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**Bringing *Operaismo* to Gurgaon: a study of
labour composition and resistance practices in
the Indian Auto Industry**

Lorenza Monaco

Thesis submitted for the PhD degree in Development Studies

2015

Department of Development Studies
SOAS, University of London

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Abstract

Inspired by the Italian tradition of *Operaismo* (Workerism), or Autonomist Marxism, this thesis provides an analysis of labour composition and of the struggles that have recently affected the Auto cluster of the National Capital Region (NCR), the metropolitan conglomerate of Delhi, in India. The analysis builds on *Operaismo* not only by deploying its key methodological tool, namely the *workers' enquiry*, but also by adopting its main interpretative paradigm of exploring industrial conflict through the 'lens' of the working class. In line with a Workerist perspective, the investigation of labour struggles in the NCR, and of the Maruti case in particular, becomes an opportunity to reflect on working class formation and agency within capitalist development, and on the relationship between working class and institutions, through the concept of *autonomia*. Within what Tronti defined as a *Copernican Revolution*, the working class determines the trajectory followed by the process of capitalist development, seen as a 'reactive formation' where capital strategies are nothing but a response to labour struggles. With reference to the global Auto sector, capital strategies are unveiled by debunking myths associated with the lean manufacturing paradigm. For such purpose, a *critical social relations* approach is deployed to complement the analysis of the real *politics of production* that lie behind the global restructuring of manufacturing and labour regimes within the Indian Auto industry. Through a combination of these two theoretical approaches, the thesis illustrates the overall features of the NCR workforce, in order to explain motivations and dynamics of struggle in the area. Indeed, the case discussed here is an example of 'where lean may fail', and of how capital strategies cannot prevent labour from organising, even in settings characterised by high levels of casualisation. In this light, what discussed in here may prove of theoretical and political relevance also beyond the Indian case.

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A PhD is a long and intense journey, that requires inspirations, motivations, support, understanding, and ‘enlightening’ moments. Throughout it, the researcher collects many valuable pieces, building a difficult but unforgettable phase of his/her own life and professional path. Regardless of its outcome, and its following applications, a PhD is an opportunity for personal growth and for a deep investigation of the self. It can be made of hard times, but also of extremely illuminating and empowering moments. Here, while approaching its very end, I wish to look back, and thank those who have contributed to make mine unique.

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Abbreviations used

ACMA	<i>Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India</i>
AEEU	<i>All Escorts Employees Union</i>
AITUC	<i>All India Trade Union Congress</i> (Union Federation affiliated to Indian Communist Party, CPI)
AMP	<i>Automotive Mission Plan</i>
AO	<i>Autonomia Operaia</i> (Workers' Autonomy)
AP	<i>Auto Policy</i>
BJP	<i>Bharatyia Janata Party</i>
BMS	<i>Bharatyia Mazdoor Sangh</i> (Union Federation affiliated to BJP)
CAW	<i>Canadian Auto Workers</i>
CITU	<i>Centre of Indian Trade Unions</i> (Union Federation affiliated to Indian Communist Party, Marxist section, CPI-M)
CCN	<i>Contratto Collettivo Nazionale</i> (National Collective Contract)
CPI	<i>Communist Party of India</i>
CPI(M)	<i>Communist Party of India, Marxist</i>
CRS	<i>Centro per la Riforma dello Stato</i> (Centre for State Reform, Rome)
CSD	<i>Council for Social Development, Delhi</i>
CTUOs	<i>Central Trade Union Organisations</i> (commonly referred to as 'National Centres')
CUB	<i>Comitati Unitari di Base</i>
FYP	<i>Five Year Plan</i>
GERPISA	<i>Groupe d'Etude et de Recherche Permanent sur l'Industrie et les Salariés de l'Automobile</i>
GoI	<i>Government of India</i>
GWN	<i>Gurgaon Workers News</i> (activists' blog)
HMS	<i>Hind Mazdoor Sabha</i> (Union Federation affiliated to Socialist Party)
IDEAs	<i>International Development Economics Associates</i>
IMF	<i>International Metalworkers' Federation</i>
IMT	<i>Industrial Model Township, Manesar</i>
IMVP	<i>International Motor Vehicle Program</i>
INTUC	<i>Indian National Trade Union Congress</i> (Union Federation affiliated to Congress Party)
ISLE	<i>Indian Society of Labour Economics</i>
MIT	<i>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</i>
MUKU	<i>Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union</i>
MRTPA	<i>Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act</i>
MSEU	<i>Maruti Suzuki Employees' Union</i>
NCR	<i>National Capital Region</i>
NRI	<i>Non-Resident Indians</i>

NTUI	<i>New Trade Union Initiative</i>
PCI	<i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i> (Italian Communist Party)
PO	<i>Potere Operaio</i> (Workers' Power)
SIAM	<i>Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers</i>
TQM	<i>Total Quality Management</i>
UNIDO	<i>United Nations Industrial Development Organisation</i>

Introduction

In 2011-12, an unprecedented wave of strikes shook the Delhi Auto cluster, in the National Capital Region (NCR). Workers from one of the Indian Auto ‘champions’, Maruti Suzuki, engaged in one of the most prolonged and intense forms of collective action India witnessed since liberalisation. The strike was unprecedented in all respects. It was unprecedented for its duration and the modalities of struggle. It was unprecedented for the demands that were raised. It was unprecedented for the location where it broke out. It was unprecedented for the composition of the workers who took action. It was unprecedented for the unity and solidarity workers managed to build despite the numerous lines of fragmentation. It was unprecedented for the violent repression that followed, leading to utter violation not only of labour and union rights, but also of basic human rights.

The observation of what was happening at Maruti inspired, and informed, the present research. The perception of what was at stake determined the direction of this work, which, ultimately, aims at explaining *what happened, how, why there, and in that precise moment*. In fact, reflections on the scope and the relevance of the Maruti events led to question the very meaning of *industrial conflict*. Specifically, they led to considerations about the role of industrial conflict as an indicator of the most profound contradictions embodied in the process of capitalist development; and on the role of conflict in revealing the nature of the power relations involved in the industrial development process.

In this way, *industrial conflict* became the core subject of the present research. The idea of exploring the industrial conflict triggering the Maruti strike shaped the research

field, and guided the analysis in its specific task of understanding the motivations, dynamics, and impact of the struggle.

In practice, these objectives inspired both the methodological and theoretical trajectory this research work followed. This trajectory is defined by the combination of two different theoretical approaches, deemed to supply complementary interpretative keys for the investigation of an industrial conflict. One approach draws from the Italian tradition of *Operaismo* (Workerism) from the 1960s-70s. This unique theoretical and political experience provided not only the main methodological tools employed in this research, in the form of a *workers' inquiry*, but also the key analytical paradigm based on the centrality of the industrial conflict within the process of capitalist development, and on its exploration through the 'lens' of the working class. Furthermore, Italian Workerism, or *Autonomist Marxism*, offered a crucial conceptual apparatus for the understanding of the relations between different actors involved in the industrial conflict, and in particular of the relationship between *spontaneous movements* and *labour institutions*. In particular, the workerist concept of *autonomia* was essential to develop an understanding of the dynamics between the emerging Maruti movement and the unions established in the NCR.

To complement the *workerist* perspective, a more recent *critical social relations* approach, as adopted by scholars of Marxian inspiration who closely studied the restructuring of the Global Auto Industry, was chosen to investigate capital strategies deployed in the Indian Auto sector. In this regard, applied studies conducted by Stewart, Charron, Pulignano, Danford *et al.* (see Charron and Stewart, 2004; Pulignano, Stewart, Danford and Richardson, 2008; Stewart *et al.*, 2009) were used to debunk myths associated with the worldwide implementation of the *lean*

manufacturing paradigm, and to highlight the impact of changing management and production systems on the workforce.

Combined together, these two approaches allowed shedding light on material causes and dynamics of the industrial conflict observed. In particular, these allowed, on one side, to reflect on the relation between processes of *working class formation* and *agency*, and on that between the working class and *institutions*. On the other side, these approaches also provide a useful platform to investigate how *capital strategies* affect labour organising. Eventually, the exploration of the NCR industrial conflict through the ‘lens’ of its emerging working class, aims to provide theoretical and political lessons which may contribute not only to a discussion of the role and the progressive potential of the Indian working class, but also to a broader debate on global labour organising.

This thesis is structured into six chapters. The first chapter focuses on Italian Autonomist Marxism. It firstly describes *Operaismo* as a theoretical practice built on the ‘*point of view*’ of the working class (Tronti, 2006; 2009), and then discusses what this implies in both analytical and methodological terms. Here, a contextualisation of the *workers’ enquiry* as a method of *militant research* is also provided. The chapter frames the historical and political trajectory of the *workerist* experience. It then builds on its intellectual legacy to discuss working class agency within the process of capitalist development and the relation between working class and institutions, in the light of the concept of *autonomia*.

The second chapter draws on the research conducted by Stewart *et al.* to debunk myths related to the implementation of the *lean manufacturing paradigm* within the Global Auto industry. It first engages with the official discourse that accompanied the ‘Lean Revolution’, to then unveil the real *politics of production* lying underneath its surface,

and highlight what the advocated *flexibility* meant in practice (see Burawoy, 1985; Charron and Stewart, 2004; Danford, 2004). The core tenets of the lean model are dismantled here by looking at the actual impact of the new managerial practices and production techniques on the workforce employed.

The third chapter introduces the Indian Auto sector. It traces the historical evolution of the industrial policies that determined its current configuration; it analyses its main competitive advantages; and discusses the major challenges it is going to face.

The fourth chapter opens the empirical section of the present research, whose findings are reported in chapter five and six. This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted throughout the field investigation, and illustrates in detail the overall fieldwork architecture. The chapter returns to the discussion of the *workers' enquiry*, and presents it as a tool for the analysis of industrial conflicts. Moreover, it presents how this enquiry was applied for the purposes of the present research. Finally, the chapter also deals with issues of ethics and politics.

Chapter five and six discuss the findings obtained through the field research carried out in India in 2011-12. In line with the *workerist* original conceptualisation and use of the *workers' enquiry* as a tool to explore industrial conflict, the field research first aimed at mapping *labour composition* in the NCR, and then moved on to analyse the motivations and dynamics of the Maruti struggle. Effectively, the enquiry consisted of two phases. One was a phase of 'extensive' research, based on a survey aimed at mapping labour composition, and working and living conditions in the NCR, whose findings are reported in chapter five. Survey findings were then deployed as a basis for understanding and interpreting the causes, demands and developments of the struggles occurred in the area and of the Maruti strike in particular. These issues are discussed in chapter six. This last chapter highlights the main issues and tensions emerging from

recent labour struggles in the NCR, and then narrows the focus down to the Maruti case. Core demands, strike dynamics, and relations between the different actors involved in the Maruti dispute are discussed here in detail. A *workerist* approach is then applied to derive a political analysis of the strike. This analysis focuses on *class formation*; on the *autonomy* of the labour movement that emerged; and on its relationship with existing labour institutions. In relation to the Maruti struggle, *local* specificities related to *class composition* and the overall *labour regime* at work in the area are also emphasised. Arguably, in fact, these have represented the main obstacles to the functioning of the ‘Indian lean model’.

Overall, this thesis aims to provide different theoretical and political contributions to the existing literature. Theoretically, it aims, on one side, to highlight the individual value of the two approaches it rests upon in relation to the case under scrutiny. On the other hand, however, it also aims to show how the combination of these two approaches may further enrich our understanding of industrial conflicts. Considered separately, this thesis aims to show the *current* validity of a *workerist* contribution, and the *wider* validity of the studies conducted by Stewart *et al.* First, the analysis shows how a *workerist* perspective can still significantly enrich the study of labour, and of capital-labour conflicts. Second, the analysis also illustrates how a *critical social relations* approach, like the one applied to the Global Auto Industry by the authors reviewed here, could be extended to a broader investigation of industrial restructuring occurring across different productive sectors, in different regions of the world. Furthermore, this study also indicates how the combination of these two approaches enables a deeper, complementary exploration of both working class agency and capital strategies. In particular, this combined approach anchors the study of working class formation to the rise and development of industrial conflicts.

From a more applied theoretical perspective, this thesis aims at contributing to several debates. Firstly, it aims to prompt further reflections on the industrial development path India is following. Within this broad objective, the thesis aims to shed light on the industrial labour regime India has deployed and is deploying in order to ‘achieve’ such development. In this regard, this thesis also hopes to provide a contribution to the understanding of the nature and potential effects of *casualisation* within Indian manufacturing. Finally, in its investigation of the relationship between working class and institutions, this thesis aims at participating in the discussion on trade unions renewal in India.

Politically, this thesis aims to contribute to several debates. On one side, and linked to its theoretical and methodological objectives, it wishes to cast light on the need for labour studies to ‘ground’ their research, in order to foster a transformative and progressive agenda. For this purpose, the methodological choice of a grounded *workers’ enquiry* was advocated as an effective tool to combine theory and political praxis. Secondly, and still in line with its theoretical and methodological aims, this thesis wishes to induce further discussion on working class strategies and on the challenging role of trade unions in labour organising, both in relation to the Indian scenario, and in comparative perspective.

Both theoretically and politically, this thesis is dedicated to the NCR workers, and their struggles.



Chapter 1

Labour agency and institutions within Italian Autonomist Marxism

Within the theoretical architecture of the present research, an analysis of the Italian *Operaismo* (Workerism) represents a particularly meaningful building block. The theoretical and political experience of the Italian ‘Autonomist Marxists’ is in fact recalled to derive both methodological tools and interpretative keys applied to investigate the Indian case which constitutes the core of this work. In particular, a workerist approach informs the centrality attributed to the working class within the process of capitalist development; the method of *workers’ enquiry* is employed as a tool to explore the industrial conflict in question; and the concept of *autonomia* helps to analyse the relationship between a spontaneous labour movement and established institutions. In relation to the NCR case and to the Maruti struggle, the chosen theoretical perspective and the selected methodological tools expressly shaped the direction followed in the present work. They determined the selection of informants and the data collection techniques preferred in the field, and the decision to analyse labour composition in order to explain motivations and dynamics of the witnessed struggle. Eventually, a workerist approach influenced the political conclusions drawn from the case studied.

Overall, we believe that rediscovering a workerist approach may significantly enrich the study of capital – labour relations within processes of industrial development. In doing so, by looking at industrial conflicts through the ‘lens’ of the working class, through the *Copernican revolution* described by Tronti (2006), a workerist perspective can help shed light on dynamics of class formation, on the material determinants of

class composition, and on practices of labour resistance. On the ground, a workerist approach, by identifying *workers' enquiry* and *militant research* as methods for both the understanding of, and the involvement in,¹ labour struggles, can help achieve valuable insights on the link between theory and practice, and on the role of the intellectual, of the researcher within it. In this sense, embracing a workerist perspective can profoundly influence and shape not only the interpretation of research contents and data collected, but also the research experience *per se*, whereby the distinction between labour researcher and political activist nearly dissolves, and research objectives become part of the ultimate goals of the political struggle. Finally, an analysis inspired by *Operaismo* can provide a significant contribution when investigating the relationship between spontaneism and institutions. In our case, it critically informed our understanding of the dynamics between the Maruti movement, the emerging working class in the NCR, and the existing trade unions. Indeed, reflecting on the concept of *autonomia* may facilitate the comprehension of the trajectories followed by historically determined labour movements, whether proceeding in the direction of progressive radicalisation, gradual institutionalisation or simply failing to gain a proper political subjectivity.

For the purposes of the present research, this chapter will focus on the theoretical contributions elaborated during the initial phase of 'political *Operaismo*' (Filippini and Macchia, 2012), revolving around Panzieri, Alquati, Tronti and the *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks)² experience (see Red Notes, 1979). *Operaismo* as part of a political and cultural tradition of what can be defined as 'Autonomist Marxism' (Wright, 2002)

¹ What distinguishes a militant research from a more general participatory approach. Such difference will be clarified later on in this chapter and in further detail in the methodology section of the present work.

² Title of the review that marked the first experience of collective writing by some of the founders of workerism, like Tronti, Alquati, Panzieri.

will first be contextualised, with reference to its broad historical, political and theoretical trajectories. Its main methodological and theoretical tenets will then be analysed in further depth, in particular dwelling upon the use of *workers' inquiry* as an expression of *militant research*, on the centrality attributed to the working class within the process of capitalist development, and on the concept of *autonomia* with regard to the relationship between the working class and institutions. Specifically, this chapter is structured into three main sections. The first traces the historical evolution and outlines the context in which *Operaismo* came into existence and developed, despite rifts and internal differences. The second discusses the role assigned to the working class as the primary agent within the process of capitalist development, also touching upon the centrality this assumes in relation to the idea of *militant research* (see Panzieri, 1976). The third section focuses on the concept of *autonomia* and on the relationship between the working class and institutions. In the concluding remarks, some observations will be made on the current validity of a workerist approach within the study of labour movements and industrial conflicts.

