformation is discussed as implying intensified forms of exploitation and subjugation, the thereby necessary collaboration and cooperation processes are directly addressed as yielding potential for subversion in the creation of different forms of sociality. It has been argued that this move implies the necessity for more attention on the 'field of desire' for political intervention and class struggle (cf. Berardi 'Bifo' 2012;

Eden 2012). This opening has supported the creation of broader alliances against exploitation, control and subjugation beyond already recognised and formalised realms of employment, while not leaving considerations of *work organisation* aside (cf. subsection 2.2.1).

While post-operaism emphasises the potential for labour to subvert and transform current conditions via a subversively productive biopolitical *refusal of work* by using its inherent power in collective ways, it remains vague in the analysis of the ambivalent configurations and given limitations for doing so (as discussed from within by Berardi 'Bifo' 2012; Eden 2012; Federici and Caffentzis 2007). The unequal division of resources for care, interdependencies in care, and the potentially transformed necessities for care created throughout this process, thus the implied burdens and limitations for such attempts are not (yet) directly addressed in great detail (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009). Different starting points, outcomes and consequences of such endeavours for particular sections of society remain obscure. Critical voices within the precarity movement that draw on feminist commentaries on care have given attention to these aspects and foremost provide analytical tools and empirical insights to address the challenges implied in maintaining and facilitating sustainable practices of care under current processes of precarisation.

What happens when subjectivation processes are increasingly central arenas for value creation and exploitation, while *publicly* organised social care and service provision is put under pressure by pseudo-marketisation and is marked by neocommunitarian neoliberal appeals for increased efforts under individualising forms of institutionalised volunteering? I have argued throughout this thesis that precarious labour in social care has to deal with a constant re-balancing of different, often conflicting desires and needs, the loyalties to issues, individuals and collectives generated throughout. Dealing with conflicting desires and needs is a crucial feature and thus inherent aspect of work in social care. Thus, the embodiment of affect plays a crucial role to keep precarious constellations productive in *both senses*, to keep the current system ongoing *but also* to transform exploitative conditions, the subversive moments that create mutually empowering practices of care.

A contextualised and not individualising analysis of desire is here paramount for exploring the potential for a constructive *refusal of work*, for building up a mobilising force which can create new subversive processes in social care. The struggles of women that were traced in this study amount to an everyday level in this realm. I captured incidents of articulated desire to escape and practices that created different spheres for the

embodiment of social care, at times in an almost stubborn struggle to change the everyday from within precarious employment conditions. Here the acknowledgement that these are *embodied* ways of dealing with intersectional forms of discrimination in precarity was quintessential for recognising differences in this struggle and thus challenges for keeping up with/building up collective answers to cuts, privatisation and misregulation. The recognition of interdependence for mutually empowering practices of care must thus be contextualised in concrete empirical analyses and detailed consideration given to unequal support and resource allocation. The traced constellations that were explored in this study were often highly unstable, at risk of being completely lost.

More attention is thus needed to keep or create supportive conditions in the organisation of social care in which extra bits of in/appropriated sociability (Papadopoulos et al. 2008) can flourish. Nourishing mobilising forms of affect, by displacing the focus of commitment to areas where change can be achieved in more collective and self-empowering ways that can lead to a spiral movement and not a circling one which might suffocate in the end, might thus be a crucial ingredient for empowering struggles in precarity. Resolving ambivalence is thereby no option: it is a constant re-balancing that requires strenuous and collectively embedded efforts, it is an embodied dealing with commonalities *and* difference.

Fostering conditions in which people can nourish their desire to position and commit themselves in reciprocal structures of care and support is thus the crucial ingredient in doing politics in precarity. *Embodying* affect and practices of care under current conditions is a constant struggle for ma(r)king (the) difference: it is necessarily a collective *affective investment*, and as such the characteristic form of a potentially subversive and as such productive refusal of work in social care in the autonomous Marxist sense. It is contextualised by power relations along the lines of gender, race, age, dis/ability and health; materialised as such by unequal income distribution, resource allocation and (denied) access to support and public services in present society. Embodying and confronting these challenges – juggling affective ambivalences – is the everyday politics of precarious workers in social care; the embodiment of affect in subversive ways by creating collectively empowering structures of mutual support is the subversive tool, the hope and remaining power of living labour in precarity.

Thus, rather than only focussing on the power of intellectual labour by the 'cognitariat', as promoted by some post-operaist scholars that formulated a critique of 'cognitive capitalism' (see for instance Lucarelli and Fumagalli 2008; Vercellone 2006), the *embodied* everyday reality of affective labour in precarity and the thereby invisibilised

forms of exploitation and subversion must be emphasised and more adequately addressed. Putting the development of sustainable practices of care in the foreground for political mobilisation will help to create alliances *despite the structurally* created fragmentation and isolation of precarious labour in this regard.

Thus, a focus on affective efforts under *both* an autonomous Marxist and feminist lens yields the potential to address *processes of embodiment* as the necessary ma(r)king of (the) difference which could lead to a recomposition of social forces. Affective efforts for collective engagement are here not perceived as a potential add-on as in the conceptualisation of a supportive role for 'affinity' processes in social care (Cunningham et al. 2010) but as *necessary requirement for any productive and sustainable organisation of social care*. A discussion of the ethical consequences of the created organisational forms of social care under current conditions of precarisation is here logically an inherent requirement. Addressing explicitly the material conditions for developing an adequate *ethics of care* is forming in this framework – as I will argue below – the crucial biopolitical dimension of doing politics in precarity.

7.4.2 Self-organising social care? The limits of DIY care provision

The debate and mobilisations around precarity have depicted not only the woes connected to the ongoing precarisation of working and living conditions under neoliberal regimes, but stressed also the inherent opportunities for and actual realisations of collective and autonomous organisation of precarious workers and their potential to subvert conditions of exploitation (Lorey 2010; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2006). In the following, I will argue that the search for labour autonomy and self-organisation in precarity is a very tricky and indeed an already very hard-fought endeavour, when applied to the field of social care under neocommunitarian settings.

Neocommunitarian reforms are marked by an emphasis on collective engagement, a celebration of civil society, community action and the role of volunteering for public service reform. In problematic ways, this reform is sustained by arguments – although twisted – by the autonomous left for state-independent spheres for political action, with some authors reminding us of the pitfalls of the institutionalisation of support and pushing for the building of *the commons* 'from below' (Hardt and Negri 2009). However, there remains the possibility that this new mandate by government exists while imposing drastic cuts to certain aspects of service provision – on which such endeavours (could) rely – and is setting increasingly inadequate standards for the remainder of public services by building up new spaces for profit-making and private investment in isolated

and highly selective forms of service provision. In this situation is there really more vigorous attention needed to keep community spaces and activities *autonomous*?

Or is it necessary to pay more attention to the ambivalent situations created through this shift in discourse and the public and economic attention given to reproductive labour, a shift which directly addresses, regulates and attempts to exploit collective action and non-for-profit engagement through subcontracting and the further delegation of the duty to care? Is there not indeed a radical *reclaiming* of public services required, as in a request of *adequately funded* services through *the state and local communities*, by asking for a radically different mode and understanding of 'professionalisation' in social care?

