



Back to the future

Gender, generations, migration and
precarious employment

Linda McDowell

School of Geography, Oxford University

The focus and the argument

- Post 1945
- Migrant workers in the UK: women and young men
- Reproduction of difference and a hierarchy of eligibility
- Continuities and change
- Challenge to binary arguments – old and new – and large-scale theorising
- Oral narratives as a key source

Transformations

- Deindustrialisation
- Old and new
- Heavy and light
- Fordism and post Fordism
- New knowledge economy
- New capitalism
- New sexual contract
- Post capitalism

New ways of working, new meaning of work

- Portfolio (positive) precarious (negative)
- Corrosion of character (men); home as work, work as home (women)
- Affective labour (positive) emotional labour, body work, caring and servicing (negative)
- Beyond the factory (positive), waged domestic labour in homes (negative), home working (positive (mummy blogging, craft work etc) and negative (sewing, packing etc))

Parallels?

- Workers invest in their own human capital. Contract out their labour and take on the risks and costs of such investments ... debt is leveraged by repressed and stagnant wages, underemployment and unemployment have increased apace ... working hours are unpredictable and unknowable [and there] is an erosion of the distinctions between the employed, the unemployed, the waged, the wageless, the underemployed and the unemployed (Adkins and Dever 2015).

Parallels?

- Working class people have few rights and opportunities. They rely on themselves and their families in an era of ... high unemployment and indebtedness, poverty is a fact of life for many thousands of ordinary families, .. not only the poorest but ordinary, resolutely respectable and hard working [families] (Todd 2012)

Changes and continuities

- Shift to a service based economy
- Rise in women's employment
- Feminisation of jobs – caring, cleaning catering, hospitality, retail etc
- Commodification of domestic labour
- New servant class?
- Affective labour and body work

Care work as demeaning

- When I came in here I apply for care assistant working at a home through Job Centre Plus. ... Care assistant was in a nursing home: personal care of the elderly people. ... I was so embarrassed to tell people that I am working in a nursing home so that's why I kept it a secret (Farah, Pakistani).

The production of difference

Intersection of:

- Labour market regulation
- Immigration legislation
- Recruitment, employment and promotion practices
- Stereotypical attitudes of employers, co-workers and public

Interpellation

- Stereotypical assumptions about ideal workers by management and co-workers
- Internalised by workers who recognise themselves in and conform to managerial naming. Subjects/workers are constituted in and take meaning from social relations in the workplace.
- Burawoy (*Manufacturing Consent* (1979)) focused on class but extended to gender and ethnicity (docile femininity, aggressive racialised masculinity)
- Dual interpellation in service sector (Williams etc)

(Mis)recognition

- Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves (Charles Taylor, 1994)
- Can this calling and misrecognition be challenged?

Case studies of migrant women's work

- Nursing in 1940s and 1950s
- Care work in 2000s
- Manufacturing – car industry in 1980s and 2010s
- Room cleaning in hotels in 2000s

Three potential labour forces in 1940s

- **Ireland:** between 1946 – 1962, approx 50-60,000 Irish women and men per year into UK
- **The Caribbean:** slow at first, only 1-2,000 per year between 1948 and 1952, rapid rise after that: peak annual number in 1957 – 42,000
- **Europe:** DPs into EVWs – 1946 Foreign Labour Committee (FLC) established. Between Oct 46 and Dec 1949 80,000 women and men from DP camps recruited– doubled the then-foreign born pop of UK but often overlooked

Less eligibility: Irish Otherness

- Irish are white but ..
- Predominantly Catholics
- Negative connotations in UK
- Less pejorative – fey, romantic, emotional
- More pejorative –stupid, dirty, unreliable, feckless and fecund, drunks
- Assumptions about Irish nurses

Irish stereotypes



The fools, the flirts, the failures and the Irish

- You Irish are always coming along and wanting someone to put a roof over their heads .. The last Irish person I had was a man and he got drunk and he was arrested and I said 'well, I don't get drunk, matron, beyond the odd glass of sherry so that's unlikely to be an issue'
- The senior staff, they would be quite .. And they used to say [about nurses], 'the fools, the flirts, the failures and the Irish'. But it never did us any harm. We didn't feel insulted, not really (Aileen, Irish).

Even less eligible?