1.1 Framing the experience: the historical, theoretical and political trajectories of Italian *Operaismo*

In Tronti's words (2009), *Operaismo* was a 'thought experience' (p.9) which marked a new way of 'producing political culture' (p.38) along lines of 'revolutionary realism' (p.39) centred on the working class as a subject, as a primary agent of development. It constituted a cultural and intellectual experience which converged upon the factory as a crucial site structuring overall social relations and on the working class as a source of both knowledge and social change through struggle. When trying to cast light upon

Operaismo's different legacies, Corradi (2011) highlights its most significant contributions. These not only include its analysis of class composition, its use of *workers' enquiry* and *co-research* as political tools, but also its reading of radical political economy as a science of class antagonism, and its remarkable attempt to report a kind of 'historiography' of workers' struggles. Indeed, *Operaismo* represented a unique phase in the history of Italian radical thought, one inspired by Marx's critique of political economy but which aimed to go beyond Marx. It attempted to put into practice his critique of bourgeois ideology in order to look at the actual, material sources of knowledge production and at the real foundations of capitalist social relations (Marx, 1867; Tronti, 2009). In his introduction to workerism, Roggero (in Brophy, 2004) lauds the way this moved beyond an idealised view of labour typical of the traditional left and managed to forge a new form of revolutionary theory and practice, through a socio-economic reading which identified in the working class a revolutionary subject able to destabilise established configurations of production. As we shall see, the working class does not merely acquire a simple subjectivity, but through political organisation and struggle assumes a sort of 'counter-subjectivity' able to potentially overturn capitalist power relations.³ Borio, Pozzi and Roggero (2005), reviewing the historiography of workerism through a collection of its contributors' subjective experiences, interestingly highlight how this was both a theoretical and organisational experiment. Through scientific and political analysis, methodological challenges, and even tactical mistakes, this experiment managed to radically question the existing political culture of the Italian left and to shake the foundations of orthodox Marxism.

³ In the sense that it can potentially make an 'antagonistic use of its antagonism', (Toscano 2009: 4). For an interesting account of revolutionary subjectivity within current processes of capital valorisation, read also Hartmann, 2013.

Operaismo emerged in the first decade following Italy's post-war economic boom, in an historical phase when the country was achieving its industrial maturity and its working class was progressively solidifying its subjective consciousness. It aimed to unveil the proper functioning mechanisms of the capitalist society in order to formulate a concrete strategy to challenge them and, ultimately, overcome them. Describing the scenario which gave rise to this unique product of Italian political culture, Brophy (2004) points at how workerism emerged as a reaction to the observed alienation of the growing working class from the traditional political institutions, namely the Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) and the major trade unions, during post-war industrial development. As reported by Bellofiore (2006), it was from the late 1950s that a whole generation started to perceive a strong feeling of 'stagnation' of the traditional left, which was deemed incapable of grasping the profound scope of the social changes accompanying the capitalist boom, the nature of the struggles linked to industrial modernisation, and the evolving composition of the working class. On these premises, all economistic and passive views of the working class were radically rejected (see also Bellofiore and Tomba, 2008). Indeed, it was precisely the attempt to fill such gaps that generated both the theoretical discourse on *autonomia* and the organisational forms of the extra-parliamentary left ⁴ that emerged through the 1960s and the 1970s. Overall, although deeply embedded in the practices of Italian Fordism and in the manifestations of the country's industrial modernisation, workerist theoretical elaborations also reflected a broader analysis of the international capitalist system and of the working class as a subject, while providing enlightening observations on factory politics and organisation. This way, while as political experience *Operaismo* was limited to the Italian scenario, and in this setting it

⁴ *Autonomia Operaia* (AO), *Potere Operaio* (PO), *Lotta Continua* – and others that will be mentioned in the following pages. All were radical groups that rejected the idea of party representation.

encountered failures and critiques, its theoretical legacy may well go beyond the case in question (see also Filippini and Macchia, 2012). Certainly, its more general lessons and concepts, as we will argue in this work, can still be deployed as a powerful critique of dominant theories of industrial relations.

In order to properly put *Operaismo* into context, we must first trace its evolution, the rifts that characterised it, its historical and political trajectories. *Operaismo* may be deemed to cover almost two decades, from the first issue of *Quaderni Rossi* circulated in 1961 until the end of the 1970s. However, the two decades were marked by profound differences, both in terms of theoretical debates and political strategies. The 1960s were undoubtedly the most prolific and significant period for the formalisation of a method of enquiry, the definition of a properly *workerist* perspective and the most interesting insights on class composition.

The post-1960s period was marked instead by a substantial divide on the basis of diverging strategies and tactics. In this later phase, some autonomist groups started advocating the need for armed struggle, becoming closely associated, rightly or wrongly, with the violent escalation of the so-called *Anni di Piombo*.⁵ This drove early workerists, and the group from Rome gravitating towards Tronti in particular, to distance themselves from later autonomist manifestations, to such an extent that Tronti himself distinguishes between *Operaismo*, from the 1960s, and *Post-Operaismo* (Tronti, 2009). Overall, comparing some of the earliest contributions, like those from

⁵ Literally, ‘Years of Lead’, indicating the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, when Italy was shaken by intense political turmoil, culminating in frequent terrorist attacks on behalf of both extremist right- and left- wing groups. Amongst the most violent episodes were the terrorist attack at Piazza Fontana, Milan, in 1969 and the bombing at the Bologna railway station in 1980. In the 1970s, several autonomist thinkers, amongst whom were Toni Negri and Oreste Scalzone, were arrested for having ‘inspired’ armed actions of the extremist left, especially revolving around the *Brigate Rosse* – Red Brigades. A broad police operation, named after the public prosecutor who inspired it, Pietro Calogero, occurred in 1979, with the aim of expressly detecting the ‘*cattivi maestri*’ (bad teachers) of the armed groups. See also Brophy (2004), and Borio, Pozzi, Roggero (2005).

Alquati, Tronti, Panzieri to some later interventions by, for example, Negri or Bologna proves extremely helpful when trying to engage with the idea of *autonomia*. This concept is crucial to reflect upon the relation between working class spontaneism and the institutionalisation of labour movements, a theme which is particularly relevant for the purposes of the present research.

The origins of the workerist experience can be traced back to the publication of the first edition of *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks) in 1961. This review, edited by Raniero Panzieri, came to light as an outcome of a series of political and cultural debates which saw the participation of a group of young intellectuals from different political traditions, ranging from communism, to socialism, to anarcho-syndicalism. Following a season of renewed struggles amongst the Milanese metalworkers and an intense offensive organised by FIAT workers against a long wage freeze imposed by the company,⁶ this group gathered around the observation of a growing gap between the new composition of the Italian working class and its organisation (see Red Notes, 1979). There was need of re-defining the subjectivity of the emerging working class in order to eventually provide the intellectual tools for a possible new organisation. According to Tronti (2006), such an endeavour initially required a re-reading of Capital in order to grasp the mechanisms of capitalist development. This is why, despite the revolutionary plan, this first workerist experiment remained mainly

⁶ The years following a damaging defeat which occurred in 1955 were marked by intensified labour struggles, especially at FIAT, where a new generation of young workers migrated from the poor South to the industrialised North carrying new aspirations and frustrations, ultimately inducing one of the most significant changes in working class composition Italy ever witnessed. Bologna (2013:127) reports how the Milanese metalworkers strikes organised in 1960 were particularly inspiring: after years of silence and fear, unprecedented ‘unity, compactness and combativeness’ in struggle were observed. This period culminated in the famous events of Piazza Statuto, 1962. Despite an eventual defeat and violent State repression that saw nearly a thousand workers being stopped and/or arrested, the Piazza Statuto moment represented a meaningful push for both workerism and the Italian labour movement as a whole. In particular, this episode left a strong imprint in terms of increasing disillusionment towards labour institutions, both party and unions. In Italian, read <http://www.infoaut.org/index.php/blog/storia-di-classe/item/2052-8-luglio-1962-la-rivolta-di-piazza-statuto>.

confined to Marx's critique of political economy, hence to a predominantly theoretical level (Tronti, 2009). However, while it can be argued that *Quaderni Rossi* never managed to actually insert the scientific scrutiny of social relations of production within a proper 'theory of action', aimed at directly intervening in the organisation of the working class, it still paved the way to what were probably the most insightful contributions *Operaismo* left. It was already in this phase, for example, that Raniero Panzieri (1976; 1994) supplied his most valuable inputs on *co-research* and *workers' enquiry* as methods for co-production of revolutionary knowledge. In the same period, Romano Alquati provided his crucial testimonies from FIAT plants (Alquati, 1975), while Mario Tronti, leading figure of *Operaismo*, developed his 'theses' on the centrality of the working class within capitalist development and on the *autonomy of the political* (Tronti, 2006; 2009; 2010).

Pic.1 Quaderni Rossi (Red Notebooks) #1, original frontpage



Source: web (www.operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com)

During the years of *Quaderni Rossi*, the young, brilliant Panzieri⁷ elaborated his ideas on the non-neutrality of production forces and machines, on the ‘plan of capital’ affecting not only capitalist development but also the organisation of society, and his seminal conceptualisation of *workers’ enquiry* as a method (Bellofiore, 2006; Bellofiore and Tomba, 2008). In the same years Tronti started articulating his on the distinction between Marxism as a science of capital and Marxism as a revolutionary theory, which would be further developed within the following experience of *Classe Operaia* (Working Class) (1964-67). It is here that *Operaismo* aims at distancing itself from traditional Marxism as a theory of economic development. By investigating the scientific laws which determine the functioning of the ‘plan of capital’, traditional Marxism only views workers as labour power, integrated within capital, and fails to acknowledge the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class which refuses to be politically incorporated within such rules (see also Toscano, 2009). Here perhaps lies the most significant legacy of the whole workerist experience: the refusal of looking at labour through capital, the idea to look instead at capital through the eyes of the working class (Bellofiore, 2006).

A reading of Marx directly contributing to the formulation of a revolutionary theory for action, closer to the *Grundrisse* than to *Das Kapital* (see Negri, 1991), was more central in the years following *Quaderni Rossi*, from 1963-64. After *Quaderni Rossi*, the original group split, generating journals like the aforementioned *Classe Operaia* (Working Class) and *Gatto Selvaggio* (Wildcat).⁸ At that time, there was a progressive separation of different ‘nuclei’. A ‘Rome core’ emerged, organised around Tronti,

⁷ Unfortunately, Panzieri tragically died in 1964. Most of his contributions have been published posthumously.

⁸ This was a factory journal based in Turin, where it voiced the experience of FIAT and Lancia workers. Romano Alquati was one of its active members.

more strongly connected to the political-institutional setting of the capital city and more markedly devoted to research.⁹ On the other side, there were different groups based in the industrial North, mainly in Turin and in the Veneto region, closer to the factory realm and more substantially inclined to activism (see also Red Notes, 1979). In the same years, and throughout the 1970s, the predominantly theoretical focus that had characterised the *Quaderni Rossi* phase shifted in favour of increasing attention placed upon political strategies, tactics and organisation. Eventually, this led to an irreparable divide between those like Tronti, advocating *entryist* positions towards institutions, and the *autonomist* groups, mainly following Negri's path, rejecting any form of compromise with party and union organisations (see, for example, Wright, 2002; Tomba, 2007). In itself, *Classe Operaia* denoted the highest peak of classical workerism, with key theses being defined exactly in the years of its existence. The journal lasted only from 1964 to 1967, but it was in this period that Tronti properly refined his theory of the 'overturning' ¹⁰ in the capital-labour perspective, formally identifying the working class as the driving force within capitalist development, and thus officially consecrating *Operaismo* as 'working class science'¹¹ (ibid.). These years also constituted one of the few, maybe only, phases of major intellectual correspondence between different workerist thinkers, whereas the following theoretical and tactical divergence proved instead to be irreparable. As Wright highlights (2002), *Classe Operaia*'s analysis of class composition, conceptualisations of *mass worker*, and the identification of wage struggles as a terrain of political

⁹ This core still survives through the currently existing *Centro per la Riforma dello Stato* (Centre for State Reform), Rome.

¹⁰ In Italian 'rovesciamento', translation provided by Wright, 2002.

¹¹ According to Ciccariello-Maher (2006), within the idea that 'each ideology is always bourgeois', Tronti formulates this conceptualisation of 'working class science' as corresponding to a sort of 'non-objective objectivity', whereby only the partisan perspective of the working class may truly help disclosing the material conditions of the capitalist system.

conflict, created a platform for debate among workerists and a sort of commonality of concerns and practices. These would evaporate with the demise of *Classe Operaia* in 1967. From this moment onward, widening gaps and disagreements between different groups, in relation to both theoretical interpretations and political strategies, were observed. In particular, past 1967, we note growing dissension between *entryists* and *autonomists*,¹² polarised around the leading figures of Tronti and Negri. Such divergence resulted in a tighter hold of the Rome group around the national PCI circles, and a more pronounced deviation of the autonomist area towards extra-institutional settings. The latter was marked by a progressive radicalisation that even touched violent peaks, in the wake of advocated insurrectionalist perspectives. As mentioned above, this opened a dark phase in Italy's political history and practically sentenced classical *Operaismo* to its end. During the *Anni di Piombo*, in fact, the autonomist groups were extensively accused of having inspired leftist terrorist actions, and with the complicity of State and police apparatuses, radical thought and political extremism were progressively silenced. In terms of theoretical elaborations produced from the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, these years were characterised by a gradual broadening of the strictly 'factoryist' perspective, whereby the analysis of class composition was increasingly stretched beyond the immediate labour process taking place inside the factory (Aufheben, 2003). Within the workerist debate, such a process was accompanied by the evolution of the initial conceptualisations of *mass worker* towards the incorporation of Negri's formulation of *socialised worker*, and the opposition of Tronti's *autonomy of the political* to Negri's *autonomy of the social* (see Bologna, 1987; Bowring, 2004; Corradi, 2011; Melegari, 2011; Negri, 2007; Turchetto, 2008; Tomba, 2007). This occurred within a changing social scenario,

¹² The former advocating the entry in institutional settings, the latter rejecting any institutional compromise. This will be further clarified in the next section.

where (from 1968 up to the 1977) working class struggles were paralleled by student and new civil society movements, within a more complex structure of social and political struggles. Abandoning the relatively rigid ‘factoryism’ which had dominated the 1960s and applying working class analysis to a wider spectrum of social relations,¹³ also meant the adoption of a broader set of tactics. These went beyond the physical workplace and the mere wage claims: they ranged from self-reductions and the refusal of bills and fares, to the complete abolition of wage-labour and the demand of a ‘guaranteed salary’ for all,¹⁴ inspired by desires and needs which radically transcended the previous economism (see Aufheben, 2003).

In terms of actual organisation, aside from a short period (1968-1973) where *Potere Operaio* (Workers’ Power), based in Veneto and led by Negri, Balestrini, Piperno, Scalzone among others, still acted as a reference point, the 1970s were crossed by a proliferation of groups, journals, and assemblies. Most notable in characterising the later workerist tendencies being *La Classe* (The Class), *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Struggle), *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers’ Vanguard), and the original nucleus of today’s *Manifesto*,¹⁵ *Contropiano* (see Wright, 2002). Theoretically, within this wide constellation of groups, *Potere Operaio* probably represented the last attempt to bring together the different fringes of class struggle around the concept of *mass worker* as a class reference point, and to keep the centrality of wage claims on the political platform (Red Notes, 1979). According to Wright (2002), this also corresponded to the strongest expression of anti-parliamentarist, anti-union, and insurrectionalist feelings, before the

¹³ As Negri did. After the conceptualisation of *social worker*, and due to the later post-structuralist influences received during the forced exile in France, he shifted to even broader and more ‘nuanced’ categories like *multitude*, and definitively abandoned his initial materialism by exploring the whole realm of *immaterial labour* (read ‘Empire’, ‘Multitude’, or with reference to the present work, Bowring, 2004 or Turchetto, 2008). Negri’s late theorisations, however, go beyond the scope of this research.

¹⁴ Like the wages for housework, theorised by autonomist feminists like Dalla Costa and Federici.

¹⁵ Which still survives today as a national newspaper, source of leftist critical information.

further radicalisation of tactics embraced by *Lotta Continua* and *Autonomia Operaia*. Overall, while the 1970s in Italy were marked by an explosion of intense struggles and political manifestations, the end of the decade also corresponded to the actual decline of the workerist experience. On the one hand, the intricate plot of autonomist manifestations, charges of terrorist ties, and State and police repression during the *Anni di Piombo* practically suffocated radical thought and political extremism. Negri and many of his followers were forced either to imprisonment or exile, while Tronti and the entryists converged around the PCI circles. On the other hand, the evolution of the theoretical and political debate towards a wider spectrum of social relations and the ‘dilution’ of original conceptualisations, alienated segments of the working class, determining an increasing detachment between ‘factory and society’,¹⁶ as originally meant (Bologna, 1991). However, a distinction should be made here between *Operaismo* as historical and political experience, which remained confined within Italian borders and a span of less than two decades, and its overall theoretical legacy.¹⁷ This, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, can still be valid, and is worth rediscovering.