Playing merely the collectivist and state-independent DIY card is in this situation not as appealing in the realm of social care projects. It might even be experienced as an affront to women's political endeavours and achievements, as it could be seen as implicitly accepting and not forcefully opposing the impending public funding cuts to social care projects. These require under current conditions more adequate forms of regulation and professionalisation. The call for an autonomous organisation of precarious workers could here be perceived as an additional attack on all those already highly overburdened employees and volunteers, playing into the hands of current endeavours by government for deregulation, public funding diversion and state funding retrenchment via further public funding cuts to social care provision.

What is required is the recognition that spaces for a collective and *interdependent* (not independent) organisation of social care need to be protected and created in manifold and highly differentiated ways. There is the urgent need to critically inform the very process of professionalisation by contributing to what constitutes adequate practice in particular areas of social care, not losing sight of the broader picture of intersectional forms of discrimination regarding the overall organisation of social care practice. These endeavours could build upon the experiences collected in critical social care practice in already established organisations and projects (Ferguson 2008; Seithe 2010) as well as connecting to recent feminist endeavours for a broader and more complex conceptualisation of the crisis of care under current socio-economic conditions.

Interesting questions might here concern the further discussion and definition of *the commons* regarding the organisation of care: what kind of practices in taking care can be 'commodified' or delegated under what form of collective organisation (Del Re 2012)? How to respond to specific needs and demands in this process as society is not divided by class conflict alone? Defining and keeping impact on the very process of

professionalization is here a particular challenge as it requires the freeing up of resources, time and space for campaigning and collective engagement. Thus, the analysis and definition of subversive management practices and the definition of professional practice in restrictive environments could play an important role to protect and establish new sustainable social care practices in already established organisations. Tracing the performed critical practices and experiences in dealing with constraints is here an important starting point (Aronson and Smith 2010).

A promising intervention regarding the setting of quality standards in dealing with Domestic Violence, for instance, has been proposed by Siddiqui and Patel (2010). Interested in a self-empowering model for their workers and service users they propose to invest in a reciprocal process in the development of professional knowledge between different practitioners, service users and members of the public. For this purpose it is suggested to build up and circulate better practice via the transformative use of methods previously developed in individual and group psychotherapy. Professional know-how, prestige and dissemination channels of the psy-sciences are used here to build up strength by *transforming* them in a forceful combination in everyday practice with feminist and anti-racist campaigning and community organising strategies.

An upfront dissemination of such successful and critically informed strategies for dealing with inadequate regulation and cuts in particular fields of social care could then follow. The post-operaist analysis and feminist critique of current forms of capitalist exploitation, isolation and alienation point however to the observation that only *broader* alliances beyond established, and isolated social care services and the building up of connections to other precarious workers might help to overcome the current crisis of care. This crisis of care is systemic and deprives more and more people from common resources and equal access to public services. If processes of professionalization lead to an increased isolation and division of social care workers from various sectors and areas of service provision, they might thus be counterproductive.

7.4.3 Resisting the dissection and qualitative change in the recognition of work

More than a merely quantitative change, the ongoing transformation is worrying as neocommunitarian reforms are imposing directly and indirectly a different quality of work in social care. Characteristics like cuts to funding and imposed quantifiable output measures are only the surface of a more fundamental qualitative transformation. The most important aspect of the neocommunitarian reform in social care is the implied imposition of a re-definition of social care work under an emergent re-composition of

the division of labour in the organisation, everyday running and campaigning activities of front-line services, a process which is newly dissecting the inherent continuum of affective labour, conceived in this study as the care-sex-attention-continuum, and taking away its inherent reproductive capacities and thus potential for a sustainable organisation of social care work.

Precarisation is a process by which the conditions for mutuality and empowering affectivity in social care relations are structurally hindered. The outcome of this process is redefining social care work by forcing labour to abandon previous acknowledgements. This is taunting already well-researched and analysed professional underpinnings of social care work by neglecting the productive debates around an holistic account of social care needs. The previously established work ethos and achievements, which included the provision of time and space for commitment to social change, are undermined. Affirmations of a political understanding of empowerment in the sense of aiming at increasing the service users' *and* social care workers' potential for life affirmation, preventive action and interest representation are today overwritten and suppressed by hollow redefinitions in reference to managerial strategies that were developed for other, highly commodified areas of production, and are in this process structurally inhibited or impeded (cf. Ferguson 2008; Seithe 2010).

I want to stress the finding that the ongoing transformation through the restructuring of the socio-material conditions for social care work in fact attacks necessary pre-conditions for affective labour that would allow it to take place in ethically bearable and acceptable ways. Current reforms are producing harming working environments through an overburdening *and* increased isolation of front-line workers. These will affect the division of labour in care chains by transferring burdens to *other* services and carers – as to mental health organisations, the NHS, family environments, community organisations or self-help groups – and creating *more* (unpaid) burdens to be taken on by *other carers*, again mostly women, in *other parts* and spaces of society.

Women reported not only on a diversion and reallocation of *work burdens*, but also on their impression that front-line support workers are negatively affected by a perceived experience of loss in their capacities to control the ways in which they work and the content they work with. Increasingly, there are structural hindrances to taking part in collective activities with colleagues *and* service users for women in front-line support. Women reported on peer-to-peer support across organisations being structurally undermined, with professional help for direct support workers being denied; they described both as important *preconditions* for dealing effectively with their daily

confrontation with at times potentially traumatising experiences of sexual and racist violence.

The currently created conditions for social care work are taking away the part which made face-to-face support work attractive, *in making it transformatively productive*. The crucial role of creating mobilising affect for the embodiment of practices of care in these settings, a process which is building up on allocated space and time for analysis and leeway for not predetermined sociability, which in turn can contribute to facilitate processes for radical change, must be restored and adequately recognised.

Social care work in women-only projects and spaces had included and informed strategies to create empowering ways of working and living together, providing space and time for collective engagement for social and political change *in but also beyond* the particular field of social care these women were confronted with. Experiences of structural violence and discrimination could be addressed by mutually empowering collective activities. These previously highly rewarding *informal aspects* of work in social care are currently being taken away or are at least at risk of being further embodied in powerful ways, especially in front-line organisations engaged in direct support work. Work intensification, imposed increased competition over funding and the concomitant qualitative re-definition of work are crucial factors in this process.

7.4.4 Looming care voids: the finitude of affective resources

What should be pointed out are the current and looming ethical differentiations implied in this ongoing transformation of social care work in precarity, resulting from this qualitative change in social care work. There is an implicit differentiation that needs to be forcefully addressed, as to what kinds of livelihoods, aims, objectives and interrelations are acknowledged, recognised and deemed to be worthy and feasibly supportable by the public and dealt with in paid social care. The current transformation is attacking the sheer quality of entire livelihoods, chances for enjoyable or indeed only 'ethically bearable' affective relationality, and thus current and future potentialities for an ethical and sustainable embodiment of life.

Earlier feminist contributions highlighted the fact that relations of care reach beyond economic activity and that this very activity must be reflective of the finitude of material and affective resources (Dalla Costa 2007). Divisions in the acknowledgement of caring obligations and the differently embodied limits and structural conditions for affective labour due to the finitude of resources need to be further scrutinised. Otherwise the belief and appeal to the political potential of *volunteering*, or even the *politics of care*,

under whatever elaborated appeals for subversive engagement, might continue to produce the highly discriminatory and harming outcomes for women, so-called 'colonial subjects', and those who do not fit the prevailing assumptions of independent, autonomous, self-efficacious individuals.