- Educationally unsuitable: 'It was understood that most of the women [from the Caribbean] were illiterate and thus unlikely to make suitable textile operatives' (Ministry of Labour records 1949)
- Geographical determinism: 'It was unlikely that West Indian women could stand up to the Lancashire climate for any length of time' (Government WP on textile industry 1948).

Caribbean nurses as inferior

- SEN, not SRN
- You were told you were coming to do your SRN but actually really to do enrolled nursing, so we weren't really given the opportunity to do what we came to do
- We all as Caribbean people, Black people, I would say, had to go on the enrolled nurse.
- In those days you were very submissive ... You'd just get on and you did it, never rebel (Brie, Trinidad).

Interpellation: opinions of co-workers

- I started talking to a sister about starting my SRN and she really put me down and said what did I want to do that for. I will never, ever forget it. It was really hurtful.
- Relative to the other, white, nurses, they weren't fair in how they divided the work, that's why it was harder. You were the ones that were always given the jobs that weren't considered to be as nice.
- I find the doctors have no respect, as a black nurse, absolutely none.

And of patients

- They can be nasty, call you names and stuff like that.
- The older patient was not used to Black people so they were very nasty. They will take their poo and throw at you or call you black or whatever.
- Some patients, because you are Black don't think you are as qualified

Caribbean nurses in the UK



What a Journey!
Retired Caribbean Nurses
& the NHS

Free Exhibition at Hackney Museum
Presented by: Black Women in the Arts

10 September 2014 – 31 January 2015

Hackney Museum	Tues, Weds, Fri: 9.30am - 5.30pm
Reading Lane	Thur: 9.30am - 8.00pm
London E8 1GQ	Sat: 10.00am - 5.00pm
Tel: 020 8356 3500	Closed: Sun, Mon and
Hmuseum@hackney.gov.uk	Public Holidays
www.hackney.gov.uk/museum	

Photo: @WAWAFCV/Collection

Total arrivals under Baltic Cygnets, Westward Ho! and Ukrainian POWs

• Ukrainian (Westward Ho)	16210	4720
• Ukrainian (ex-POWs: men only)	8320	
• Polish	9351	4667
• Latvian	9706	2126
• Yugoslav	9220	972
• Lithuanian	4763	969
• Estonian	2891	1223
• Hungarian	2152	322
• Czechoslovak	1144	192
• Rumanian	652	148
• Bulgarian	86	-
• Sudeten*	-	1319
•		
• Total	65,409	17,422
•		

• Source: British Immigration Statistics, from Tannahill, J A 1958 *European Volunteer Workers in Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, table 1, p 139.

• *Only women were included in these early labour schemes.

Displaced Persons' camp



From refugees to EVWs

Unlike the Irish and Caribbean women, EVWs did not chose to come to the UK for employment but were directed into female-dominated industries where had to work for a specified period

- Hybrid or in-between group:
- neither or both refugees/asylum seekers and/or economic migrants
- middle class by origin/working class in UK
- workers/mothers
- white not black
- aliens not citizens in UK, stateless/Soviet citizens
- Europeans but non-English speaking
- EVWs constructed as more eligible than post-colonial, non-white subjects and white Irish

Qualification as a woman EVW

- Age: young – between 21 and 40
- Status: single
- Health (fit, no infectious or sexual diseases, not pregnant) and cleanliness
- Virtue: could be rejected on grounds of sexual immorality or ‘general intractability’

Constructions of Baltic acceptability

- Imagery of the name – ‘that white swan thing’ (whiteness associated with goodness, all that is benign and non-threatening (Dyer 1998) + wages of whiteness (Roediger; Ignatiev How the Irish became white)
- Europeans: common culture
- Aliens and not citizens and yet seen as candidates for assimilation
- Potential mothers as well as workers (rather contradictory)
- Urban and largely middle class, unlike many Irish and Caribbean women
- Protestant not Catholics like Irish women

Fit bodies

- The women are of good appearance; are scrupulously clean in their persons and habits. . . . There is little doubt that the specially selected women who come to this country will be an exceptionally healthy and fit body . . . and would constitute a good and desirable element in our population.
- Memo from Foreign Labour Committee, 1945

An aside on Baltic men

- Also seen as superior, to Irish labourers in their case, and indeed to British men who, in a post war scheme, were transferred from areas of high unemployment to work in mines and brickworks: ‘the British residents who are arriving [to hostels], 80% are the scum of the earth, are filthy, have a Police record. This compares to the ‘superiority of the foreign residents, to their sobriety, to their cleanliness and to the little trouble they give’. Parallels now in discourse about hardworking Polish men?