¹⁶ From the title of Tronti’s famous essay ‘*Fabbrica e società*’, part of *Operai e Capitale*, his ‘epoch-making’ collection of writings first published in 1966.

¹⁷ For an historical assessment based on such distinction, interesting readings are given by Filippini, 2011, and Filippini and Macchia, 2012.

Pic.2 *Potere Operaio* demonstration in the 1970s



Source: web.

1.2 Working class agency and capitalist development

Among the most important contributions *Operaismo* provided, there is what Tronti defines as the theoretical practice of the ‘point of view’,¹⁸ the idea of a ‘partisan reading of reality’ which assigns working class a primary role both in the production of knowledge and in determining the direction followed by capitalist development (Tronti, 2006; 2009). This probably constituted one of the most salient features characterising *Operaismo* as a unique cultural and political experience, and set a milestone within radical thought of Marxian inspiration. According to Tronti (2009), the theorised ‘practice of the point of view’, and its partisan reading, involved an ‘overturning of intellectual forms’ (2009). This entailed the shift from a capital-centric

¹⁸ In Italian, ‘*pratica teorica del punto di vista*’.

to a worker-centric interpretation of history and industrial relations. Here, we will analyse what this meant on two fronts: one, the production of knowledge, based on *co-research* and *workers' enquiry* as preferred methodology (see Alquati, 1975; Panzieri, 1976; 1994); two, the capacity of the working class to act as the political engine of capitalist development, implying a critique of classical Marxism.

Tronti's (2006; 2009) groundbreaking thought, laying the core foundations of the workerist theoretical contribution, begins by delineating what he considers to be a '*Copernican revolution*' within the analysis of capital-labour relations characterising the capitalist system. First, he advocates what comes to be a '*partisan reading of reality*', the interpretation of the system as a whole through a specific point of view, that of the working class. This, in the firm belief that in order to grasp the functioning of the system as a 'totality', one has to look at a 'partiality', carefully choosing a vantage point. In this sense, the lens chosen to investigate reality becomes the incarnation of a determined theoretical and political choice (see also Filippini, 2011). Such choice, as discussed earlier, requires a departure from classical Marxism, which stands accused of 'reifying' capital when scientifically analysing economic development by looking at labour through capital. In Tronti's view, instead, *Operaismo* had to involve a complete reversal of this relationship, by interpreting capitalist development through the lenses of the labour that through struggle makes itself working class (2006). This relates to both the idea of '*partisan research*',¹⁹ informing practices of *militant research* as *workers enquiry*²⁰ and *co-research*, and the interpretation of what *conflict* entails. Tronti's starting point is that '*knowledge is tied to struggle*' (Tronti, 2006; 2009; Wright, 2002), and that it is within the process of

¹⁹ 'Partigianeria della ricerca' in his own words. See Tronti, 2009:8-9.

²⁰ In Italian, 'inchiesta operaia'.

struggle that the working class not only gains awareness of itself as a revolutionary subject, but becomes a source of revolutionary knowledge. This is necessary for both the understanding of capitalist dynamics and for the design of organised actions. And it is this source of knowledge that the ‘organic workerist intellectual’ needs to refer to, within a process that becomes one of mutual support, mutual understanding, joint production of thought, aiming to the ultimate realisation of a revolutionary strategy. In Bologna’s words (2013:123), workerists aimed at grasping the ‘knowledge that was never formalised and impossible to transmit except through direct participation in factory- and worker-affairs’.

While Tronti provides a first theoretical definition of how class struggle yields knowledge, Panzieri and Alquati concretely attempt to formalise a research approach able to epitomise the overturning, and to ultimately link political theory and praxis (Alquati, 1975; Panzieri, 1976; 1994). In their pioneering work, the analysis of class composition and of dynamics of conflict occurs through practices of ‘*militant research*’, namely ‘*co-research*’ and methods proper of ‘*workers enquiry*’. As first experienced by Dolci and Montaldi in the 1950s and by Alquati during his works at FIAT and Olivetti in the early 1960s, co-research aims at establishing a new relationship between intellectuals and workers, based on the joint production of ‘social knowledge from below’ (Wright, 2002: 22). As Borio, Pozzi and Roggero point out (2005), this highly evocative practice seeks to overcome the distinction between interviewer and interviewee, in order to generate a shared process yielding knowledge, political subjectivity, theory and organisation. Through his concept of ‘*workers enquiry*’, Panzieri also suggests a path for political investigation on workers struggle. Notwithstanding critiques of ‘bourgeois science’, he reconsiders some of the methods of sociological surveys (1976), to be associated with a collection of materials produced

by workers themselves, and complemented by the direct observation of processes of productive restructuring (Tronti, 2009). As experienced in our case, survey methods may help ‘systematising’ the data collected in order to map labour composition, while only direct accounts from workers can shed light upon real motivations and dynamics of struggle.²¹ What particularly distinguishes a *workers’ enquiry* as expression of *militant research* though, is the ultimate use that will be made of the knowledge produced. While in fact the whole enquiry, following an initial phase of ‘*inchiesta a caldo*’,²² also involves a detachment from spontaneous practices and a moment of scientific analysis on the grade of consciousness reached by the working class, the final use will be purely political, aiming at the design of revolutionary actions (Panzieri, 1976, 1994). The militant, organic intellectual and the struggling worker are therefore united throughout the process by shared practices and common objectives, while there is an evident continuum between theory and praxis. The *workers’ enquiry*, as initially defined by Panzieri, was also adopted, during the following decade, by the group Primo Maggio, founded by Sergio Bologna. Subordinating historical research to struggle, these late ‘rationalist’ workerists, openly advocated a ‘history of and for the workers’ and peasants’ movements’, which could ‘only be a history written by a militant for militants’ (Wright, 2002:186). Overall, besides guidelines provided in terms of suggested methods for data collection, and the definition of a specific role for the intellectual/researcher, who becomes part of the struggle and expresses his/her voice in unison with workers, what has to be emphasised here is, once again, the primacy of the working class as an essential source of knowledge and expertise. Bologna (in Wright, 2007), highlights how the central role played by the working class

²¹ For a more detailed account, see chapter 4.

²² Research developed within the highest peak of social conflict (the ‘hot’ peak, *caldo*), where the relationship between working class and capitalist system appears clearer.

in producing knowledge was not only designed for research purposes, but generated a sense of ownership, where workers felt active part of the narration of their own history, as it was taking shape. At the same time, there was a widespread perception amongst workerists that collective effort, the joint production of a discourse, could fill the gaps which party militants and leftwing intellectuals were neither able to perceive, nor to interpret. Institutional, top-down analyses were in fact considered unable to comprehend the needs of the class they were supposed to defend.²³

The primacy of the working class as a subject also emerges from workerist interpretations of the capitalist development process. Overall, the analysis of what triggers development can be conducted at two different levels. One concerns the *agency* able to set in motion capitalist development, according to the *Copernican revolution* Tronti describes. The other relates to which *sphere* determines the process of change, and where the highest potential to challenge the system lies. This is discussed within the controversial opposition between Tronti's *autonomy of the political* and Negri's *autonomy of the social*,²⁴ which also underlies the evolution of the *mass worker* as interpretative category towards the later *socialised worker* (see Bologna, 1987, 2013; Bowring, 2004; Corradi, 2011; Farris, 2013; Melegari, 2011; Negri, 2007; Turchetto, 2008; Wright, 2005). With regard to the former, Toscano (2009) provides a brilliant account of how the working class determines the direction taken by capitalist development and of how it can potentially undermine it by exercising its power as an antagonist subject. Within Tronti's *Copernican Revolution*,

²³ Even Tronti's Leninist conception of organic intellectual as still linked to the Communist Party, never completely detached from an institutional apparatus deemed necessary to guide a revolutionary overturning, can be inscribed within such critique. Despite his explicit *entryism*, in fact, he was always extremely critical towards the 'old guard' of the PCI bureaucracy, and advocated a shift in direction of a more markedly 'class party', built around the centrality of the working class.

²⁴ Since this distinction closely pertains to the role that institutions play within dynamics of social change, it will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph.

where the epistemological overturning is not separable from the political one, the working class anticipates, precedes, provokes capital's moves through struggle. Such moves come as a reaction, or an attempt to restore command over the system of production once class conflict has been triggered. Here, Toscano explains (2009), labour-power is not seen as a mere factor within the production process and its political rationalisation, able to gain political subjectivity only by delegating its representation to party and union institutions, but is a *subject of antagonism*, able to determine its own political destiny. This way, within the process of capitalist development we find a perpetual, inner tension, which determines a dialectical clash between the working class seeking to make an 'antagonistic use of its antagonism' (Toscano, 2009:4) and capital's attempt to take advantage of the ruptures caused by labour in order to ultimately make its own 'capitalistic use of struggle' (Tronti, 2011 in CRS, 2011). In this sense, the whole process of development turns out to be nothing but the 'history of the successive attempts of the capitalist class to emancipate itself from the working class' (Toscano, 2009:3), which nonetheless anticipates and provokes the dynamic of change. We have, on one side, a working class which refuses to be incorporated into the rules of capital, which rejects the capitalisation of antagonism itself, and can potentially break the cycle – representing simultaneously both the '*presupposition* and the *principal threat* to capitalist reproduction' (Toscano, 2009). On the other, there is capital seeking to discipline labour and re-establish its command over the production process. In practice, this can be observed in frequent managerial decisions to strategically introduce new technologies, or in the constant attempts to flexibilise and de-politicise the labour-force.²⁵ Within Tronti's *Copernican Revolution*, Toscano continues to illustrate, the working class becomes the *independent variable* that

²⁵ Concerning capital strategies to weaken labour, see chapter 2.

anticipates capital's reaction, while capital is left as a *function* of the working class. In relation to Marx's thought, such overturning does not simply aim at complementing the original critique of political economy with a theory of voluntarism and a mere reflection on subjectivity, but it intends to depict capitalist development as a *reactive formation*, where *resistance* anticipates, precedes and provokes *exploitation* and *domination* (Toscano, 2009). Taken to its extremes, this leads Tronti to envisage exploitation as essentially 'born, historically, from the necessity for capital to escape from its *de facto* subordination to the class of worker-producers' (Tronti, 1980, in Toscano, 2009:5). Corradi (2011), in her valuable reconstruction of the history of Italian Marxist thought, analyses both Tronti's and Panzieri's contributions to the definition of working class placement within capitalist development. In his works, Panzieri clearly outlines the way *Operaismo* distances itself from a classical Marxian reading of capitalist development, powerfully unveiling the false rationality and universality of its progress. Here, capital is moved by the political need of restoring command over the production process, forms of domination and mechanisms of regulation of the labour process²⁶ are propelled by political and not technical needs, crises have a social and not purely economic nature.²⁷ And the only limit to capital lies in labour insubordination, which does not represent progress but a breaking point within capitalist development, entailing the attempt to oppose a completely new social regulation of the production process²⁸ to the previous 'rationality' of capitalist relations. Already in the early 1960s, Panzieri pointed at how capital's endeavours to maintain control upon the labour process do not necessarily manifest themselves

²⁶ He refers to division of tasks, wage differences, strategic use of skilled/ unskilled labour etc.

²⁷ In workerist terms, the socio-political nature attributed to crises prevails over explanations to be connected to consumption/production patterns, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, etc. (read Corradi, 2011). This would however require further analysis, which falls outside the scope of the present chapter.

²⁸ Ultimately, through the establishment of socialism.

through authoritarian rule or overt coercion, but often achieve full realisation within flexible systems of regulation and democratic forms of government (Corradi, 2011).²⁹ As it emerges from Tronti's theses, Marxism is read through a valorisation of the subjective element, of the agency within the socio-historical process of capitalist development. It becomes the science of antagonism and workers' insubordination, rather than the theory of the scientific development of capital (Corradi, 2011). This is the reason why Tronti symbolically proposes to place 'Lenin in England': ³⁰ capitalist chains must be broken not where capitalism is weaker, but where the working class is stronger, where a revolutionary subjectivity is more likely to be engendered and provoke a rupture (see Tronti, 2006; Corradi, 2011; Wright, 2004). In this regard, *Operaismo* faces a clearly defined objective, that of "*identifying the specific development needs of capital, to then turn them into subversive possibilities for the working class*" (Tronti, 2006: 22).³¹ However, in order to fully grasp the revolutionary potential of the working class, a phase of objective analysis is also necessary. As Roggero underlines (in Brophy, 2004), in order to understand how workers can free themselves from capital and from the system, we must first appreciate the nature and the material conditions of the working class. This entails, according to Tronti (2006:14), understanding "*the inner composition of the working class, how it functions within capital, how it works, how it engages in struggle, to what extent it tactically accepts the system, in what forms it strategically rejects it*".³² The emphasis placed on the analysis of class composition is what leads workerists to delineate a sort of 'ideal-type' of worker, emblem of the Fordist system: such is the *mass worker* as

²⁹ For a more detailed investigation of capital strategies of labour control within flexible modes of production, see chapter 2.

³⁰ 'Lenin in Inghilterra' (1964), title of one of the most famous essays included in *Operai e Capitale*.

³¹ Translation by the author.

³² Translation by the author.

interpretative category, which later evolves into Negri's conceptualisation of *socialised worker* (Negri, 2007). In his paradigmatic essay '*Factory and Society*',³³ Tronti outlines the nature of social relations under Fordism, where the entire social production comes to be identified with industrial production, and more than a mere 'construction that houses men and machines', the factory can rather be seen as the nucleus and the 'highest degree of capitalist production' (Wright, 2002:41). The subsumption of the whole society into the production relations of the Fordist factory are personified by the key figure of the *mass worker* – whose main attributes are those of being massified, of performing simple labour and of being located at the core of the immediate production process (see Wright, 2002). Bologna (1987) highlights how, due to the highly evocative scope of the concept of mass worker, this was gradually absorbed into the common language of a wide range of disciplines, from sociology to political science and historiography.³⁴ Turchetto (2008:288) also helps to identify the main features embodied within the category of *mass worker*, as first defined by Alquati in his studies of the Olivetti plant: the new productive subject of the Fordist factory. This becomes the symbol of that 'technically deskilled, subjectively expropriated', socially and politically rootless workforce, that while subordinated bears enormous potential for generating conflict. The workerist study of class composition, in this sense, serves the purpose of helping to disclose connections between the *technical composition* of this new productive subject, and his/her *political* potential as a class. Corradi (2011) points at how the mass worker epitomised all the characteristics of the working class emerging within the Fordist system –low technical skills, scarce discipline compared to the craft worker, highly exploited, revealing substantial

³³ 1962, included in '*Operai e Capitale*'.

³⁴ One of the principal aims of the journal Bologna founded in 1973 and edited until 1980, '*Primo Maggio*', was precisely that of retrieving a process of historical reflection upon the category of mass worker. See Bologna, 1987.

potential for conflict. In short, he/she constitutes an exemplary representation of abstract labour.³⁵ Bowring (2004) discusses how the *mass worker* is a ‘human appendage to the assembly line’ (Baldi, 1972, in Bowring, 2004). He is born from capitalism’s assault on the skilled craft worker, and soon becomes recomposed as a new class subject ‘*empowered by the organisational advantage of workers’ concentration in huge factories*’ (p.107). However, despite the centrality of the concept of mass worker within workerist analysis of class composition, its technical and political configuration started to be challenged during the 1970s. The concept was in fact accused of no longer representing the changing nature of capitalist productive relations. While on one side the end of the 1960s marked the highest point in terms of workers’ offensive and subsequent gains achieved through struggle,³⁶ the 1970s also witnessed an enlargement of social and political demands,³⁷ the increasing financialisation and tertiarisation of advanced economies, industrial restructuring and a gradual shift to post-Fordist strategies in the factory realm. Such an evolving scenario also led to a theoretical reconsideration of previous epistemological references, based on the assumption that each phase of capitalist restructuring, induced by labour struggles, determines a new technical – and accordingly political – composition of the labour-force, thus generating new hegemonic figures (see Corradi, 2011). In this way, the identity factory-society and the exasperated ‘factoryism’ of the early workerists comes into question, with Negri introducing his conceptualisation of *socialised*

³⁵ ‘Labour which is independent of the particular concrete form it takes at any given time’, see Bowring (2004: 106).

³⁶ The 1970s represented a momentous milestone on the terrain of labour advancement, whereby following a whole decade of intense struggles and the ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1969, the new ‘*Statuto dei Lavoratori*’ (Workers’ Statute) was conceded. This included proper regulations regarding freedom of association and union rights on the workplace, and specific references to the right to strike, wrongful dismissals and discriminatory practices within employment relations.

³⁷ As outcome of the 1968 movements, growing students contestations, an increasing feminisation of the labour force, anti-war mobilisations, environmental concerns etc.