Capitalist exploitation has been characterised by Federici (2004) in its gear to incorporate communal spaces and forms of reproductive labour into marketised corsets, to then exploit and thrive on these, by thereby reproducing and increasing the system's inherent inequalities. Federici has argued that this has been a process by which livelihoods and ways of living of women and colonial subjects have been destroyed and ultimately lost. Women in my study reported not only worries that their activities will become pushed into the under- or unpaid realm, and/or might be taken on by other workers, however differently subjugated and less recognised (as analysed by scholars in tracing global care chains, see subsection 2.1.3).

Far more important and also drastic is the finding of this study that women are reporting on their experience that certain aspects of their work and projects *are disappearing*, as they are not taken on by themselves any more, or by others, and might just be entirely lost, potentially leading to a loss of life, of particular livelihoods, of attention to an ethical embodiment of life and ecological forms of social relationality. Thus, indeed, this leads to a loss of qualities of life, resulting implicitly in a brutalisation of society.

The effects of the looming loss of a sustainable form of care and attention to support needs in the neocommunitarian crisis of care will be experienced differently: not everyone is affected by this potential loss of quality of life (in the case of this study for some women) directly and in similar ways. It will not necessarily be always traceable as a loss in economic productivity, the loss of efficiency of existent social care provision in the UK, or increased burdens on others' services. There might be shifted burdens to other providers of care like the NHS, shelters for the homeless, mental health institutions etc. which result in more burdens to be taken on by other carers. It could be also less palpable to the general public, as in the sheer loss of livelihoods, in terms of a rise in suicides and homicides in the UK (cf. Women's Aid 2011) and/or the loss of quality of life for some individuals and communities. For certain, it will be a loss of leeway for socio-cultural change towards a more sustainable way of living by further subjugating those bodies affected by these transformations, and thus indeed a loss of the sheer quality of life for some, their loved ones and dependents.

These are aspects which are *not* entirely measurable and accountable in quantifiable economic in- and output figures, but which relate to ethical questions of how

we want to make a living in society: whose lives, and especially what kind of existence and forms of solidarity, will be publicly protected, supported and whose lives and what kind of existence and forms of solidarity might not. The ongoing brutalisation of society and the proposed necessity for a shift in our attention towards the efforts needed in attending to the precariousness of life (Butler 2009) in sustainable and ethical ways is starting but going beyond a mere focus on the ongoing change in the production regime and the redistribution of material wealth.

There are increasing *care voids*, and as such highly differentiated neglect of the differences in care requirements when dealing with support needs of individuals along various factors such as gender, age, dis/ability, health and citizenship, to various degrees of assumed and embodied caring obligations, and as such a lack of respect and support for life in its various formations and differentiations. This is also an ethical question of the creation of environments for social change and the very conceptualisation of inequalities, thus about the development of objectives in the very definition of work content in social care.

Focussing on social care work in the women's sector has made me aware of the importance in making the point that there is *indeed* a precarisation of *employment* taking place that is affected by a new division of labour, with a transformation of work in the sense of what kind of activities are paid and recognised, or unpaid and unrecognised. What struck me in this transformation was my respondents' fierce struggle to keep their activities in social care existing and alive, *however organised and embodied*, and the reported difficulties, renunciations and defeats in doing so.

Further research is needed to tackle the impending *care voids* and the emerging interrelational phenomena in overlapping and intersecting inequalities regarding precarious work and the informally organised activities in social care. This would require addressing in more detail the imposed affective burdens that are put on social care workers through institutionalised volunteering and isolation, in consideration of the finitude and limitations for contributions by single subjects and communities. This could help to address persistent and intensified divisions of labour, but also the new emerging chances for collective and transformative solidarity beyond difference, and thus to potentially productive conflict in, but also beyond, the issue of social care work.

It is vital to discuss and address thereby the different forms of collective control over resources and the organisation of labour and work environments that would be adequate and indeed necessary for different fields of re-/production and thus in different fields of social care. Otherwise, appeals for self-organisation and labour autonomy could

again become a very exclusionary endeavour, overlapping with appeals by neoliberal government for state independence and retrenchment, and thus *failing* to address the consequences of the already existing and looming crisis of care and the thereby apparent differences in affective burdens to be taken on by individual subjects and communities, increasingly divided along sex, race, gender, dis/ability, citizenship and age.

Conclusion

Under neocommunitarian neoliberalism, public service reforms are promoted that try to thrive on public support for issues like 'empowerment of local communities', increased 'voice and choice' for service users, and a discourse of 'partnership and co-production' between government and the Third Sector. But the very implementation of these neocommunitarian reforms in social care under cost-cutting endeavours has twisted and counteracted their stated intentions. The outcomes of these reforms have been analysed in this study by addressing the ongoing transformation of working conditions in the women's voluntary and community sector. Neocommunitarian reform has resulted in severe cuts and the imposition of excessive workloads in front-line social care projects leading to a loss of highly specialised support projects, with drastic loss of publicly funded support for BAMER communities. This loss and diversion of funding for direct support work undermines the creation and collective sustainment of empowering working and living conditions for service users *and* support workers and intensifies existing discrimination along the lines of gender and race. Qualitative shifts in the very definition and recognition of social care work display a drastic worsening of working conditions depicted in this study as a loss of control over front-line support. Neocommunitarian reforms that pushed for a centrally guided pseudo-marketisation of public services have thus enforced unsustainable forms of work under institutionalised volunteering in social care which will exacerbate the ongoing *crisis of care*.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Voluntary Sector workforce characteristics

Since 1996, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has published Voluntary Sector Almanacs based on the analysis of data retrieved from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) by the Office for National Statistics. The Labour Force Survey is the most comprehensive survey of employment in the UK, representing the whole population of the UK resident in private households. It samples 60,000 households every three months (see: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/policy-research-analysis/research/civil-society-economy/almanac-previous-editions>, access date 01/06/2011). In 2007, the NCVO Voluntary Sector Workforce Almanac provided an in depth overview and analysis of change in employment figures from 1996 to 2005. It states that the paid workforce in the Voluntary Sector has been steadily rising, estimated for the UK at 611,000 in 2005. Employment in organisations involved in “social work related activities” is estimated to have comprised over half of all employment in the Voluntary Sector (54%) in 2005, with a sharp rise reported in workplaces related to “social work activities without accommodation” of 86% over the ten year period (Clark 2007, p. 20-22).

Unfortunately, NCVO does not provide in its almanac any closer analysis of this section of the workforce in the VS. However, it clearly states the distinctiveness of the VS in terms of its overall workforce and employment characteristics when compared to the public and private sectors: NCVO reports that VS employees work predominantly in *small* workplaces compared to figures for the private and public sector workforce, a condition which would make it more difficult to address and implement workforce training and skills development, or to achieve collective arrangements regarding terms and conditions in employment.

NCVO states that a higher proportion of VS employees work on temporary contracts than in the public and private sectors: only 91% of employees were working on permanent contracts, compared to 92% of public sector employees and 96% in the private sector. The number of employees on temporary contracts in the VS has thereby remained static from 1996 to 2005 in comparison to a decrease in the private and public sectors. This has been interpreted as an indicator of less job security in the VS compared to jobs in the other two sectors and it has been suggested that the percentage of employees in temporary employment might even be higher, as people on fixed-term

contracts may not perceive themselves as temporary workers (Clark 2007).