Hierarchies of eligibility among hospital domestic workers

- The girls doing the domestic work they were all, well there were three Latvians and I think there were three Estonian women and of course the English, they lived there as well, but some were, you know, simple-minded. They were only for domestic work and all and it was a bit, well, you couldn't hold conversations with many of them, nothing in common. I mean I am not a snob and, of course, the English. I have learned English from the age of eight all through school, but it was a different language when you land in Yorkshire, it was much broader than now and it was difficult.

A caste system in post-war hospitals?

- We lived in domestic quarters and the nurses in another wing and we weren't allowed to go there. They were a bit higher and it was like a caste system: matron and the hierarchy, sisters and nurses. It wasn't said but it was understood that you hadn't to get any contact with nurses.
- And we were polishing floors and serving meals and making beds and you know, we were ward orderlies, we were not domestic help. One up it seemed.

Opinion of superiors

- The matron, the sisters, they all told us that we are not really the lower class people. I am sorry to say that. We couldn't fit in so we kept to ourselves mostly (Monika, Latvian) .

And yet? Eligible for nursing or not

- I met the matron and I said I wanted to do nursing. I had to stay with the matron, as her maid in the hospital. To brush up or something. That was the rules or something then (Vieda, Latvian)
- I asked if I could train as a nurse. “What you and all your friends?” was what she (the matron) said (Diana, Latvian)

Mechanisms of Othering: remaining silent

- We knew the English, but the English was not ... we couldn't understand it the English from white people. .. communication was too hard for us so you had to remain silent (Catherine, Kenyan).
- My English, it was not that good as it is now. .. here the British people speak very fast English and it took me ages to understand them (Farah, Pakistani).

Misrecognition by older British

- The worst of it, you know, it's a problem, the colour. When they [residents in the care home] see you they just wonder what you are doing in there. Yeah, it used to take time. Those days, people were no ... too many people weren't black. I think they were not working around here. They are old people, you know. They are very old ... and they just shout 'don't touch me; don't come to my room. They send you away before they come to understand it (Catherine).

And again

- Sometimes they [elderly residents] are very shouty and so I didn't like that. ... Some of the staff are like discriminative type of people, but not all of them. Because when i was there, they give us the job which they don't give to other people and their way of communication with us is quite rude (Farah).

Working for Ford

- Somebody met me, somebody working there [for Ford], they meet in a pub .. and they said 'a job is there; I bring application for you if you want to work there'. I then applied and i get it. At interview they test me n the machining .. they gave me one cushion to do it. She tell me how to do it, she showed me how to do it, then i done it and they said 'oh right, you passed' (Harshini, Indian).

On the line

- Now I am engine plant. The machining stopped and I went to engine building. Now I am in the plant. I am on the line. I do the oil pump; I put in oil pumps now. It is not difficult work. It's easy not heavy, no, but still on machining you had a rest. In here you work, work on the line, you work hard.

The importance of deference

- When we get with Indian ladies, we start talking Indian and they say 'you are not allowed to talk Indian because we think you are talking about us'. .. Slowly, slowly the English people get used to us. When they see that we are humble, we are polite to them, everything, then they were very friendly with us (Parvani, Kenyan Asian).

But the problem of speed

- But we do it so fast machinist; we finish at 1pm. ... After that time, we'd go and sit outside, we'd go and do our exercises, so that was quite fun for us. And the people who were slow machinist, they have to work up to 4pm.

Punishment and resistance

- There was this one manager, he come and he took me from the machine and put me on the press. Believe me, I didn't like the job of that, always pressing and standing, that was a man's job. Everyday he go again 'I'm putting you in the press'. The I thought what to do, then I go to the union.
- The manager didn't like it but I win because I fight for myself. ... and everyone was surprised at this Indian lady. 'What is she doing?' but I thought I have to fight for my rights (Harshini).