*worker*³⁸ and progressively embracing post-modernist and post-industrialist discourses, paving the way to the debate on *immaterial labour* (see Bowring, 2004; Corradi, 2011; Negri, 2007; Turchetto, 2008). From Negri's analysis, it emerges how capital, facing a systemic crisis and the related fall in the rate of profit, seeks to extend the valorisation process to the whole society. Productive relations are here stretched beyond the immediate production process, and the conflict terrain can be identified with the society as a whole, which thus becomes a '*social factory*' (Corradi, 2011). As Bowring (2004) clearly explains, the concept of socialised worker comes to indicate that the productive capacities of the worker are now embedded in a whole network of social relations that goes well beyond the factory domain. In this sense, antagonism is now to be found within a new proletariat '*disseminated throughout society, congregating in the spheres of both production and reproduction*' (Wright, 2005: 1). Not dwelling on this specific debate further, as it strays into theoretical controversies that go beyond the focus chosen for the present research, what is mainly of interest here is what this conceptual differentiation was associated with in terms of political practices and theorised strategies. This pertains to the divide that progressively separated the circles surrounding Tronti and Negri, and the concept of *autonomia*, which is the focus of the analysis developed in the next and concluding section of this chapter.

³⁸ Which later evolves into the idea of *multitude* – 'characterised by a hybrid of material and immaterial labouring activities linked together in social and productive networks by highly developed labouring co-operation' (Hardt and Negri, 1994, in Bowring, 2004). These debates, however, fall outside the scope of the present research.

Pic.3 Gasparazzo



Famous comic strip drawn by Roberto Zamarin in the 1960s, it represented the story of a Southern worker migrated to the Northern factories – and came to personify the *mass worker* as defined by the workerists.

- 1) BREAD AND WINE: Half kg and 1litre! (100 liras)
- 2) Yes! There is crisis!
- 3) Four hectograms and $\frac{3}{4}$! (150 liras)
- 4) This is what you wanted!
- 5) Three hectograms and half a litre! (200,5 liras)
- 6) Too many wage increases!
- 7) A glass and a small loaf! (350 liras)
- 8) Luckily, the lira is strong!
- 9) ARMORY.

Source: <http://digilander.libero.it/romolimarco/satira.htm> (Copyright R. Zamarin)

1.3 Working class and institutions: on the concept of *autonomia*

In order to properly understand the way *Operaismo*³⁹ engaged with the debate concerning the relationship between working class and institutions, it is necessary to outline the concept of *autonomia* – although its multiple interpretations and political manifestations are definitely too wide and varied to condense within the scope of a single chapter. As Bologna suggests (in Cuninghame, 2000), the term itself is

³⁹ With reference to the distinction between *Operaismo* and *Post-operaismo* mentioned earlier, we should actually refer to post-workerism here, as the debate around working class autonomy and institutions was properly developed during the 1970s.

undeniably complex and ambiguous, and can relate to different meanings. First, the term is often associated with (a) the political experience of the group *Autonomia Operaia* (AO), which dominated the 1970s and definitively marked the divide between earlier *workerists* and *autonomist* ‘nuclei’.⁴⁰ Second, and in line with such political differentiation, the term often refers to (b) the debate between Tronti’s *autonomy of the political* and Negri’s *autonomy of the social*, which frames the controversial relationship between working class and institutions. Building on Negri’s conceptualisation of the *autonomy of the social*, post-modern theorisations of social movements’ subjectivities have often been drawn.⁴¹ Third, and closely connected to the above controversy, the term is also linked to a broader discussion on the (c) alternative between *spontaneism* and *organisation*. In this regard, the contributions provided by Sergio Bologna can be of particular interest (1977; Cuninghame, 2000). Finally, the term is often used to indicate (d) practices of *autonomia*, meant as forms of independent organisation not belonging to the realm of formal labour institutions – a crucial example being the historical experience of the Italian *Comitati Unitari di Base* (CUB). In this chapter, the discussion will not dwell upon the specific trajectory followed by AO, but will focus on a theoretical conceptualisation of *autonomia* with regard to the debate around *spontaneism* vs *institutions*. In addition we also report the main lines of the argument between Tronti’s and Negri’s view of autonomy. The CUB experience will also be touched upon, as it can provide interesting insights on the relationship between workers’ organisation and traditional union associations, especially in relation to the Maruti case analysed in chapter 6.

⁴⁰ This is how autonomist groups used to refer to themselves.

⁴¹ These are not related to the present work, though.

Autonomia cannot be defined as a national movement, nor as a precise political strategy, or associated with only one group. It was a sort of ‘thought-for-action’, manifesting itself in various forms, that is, in certain groups, certain tactics, and certain background theoretical and political principles. In Wright’s words (2002:152), we can think of it as ‘*ideologically heterogeneous, territorially dispersed, organisationally fluid*’. Mainly inspired by Negri’s ideas and gathering the most radical fringes of the earlier *Operaismo*, it was an experience which, while raising substantive controversies, nevertheless represented a milestone within the Italian 1970s, and has undeniably influenced the leftist thought well beyond its geographical and temporal boundaries. Today, many social movements can be deemed to trace their origins and *modus-vivendi* back to autonomist thoughts and practices. In Italy, this is certainly the case for the groups born, and built, around the ‘*centri sociali*’ (social centres)⁴² tradition and the ‘no-global’ movement. In relation to the previous workerist movement, the development of *autonomia* not only set a profound divide, but somewhat induced its decline, due to a gradual detachment from the original analysis of class composition and from the focus on the factory as epicentre of social relations of production.⁴³

In itself, *autonomia* combined the libertarian - often nearly anarchist - manifestations, which emerged through the 1968 movements, and the autonomous practices which had characterised workers’ insurgencies during the Italian ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1969 (Cunningham, 2000). It revolved around a diffuse rejection of both political élites and

⁴² Occupied, self-managed social centres – a phenomenon originally born in the 1980s in the North-East, which then spread widely all over the country. These have somewhat reflected the increasing incorporation within extra-institutional politics of a broad range of subjects and issues, all converging towards anti-globalisation claims: from students, to feminist, to environmental groups, generally agreeing on a rejection of traditional tactics and forms of expression, highly mediated, and focusing on specific matters rather than on ‘grand, ideologised, old-fashioned’ discourses adopted by the traditional left.

⁴³ With the gradual emergence of the concept of *social factory*. See also the previous section on the evolution from *mass* to *socialised worker*.

the institutional left, seen as incapable of properly understanding grassroots needs and of adequately voicing rank-and-file demands. It was characterised by a widespread refusal of all sorts of delegated democracy and of traditional forms of labour representation, including both party and union (see Aufheben, 2003; Cuninghame, 2000; Fuller, 1980). As reported in Red Notes (1979:4), the term itself was not simply meant to describe an independent movement but alluded to a strong ‘counter-language’ of independent class politics, ‘*outside and against*’⁴⁴ *official politics and the established Marxist tradition of the Communist Party and the official labour movement*. In principle, this can be connected to the assumption, related to the early workerist conceptualisation of working class as revolutionary subject, that *spontaneism* per se does not exist, that even spontaneous actions are the expression of a ‘sophisticated system of political consciousness’ that already exists at grassroots level (Bologna, in Cuninghame, 2000). In this sense, what was termed ‘spontaneity’ did not indicate lack of organisation, but constituted instead a ‘micro-system of struggle’ composed by politically mature organisms, directly emerging from the working class without external political mediation. In this way, *autonomia* implied a profound anti-institutionalism and the refusal of the mechanisms of bourgeois representation. In line with the revolutionary agency attributed to the working class, seen as an antagonist subject able to influence capital’s moves, even the refusal of taking part in union actions and organised strikes was never read as passivity or as an absence of class conflict, but rather as an expression of workers autonomy. Theoretically, *autonomia* emerged from groups of militants who started questioning Leninist forms of organisation and political practice, especially linked to party structures, while placing emphasis back on working class needs (Aufheben, 2003). To

⁴⁴ Opposed to this, there was the ‘within and against’ position advocated by Tronti. We will come back to this shortly.

this extent, 'organization was to be rooted directly in factories and neighbourhoods, in bodies capable both of promoting struggles managed directly by the class itself, and of restoring to the latter that 'awareness of proletarian power which the traditional organisations have destroyed'' (Comitati Autonomi Operai, 1976, in Wright, 2002:153). This was exactly the meaning of the CUB (*Comitati Unitari di Base*, similar to factory committees) experience, and of all the 'factory councils' which began to be built inside workplaces. The first CUB was founded at the Pirelli plant in Milan in 1968. Born as an autonomous workers' unit, this started from the contestation against the signature of a new collective contract (CCN – *contratto collettivo nazionale*) on behalf of the national unions and the consequent, widespread disappointment that had grown amongst the plant's workers. It then became an independent organism, run by workers themselves, progressively focussing on a wide set of demands, ranging from a decrease in working rhythms to the abolition of different ranks of workers and equal wage improvements for all.⁴⁵ Above particular claims, there was also an overarching discourse built on the opposition to the imposed correlation between productivity and wages, between performance and compensation. Against union and party bureaucracy, the aim was to establish a proper 'workers' democracy', direct and free from any mediation. Such was the logic behind the enacted 'self-imposed reductions' in working rhythms and the 'performance strikes'. After Milan, in the same year, CUBs made their appearance also at Siemens, Rex in Pordenone, at Necchi in Pavia, and at Pirelli, Ceat and Michelin in Turin, and were

⁴⁵ Slogans commonly used in those years were calling for the separation of wages from productivity, for the abolition of all gradings and hierarchies on the workplace and against forms of delegated democracy – 'Equal wages for All!', 'Grade 2 for Everybody!', 'No Delegation of Demands!'. Read Red Notes, 1979.

later followed by similar experiences occurring even outside the main industrialised areas in the North (Dalmasso, 2000).

Besides forms of direct democracy, *autonomia* also meant the adoption of creative, pointed, often unpredictable practices, ranging from *wildcat* strikes, slow-downs, targeted absenteeism and sabotage at factory plants to self-reductions, occupations, and expropriations in opposition to broader social issues. Beyond the factory realm, the diffusion of Negri's concepts of *social factory* and *socialised worker* and the emergence of new social groups (students, feminist movements, environmentalists, etc.) corresponded to an increase in the attention paid to the relation between qualitative needs and self-organisation in struggle (see Red Notes, 1979).

However, besides a changing social composition and the establishment of new political subjectivities, it is important to bear in mind that the 1970s were also marked by one of the most severe economic crises that ever shook the advanced economies.⁴⁶ Without dwelling upon causes and dynamics of what resulted in a severe global recession and substantially affected world economic relations, it is worth noting how this led to industrial restructuring and to a gradual shift in state-capital-labour relations in Italy as well. This obviously also impacted upon the nature and the modalities of anti-capitalist resistance, as well as upon institutional settings. On one side, a decline in industrial productivity reduced the leeway in terms of wage claims, justifying restrictive measures and productive restructuring.⁴⁷ On the other, crisis management entailed an increasing need to regulate social conflicts. It is within such a scenario that the role of the Italian State and of labour institutions gradually evolved, and that social

⁴⁶ And gradually a crisis which spread to the whole developing world, as it was shocked by the debt crisis, the imposed structural adjustment programmes and strict aid conditionalities. This will not be treated here though as it goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁴⁷ Not only in terms of reorganisation of labour structures, but also concerning a spatial reconfiguration of manufacturing. It is in this period that the study of post-fordist 'industrial districts' takes shape.

conflict increasingly polarised. Indeed, facing one of the strongest and best organised working classes in Europe – at that time – capital embarked upon an attempt to regain control over the business cycle, while the Italian State opted for a combination of fiscal restrictions and political repression (see Red Notes, 1979). It was in this context that a progressive alignment of left parties and labour unions was observed, particularly strongly after the launch of the so-called ‘historic compromise’.⁴⁸ In his analysis of the ‘*crisis of the planner State*’,⁴⁹ Negri highlights how the shift in the role of the State from Keynesian-style planning towards a commitment to restoring capitalism’s stability drew upon repressive functions, and was accompanied by the need to rely on unions and parties to contain and mediate class conflict (read also Bologna, 1977). Within this framework, while autonomous groups maintained the scene throughout the decade and workers’ struggles intensified again between 1971 and 1973,⁵⁰ the debate around the working class and institutions gained particular prominence. It reached relatively heated peaks in the opposition between Tronti’s *autonomy of the political* and Negri’s *autonomy of the social*. Tronti’s late thought somewhat reflects a relative pessimism matured in the years of the crisis, and reveals the consideration of lessons learnt from an experienced defeat.⁵¹ Negri, on the other hand, partly anticipates, partly describes the diffusion of conflict to the whole society theorising new shades of antagonism which almost result in a mystification of material class relations. Tronti elaborates the assumption that although structurally workers’ struggles may influence direction and modes of capitalist development, where a strong and organised

⁴⁸ This was a political alliance between the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Communist Party (PCI), initiated by Aldo Moro in the 1970s. This marked a definite ‘moderation’ of the parliamentary left.

⁴⁹ The original Italian version is titled ‘*crisi dello Stato piano*’ - excerpts can be found at <https://libcom.org/library/crisis-state-antonio-negri>.

⁵⁰ Long and intense strikes occurred, for example, at FIAT Mirafiori in 1973 – read Negri’s account translated in Red Notes, 1979.

⁵¹ Despite the persistence of working class struggle, the 1970s were a decade of State and police repression, arrests, and treason by unions and parties – which overall represented a severe assault on labour.

subjectivity is absent and therefore a proper revolutionary process, able to overturn existing power relations, is not sparked, capitalist development will eventually absorb and make use of workers' struggles to its own advantage (Tronti, 2009). In order to avoid this, and to finally divert mechanisms of capitalist production, the working class needs to attack the principal material obstacle, '*the political*', interfering between workers and capital. According to Tronti - and here lies his most controversial claim - this can be done only by comprehending its internal logic and functioning, penetrating its realm in order to eventually turn its opposing forces towards working class needs. Working class must therefore be '*dentro e contro*' (inside and against).⁵² This brings to the 'instrumental role' assigned to political institutions, terrain where the major rifts between Tronti's political realism and the autonomist groups emerged. Tronti thus advocates the 'entryism' into institutions, and into the Communist Party (PCI) in particular. Workers can still access and make use of the traditional institutions of party and union while keeping an 'autonomous strategic perspective free from restrictions and compromises' (Wright, 2002: 64). The ultimate goal will be that of building a 'party in the factory' and a 'class union'⁵³ (see Wright, 2002). As highlighted by Corradi (2011), here the distance with Negri, who sees institutions as merely bureaucratised and corrupt, functional only to capital, is irreparable. Negri's autonomist positions remain instead on a '*fuori e contro*' (outside and against) line, where the autonomy of the political is pictured as crushing any previous form of antagonism while paving the way to that reformist political strategy inaugurated by the *historic compromise*, and the Roman workerists, Tronti's group, are depicted as mere 'bureaucrats of the working class movement' (Negri, 2007). Throughout Negri's discourse, that while claims a stronger attachment to the material basis of the working

⁵² *Within* (dentro) the system, within political institutions, but *against* (contro) them.

⁵³ In Italian, 'partito di fabbrica' and 'sindacato di classe'.

class touches extremely radical and often unrealistic peaks, State and party are represented as agents of pure repressive mediation and any kind of political compromise is interpreted as a reactionary turn inimical to the working class.

The debate about *entryism* vs *extra-institutional strategies* not only determined that theoretical rift between Tronti and Negri which has never been bridged, but also provoked that separation in tactics which saw Tronti's group coming closer to the PCI and Rome's institutional settings, and Negri following the line of *Autonomia Operaia* (AO). Undoubtedly a strong reference point for the whole extra-parliamentary left throughout the 1970s, once AO's profound anti-institutionalism came to justify the radicalisation of class conflict to include forms of insurrection involving armed struggle, its destiny was inevitably compromised. Negri, Scalzone and the other leaders were accused of having inspired the terrorist acts of groups like the Red Brigades, and by the end of the decade were either arrested or forced into exile. Such repression officially brought the whole workerist experience to a close – silencing, at least in Italy, those who are still remembered as '*cattivi maestri*'.⁵⁴

Concluding remarks

As analysed in this chapter, despite its arguable political trajectory, *Operaismo* left some highly remarkable, both theoretical and methodological, hints which are absolutely worth re-exploring and bringing back to light. Indeed, if appropriately contextualised and employed, these can still incredibly enrich the study of capital-labour relations and of conflicts occurring within the process of industrial

⁵⁴ As before, 'bad teachers'.

development. In particular, embracing the scope and the tools of a *workers' inquiry* or of a *co-research* project can make a substantial difference in the research experience of a scholar or a 'militant intellectual' wishing to investigate dynamics of labour struggles or the subjectivity of a determined working class. At the same time, reflecting on capitalist development as a 'reactive formation', where struggle 'precedes, provokes, causes' capital's reaction may help unveil the real motivations prompting capitalist strategies and the way the institutional apparatus may be integrated, and functional, to dominant needs and chosen directions. Undoubtedly, even by questioning the trajectory followed by the Italian autonomous movement, thinking over the concept of *autonomia*, analysing the relationship between spontaneous practices and organisation may considerably enlighten the comprehension of dynamics between labour movements, the State, and institutions. These methodological and intellectual tools will be here applied to the Indian case – somewhat bringing 'Operaismo to Gurgaon' – thus rejecting the original idea that 'chains must be broken only where capitalism is stronger'. Fifty years ago, the early workerists partly refused the third-worldism that was emerging in certain leftist circles. Today, we will aim to demonstrate how globalised capital may face resistance and encounter disruptions everywhere. Even where working class subjectivity is less likely to emerge, and is less likely to show an 'autonomous' character, against State and labour institutions. Before doing so, we will analyse how capital attempts to build global strategies and narratives to contain labour power. This will be done by debunking myths associated with the imposition of a *lean manufacturing* paradigm within the global Auto sector.