These characteristics affect a predominantly *female* workforce: in 2005, two thirds (69%) of the overall VS workforce was female, which compares to 67% in the public sector but differs significantly from 40% in the private sector. Part-time employment was at 39%, forming a higher percentage for women in part-time employment in the Voluntary Sector than in the other two sectors (Clark 2007).

According to the most recent almanac, only 22% of VS employees are unionised compared to 56% in the public sector. Moreover, the proportion of employees covered by agreements between unions and their employers was also 22%, compared to 73% in the public sector (Skills Third Sector et al. 2010). These figures reflect the concerns put forward by unions around the *relative isolation* of workers in the Voluntary Sector when it comes to collective agreements to secure better terms and conditions.

Appendix 2 Historical roots and organisational diversity of the UK's WVCS

The sector's roots can be traced back through a rich history of struggles by women for equal treatment and social and political rights. However, it is feminism and the formation of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 70s, with its links to the worldwide civil rights, peace, environment and anti-capitalist movements which has informed the discursive realm, organisational structure and varied campaigning experience of today's women's sector. Women's collective self-assertion against sexism in patriarchy and the implicit change in women's self-understanding brought momentum into their fight against persisting inequalities over sex and gender in British legislation and everyday life. Women took their imaginative protest onto the streets, focusing on a wide range of topics such as violence against women, equal rights and equal opportunity legislation, the right to abortion and free contraception (WRC 2006c).

It was during the 1970s that grassroots and local community based women's groups and projects spread throughout the country, soon followed by nationwide operating organisations and associations: in 1972 the first women's refuge in the UK was set up in London; two years later, the National Women's Aid federation pooled together 40 other refuges (organisations operating under the Women's Aid federation and the organisation Refuge are today the most prominent and largest players in the field of refuge service provision in the UK) (WRC 2005). It was also during that time that Black and Asian women's groups asserted themselves, with the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent as the first national umbrella organisation of Black women's organisations formed in 1978 (Brah and Phoenix 2004).

These projects and organisations operated initially mostly on a voluntary basis with focus on peer-to-peer support, empowerment and needs-based services. The collective engagement as women and decades of work experience in tailored gender-sensitive support and intersectional dimensions of inequalities inform the particular expertise of the sector and is discussed as building up a strong legacy for today's women's organisations. This includes transformative and constructive conflicts inside the women's movement over how to provide tailored support to women and needs-adequate support by attending to cultural differences and the politics around issues of class, race, sexuality, dis/ability and age (cf. WRC 2005, 2006a, 2009).

Today, the aim to support women and women's issues finds expression not only in a great variety of social bodies, differing in area and focus of work but also in status, size, structure and sources of funding. Women's voluntary and community organisations

are active in different fields, most prominently in rights and equality, violence against women (VAW), health, education and employment; but also in areas like the criminal justice system, sports, the arts and the environment. Their projects, services and campaigns reach out to the most marginalised (communities of) women in terms of age, ethnicity, religion, citizen status, sexual orientation, educational background and dis/ability. Women have organised themselves very creatively, forming various social bodies, including groups (e.g. informal campaigning and self-help groups), networks (e.g. online communities and mailing lists), organisations (e.g. charitable organisations, social enterprises, worker's cooperatives) and coalitions (e.g. the recent coalition to abolish the 'no recourse to public funds' requirement in immigration and welfare law) (Oxfam 2011; WRC 2006a, 2009).

Appendix 3 Researching precarious labour in the WVCS

Invitation Letter to potential research participants in women's organisations

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The reorganisation of funding for work in the community in the UK

Research into working conditions, everyday experience, strategies and policy development
in women's organisations

Dear ...

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on care and community work in projects, services and spaces for women in the UK. The research project is based at the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University and addresses the question of how the ongoing reorganisation of public funding affects the working conditions in women's organisations in London.

The Women's Voluntary and Community Sector (WVCS) has faced severe cuts in terms of funding in the last couple of years. The *Why Women?* Campaign initiated by the Women's Resource Centre and related research have pointed out the importance and strengths of highly specialised projects and services run by and for women. However, further research and emphasis on concerns in the sector are needed.

I started this research project to explore and draw particular attention to women's *everyday experience* at work in the WVCS. I intend to carry out a series of interviews which would last about one hour. In these conversations I would like to learn from you about the particular content, direction and terms and conditions of your work, the enjoyments and difficulties that you experience, and how you think you are affected by the changes in funding provision and procedures for care and community work in the UK.

I would be very pleased if you could participate in the study. Anonymity is guaranteed. The results will inform my PhD thesis on the reorganisation of care and community work in the UK. Please find attached an Information Sheet regarding the background and conditions of the research project. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I do hope that you find this proposal interesting and that you will help with the research. Please feel free to pass the letter on to anybody else who you think might be able to help me. I'd be grateful if you would ask them to email me in case they would like to participate.

I am looking forward to hearing from you
Best wishes

Amanda Ehrenstein

Participant Information Sheet

Amanda Ehrenstein Dipl.-Psych. MSc School of Social Sciences Cardiff University
EhrensteinA@cardiff.ac.uk a.ehrenstein@gmx.de +44 20 77376189 +44 79 4694 2128

The reorganisation of funding for work in the community in the UK

Research into working conditions, everyday experience, strategies and policy development in women's organisations

Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on working conditions and everyday experience in care and community work for women in London. The following will give you a short overview of what this means for you and the information you decide to give me. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Do not hesitate to talk about the study with other people.

Who am I?

My name is Amanda Ehrenstein and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University. I am supervised by two Senior Researchers in the School of Social Sciences. The research has the approval of the School Research Ethics Committee and is funded by the School of Social Science at Cardiff University.

Why am I doing this research?

Although there have been some studies on the reorganisation of funding for care and community services and the impact of recent government initiatives on smaller and highly specialised voluntary and community organisations in the UK, the effects of these changes on working conditions in care and community work for and by women have not been examined in close detail.

Who can take part?

I am approaching people who are working in women's voluntary and community organisations in London. As part of the overall research project, I will also approach people working for local authorities and relevant government agencies as well as representatives of trade unions and social movement activists campaigning for better care and community services in the UK.

What would be involved?

If you choose to participate, I would like to discuss your views on the process of changes occurring in the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector (WVCS) in London. This would last about one hour. I would like to talk to you about the following topics:

- How do you think you are affected by the current reorganisation of funding for care and community work in the UK?
- What strategies have been applied and which have proved to be useful in dealing with these changes in the WVCS/in your organisation?
- What are your everyday experiences at work? How do you deal with difficult living and working conditions related to care and community work?
- Have there been changes you would like to comment on regarding the content, direction, terms and conditions of work in the WVCS?

The interview will be digitally recorded. If you are interested, I will come back to you for further interviews to clarify aspects of our conversation or to continue other aspects of it.

What will be done with the information?

I will transcribe (parts of) the interview and if you are interested I will give you a copy of the transcript. The transcript will only be read and used by me for my research project and not be used for any other purpose. The information from these discussions will be the basis of my PhD thesis which will be assessed in order for me to gain the PhD. The transcripts might also be used to write and publish articles in academic journals or to give presentations on conferences and in academic seminars. You are welcome to see the final thesis and/or a copy of the articles/papers before they are published.

Will everything said be kept private and will your taking part be confidential?

You can say as little or as much as you wish. The transcript and recordings will be kept in a secure place. In the transcript the names of yourself, the organisation(s) you work for and the names of the people you mention will be changed or omitted so you will not be identifiable.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

If you decide to take part then this is your voluntary decision, therefore you are also free to withdraw from the study at any point you wish, without giving a reason.