1984 dispute about re-grading



Working for BMW

- Twelve hours everyday and then working for four days because sometimes Friday, Saturday and Sunday we don't working. We start gain in the Monday but it depends the shift we get because sometimes two weeks morning shift, two weeks night shift and then I'm struggle.
- In my lines they have five womans. Four womans is foreigners and one woman she's a British. Three peoples from Eastern Europe and just me that's from another country (Maria, East Timor).

Harassment, resistance and punishment

- In working the Team Coordinator he is always come to hold women's bums, especially for when he want to hold my bums and I said 'don't touch me; I'm married and i've got a son and you didn't respect me. I'm come here, I'm working here; I'm not come here to play with you ... then he start, like, give me a heavy job and he always takes me to a different line.. and he start to move me, another job, another job. Because we have to learn from the basic again to how to do this one. He move again and again, again, again. But sometimes he put me in the main job, in the engine job .. and then the men see me and it's like 'what are you doing in here?' Because the first woman working that line, it's me. They so 'oh, you're not supposed to work here because woman never come here, just you'.

The engine plant at BMW



Recruitment, exploitation and illegal entry

- It's like a friend of our friends and she said 'you can go there, it's a good agency, good woman, pretty. So we went there. She said 'you have to pay too much money but its 100 per cent work, accommodation, everything'. We said okay 'too much money, but we will pay, then we have guarantee'. We paid £600 there [in Riga] and here [in London] we pay £250, £250 more. She said £150, but we paid £250 because in UK agency they said 'we don't know anything about £150, you have to pay £250. If you won't pay, you can go outside'. We didn't want to go outside to sleep on a bench in a park, so we pay (Karina, Latvian).

Irregular employment

- This guy, my school friend he said 'you can go and work at least one day a week when it's busy in the hotel, you can go there. It's illegal but you can go there, at least £30 a day or £20 a day'. And maybe twice a week, once a week we went there, it was busy but it was of course illegally. They said 'you can clean the rooms and just go' and they paid £30 cash. From the beginning it was terrible. I couldn't walk, my feet, it was horrible, my arms, everything. But we had to do that, we need money, we earn every penny.

Working for an agency

- I start and training is three days and then I clean rooms. .. Sometimes it's not many, sometimes its very more rooms and no time, 20 minutes because I'm near end. Should be 30 minutes and finish at 2.30pm. Sixteen rooms is usual. But sometimes we don't have the empty room or free room to clean, so we have to wait and finish at 3.00pm or 4.00pm. Most of the time i have 16 rooms and more. And sometimes takes longer to clean. Very dirty room, one hour is cleaning this room because everything is oh my God! .. Sometimes the supervisor ask me 'you more rooms, you want?' .. And sometimes I can say if I, don't know, feel bad or I am tired, I can say 'i don't want to take it extra rooms'. .. If we are sick we have to call one hour before and they don't pay for this day, no (Beatta, Polish).

Performing invisible work

- The guests in the hotel they don't see us ...
And oh my God, I'm tired. I have headache sometimes, in the room when it's too hot. And i have sick skin, even if you use the gloves you have. And i have to look nice, good. Broken shoes are no good. My uniform clean, not too much make up, hair spiky if short. I have to look nice even if nobody see me.

Polish hotel worker and activist



Young migrant men in a precarious labour market

- Young men struggle to find employment, especially migrant men
- Bodies matter – size, tattoos, accent
- That without a regular income, it is hard to establish a personal life – few had partners or much of a social life
- That family, especially mothers were crucial to everyday survival tactics and strategies. New generational sexual contract?

Conclusions

- Continuities over time
- Continuities in feminised servicing employment
- Migrants least eligible
- Ethnic penalties and pay gaps – how long to disappear
- Individual stories – variations, similarities and agency

New shape of post-Fordist employment: questions that remain

- The nature and significance of growing class differences (and similarities) between women/mothers?
- The ideology of mothering when labour market participation is a key attribute of citizenship – are both working class and middle class mothers subject to new ideals of mothering – is what x termed the new capitalist mother only available to the middle class?
- The changing nature but persistence of a pay gap: migrant women do worst, but what about a lost generation of young people?
- Solidarity and alliances across classes/generations in the precariat? In or outside the workplace?
- Alliances between native and non-British born workers in current xenophobic and anti- EU atmosphere

New book March 2016