Chapter 2

Lean Production and the Global Auto Sector: debunking myths

Building on the workerist understanding of capitalist development as *reactive formation*, where capital strategies are seen as a response to working class struggles and their power to destabilise the system, this chapter aims to analyse corporate attempts to contain working class antagonism within the Global Auto sector. Historically, the promotion of the Japanese *Lean Manufacturing* paradigm, can be interpreted as a managerial response to the increasing labour power and the established working class consciousness achieved within the Fordist auto factory, whose conflictual contradictions were unveiled by *Operaismo*.

Within this framework, the present chapter embarks on a specific task, namely that of deconstructing the lean production paradigm through the review of a set of studies, which to date still remain narrowly applied and are mostly confined to debates concerned with industrial restructuring within the Auto industry. The chapter will analyse the relevance of these studies, - which can be defined as critical analyses of social relations within the field of industrial sociology of Marxian inspiration, and their possible applicability to a broader spectrum of productive sectors. Subsequently in the following chapters, this kind of research, mainly elaborated in England since the 1990s, will be connected to the Italian *Workerism* from the 1960s-70s in order to analyse a case quite far in space and time: labour struggles which have shaken the Indian Auto sector in the past decade. This rather complex endeavour, which aims to build a linkage between the categories deployed by the two theoretical traditions and

the case study, will then be better highlighted and clarified in the final section of this work, where the whole story will be drawn to a conclusion.

The first goal of this chapter, however, is to debunk the myths diffused through the highly evocative rhetoric of lean manufacturing by arguing that its implementation was neither revolutionary in terms of production process nor in terms of the employment relations it engendered. In particular, this chapter will question its worldwide application and its universal exportability through the example of different historical settings where the thorough success of the model may be rebutted. On the basis of the case study investigated here, and with reference to the embraced workerist perspective, this chapter will identify working class composition and the sustainability of the implemented labour process as elements that are able to potentially undermine the full applicability of the lean paradigm. Indeed, these determine the level of resistance to the applied model, and lead to question its core ideological underpinning, which shapes the powerful rhetorical apparatus used to impose it.

Before reaching these conclusions, however, this chapter will first unhinge the core principles on which the lean manufacturing model is built, in order to unveil its questionable, rhetorical claims. The chapter will then challenge the substantive logic of this paradigm with the help of a series of applied cases, which show the real implications of ‘lean restructuring’ in terms of its concrete impact on those who materially allow lean production to function: the workers. Finally, in the last section, the chapter assesses how the lean paradigm proves to be much less credible and revolutionary than it initially appeared.

2.1 The Auto sector and the Lean revolution

The whole mythology of lean production starts with the appearance of what can now be reasonably considered as the ‘Bible’ of lean thinking, a study which first consecrated the core principles of the Japanese revolutionary manufacturing system which would have entailed a substantial, structural improvement of production techniques worldwide. Commissioned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the International Motor Vehicle Program (IMVP)⁵⁵ was, at that time, one of the most comprehensive surveys on the Automobile manufacturing process ever undertaken. The results of this survey culminated in 1990 in the legendary book *‘The Machine that Changed the World’*, by Womack et al. (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990). Relying upon an extensive data-set of more than 90 car assembly plants around the world, the study represented the first attempt to define and systematize the changes that had affected the ‘industry of industries’ (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990: 11) in the previous two decades, with the objective of explaining to the whole world ‘what lean is, where it came from, and how it works and can be spread everywhere for mutual benefit’ (p.12). In the authors’ words, lean production is blatantly introduced as a superior system that, if integrally and uniformly applied across the globe, will help overcome all inefficiencies and faults previously encountered by the dominant Fordist factory. Unlike the Fordist model of mass production, the new, flexible structure first designed by Taichii Ohno for the Toyota factory plants will allow producers, consumers and workers to meet their needs and preferences within an efficient but

⁵⁵ 5 years research project launched by the Massachusetts MIT in 1985.

‘human’ system, far from the hierarchies and the alienation of the large Fordist organisation (Coffey, 2006; Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990).

In their work, Womack et al. (1990) not only outline the historical evolution from mass to lean production, but also illustrate in detail all the advantages and the key elements embodied in the ‘new’ lean factory, and provide precise guidelines for the model to be exported and successfully implemented. Here, in order to eventually grasp the core logic underlying ‘lean thinking’, and to ultimately disclose the reasons that make its rhetorical claims so unconvincing, it is important to dwell on the main features of the model, as reported by the original work by Womack et al.

To start with, the term *lean* alludes to a light, agile system of production and management, where all unnecessary burdens are eliminated – excess stocks, prolonged times, superfluous spaces and unneeded human efforts – within a flexible structure that aims at optimising times and linkages between producer and consumer on one side, and between managers and employees on the other. The core target is to produce a wide variety of models in order to meet changing consumer demands (as opposed to the rigid standardization of mass manufacturing), while reducing costs, limiting inventories, idle times and minimising wastes and defects (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990). In practice, the system first experimented at Toyota entails clear innovations within the entire management and production process, as well as in the relationship with dealers and customers. The main focus of the designed changes are the phase of production planning in relation to customer preferences, spaces and times of manufacturing operations within and outside the factory, and workers involvement through the establishment of a complete new set of company values and practices.

For what concerns the planning and design of new models to launch onto the market, the lean system aims at radically reversing the ‘producer-driven chain’ (see Gereffi, 1994) typical of the Fordist factory. Partly as a reaction to the saturation of the demand for standardised products and partly in the attempt to avoid risky accumulation of stocks, the Toyota-style production is tailored upon customers’ requests, which determine both quantities and varieties of products - to be manufactured, assembled and delivered *just-in-time*. The customer is given an absolutely central role, whereby his/her needs are carefully cherished through a direct relationship and constant communication with the manufacturing company, with no unnecessary mediation of dealers, and his/her orders straightly turn into production inputs. This way, not only are product volumes and varieties meant to be adjusted to the exact demand received, but the company will make sure to maintain a prolonged market niche thanks to the loyalty developed by customers who feel looked after (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990).

This built-to-order system, or *just-in-time* achieved through the *kanban* method,⁵⁶ requires, of course, a rapid and continuous supply of components, manufactured outside the assembly plant by several functional tiers of ancillary units (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990). This becomes possible through the spatial restructuring of production operations and the vertical disintegration of manufacturing activities, earlier concentrated inside the big factory. Here processes of *clusterisation*, *ancillarisation*, *outsourcing*, and the progressive formation of production chains can be observed, all aimed to the flexibilisation of productive relations between assemblers and component suppliers.⁵⁷ What this spatial reorganisation generally entails in terms

⁵⁶ Designed by the same Taichii Ohno, Toyota engineer celebrated as the architect of lean manufacturing, it is a method to control the whole logistics of the chain in order to reduce the accumulation of stocks to the bare minimum, by setting a strict limit to work-in-progress inventory.

⁵⁷ See for example classical studies like Piore & Sabel, 1984; Scott, 1988; Becattini, 1990. Or more recent research, also on India, like Tewari, 2008; Knorringa, 2005; Das, 2005; Landy and Chaudhuri, 2004.

of corporate strategies and employment relations will be discussed in the next sections. Here, it is relevant to stress how the attempt to lighten the productive organisation of the previous manufacturing system, deemed inefficient and conducive to the waste of time and resources, involves the restructuring of spaces both outside and inside the factory. Outside the factory, the vertical disintegration of previously centralised operations and the outsourcing of component manufacturing may lead to the re-design of territorial configurations.⁵⁸ This is particularly evident in the Auto sector, where such processes have generally led to the creation of large clusters, with a network of component suppliers, often organised along a tiered structure, located all around the main assembling plant.⁵⁹ Inside the factory, a re-arrangement of space, time and methods of production occurs as well. The attempt to eliminate idle times and minimise defects and waste in order to make the whole process as agile and efficient as possible, induces in fact a restructuring of assembly lines, where spaces amongst lines and workstations are reduced so that workers can communicate face-to-face, all workers are actively employed on the line and are asked to perform their tasks at the same pace. This is supposed to guarantee fast, efficient, and balanced operations. While rapid communication amongst workers is encouraged, a system to quickly spot faults and identify defective parts is also devised, where all workers can easily stop and re-start the line without causing prolonged or irreparable glitches (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990). The way workers directly contribute to detect production flaws on the line is undoubtedly related to the idea that everyone can participate in ensuring that the manufacturing machine achieves *continuous improvements*. Known as *kaizen*, the Japanese concept refers to the collective effort all company employees can devote in

⁵⁸ Besides a redistribution of production costs, as we will later see.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the overall structure of the Indian Auto industry, see chapter 3. For a description of the cluster where our research was conducted, see instead chapter 5.

order to allow a successful advancement of production activities and processes. This takes place by both diagnosing faults and suggesting possible solutions to overcome them. The engagement of workers in the *kaizen* system is obtained via the creation of *teams* and the appeal to company values, reinforced by the provision of material incentives. Teams or ‘workers units’ are established not only to facilitate the best performance of certain operations, which they follow from the beginning to the end, throughout the whole set of tasks composing them, but also to let workers develop a sense of ‘strong belonging’ to the company, of ‘ownership’ towards the activities they undertake, and of responsibility towards their fellows. The loyalty to the company is also built through the provision of benefits, like seniority bonuses or productivity prizes, and through the promise of long term employment, sometimes even lasting for life (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990). All this is supposed to engender a ‘community’ atmosphere, where workers feel motivated to contribute to the ‘collective effort’ by being as efficient and productive as possible, where by perceiving to be entitled to rights and benefits they are committed to pursue what is best for the company, continuously pushing for improvements in its production targets.

Based on the combination of these core ingredients, lean production as first designed and experimented within the Toyota factory was presented by Womack *et al.* as a revolutionary recipe which would re-shape the destiny not only of the global Auto industry, but of the entire manufacturing system worldwide, prescribed as a

‘superior way for humans to make things...providing better product in wider variety at lower cost...and more challenging and fulfilling work for employees at every level, from the factory to headquarters’ (Womack, Jones, Roos, 1990:225).

Womack et al.’s forecast was that the lean system would spread worldwide to achieve world-class manufacturing production. This would take place, either applied by

Japanese firms taking over companies abroad or through Western mass-producers autonomously adopting lean systems. However, 25 years later, it is clear that things did not exactly go as predicted. The lean production model was rarely applied integrally, and often encountered glitches. Indeed, even where prescribed changes in the manufacturing system did lead to improvements in productive performances, the whole package including workers' involvement and peaceful industrial relations was often hardly digested. In practice, lean manufacturing appeared rather different from the romantic idea of a universal recipe to be unconditionally prescribed and implemented worldwide. When facing ground realities, on the contrary, it revealed to be fairly distant from the discourse which had accompanied its inception, disclosing a wide gap between the technological and managerial changes it entailed and the ideological apparatus which stood beneath their surface. Such 'divide' will be explored in the following sections, and re-discussed in relation to the Indian case, in order to eventually provide an assessment of why lean 'may fail.'

2.2 'Politics of production': managerial practices and 'class struggle from above'

As a few case studies will reveal shortly, *lean* in practice meant something starkly different from the romanticised representation initially offered by Womack et al. (1990) and numerous, similar studies which followed. The original 'package' could hardly be integrally applied in its entirety, due to context-based circumstances. Glitches occurred all the time, and the hoped for 'harmony' in the workplace, based on serene and collaborative industrial relations where productivity would increase due to everybody being happy and motivated, rarely materialised. Reality is actually

tougher and more complex, while industrial peace is often a euphemism hiding silenced interests in conflict. Here, in order to unveil what really lied behind the introduction and implementation of the lean production system, we will refer to a Critical Social Relations approach, epitomised by studies in Industrial Sociology of Marxian inspiration by authors like Paul Stewart, Andy Danford, Elsie Charron, Valeria Pulignano or Mike Richardson (Charron and Stewart, 2004; Pulignano, Stewart, Danford and Richardson, 2008; Stewart, Richardson, Danford, Murphy, Richardson, and Wass, 2009). These works, mainly revolving around the *GERPISA* Network (*Groupe d'Etude et de Recherche Permanent sur l'Industrie et les Salariés de l'Automobile*), all apply a critical perspective toward analysing production and employment relations in the Automobile sector with the aim of materially investigating the impact of industrial restructuring inspired by the Japanese lean thinking.

The starting point for all these studies is that new production regimes cannot be understood in isolation, as abstract paradigms endowed with universal validity, operating in a '*social and institutional vacuum*' (Stewart et al, 2004: 267). Rather, they highlight how material circumstances characterising the social and economic structure in which they are embedded determine their success or failure. In this sense, national features and historical paths may have a substantial degree of influence upon corporate strategies (Stewart et al, 2004). Thus, the context in which a given production system is introduced must be analysed in its concrete specificity. As a matter of fact, this explains the nature of these studies, which generally refer to applied cases of single factory plants or companies in a defined location and time-frame, where management-labour relations are investigated within their historical, geographical, social and political space (see Yates, Lewchuck and Stewart, 2001; Pulignano *et al.* 2008). The second key feature of this literature is the belief that corporate practices and production

strategies never induce politically neutral changes, but are moved by clearly ideological contents, shaping well defined '*politics of production*' (Burawoy, 1985; Charron and Stewart, 2004; Danford, 2004). This finds its origin in Burawoy's initial theorisation of the process of production as going well beyond the pure economic moment, to rather deeply fall within the political and ideological sphere. In his view, the *labour process*, composed by the network of social relations of production, is controlled by the *political apparatuses* that guarantee its reproduction through the regulation of struggles. According to Burawoy's reading of Marx, the only politics of production which can allow the capitalist system to sustain the pressure for profits is *market despotism*. Inside the factory, the form of labour control which allows the capitalist to respond to the imperatives of market despotism lies in technology, represented by the assembly line, where the extraction of profit occurs through the coercive subjection of workers to paces and modes of the mass production regime. However, within the regulation of production, as capitalism develops, the labour process reaches a point where arbitrary coercion is no longer sufficient, where further exploitation of workers for surplus extraction is only possible through *persuasion*, whereby workers must be convinced to cooperate with management, to coordinate their interest with that of the capitalist class for mutual benefit. Here, *consent* prevails over *coercion*, and a *hegemonic* factory regime replaces the previous *despotic* regime (Burawoy, 1985). In current times, however, what we experience is a further evolution of the *hegemonic regime*, towards new forms of *despotism*. Allowed by almost unconditional capital mobility and reinforced by the blackmail of restrictive measures presented as inevitable recipe to overcome crises of profitability, global capital has now re-gained terrain to impose a new onslaught over labour. Under the most recent form of *hegemonic despotism*, labour is no longer *granted* concessions but *makes*

concessions, within a form of ‘rational tyranny’ of capital mobility over the collective worker (Burawoy, 1985: 150). If still formally achieved through consent and not coercively demanded, this may be observed whereas workers find themselves defenceless in facing the opportunity costs of capital. In this sense, and particularly evidently within globalised industries like the auto chain, workers are often forced to choose between wage cuts, more precarious and insecure conditions, and job losses, which may follow capital flight, plant closures, disinvestment and transfer of operations (Burawoy, 1985: 150).

Indeed, Burawoy’s transition from a *despotic* to a *hegemonic* regime can be traced in the passage from the old system of mass manufacturing to the post-Fordist lean production, where the labour process is controlled and struggles are regulated through the direct involvement of the workers in the factory regime. Within the current stage of global capitalism, instead, the most recent applications of the lean paradigm, where the rhetoric of consent rests upon only fakely democratic tradeoffs, can be related to new forms of *hegemonic despotism* of capital over labour.

Making sense of Burawoy’s original conceptualisation in relation to the politics of production deployed within the contemporary Auto industry, Charron and Stewart (2004) understand the lean system as the ‘*current form of hegemonic control at the level of the firm*’ (p.14), as a specific regime of labour subordination which extends from the factory to the whole community through a powerful ideological discourse, aimed at ultimately determining ‘*how hard, how long and under what conditions labour is driven*’ (p.6). Also drawing upon Burawoy’s reading of production politics, Danford (2004) explains how the implementation of lean strategies was an outcome of a long-standing managerial agenda to increase flexibility, intensify work and meet the cost-cutting imperatives of the market, based on the ability of ‘*footloose global*

capital’ to weaken previous organised form of labour resistance. However, as it will later be argued, Danford also points at how the ‘lean version’ of hegemonic despotism does not necessarily lead to a successful, total managerial control, but is often hindered by new forms of collective resistance inspired by the inevitable discontent it generates (Danford, 2004). Both Stewart *et al.* (2004) and Pulignano *et al.* (2008), still drawing on Burawoy, contextualise lean production as a particular form of hegemonic despotism embodied in defined managerial strategies, which allowed capital to reverse the labour standards established through the post-WWII Fordist production regime – including strong union capacities and bargaining powers acquired within large factory settings. In the later work ‘*We sell our time no more*’, Stewart *et al.* (2009) make even clearer how lean production has come to represent one of the core tenets of the neoliberal paradigm of business organisation, allowing capital to fulfil a systematic, ‘ideological assault’ upon organised labour. However, despite the powerful rhetoric on labour subordination, insubordination remains persistent and unresolved. In their words:

‘lean production, then, is a managerial agenda that gives capital the leverage to restructure not just for good times, but also for bad – specifically in the face of declining profitability. As such, it can be seen as creating a range of organisational and ideological resources for subordinating opposition to the rule of capital. This is what we mean when we describe it as a new regime of subordination which strives, by necessity, to exclude organised and independent labour’ (p. xi).