If you would be interested in taking part or have any questions concerning the research, feel free to contact me at 020 7737 6189, 079 4694 2128 or email: EhrensteinA@cardiff.ac.uk. I would be happy to answer any questions and look forward to meeting you.

Consent Form

Amanda Ehrenstein Dipl.-Psych. MSc School of Social Sciences Cardiff University
EhrensteinA@cardiff.ac.uk a.ehrenstein@gmx.de +44 20 7737 6189 +44 79 4694 2128

The reorganisation of funding for work in the community in the UK

Research into working conditions, everyday experience, strategies and policy development
in women's organisations

Consent Form

Name of researcher: Amanda Ehrenstein

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in the study

Name of participant

Date Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date Signature

Topic Guide for interviews in the WVCS

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Exploring working conditions and affective experience in the WVCS

1 Funding situation, endowment of projects and division of labour

- Job/role/position in project/organisation
- Situation of project/organisation in terms of funding?
- What are the challenges in this regard?
- Division of labour: who is doing what in the organisation?
- Collaboration with colleagues, organisational structure
- Collaboration with other (women's) organisations?

2 Employment conditions

- Work tasks and workloads: definition of work, describe your working day
- Employment status: contract, rights and benefits
- Recognition and remuneration
- Working hours, overtime
- Further education and training provision on the job
- Experience of change in all these regards?

3 Experience of working conditions

- Can you describe me a typical day at work?
- Do you enjoy your job? Why so/why not?
- What do you like/dislike regarding your work? Why?
- What do you experience as particularly difficult or supportive for doing your work?
- (Quality of) support provided in organisation?
- Infrastructure, networking activities
- Are there conditions that you are struggling with?
- For what do you miss time and space?

4 Background for engagement in WVCS and plans for the future

- Why taken on employment in WVCS/in that particular project/organisation?
- Important incidents/encounters/people/events for commitment (in WVCS)?
- Involvement in collectives/initiatives/collaborative projects?
- Former forms of employment, for which organisations?
- Formal education
- Future (career) plans

5 Issues of care

- What do you understand under care for others and yourself?
- How do you deal with issues of care for others and yourself?
- Do you receive support in caring for others? in which ways?
- Do you experience any collision of interests with your job in the WVCS in this regard?

6 Affective experience and strategies

- Have you observed/experienced any tensions in your organisation/in the WVCS?
- What are your strategies for dealing with tensions in your organisation/in the WVCS?
- Do you feel vulnerable? In what?
- What makes you feel strong?
- Motivation, beating the blues, charging energy – what is helpful?
- How does the reality of your daily life compare with your hopes and dreams?
- Are there people, organisations and institutions you get support from?
- How do you see your future and the future of your projects/your work?
- Perception of change in these regards?

7 Political commitment and understanding

- What would you put on the political agenda?
- Lobbying for and collective organisation in the WVCS: achievements/challenges?
- What attracts you, what makes you withdraw from commitment/collective organisation/collaboration with others?
- What is hindering a better collective organisation of labour and representation of workers' interests in the WVCS?
- Membership in union/party/other organisations?

8 Further contacts, suggestions

- Can you suggest me any other organisation/women to get in contact with?
- Any other suggestions/questions?

Appendix 4 Tables

Table 1 List of formally interviewed workers in the WVCS

pseudonym	type of organisation	size of organisation	location/ remit	position
Marta	second-tier, generic, VAW	smaller medium	London	director
Liliana Clare Anne Sarah	second-tier, generic	larger medium	London/UK	policy officer policy officer policy co- ordinator information officer
Barbara	second-tier, generic	smaller medium	London/UK	policy officer
Ramira	second-tier, BAMER, VAW	smaller medium	London/UK	policy officer
Helen	front-line, generic, VAW	large	B1 & several other	project manager
Jane	front-line, generic	large	other	project manager
Natalie	front-line, generic, VAW	no data	other	project manager
Lin Pia	front-line, generic	large	other	director fundraiser
Evelyn	front-line, generic, VAW	large	B1 & several other	director
Gil	front-line, generic	larger medium	B2	initiator, manager
Monica	front-line, generic, VAW	smaller medium	B2	ex project manager
Alisha	front-line, generic, VAW	smaller medium	B1	senior project worker
Dora Saskia Maren Farida	front-line, generic	small	London	project development workers
Jasmin	front-line, BAMER	small	other	project manager
Rohini	front-line, BAMER VAW	larger medium	other	project manager

Mona Mia Sahira Ayan Daya	front-line, BAMER	smaller medium	B2 & surrounding boroughs	director frontline workers
Shezan	front-line, BAMER	smaller medium	B2	director
Janet Marina	front-line, BAMER	micro	B2	project initiator volunteer
Agatha	front-line, BAMER	smaller medium	B2	director
Sita	front-line, BAMER VAW	smaller medium	B1	initiator, project manager

31 women working in various positions for 19 different London-based organisations were formally interviewed. I focused on organisations located in two Labour-led boroughs (B1 and B2), but also approached organisations based in other boroughs of London. With Ramira I only had a short conversation via phone, the interview we had planned was postponed and finally cancelled and therefore not included in the final count. Monica was interviewed twice.

front-line: organisations offering direct support services to women.

second-tier: organisations offering support to front-line support organisations and/or specialising in policy work/campaigning.

BAMER: organisations offering specialised services by actively addressing (particular) BAMER communities.

generic: no specification made in terms of race/ethnicity/citizen status of service users in the organisation's programmes.

VAW: organisations that offered specialised Violence Against Women support services.

other: organisation provided services in another borough, not in B1 or B2.

several other: organisation also provided services in other boroughs.

surrounding boroughs: organisations also provided some projects in surrounding boroughs.

In this thesis I use the distinctions introduced by NCVO on the size of VCOs along their annual income for a differentiation of organisations operating in the women's sector:

micro: up to £10k;

small: £10k-100k;

medium: £100k-1m;

large: £1-10m;

major: over £10m.

Additionally, I borrowed the differentiation between

smaller medium: £100-550k and

larger medium: £550k-1m organisations

from the WRC to point out that most women's organisations in the medium income band are part of the former category (WRC 2009).

Table 2 List of organisations in the WVCS

	front-line		second-tier	
size	BAMER	generic	BAMER	generic
micro ($< \pounds 10,000$)	2	2		
small ($\pounds 10,000 - \pounds 100,000$)	1	1		
smaller medium ($\pounds 100,000 - \pounds 550,000$)	5	2	1	2
larger medium ($\pounds 550,000 - \pounds 1\text{million}$)	1	1		1
large ($\pounds 1 - \pounds 10\text{ million}$)		4		
major ($> \pounds 10\text{ million}$)				

This list comprises 23 women's organisations in London from which workers participated in this study in the form of arranged interviews or longer informal conversations. Only those organisations were included for which information on size was given by participant or could be retrieved on the GuideStar UK online database for Voluntary and Community Organisations. Size was here defined as in the organisation's annual income for the financial year 2007/2008.

Table 3 List of interviewees outside the women's sector

pseudonym	type of organisation	location/remit	position
Ben	unions	London/UK	national policy officer for VCS
Joanne		London/UK	policy officer
Kate		London	policy officer
Steven		London	VS branch officer
Marianne			manager
Rose		London/UK	national policy officer for VCS
Val	LIOs	B1	capacity building manager
Farid		B2	capacity building manager
Tania		B2/UK	consultant for LIOs
Prita	local authorities	B1	commissioning officer for DV
Tracy		B1	DV coordinator
Nora		B2	procurement officer for VCS
Michelle		B2	commissioning officer for women's services
Nora			procurement officer for VCS

12 interviews, 13 interviewees

I met Nora twice as she also attended the second half of the interview with Michelle.

Appendix 5 Statistical data on the women's sector in the UK

It is difficult to provide a picture about the WVCS as a whole. The main hindrance for a quantitative analysis is a lack of attention to, and therefore missing government figures on women's voluntary and community organisations (WRC 2009). Any statement and research on the sector depends on the definition of it and its methodological implementation. Overviews and conclusions on the status of the sector are mainly provided by bodies in the sector itself, mostly by second-tier organisations. Their studies are informed by the experience of their membership organisations and/or based on data provided by the Charity Commission. However, not every not-for-profit organisation appears on the radar of these organisations and the Charity Commission. For instance, it has been estimated that for every registered charity in the UK there are at least five times as many unregistered self-help and local community groups (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2009b). Furthermore, studies based on the Charity Commission's register cover neither the growing number of social enterprises and the remaining worker's cooperatives, nor those women-specific projects which are part of bigger organisations with a broader remit and do not appear as such on those registers.

While previous research has estimated the overall number of women's organisations in England and Wales at 11,000 (WRC 2006c) up to 30,000 in the UK (WRC 2008d), a more recent study reported on 1,348 women's organisations with charitable status in England (WRC 2009). Despite its highlighted methodological weaknesses as it gathered data only on particular registered charitable organisations in the sector, the 2009 report gives important insights in quantitative terms on women's organisations in England and London. It is the only existing up-to-date report and quantitative analysis of organisational features for the women's sector in the UK and provides a picture of how the sector presents itself and reflects upon its current situation.

Both WRC studies gained their data by searching the GuideStar UK online database for Voluntary and Community Organisations (www.guidestar.org.uk). The dataset for the 2009 study was obtained by searching for 'women', selecting those organisations where 'women' appeared in the name or the organisation's activities. The sample was then cleared from organisations primarily concerned with conversion and filtered against the keywords 'townswoman', 'girlsschool', 'ladiesclub', 'almshouse', 'nun' and 'sister'. Furthermore, 6,800 branches of the *Women's Institute* and 1,000 of *Girlsguide UK*, the two biggest Voluntary and Community organisations for women and girls in the

UK, were excluded from the sample, as it was feared that their datasets could distort the overall picture of the WVCS (WRC 2009).

The 2009 report paints a rather grim picture: almost *one in five* of all the registered women's organisations (18%) had *no financial record for any* of the three years covered by the analysis (2004-2007) and can therefore be deemed to be “inactive, i.e. they might have already been closed” (WRC 2009, p. 2). Criteria for the inclusion in the dataset for further analyses on funding were the existence of three consecutive financial reports for the years 2004-2007. Of the dataset of 1,348 registered organisations in England, only 751 (56%) fulfilled these criteria and were therefore included. As these annual financial reports are a requirement by law to retain the status of a registered charity, it is most likely that the remaining 597 charities face serious existential difficulties (WRC 2009).

For the women's sector in London, the report identified 448 registered women's charities which means for the area of Greater London “1.4 organisations per 10,000 population of women aged 15 years or older” (ibid., p. 1). The sector's richness and the variety of the services it (still) offers in London come fully into the picture in the analysis of the area of work of these 448 organisations. Analysed along 18 categories, from a specification of the type of work and service offered like 'Advice', 'Counselling', 'Policy', 'Research', to categories regarding the focus of work like 'Offending', 'Sex work', 'Housing', 'Poverty', 'Arts', etc., only 4 out of 18 categories had over 10% of all the organisations allocated to them. These categories were 'Violence against Women' with 13%, 'Health' with 15%, 'Employment, Education and Training' with 19% and 'General' with 29%. Organisations were allocated to a maximum of three different categories. The category General was applied to all those organisations offering a wide range of different services, e.g. women's centres, which would have otherwise been allocated to four or more categories (WRC 2009, Appendix London, p. 4).

WRC's analysis of the organisations' focus on specific equalities strands shows that the women's sector also (still) reflects the cultural and ethnic diversity of London's population: 57% of the 448 registered women's organisations in London can be counted as BAME organisations (working either with Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic women); even more impressively, 10% have their main focus of work on refugees and asylum seekers. In the report, emphasis is also given to the gender dimension in the women's sector itself, by highlighting the small number of registered charities in London (only 5) which focus their services on lesbian, bisexual and/or trans (LBT) women (ibid.). Within the scope of this study, I have not addressed issues concerning the latter subgroup, while it should certainly be stated that subjects perceiving themselves as performing gender

beyond binary dichotomies and the heterosexual matrix face even greater difficulties receiving adequate support and public funding for collective self-organisation.

Alarming for London is the finding that even though the final analysis on funding included only fully financially accountable and registered charities – and therefore more robust organisations – the growth in overall expenses in London's women's sector was stronger than the growth in generated income, with the income of the fully accountable 225 organisations “[growing] by 13% from 2004/05 to 2005/06 and by 10% from 2005/06 to 2006/07 (...) [while] spending increased by 19% and 15% during the same period”. The gap between income and expenditure narrowed for the included women's organisations all over England, but even more sharply in London (ibid.).

Appendix 6 Longer excerpts of interviews

EI 1

Prita: I would argue when we come to re-commission this, to say, hang on, *why not get one provider to run all these services, keep X¹⁰² as Asian women's refuge, and keep the workers as well, but to save on the overheads and management, why can't we go to Refuge or Y and say, run all of the refuges in B1 because we at council level, we have to make savings and are under pressure also from politicians because they are saying, we are spending a lot of money on refuges which are housing women from other parts of England, Wales, Scotland but that's not helping women in B1 who are suffering DV, so, we need to concentrate on that, so, it could be an idea to combine them all.* Keep the speciality but is there any reason why they could not be managed by one provider? At the moment we have to provide management overheads to all of them and we could make great savings! (...) I know that there will be a great appeal, in a sense, they have never been challenged and this change is going to be difficult. X will probably say 'Oh but you can't do that, we are specialist refuge serving Asian women'. We don't have a problem with that. Any organisation that steps in we would expect them to keep Asian staff, to keep that speciality, to lead those refuges taking only Asian women. (...) *It would be kept the same, but we want somebody who, who has more experience and also who is more about to get extra funding.* So for example if I say for example Refuge, they are very exposed because Cherie Blair used to be the patron or maybe still is the patron and they can attract a lot of funding. So that would help the women to have extra support in terms of counselling or childcare or education, training. But that's just one argument, you know. *I'm sure there could be other arguments about splitting it, whatever. But so we can keep the cake and eat it as well.* The only issue will be that X has been managed for [>10] years by a management committee of Asian women who don't want to relinquish that. But when we compare a lot of our PIs [pro forma invoice] and things, *we want to get more truth out of them, we want to get more outputs for our money, we wanna get value for money, so that is the change that some refuges across the country have not prepared themselves for.*

¹⁰² X and Y: Names and specific data of the organisations obliterated to secure the anonymity of my respondents.

EI 2

AE¹⁰³: Has this changed through Supporting People? So, previously, was it [the funding for women's organisations] not local area – or borough – organised?