While acknowledging certain innovative features in terms of technical and organisational assets,⁶⁰ which nevertheless embody all but a socially neutral character,

⁶⁰ According to Moody (1997), while some ‘near-qualitative’ innovations like reduction in die-changing time occurred, quantitative innovations, like the improvements the introduction of the *kaizen* methodology should have brought about, were marginal. In his view, organisational restructuring as the

lean production can thus be seen as a process of capital restructuring carrying no real revolutionary improvement for labour. Far from becoming empowered, labour remains only deceptively involved in the quest for higher profitability through the rhetoric of consent, collective effort and teamwork. In this respect, the authors' reference to Ralph Miliband's concept of *class struggle from above* (Miliband, 1989; Stewart *et al*, 2009), is undoubtedly worth exploring. Through a thought-provoking analysis of the different forms defining class struggle 'from above' within modern capitalist societies,⁶¹ Miliband provides a description of the way in which those who control the means of domination within a society, mainly represented by the employers and the state, impose an hegemonic social order upon subordinate classes. The concept of hegemony, in his formulation, draws directly on Gramsci's understanding of the capacity of dominant classes to spread their values and ideas in order to subsume the subordinate classes into their own social order (Miliband, 1989). Interestingly in relation to our own discussion, Miliband (1989) points at how, in order to turn formal command into effective control, employers may seek legitimisation by resorting to an extremely democratic rhetoric, sometimes even apparently radical or revolutionary. However, this in reality just disguises the attempt to discipline labour movements, left parties, and all the progressive social forces in a society. This move is generally accompanied by the deployment of different devices, aimed at ultimately securing the privileged position of the dominant groups. They can combine supervision, coercive control, persuasion and enticement – in essence, whatever enables the winning of 'the hearts and minds' of the subordinate classes.

extensive outsourcing and the adoption of the just-in-time delivery system constituted nothing but 'quantitative cost-cutting measures in the context of value maximisation' (p.87).

⁶¹ Including social policy, taxation, the use of the media and political repression.

In this sense,

‘ideological class struggle from above constitutes a gigantic enterprise in political socialization and indoctrination, and amounts in effect to a daily, massive assault on popular consciousness’ (Miliband, 1989:145).

Addressing the methods adopted within the Japanese industrial relations system, and shortly before the above-mentioned conceptualisation of lean production officially came to light, Miliband (1989) strongly referred to them as a form of *‘daily terrorism’*. Through a mix of control, ‘family-like’ interference, political repression and welfare schemes, the objective of this system was, for Miliband (1989), to earn workers’ loyalty and grateful recognition, in order to eventually secure an enthusiastic endorsement of the imposed order, and to contain conflict. Investigating the concrete implications of lean techniques in terms of impact on the factory workforce, Moody (1997) elaborates instead the idea of *‘management-by-stress’*, highlighting the level of pressure workers are still subject to in order to satisfy management’s needs. The next section, will build on these overall interpretations of what the ‘lean turn’ concealed behind a declared revolution in the world manufacturing process and what the adoption of the new management and production system effectively entailed.

2.3 Lean in practice: flexibility for whom?

Having framed the way in which lean production can be conceived as a managerial strategy epitomising the vehement attack ‘from above’ that labour has suffered in the neoliberal era (see Harvey, 2005; Saad-Filho, 2005; Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005), it is now worth unveiling what the core tenets associated with the new manufacturing system meant in practice. To begin with, it is critical to explain what the advocated flexibility concretely represented, or better, who actually benefitted from the

flexibilisation of the production process, and what this implied for the workforce. Second, it is also crucial to challenge the main principles on which the lean revolution was built and the key changes it entailed. In particular, in this section, the concept of *continuous improvement*, the creation of *teams* of workers and the spatial reconfiguration described above, will be rebutted. The analysis will then conclude with some final reflections on why ‘lean may fail’ and where its most critical rifts may potentially emerge. These remarks will then be elaborated further in the light of the case study presented in this thesis, which will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

The insistence on the increasing flexibility achievable through the implementation of a leaner production system has been one of the core arguments of the advocates of the post-Fordist factory evolution. The rhetorical claims by which a less rigid organisation of both manufacturing process and labour regime would be the recipe for raising efficiency and productivity levels highlighted the reality of fierce cost-reduction strategies, not necessarily leading to improved quality in industrial output and better labour performances. Indeed, the Toyota production model was praised for allowing, through the *just-in-time* delivery mechanism and the consumer-oriented design-production line, to rapidly switch process and product configurations and to swiftly adapt output quantities to market inclinations, while avoiding waste and hefty accumulation of stocks (Storper, 1992, in Kiely, 1998). Overall, the lean manufacturing system was designed to rely on *flexible technologies*, able to respond to different quality and quantity in demand, *flexible relationships between core firms and suppliers*, linked to the spatial re-organisation determined by the described innovations, and a *flexible organisation of the labour process* (Kiely, 1998). The point made here is that not only the demand for labour flexibility has enormously surpassed the innovations implemented within the factory productive process, but that all forms

of required flexibilisation have negatively and heavily impacted on the workforce. In this sense, as it will be illustrated in more detail later and mainly with reference to the Auto industry, the adoption of more flexible technological assets and the partial restructuring of assembly lines (aimed at reducing idle times and spaces between workers and workstations), has generally caused the intensification of the working pace and of the pressure put on workers. In terms of the linkages between assembling operations and components supply, the internal disintegration of manufacturing activities and the following outsourcing of productive segments to external firms were often accompanied by processes of informalisation and growing insecurity in production relations. Finally, the flexibility imposed on workers, a crucial node of the lean manufacturing system, far from leading to a progressive empowerment of the labour force, has rather contributed to its increasing precarisation and depoliticisation. Arguably, these were the real targets of the ‘lean revolution’.

In line with this interpretation, Moody (1997) clearly illustrates how the employers’ demand for *functional*, *numerical*, and *time flexibility*, which the workforce is expected to conform to, well exceeds the emphasis placed on flexibility of new technological assets and spatial configurations. Allowed by the overall standardization of tasks on the lean assembly line, where demarcations between different jobs are reduced, functional flexibility refers to the tendency of employers to deploy workers or rotate tasks according to temporary industrial needs, sometimes even within the same shift. Numerical and time flexibility are connected instead to employers claiming the freedom to adjust the amount of workers employed and the length of operations these perform. The possibility of smoothly varying the number of occupied workers is achieved via two different channels. On one side, adjustments are managed internally, through the pursuit of specific corporate strategies like the sub-contracting of part of

the workforce to external companies or recruitment agencies, and the increasing employment of casual/ temporary workers, easy to dismiss. On the other hand, pressure is put externally by lobbying on political institutions for the flexibilisation of labour market regulations: easier hiring & firing procedures, fewer limitations on the use of contract labour, simplification of bargaining mechanisms are all part of a concerted effort to freely dispose of labour in accordance to market and production needs. As for time flexibility, this not only concerns an often uncontrolled use of overtime work, in the sense of absolute surplus extraction,⁶² but also the arbitrary arrangement of shifts and rotations in case of sudden variations of corporate requirements.

Investigating recent restructuring at the FIAT Pomigliano plant in Southern Italy, the CRS⁶³ Group (2011) observes how the need to increase flexibility in order to improve efficiency and productivity was mainly imposed on workers from above. This was based on forced adjustments of working times and on imposed mobility. In terms of working schedule, weekly shifts were extended, breaks were reduced, extra hours were added to the annual grand total, productive catch-ups were introduced.⁶⁴ Mobility meant instead the possibility for the employer to freely relocate workers in response to changing needs: internally, assigning workers to different workstations whenever

⁶² Surplus extracted by lengthening the working time. Marx, 1867.

⁶³ *Centro studi e iniziative per la Riforma dello Stato*, 'Centre for studies and initiatives on State Reform'. Established in 1972 by scholars and intellectuals belonging to the Italian Communist Party (PCI, *Partito Comunista Italiano*) and located in Rome, Italy, this is an historical place for studies, research, political debate on Italian politics and institutions. Long chaired by Pietro Ingrao, since 2004 it has been presided by Mario Tronti, one of the 'founding fathers' of *Operaismo*, already mentioned in chapter 1.

⁶⁴ The recently introduced industrial plan – *Piano Fabbrica Italia* - demands 18 shifts per week, places the lunch break at the end of the working shift and reduces the length of each break allowed, adds up to 120 compulsory extra working hours per year, includes the possibility to amend the mandatory 11 hours between two shifts, imposes 'productive catch-ups' (compulsory over time when required by production needs). See CRS, 2011 and Monaco, 2015.

required⁶⁵ (as for the functional flexibility described by Moody), and also externally, moving workers across plants at company's discretion. In both cases, besides providing the chance to quickly react to changes in production needs, mobility also proved to be a dangerous tool in the hands of the employer. Often used as an instrument to reward more efficient and disciplined workers and penalise less productive and submissive ones, it seems to have served the twofold purpose of selecting the 'best' workforce while de-politicising it (CRS, 2011).

Overall, the constant focus on flexibility, a core component of the lean production design, must be read not only in terms of cost-reducing strategies aimed at increasing capital profitability, but as a key part of the highly ideological and concealed attempt to weaken and discipline labour. This point also emerges when deconstructing the main tenets of lean thinking, to disclose its actual implications. The next section focuses on these issues.

2.4 The lean mantra: beyond teamwork, continuous improvements and spatial restructuring

Going back to what have been identified as the guiding principles of the lean revolutionary turn, it is important to unveil what these conveyed in practice. Before

⁶⁵ According to A. Di Luca (Prc Fiat Auto – Avio 2011), internal mobility raises several issues. First, by suddenly shifting the worker to a different workstation, the quality of the final product is not guaranteed, as the worker might have been trained for a different process or operation, and turn out to be unprepared for the demanded task. Second, when immediately assessed by his/her supervisor on a task totally new to him/her, the worker is exposed to a high stress level and to inevitable psychological pressure. Third, due to the lack of information about the risks related to that workstation, whereas there is often no time to warn union representatives, the worker's security is undermined. Fourth, there is a concrete danger connected to the introduction of 'lean' metric systems as involving standardised tasks and reduced health risks, where therefore every worker can be freely located. This is untrue, and contradicted by the high number of workers presenting work-related pathologies and still frequent accidents recorded in the plant at issue.

doing so, however, it is necessary to reassert two equally important and interconnected points. On one hand, lean production never meant the same thing in different places. As mentioned before, it did not constitute a universally applicable recipe, nor a ‘monolithic entity’ (Cooney and Sewell, 2008), and it did encounter diverse obstacles and forms of resistance. On the other hand, though, it can be argued that despite the differences in concrete applications and degrees of assimilation/adaptation, lean production was part of a global agenda of capitalist restructuring that needed to subject labour to renewed forms of exploitation, and whose rhetorical discourse, now profoundly embedded in global industrial relations, conceals the same reality worldwide. Even more, the rhetorical and ideological apparatus disclosed through the promotion of lean thinking, permeates today the political economy discourse of fields that go well beyond the manufacturing sphere.⁶⁶ Twenty-five years after its first diffusion, it has undoubtedly invaded all spaces and productive activities – from services to the production of knowledge. Overall, we may argue that the harsh forms of subordination labour keeps facing today, involving processes of casualisation and informalisation, and attacks to labour organisations and union representation – are nothing but the end-product of over thirty years of ‘class struggle from above’, across different production activities and spheres. A severe onslaught of global capital over labour, that continues, taking new and more aggressive shapes, but does not always advance unhindered.

In order to exactly understand the scope and intensity of the attack perpetuated through the diffusion of the lean model, it is crucial to deconstruct the rhetorical apparatus which has accompanied it. This can be done by analysing the three core concepts it is

⁶⁶ This interestingly emerges from recent studies on managerial practices in the service sector. See for example Carter, Danford, Howcroft, Richardson, Smith and Taylor, 2011 and 2013.

built upon. One is the idea of workers' involvement, through the creation of *teams* and the constant emphasis put on their participation within the 'collective productive mission'. Second, the conveyed belief that the common effort may lead to *continuous improvements* in the production process. Third, attention is paid to the implications of the implemented *just-in-time* system, in terms of spatial reorganisation inside and outside the factory and restructuring of production relations between assemblers and suppliers. All these 'myths' will be questioned mainly by providing evidence collected through applied research conducted within Auto manufacturing plants, but also mentioning, at least briefly, studies more recently performed in non-manufacturing segments.

The idea of involving workers in the production process, through a constant and direct communication with management, the formation of *teams*, and a restructuring of assembly lines in a way that allows each worker to interrupt the manufacturing chain in case of detected faults, also connects to the belief that everyone can contribute and suggest *continuous improvements* of the factory system. The attempt is that of apparently reducing hierarchical structures, prompting a sense of ownership and belonging in the 'hearts and minds' of all those involved in the productive effort, whilst simultaneously instilling the faith that what is good for the company will accordingly be good for everyone. Cardoso (2004) spells out how the restructuring of workplace relations at the Betim FIAT plant in Brazil involved the functional integration and the horizontal distribution of workers in *Elementary Working Units* (EWUs)⁶⁷ of not more than 50 workers each, together with the establishment of more flexible communication between workers and management, facilitated by REPOs acting as both supervisors

⁶⁷ From the Italian *Unità Tecniche Elementari* (UTE): teams in the FIAT style.

and intermediaries.⁶⁸ The loyalty of the workers towards the benevolent *Familia FIAT*, recalling the same attitude FIAT management used to perform in the Italian plants already in the years of mass consumption during the post-war economic boom, is also induced via the distribution of both material and symbolic benefits, in the form of prizes, status, and private assistance. This sort of caring paternalism, however, while apparently contributing to build a progressive kind of participative management, hides a well designed model of hegemonic control, which manifests itself in the selection of a *greenfield* site with no history of labour organisation and through repeated, firm anti-union behaviour (Cardoso, 2004). In a study conducted at the Hyundai Asan plant in Korea, Chung (2004) also shows how a *greenfield* strategy was combined with traditional authoritarian and paternalistic control, based on a mix of *familyism*, work ethics and discipline inspired to Confucianism. Here, industrial peace was achieved through the rigid exclusion of the union from the entire decision-making process at plant-level, and the continuous reference to workers as individuals, abstracted from any idea of collective with ‘co-determination rights’. Examining cases of restructuring at FIAT, Renault and Volkswagen, Pulignano and Stewart (2008) effectively note how the implementation of teamwork was expressly employed as a tool to discipline workers, whereas the systematic use of punitive measures and rewarding mechanisms in the form of welfare benefits and incentives specifically acted as a structure of labour regulations aimed at controlling labour. The integrated system of team working, they argue, was designed to push for higher productivity while establishing mechanisms of mutual dependency ‘amongst workers and employers alike’ (p.33). At the same time, the provision of incentives to raise performance standards officially generated behavioural rules that even reinforced bureaucratic control at work, within the same

⁶⁸ More than simple representatives, these practically act as facilitators with the aim of integrating workers towards the objectives of the enterprise. See Cardoso, in Charron and Stewart, 2004.

lean system supposed to be more flexibly regulated. Vallas (1999) highlights how, although the use of teams and employees' involvement programmes has spread rapidly and widely, this remains confined to a mere rhetorical significance, rarely leading to substantial changes in jobs organisation and actually subordinated to the imperatives of increasing productivity and improving quality. Even more, he points at how such programmes respond to their underlying, predominantly ideological function, namely that of providing management with tools to keep social cohesion inside the factory, in order to prevent conflict and overcome the disparities between individuals and groups created by the system itself. Stewart *et al.* (2009) further underline how even where worker involvement and worker autonomy are somewhat promoted, their meaning is nevertheless defined by management itself. No spontaneous and self-determined organisation is contemplated, while union representation and independent actions are radically obstructed, within a broader design of labour de-politicisation and conflict prevention.

The adoption of the *kaizen* methodology, or the idea of continuous improvements, must likewise be challenged. First, because constant improvements simply seem to represent the pursuit of continuous cost reductions rather than actually providing any substantive betterment of either product quality or working conditions (see Moody, 1997; Pries, 2004). Second, because the instilled conviction that workers can perpetually contribute to spot flaws occurring on the assembly line and to suggest ways to overcome them, is inscribed into a just formal involvement of employees in the collective mission. More often instead, productive improvements are achieved through the partial reorganisation of assembly lines. In order to minimise waste and idle times, spaces between workers and workstations are reduced, tasks are standardised, work pace is made uniform. This translates into increasing pressure on the line, intensifying

rhythms, and growing stress. Investigating the impact of lean manufacturing on labour within the British Auto-component segment, Danford (2004) notes how the combination of team-working and *kaizen* methodology intensifies disciplinary pressure and more pervasively subordinates the worker to supervisors and the machine, enhancing the whole system of labour control. Overall, this responds to nothing more than the capitalist imperative to eliminate idle time, to maximise the utilisation of labour and to reduce the individual control of the worker over pace and rhythm of the work performed. Pulignano *et al.* (2008) and Danford *et al.* (2008) highlight how even in this sense, the gap between the rhetorical discourse, focusing on workers' empowerment, and the actual experience of workers, who face the degradation of their employment conditions through the intensification of work, increasing managerial surveillance and higher levels of stress, is substantial. Pulignano and Stewart (2008) also describe how continuous improvements at FIAT, Renault and Volkswagen involve pay rewards linked to the quality of the product and the service provided, within an overall increasing pressure on the employees to meet the company standards at any time. Stewart *et al.* (2009) underline how continuous improvements can be reduced to a never-ending demand to be more and more efficient, competitive, careful on the line, where the 'pace of work and the relentless push for more with less is simply mind-blowing' (p.122). As part of what he defines as 'management by stress', Moody (1997) describes how the continuous search for marginal improvements in costs, to be achieved through constant readjustments of the production system and increasing stress of the labour process is undoubtedly one of the distinctive features of lean manufacturing. Within the lean factory, therefore,

'all costs associated with non-value added functions are waste and are to be eliminated, whether it is buffers between operations, slack time, waiting time, walking

space at work stations or more generally indirect labor such as the skilled trades' (CAW,⁶⁹ in Moody, 1997:88).

Quality, in this conception, acquires the meaning of a zero defects-zero waste ideal target, to be achieved by stretching the labour process to its extremes and ensuring that workers perfectly conform to standardised requirements fixed by the company. Studying the impact of one the most recent version of *kaizen*, the Total Quality Management system (TQM),⁷⁰ on the labour process at the FIAT Pomigliano plant in Italy, CRS (2011) reports how the rationalization of the production process and the minimization of most waste, implied the elimination of all the 'not-value-adding' operations, the reduction of any dysfunction or fault potentially compromising the product's quality, the maximisation of labour productivity through the cancellation of any idle time, and the optimisation of the worker-machine relation (ergonomics).⁷¹ In practice, by implementing the TQM, FIAT managed to eventually reduce breaks, obtain the full utilisation of the plant, and overall make employees work harder and faster, rather than smarter and more comfortably as it proclaimed.

The acceleration of working rhythms and the spatial reorganisation of assembly lines were also a direct outcome of the implemented *just-in-time* system, the idea that the speedy delivery of components and the strict compliance with customers needs would lead to a substantially more efficient manufacturing process and to the avoidance of unnecessary accumulations of stocks. Indeed, this also translated into an overall obsession with cost-reduction, which in turn triggered a whole series of processes

⁶⁹ Canadian Auto Workers.

⁷⁰ Integrated management system aimed at enabling a firm/organisation to continuously improve its capacity to deliver high-quality products and services to customers.

⁷¹ The basic idea is that working more 'comfortably' allows the worker to work faster and harder and to reduce useless breaks.

impacting on both the spatial configuration of production sites, and on the organisation of the labour process. Inside the large factory, the pursuit of 'leaner' structures led not only to the optimisation of times and spaces on the assembly line, but also to the vertical disintegration of manufacturing operations, whereby the Fordist factory model used to concentrate all phases - from component production to assembly - within the same site. The mass manufacturing system entailed in fact the vertical integration of all functions in-house, coordinating the whole chain within the same plant; a structure which proved too rigid, expensive and hard to transfer and re-produced, in case a change of setting was necessary (Womack *et al.* 1990; Moody, 1997). The shift to the lean system therefore involved a radical restructuring of manufacturing operations, which mainly revolved around the externalisation of most components production through the outsourcing and sub-contracting to smaller suppliers located outside the large assembling plant.

These processes, as we will see later on in relation to the Indian case, reshaped geographical settings, leading to the formation of industrial clusters characterised by layered structures of large to smaller firms, within a tiers-based system linking the mother factory to smaller ancillary units. Moreover, such restructuring profoundly affected the workforce, in line with the corporate strategies outlined in earlier sections. Indeed, outsourcing meant not only cutting production costs, but also reducing labour costs. It meant shoving workers to firms generally dispensing lower salaries, forcing them to more precarious employment relations, to more 'flexible' labour regulations that often provided less protection. In countries like India, this has involved the contractualisation, informalisation, and casualisation of the labour force in particularly harsh ways, and the progressive move from more protected and regulated to less protected and less regulated segments. On the other hand, at global level, outsourcing

was a key part of the exportation of the Toyota lean system abroad, within a trend which has seen labour being progressively pushed down the production chain, confined to lower wages, less job security and poorer working conditions (Moody, 1997). Besides allowing the main company to reduce costs, outsourcing and the threat of outsourcing have also served the purpose of raising competition between workers of different plants (ibid.). Arguably, the same interconnection of manufacturing units within a production network could be used as a deterrent against labour organising, whereby if one node of the chain ever stops, due to a strike for example, the effects of any interruption will be automatically felt along the other nodes, and the consequences of the stoppage will be borne by all the other actors operating in the cluster. On the other hand, as we shall see, this could also be used as an incentive towards more effective industrial actions.

Finally, the will to turn to leaner forms of production also involved the closure of specific plants and the relocation to new industrial areas. This often meant the downsizing of existing units, together with the frequent dismissal or lay-off of previously employed workers, often in the pursuit of new *greenfield* sites⁷². Not strictly related to the restructuring required by the implementation of *just-in-time* systems, this is rather a response to the overarching strategy identified above: that of escaping or preventing labour organising, in order to ultimately avoid any sort of conflict, in an attempt to mainstream an ideal factory model where collective efforts could be embraced by consensus through a full, enthusiastic endorsement of corporate strategies.

⁷² Areas of new industrial formation, these are generally characterised by the absence of rooted forms of unionisation and labour organisations.

Going back to the starting point, as argued by Stewart *et al.* (2009:x) in *We Sell Our Time No More*, *lean* can be seen as

'the means by which capital today seeks with ever-increasing intensity to drive work. It is, we argue, the reason for the deterioration in the employment experience for many millions of workers. The elements of lean just described can be interpreted as a means to manage workers and the workplace by stressing them to their limits in order to find, and hence eliminate, obstacles to success.'

Indeed, the managerial attack represented by the evolution towards a *lean factory regime* has not ended, neither it has remained confined to manufacturing segments like the Auto sector. Today, what we observe is the permeation of the original lean thinking inside all productive spheres, the acquisition of the *flexibility mantra* within the most diverse managerial agendas, the attempt to politically neutralise workers by only apparently involving them in the decision-making process, at all levels. In most cases, the impact over workers' lived experiences has just become more pervasive, leading to more precarious and deleterious working conditions also for those traditionally better off. For example, the studies conducted by Carter, Danford, Howcroft, Richardson, Smith and Taylor (2011; 2013) on the UK civil service, interestingly reveal how lean restructuring has affected also the service sector, and tasks performed by white-collar workers, previously considered the most safe and protected. In particular, their findings show how the redesigned workloads, the standardisation and fragmentation of tasks, which accompanied the implementation of the lean working system, led to increasing stress and worsening occupational health and safety (OHS), even within clerical jobs. In this sense, the lean paradigm might be seen as having advanced more and more powerfully, and progressively invaded all productive spheres with few exceptions. As we argue here, and we will substantiate by analysing our case study, this is only partly true. Indeed, while still dominating global management and

production strategies, the lean system is not invincible. It can generate substantial internal contradictions and incur severe obstacles. While we have already acknowledged some, in relation to different cases discussed by critical scholars, in chapter 6 we will illustrate in detail how these contradictions have manifested in the case of India.

2.5 Concluding remarks: where lean may fail

What discussed in this chapter leads to some concluding remarks. First, despite the revolutionary claims, the ‘lean turn’ did not entail substantive innovations in terms of production organisation and in particular in terms of configuration of the labour process. Rather, it mainly involved deepening methods of labour exploitation. To an extent, this questions the same novelty of the system. The intensification of working rhythms, the extension of labour time, the growing pressure placed on workers in the name of efficiency and productivity, is nothing more than old wine in new bottles. Second, despite the emphasis put on workers involvement and empowerment, these proved to be nothing more than a ‘trojan horse’ (Yates, Lewchuk and Stewart, 2001), a channel towards a more complete subsumption of labour to fiercer capital imperatives. This confirms a huge gap between the rhetorical claims that accompanied the rise of the lean production system and the rather different lived experiences of what the system entailed on the shopfloor. Overall, this system has mainly been an attempt to de-politicise labour, to prevent labour from organising and contain conflict. However, such goals, do not always, and fully succeed. And here lies the potential drift lean may encounter: a glitch based on different omissions. First, by promoting a model

as a universal recipe it neglects the material conditions characterising the recipient context. Material settings that also involve a specific class composition of the employed – and exploited - workforce. In this sense, class composition may vary, and it undoubtedly affects the way a new production system is potentially ‘welcomed’. Second, a drift may be generated due to the wrong assumption that the rhetoric of workers involvement and the underlying modes of exploitation, which still rely on fast pace of work, intense rhythms, unbearable workloads, may keep resting on increasingly precarious forms of employment. Stable and protected forms of employment may have led, in the past, to an apparent perception of empowerment and ownership functional to capitalist needs, casual and precarious occupations do not. Finally, that conflict may simply be avoided by fragmenting labour, shifting locations, restructuring lines in ways that prevent workers from interacting, dressed with a captivating rhetorical discourse. This may not be sufficient – as our case will prove.

Chapter 3

Industrial Policy and the Auto Sector in India: an overview

Before introducing our case study and discussing the findings of our field research, it is worth outlining the framework in which particularly explosive contradictions related to the industrial development path India followed, suddenly emerged. This chapter describes the configuration of the Auto sector in India, and traces the evolution of the policies that have shaped its restructuring over recent decades. Indeed, it is important to highlight how this sector played a leading role within the industrial growth of the country, and how it represented a testing ground for the introduction of new policy settings, new manufacturing and labour regimes. In particular, it is crucial to note how Maruti performed a key function within India's liberalisation process, channeling both the entry of foreign capital and the penetration of the Japanese management and manufacturing system, through the establishment of the first joint venture with Suzuki. In this sense, labour struggles occurred in the NCR since the early 2000s can be seen as a clear indicator of how the 'Maruti revolution'⁷³ (Ishigami, 2004) did not succeed.

In the past few years Europe and the West have been severely hit by the global crisis, experiencing stagnation, industrial downturns, and financial collapses. However, looking East we find several 'success' stories, worth exploring both for their theoretical relevance and for the political implications they entail. India, based on its industrial development path, is one of those. With its huge domestic market, a fast expanding middle class which is prompting a marked upsurge in both production and

⁷³ Expression frequently used to indicate the way Maruti allowed the access of Japanese capital and of the Japanese lean manufacturing model to the Indian Auto industry, and consequently to the Indian factory system as a whole. This will be discussed again in chapter 6.

consumption patterns, and an overall well educated workforce, India holds an enormous development potential. Looking at its manufacturing sector, which has been lately characterised by a substantial growth in both capital and consumer durable goods, increasing investment and an emerging, lively entrepreneurship culture, Majumdar (2012) refers to India as undergoing a ‘late late industrial revolution’. However, whether India will assert itself as an international industrial power will depend not only on its key manufacturing sectors, but also on the way these will overcome their internal conflicts. In this sense, the automotive segment, recognised as a ‘sunrise sector’ able to operate a leading function and promote India’s international competitiveness, deserves particular attention. Together with staggering growth and a potentially pioneering role within India’s integration on global markets, this sector has also been shaken by the most intense industrial conflicts the country has experienced in the past decades. While the ‘bright side’ of the sector’s expansion will be outlined here, the actual ‘darker’ side of such growth will be analysed in chapters 5 and 6.

The present chapter is composed of five main sections. The first two outline the historical evolution of Indian industrial policy regimes. As we shall see, even pursuing the target of progressively liberalising the industrial sector in order to align it with international standards and global competition, the country followed its own path, which makes the Indian case rather different from other emerging economies. Contrary to neoliberal accounts which point at the pre-liberalisation period as essentially leading to failures and inefficiencies, this chapter argues that it was actually through the planning experiments and the slow pace of reforms that the national industrial basis was set, and that significant industrial growth could later be achieved.⁷⁴ Sections three and four explore the Indian automotive case, first in relation to the gradual

⁷⁴ A similar argument is developed by Tewari (2008) in relation to garment production.

liberalisation of auto policies, then by providing a current overview of the sector, including recent growth trends and factors of competitiveness. Indeed, as for the organisation of production and the labour regime implemented, which will be discussed in the following chapters with reference to the NCR, even in terms of industrial policy the Indian auto sector performed an interestingly precursory function, somewhat anticipating dynamics that have more slowly affected the whole economy. The concluding section discusses the potentially leading role that this segment can play within the Indian economy and how this is undoubtedly linked to the way it will deal with present challenges, especially the management of capital – labour conflicts.

3.1 India before 1991: from a state-led industrial regime to the liberal turn

For three decades after independence, India followed a unique path of mixed economy, combining multi-party democracy with development planning, and a relative leeway for the private sector with substantial state intervention. Inspired by both Western socialism and Soviet planning, India's developmental experience aimed at achieving economic self-sufficiency and high rates of growth whilst at the same time guaranteeing an even distribution of its benefits, sustaining consumption and reducing unemployment; it was therefore overall welcomed by the people (Chandrasekhar and Gosh, 2004; Goyal and Chalapati Rao, 2001; Singh, 2009; Pathak, 2007; Mehta, 2004). In terms of industrial policy, a strong presence of the state was supposed to coordinate private and public investment and identify leading industries in the economy, to be kept under state ownership. This was governed by the *Industries (Development and Regulation) Act (1951)*, which regulated industrial licensing, reservation of strategic

industries for the public sector, protection of small scale units from the entry of large producers, and ensured targeted investment. At the same time, excessive concentration of economic power was prevented through the *Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTPA, 1969)* (Goyal and Chalapati Rao, 2001). In this way, the state maintained its monopoly on all industries identified as key priorities for national development (defence, energy, transport and communications, coal, iron and steel, etc.), while the private sector, highly controlled and regulated, was meant to only complement government's operations. In principle, the first post-independence Industrial Resolutions (IR -1948, 1956, until the Janata Government Industrial Policy, 1977), included a marked emphasis posed on equitable distribution and social justice, on national interest, and on growth with stability. Compared to the first two industrial frameworks, instead, the Industrial Resolutions from 1977 and 1980 involved a progressive de-centralisation in favour of small scale industries, more attention to rural industry and employment generation, an initial re-direction towards export-oriented units (Pathak, 2007; Satyanarayana, 1996).

For what concerns their overall strategic orientation, the pre-liberalisation industrial plans focused on heavy industry and on the enhancement of the capital goods sector. With the ultimate target of achieving national self-reliance and of promoting a domestic industrial base, import substitution was combined with a marked inward-orientation, through a specific set of measures including not only industrial licensing, but also strict import controls, subsidisation of exports, severe limitations imposed on foreign investment and administered prices (Singh, 2009). Moreover, in order to protect domestic, infant industries, firms' entry to the market was rigorously controlled and phased import programmes were used to track the indigenisation of production (Auty, 1994).

Unsurprisingly, free-market advocates have generally blamed India's pre-liberalisation industrial strategy for leading to imbalances and inefficiencies. The main criticisms have been against the limitations imposed on domestic competition, the misallocation of resources, the too high barriers to entry and exit of firms, the lack of incentives to entrepreneurship and technology upgrade, the poor performances of state-owned enterprises (Singh, 2009). In addition, employment generated through the industrial growth produced by the interventionist design of the planned economy was deemed insufficient to stimulate substantial increases in demand. The industrial capitalist class, dependent on the state which through trade protection and import substitution guaranteed a market for domestic manufactures, while promoting investment through infrastructure-building and industrial development banks, was seen as still scarcely dynamic (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2004).