Helen: I don't know, I have seen it become more and more marked. I've only been in the sector since 2003 when SP came through. So, I don't know, *it certainly has become more and more marked*. At the moment we are supporting a group called Southall Black Sisters to fight against a funding reduction from Ealing Council. Part of that is linked into single strand equalities funding and cohesion funding that have both caused trouble and part of it is linked to the fact that they provide services locally, pan-London, nationally, internationally, and Ealing aren't too happy about funding anything outside of Ealing. And then no one else is going to fund them to work with a service let's say in Bromley or Westminster. They would not give that funding. (...)

AE: I mean in a sense you could say, ok if it is organised locally, then community-based organisation would profit, should be coming out now. Is this the case?

Helen: No, with the advent of LAA things changed a lot. They began a couple of years back; they are getting more prominence now. A LAA is decided by a local LSP. To be part of that LSP, basically, you have to be a large Voluntary Organisation or statutory organisation with the time to commit to that service in that borough, *so the biggest groups with the strongest voice get their needs through to the board, they end up on the LAA*; they did make the priorities of that area. Equalities issues because of their very nature they are submit to discrimination, there are small groups, are not going to be able to make that impact: so you are looking at gender, you are looking at race, you could be looking at religious background, all those minority issues (laughing) – well, [are] women a minority? – are just being pushed aside. And the smaller groups aren't being heard. Smaller groups are also less like to get funding from the pan-London, source of funding by London Councils. Larger organisations are more like to be successful because they have the infrastructure that is required to be able to return those requests for that funding...

AE: It's funny because in the government's policies it always reads different.

Helen: Yes! I think sometimes they don't think about the impacts of what they are doing. So the recent cohesion funding talked about supporting grassroots organisations and improving community cohesion. And actually what they have done by not funding same-extract-equality groups, they stopped community cohesion, they are stopping the most vulnerable people from ever gaining support, and ever being able to play an active part in that community!

¹⁰³ abbreviation for Amanda Ehrenstein

AE: But can this only be accidental? I mean they are policy makers, they should know what the effects are...

Helen: I think it is not thought out. You know, look at the cohesion guidance, it was brought out about April last year, quite a while ago, enough for it to be having an impact on actions being taken now, the current round of LAAs, but the community cohesion guidance came out about 6 weeks ago, and it is currently up for consultation, not even a full document! How can you publish a document that will influence funding and then publish the guidelines for funders on that document, you know, 6-8-9-12 months later? Really, it's crazy! And also they are doing that now, that the LAAs are mostly being decided. 'They will be slowly in the regions' offices now, and about to coming into effect in about April or May, and all this stuff is going to have any effect on them. *There is no overview, no strategic planning behind releasing of things, no space for error. A lot of it is being dictated by government's need for change, rather than the support needs of people in the community.*

AE: And government's need for change is? What are their priorities?

Helen: *Mostly it seems to be, it all seems to be reducing the amount of money being spent. They were trying to put people back in control of their care. I'm not sure if it is successful. I don't know, there is also this mix; they are pushing in different directions. They are not all thinking together, sometimes.*

EI 3

Marta: Another good example is the LAA target that exists for rape and sexual assault (NI 26), what the target says is an increase in the percentage of women who, well, 'people' I think, who experience rape or sexual assault, who go on to receive specialist support. Which on the face of it looks really good, and it looks like this is funding for – say a Rape Crisis Centre. But a Rape Crisis Centre provides services for women, sometimes men, who have been raped and sexually assaulted whenever, right, it doesn't say 'we are not providing you with a service because your rape happened five years ago', 'we are not providing counselling to you because you were raped as a child'. So maybe as a Rape Crisis Centre you see 300 women a year, maybe 50 of those have been raped in the last 6 months, right, so the target will only fund you to work with those 50 women because it has to have been reported to the police. And you can't report a rape that happened, well you can report a rape that happened 2 decades ago, but who is going to take any notice! The next sort of layer of that is that the local authorities whose own funding that it passes onto the Rape Crisis Centre is dependent on them meeting the target, is going to come round to the Rape Crisis Centre and say, 'ok you had 50 women in the last year who were raped in the preceding 6 months but only 2 of them reported to the police, next year we have to have an increase, otherwise we don't get the money to fund you'. So then the Rape Crisis Centre is put into the position of having to pressure women to report to the police so that they can get their funding.

EI 4

Rohini: Well, what happened was the Council opened up the bids, so some women's organisations didn't get it. *Somebody else got the money, we have got other women's organisations [in the borough] but nobody is funded by the Council.* So we see this incredible situation where there is no *acknowledgement that you need to fund these organisations, I mean we exist and this is wonderful, the Council refers clients to us, and then they question why we don't deliver, or why – we are part of the domestic violence forum of the borough, we contribute to the policy making, and we contribute to the discussions and so on, but where we get the money from is not their problem.* (...)

AE: It's amazing that they refer clients to you but don't fund you.

Rohini: Oh yeah, *they do that all the time and it really frustrates me*, because the police will be calling us, 'There is an Asian woman, there is an Asian looking woman, wants some advice, will you speak to her, can I send her to your office?' and I would be like, 'it's down to you at the police station, if a white woman was to turn up, would you actually call a women's organisation, would you not give her the advice, would you not actually go and arrest the husband?' But because she is Asian there is this thing, calling MOSA is the answer, but that is not the answer, so we have had to - it's taken us such a long time to have that connection, tell people, why don't you call the language line? *We are here, we are very happy to provide the service, but we can't do the job in place of social services, in place of police, in place of housing department!* - but, and this is, I am talking about X¹⁰⁴ which you would imagine is, should be a better place, because of the diversity in X, because it is one of the most diverse boroughs in London, and it has such a huge Asian population, so people should know. But even, it's incredible the way people behave, people still don't know about the culture, *people still don't want to provide that service for clients, wash your hands off, too complicated. I don't know what to say, what to do, they will deal with their people, you know; when it comes to getting the money, there is none.*

¹⁰⁴ Name of the borough obliterated to secure anonymity of my respondents.

EI 5

AE: And you were saying that you look for your employees that they don't do over hours, but then – you yourself are hard working, how do you deal with your own responsibilities for other people, caring issues like with family or friends or networks?

Marta: Somehow I fit it in. My family are not particularly close. My parents live abroad, so they are not physically close as well as we are not particularly an emotionally close family. So I don't have any caring responsibilities there. I don't have children. My partner has children, my partner can look after himself. He doesn't need me to look after him. *I mean if anything he cares for me, that enables me to do my job.* So I don't do any cooking or cleaning Monday to Friday, so I turn into a housewife at the weekends (laughing). I don't like doing maintenance cooking, I like to do elaborate cooking. I love to cook, but I would rather spend 3 hours in the kitchen cooking. So we have this joke that on Sundays we do rigid gender roles. I go to the gym and come back and cook and he takes the rubbish out and watches football, but you know, so his support and he probably does about 80% of the housework, *and his support enables me to kind of do this. So he cares for me rather than the other way round.*

AE: You chose the right way...

Marta: Yeah but it would have been, I mean a close friend in my sector had a child last year, and it's really kind of, *she used to be like me, and now she can't be because she is raising a child. It wasn't a conscious choice to not have children in order to be able to do my career. It wasn't that kind of choice but it would have been difficult. It would have required me to have a complete re-organisation of my priorities,* because at the moment I leave the house at about 7am and I usually get home just before 9pm.

AE: Oh wow.

Marta: *So that's my working day, which is not compatible with raising a child.*

AE: But do you take off the weekend, do you keep this kind of 'my space'?

Marta: Mostly yeah, I try not to work on Sundays, if I have to do any work over the weekend I try and do it on Saturdays so it's out of the way. Otherwise you spend the whole of the weekend thinking 'I should be doing this, I should be doing that'. You don't get round to it, but you might as well have done, because you have spent the whole weekend with the shadow of it in the back of your head. *So I am trying to get better with having a cut-off point of around early afternoon Saturday.* And if I haven't done any work I needed to do on the weekend by then, then I don't do it. So I do have that mental space, *but I am pretty kind of full on in terms of – I am a sad obsessive geek, I have come to terms with it now.*

AE: Why sad?

Marta: Why? *Because it endlessly fascinates me. I am extremely destructive when I am bored, and this doesn't bore me. It's never bored me, it keeps me engaged, interested and intellectually stimulated.* If I am bored I become destructive to try and create some drama to entertain myself with, so I need a job that, or I need something. Even when I relax I am not very relaxed. The idea of meditation is my worst nightmare, because my brain doesn't shut up. So I need to distract my brain with things, so I cook, I make things and my relaxation, I am still active when I am relaxing, when I have taken big breaks. *When I took 3 months out, it takes about 6 weeks for my brain to shut off, so I am just that kind of person.*

AE: And you plan this in advance to take these 3 months?

Marta: Yeah. It was my (...) birthday present to myself. *But I have, up until doing the contract with [funding body 'T'], for the whole of my career, I always used to take off December and January, so I am not very good at winter, I am kind of ready to slit my wrists by February if I don't get winter off.* So I had always taken December, January off, so I had always taken that kind of chunk of time off as *my kind out, as my kind of self-care*, heading for the tropics. *But it does take about 6 weeks for my brain to shut off, I'm just thinking about it, it's all the time. I am really sad, obsessive.*

Sita: *I've actually been saying that I don't know whether I have the energy to go around the circle again, to start again. But I do know, I do know that I have a commitment, I am committed.* Because wherever I travel, if I go on holidays, or wherever, I do, I'm always trying to find out what's happening to women there, about domestic work, and what they are paid, whether they have unions, whether they have organisations, what about if somebody is experiencing abuse, what happens, who do they go to? So I'm always looking to, for example, if they are picking coffee on a farm, how much do they earn? And is it a daily work? ... How does it work? And when you are actually looking into it, whether you are in the developed world or in developing countries, *there is a lot we share in terms of our struggle, struggles as women.* So I know that I will continue, somehow, somewhere, but I don't know whether I will continue in this role. And it's not just me. I've been talking to other people, and when I say 'I don't know whether I can start off again, in terms of the circle', then the others are saying 'exactly, that is what I think, I don't have the energy'. Because we've all, if you think about the Voluntary Sector, it's not a nine to five job, we take our work home, we work in the evenings, we work through the nights, we've been to demonstrations, all of those things. And it has been on the expense of some thing or the other, that commitment. So it's about can we see it through, again? Or do we let someone else coming in, to take that on board, but continue to support it?"

EI 7

Rohini: Clients might be poor but they will cook a meal for you. 'There is a client that got me fresh coriander leaves from her dad, two of my clients have a real problem about me being atheist, so whenever they go to a temple they bring sweets from the temple and ask for forgiveness for on my behalf. *It's quite sweet, the ways they touch you. It's quite sweet and in that sense it's quite rewarding.* Like a client's mum lives in Bangladesh and her mother knitted a bed sheet for me, hand knitted a bed sheet! And I think: 'who would do that?' A private sector client might have got me a table for two in a restaurant but you know, *it's not anything near what the clients do or the way they feel for you, and the things that they say to you and how – you touch people's lives, so yeah, it's incredible, so that reward you can't get anywhere else.*

Rohini: There is a real commitment here of, with all the advice workers, to actually provide a good service. But in their minds, and my mind, the question is: *What next?* Although the funding started funding last year, we have got another two and a half years to go, but what is going to happen thereafter? *There is no sustainable source of income that you know for a foreseeable future of time*, you know of that it is going to continue, there will be many (pausing) – *people can't think long term*. It's quite hard when somebody is trying to think about their own life, their career, their, and how they want to do (pausing) – I mean, I have left my job and I am back here, but I am not sure what is going to happen in three years time. *I am not sure how I should take my decision about work and how reliable this job is going to be, how reliable the service provision is going to be. Because this is not the kind of work, it's not a project-based work, it's something you do every day, it's something providing the very essential service to women, and there is no alternative. There is nowhere else for them to go (...). There needs to be a level of – you can't just close the shop and go home, but you don't know if it is sustainable.* And it's even harder for younger people who work here, because in terms of their own professional development, if they are just starting off their careers they are not sure whether they are here in this job short term, medium term or long term, what it is they can do, and so on. So it's really, really hard.

EI 9

Rohini: *We are fighting a battle at various levels: first the fact that we do need to exist because of who we are, because we do provide that service to a specific ethnic group, and there is still a need, the numbers can tell you there is a need, the number of women who come into our office tell you there is a need. And there is no denying the fact that the skills that workers have here, in terms of cultural understanding, in terms of the language, it's experience, and that's required, and so if you, if we didn't exist, who would do that work? So we need to first justify that a women's organisation is required, then we do justify that a South Asian women's organisation is required. Within the South Asian women's organisation we need to justify a legal advice service is required; we do need to provide advice on employment law; we do need to provide advice on debt work; we do need to provide training. Within training we need to provide training in what our women want, not in construction work. So there is a whole, you know, I think this should have stopped really, you shouldn't have to question our credibility after 20 years of working hard in the area, 20 years of providing that service. You shouldn't, we shouldn't have to say that we need to exist.*

Rohini: *Every time you change*, and there is frustration between the workers, as well, because you are constantly having to adjust, and another department (...). This particular colleague of mine, she has had to apply for her own job four times already, *because every year the cycle changes and there is another funder. So she is essentially doing the same job, pretty much the same job, but funded by another organisation, another funder. So the targets have changed, the way the targets are measured has changed, so there is a new job description.* So it feels so awful that we actually advertise that post because the funder wants you to advertise for that post. So there is this whole thing. Then you have the interviews, people coming for the interviews. Again my colleague would apply for the post and she is obviously more qualified than others having done that job in the previous three years. She would get the job again. But every time she would need to do that! *And so she has made the same application for the same post for four years now and the current cycle ends tomorrow and she is saying that she is not going to apply for the post again because she is tired. She doesn't have a job to go to and she lost her job, but she is just like – she is tired of this uncertainty of what's going to happen next April.* (...) So of course there is resentment! Because you think 'what's in it for me?' As it is people choose to work in the Voluntary Sector because they have got some commitment. And they remain on it, because we are a medium scale organisation. So we can't, if somebody wants to work here for five years they would probably be doing the same job for the next five years unlike the private sector where you can progress. *There are not many levels to progress here, how do you progress?! So rather than praising somebody who is committed to providing that service that the public sector should be providing, there is a constant uncertainty of what is going to happen to your post, how you measure targets, how you appease the funders, rather than service delivery.* And there is that tension, that tension all workers feel. *So yeah, even if you were politically committed, just to keep this all together you need to think about your own future and people move on to different things.*

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