Overall, the state-led industrial regime functioned for at least two decades after independence, undoubtedly conveying an important modernisation of Indian manufacturing. Already between the 1960s and the 1970s, however, an apparent exhaustion of the import substitution stimulus and a decline in industrial growth begun to pave the way for a turn which eventually led to the liberalisation of the sector.⁷⁵ While in fact in the first years after independence manufacturing output grew at an overall sustained rate, registering an average annual growth of 7.8% between 1951 and 1965, by the early 1970s this had dropped to 3.3%, and by the end of the decade only increased to 4% (Chandrasekhar and Gosh, 2004). The stagnation of the 1960s/70s, actually already overcome by a recovery experienced in the 1980s, was then partly used as a justification by those pointing at the inadequacies of the interventionist model

⁷⁵ On the other hand, the IS model was perceived as exhausting its potential everywhere. See Hirschman, 1968; Bruton, 1998.

and advocating a progressive opening to the market, which formally occurred with the reforms package inaugurated in 1991. India's shift towards a more liberal regime was actually determined by several internal factors, which together characterise the country's liberalisation experience in a sense much different from hetero-directed paths followed by many other developing economies during the Washington Consensus era. Following the socialist compromise of the Nehruvian period,⁷⁶ the country found itself facing complex internal challenges. On one hand, a fiscal deficit caused by a prolonged inability of the state to extract adequate resources through an efficient taxation system (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2004). On the other, internal power balances were progressively shifting in favour of large agrarian and industrial capitalist groups, widening the gap with those masses who had constituted one of the pillars of the Nehruvian developmental project. What happened during the years of the planned economy then, was a gradual diversification of the industrial capitalist class, which undoubtedly contributed to the drive towards the market. Firstly, while benefitting from state protection and import-substitution, a new generation of capitalists who had earlier accumulated capital outside traditional monopolies started entering manufacturing, investing in industries characterised by economies of scale and prompting the acquisition of new technologies. Indeed, these would later welcome deregulation, market competition, and, in particular, new import inflows. Secondly, established capitalists who after years of protection and limited competition had seen their position relatively worsening, began to push for expansion abroad and for the abolition of business restrictions in order to explore new venues of accumulation. In addition, there was a third mixed group, external to industrial capital, which also supported the liberalisation project: this was composed of Non-Resident Indian (NRI)

76 The first president of independent India, forefather and author, together with the economist Mahalanobis, of the economic planning model, died in 1964.

businessmen and traders, layers of the top bureaucracy close to international financial institutions and urban middle classes, eager to gain access to consumption goods from abroad (Ghosh, 2004). Pedersen (2000) also provides an excellent explanation of changing power balances which facilitated India's turn towards a liberal economy, by analysing the role of the state within the interplay of economic and political interests which determined a shift in the industrial policy regime. Looking at both relationships between state and society and state and international actors, he rightly grasps the most peculiar feature of India's transition to an open economy, namely the strong internal pressure which almost outplayed the influence exerted by the external environment. From the late 1970s in fact, while ties between Indian businessmen and foreign capital, and between Indian bureaucracy and international financial institution, together with a partial interference of foreign institutions offering conditional solutions to solve debt issues, undoubtedly played a role, it was the emerging industrialist class and the expanding consumer-oriented middle class that mostly urged a change. In this sense, while the Indian state somehow started easing its attitudes towards private capital, it also managed to resist pressures from outside, maintaining a rather firm 'ownership' on the whole liberalisation process.

3.2 The liberalisation experience: an overall assessment

Such was the political-economic scenario which led India throughout its neoliberal turn, partially occurring during Rajiv Gandhi's government in the late 1980s but officially endorsed through the reform package approved in 1991, under Singh's rule. In terms of industrial policy, liberalisation meant that industrial controls were gradually dismantled, the number of industries under state monopoly was

progressively reduced,⁷⁷ industrial licensing was almost completely abolished except for selected sensitive areas,⁷⁸ and the MRTPA was practically replaced by softer rules governing anti-competitive behaviour. For what concerns related trade policies, import restrictions and duties were also progressively lowered (Ahluwalia, 2004). In sum, the industrial policy reforms that started in 1991 moved along three main lines: deregulation and reduction of the public sector by ‘dereserving’ and ‘delicensing’, which allowed broader leeway to domestic private investors; easing of anti-monopoly prescriptions and limitations on large firms through the abolition of MRTPA; liberalisation of FDIs through gradual concessions of higher equity participations for foreign firms and the increasing abolition of import controls (GoI, 1991; Chandrasekhar and Gosh, 2004; Satyanarayana, 1996). Since 1991, India has endeavoured to make its industry globally competitive, seeking to attract foreign investors, facilitating technology acquisitions and innovations, supporting private initiatives. Five Year Plans (FYPs) designed in the liberal era have tried to re-orient the role of the state, freeing the private sector from excessive bureaucratic and governmental interference. As we shall later see, this has been reflected both in the way capital has been allowed to pursue its strategies at the expenses of existing labour regulations, and in the way industrial relations have progressively evolved. In terms of proposed targets, post-liberalisation plans have prioritised the need to encourage entrepreneurship in small scale industries, technology upgradation and investment in infrastructure (GoI, 1997; 2002; 2007). Interestingly, the 12th FYP (GoI, 2012; ongoing), following a recorded downturn in manufacturing performances in the previous five years,⁷⁹ resumes the need of active government participation in

77 Within ten years from the start of the liberalisation process these were drastically reduced to three: defense aircrafts and warships, atomic energy generation, and railway transport (see Ahluwalia, 2004).

78 Like for industries linked to security or having a substantial environmental impact.

79 2007 – 2012, covering the highest peak of the global financial crisis.

addressing industrial policies: state inefficiencies and unnecessary bureaucratic hindrances are still ‘deplored’, but government is deemed to have a *‘key role in facilitating the process of learning and collaboration between producers and policymakers’* (GoI, 2012: 56), in building institutional capabilities, formulating sector strategies in order to enhance the performance of the most promising industrial segments.

Given this framework, and in order to appropriately contextualise the specific case of the Auto sector that will follow, it is important to provide an overall assessment of the liberalisation experience, as opposed to the trends and dynamics observed in the years of the planned economy model. Indeed, an interpretation based on economic growth rates can be misleading, and it has often been used as a ‘confirmation bias’ to neglect long term tendencies. Whilst it is true that India underwent a substantial decline in manufacturing growth between the 1960s and the 1970s, as previously reported, it is equally true that before officially resorting to market opening in 1991, the country experienced a significant recovery throughout the 1980s (Kolhi, 2006; Singh, 2009; Chandrasekhar and Gosh, 2004). This can be observed in the table n. 1 on the following page.

Tab. 1: Total and Sectoral GDP Growth Rates (percentage, per year)

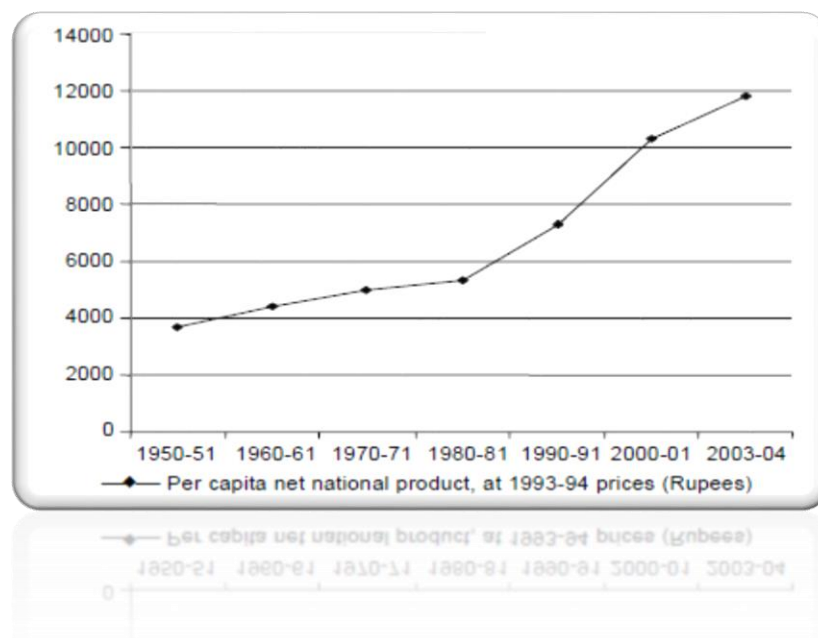
	Total GDP Growth	Sectoral Growth of GDP		
		Agriculture	Industry	Services
1970-72 to 1980-81 (average)	3.2	2.0	4.0	7.2
1981-82 to 1990-91 (average)	5.7	3.8	7.0	6.7
1991-92	1.3	-1.1	-1.0	4.8
1992-93	5.1	5.4	4.3	5.4
1993-94	5.9	3.9	5.6	7.7
1994-95	7.3	5.3	10.3	7.1
1995-96	7.3	-0.3	12.3	10.5
1996-97	7.8	8.8	7.7	7.2
1997-98	4.8	-1.5	3.8	9.8
1998-99	6.5	5.9	3.8	8.3
1999-2000	6.1	1.4	5.2	9.5
2000-01	4.0	0.1	6.6	4.8
2001-02*	5.4	5.7	3.3	6.5
1992-93 to 1996-97 (average)	6.7	4.6	8.0	7.6
1997-98 to 2001-02 (average)	5.4	2.3	4.5	7.8

Source: Ahluwalia, (2002:68), based on 2001-2002 Economic Survey from Minister of Finance, Government of India

On one hand, already before 1991 small steps towards a partial liberalisation had been taken by Rajiv Gandhi, at least as concerns the import of capital goods and components needed for the production of luxury goods, including automobiles. This was aimed at pleasing the increasingly demanding upper class, with the idea that growth would then ‘trickle down’ to the poorer masses. A marked departure from previous socialist goals of equitable growth and even distribution in the national interest was, thus, evident. On the other hand, state intervention in the 1980s was still a significant part of Indian political-economic strategies. What in fact also allowed to revive total and sectoral growth was an increasing fiscal stimulus linked to larger government spending, together with the state’s decision to rely more on external commercial borrowing

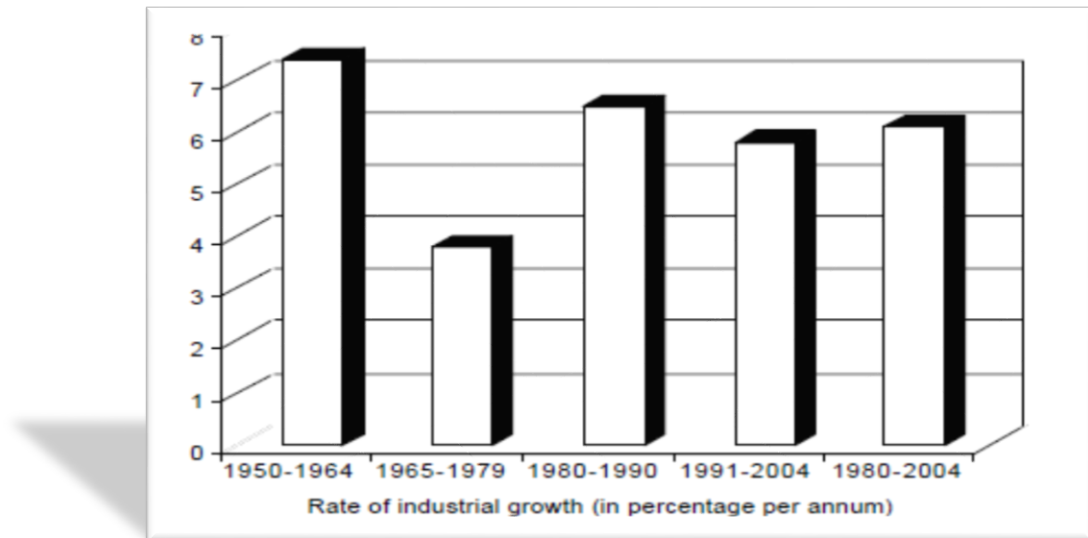
(Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2004). By contradicting the pro-market view, according to which the pre-liberalisation sluggish growth was a clear outcome of excessive state intervention and of misguided import substitution policies, whilst market opening spurred capital accumulation, improved efficiency and conducted to accelerated growth, Kohli (2006) goes further. He points at how, not only economic growth returned to a more expeditious track already during the decade preceding 1991 reforms, but also at how, despite substantial deregulation and liberalisation, industrial production did not accelerate significantly in the aftermath of reforms (see charts n. 1 and 2 below).

Chart 1: Growth of Per Capita Net National Product in India (1950-2004)



Source: Kohli (2006: 1254) – based on National Account Statistics, Government of India

Chart 2. Industrial Growth in India (1950-2004)



Source: Kolhi (2006: 1254), based on Economic Survey, Government of India.

Singh (2009) provides a critical and thorough evaluation of Indian industrial policy pre- and post-liberalisation, by interestingly deconstructing neoliberal interpretations. He firstly questions the discontinuity that neoliberal scholars have stressed between industrial policy frameworks adopted and economic growth trends, suggesting how peaks in growth rates did not actually correspond to a shift in industrial and trade regimes, but rather followed other shocks.⁸⁰ Second, and most relevant in relation to the automotive case that will be analysed in the following section, the growth rates registered in the Nehru-Mahalanobis era⁸¹ - not outstanding but averagely positive - do not reflect the substantial structural progress which the country achieved in terms of scientific and technical infrastructure. Thirdly, Singh analyses the nature of the

⁸⁰ The most onerous shocks were endured by the Indian economy in the 1965-75 decade, in conjunction with the two wars with Pakistan (1965 and 1971), shortly following the previous war with China (1962), the corresponding suspension of foreign aid, the heavy drought in the late 1960s and the oil shocks in 1973-74.

⁸¹ First industrial plans after Independence.

industrial growth recorded in recent decades: despite an acceleration in growth rates, some trends like a premature *de-industrialisation* in certain areas, a relatively slow structural change, the much discussed *jobless growth* in modern industry and services, and the increasing *informality* of the economy could potentially seriously affect Indian industrial growth and undermine its sustainability in the long run. D'Costa (1995) highlights how in the post-colonial period considerable changes occurred. First, between 1950 and 1980 the manufacturing share on the total national income increased from 15% to 27%. Second, in the period 1950-1984 the number of public sector enterprises rose from five to 214. In addition, in the years 1961-81, while private sector employment grew at 45%, public sector employment increased by 120%.

Indeed, if lessons can be learnt from a reading of economic trends and political strategies which accompanied India from the early post-independence years to market reforms embraced from the 1990s, we should start by rejecting a narrow perspective looking at the planning experience as only leading to failures and inefficiencies. Marked state intervention in industrial development did help build a sufficiently strong industrial basis which could later face market competition. It is also absolutely important to endorse a long term analysis, whereby concrete outcomes of a strategy aimed at developing heavy industries and at establishing a sounder domestic manufacturing base could not have been observed in the short run. However, what considerably contributed to India's later success and what makes the industrial development path followed by the country truly unique, is not only the socialist-inspired planning strategy pursued in the Nehruvian era and until liberalisation. Rather what strongly distinguished Indian capitalist development was the persistence of a firm role played by the state even once market was opened. A robust state which, despite its political failures, managed to keep control of the pace of reforms and imposed a

gradualist approach, never letting domestic enterprises face foreign competition while still unprotected and unprepared, as it happened in several countries where Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were too swiftly applied. In this sense, and as argued earlier, for the first years after liberalisation the Indian state managed to maintain a good level of ownership on the whole process, avoiding a harsh impact on the domestic productive structure and a premature subjugation to external interests (Monaco, 2014). Unfortunately, this is no longer the case.⁸² What we have observed, particularly in the last ten-fifteen years, is a progressive alignment of state-capital interests, which has not only impacted the system of industrial relations, but has also affected the overall sustainability of the industrial development process, due to the consequent incapacity to prevent and manage conflicts.

In the next section, deploying the historical evolution of Indian industrial policies as our background, we will contextualise the case of the automotive industry, in order to provide an assessment of its competitive advantage, weaknesses and potential challenges.

3.3 Auto Policies: from Inward orientation to the Globalisation era

Within the study of Indian industrial development and of industrial policy frameworks pursued, an analysis of the trajectory followed by the auto sector can be of particular interest, for several reasons. This industry has in fact, not only contributed to a progressive integration of the country on international markets, but has represented a

⁸² In the sense that today the Indian State has ‘surrendered’ to capital interests, acting, as we will later argue, as an ‘agent of capital’, thus showing no ownership of the development process (from an interview with an NTUI rep, March 2012).

testing ground in terms of policy, production organisation for the manufacturing sector as a whole, and new labour regimes. In relation to industrial policy, the sector has not only played a pioneering role during the transition from a protected economy to a deregulated open market, but has lured investment and new technologies, while still retaining an enormous expansion potential on the huge domestic market, notwithstanding negative peaks. Considering its overall performance in the past three decades, most commentators rate it amongst India's success stories, and reveal high hopes for its future developments. Khan (2009) quotes the automobile industry as one of India's 'successful emerging sectors', pointing at how an adequate understanding of the process which allowed this segment to achieve critical capabilities, higher growth, and progressive regional diversification can potentially inform policies able to enhance competitiveness in other key sectors. Majumdar considers the Indian automotive industry as having the potential to become a world-class industrial sector, contributing to make India a global manufacturing hub. In the long term, he states, *'the expansion of automotive production will also have considerable welfare consequences, in terms of domestic mobility for Indians, in impacting world trade, and for the direction of India's trade balances'* (Majumdar, 2012:298). The sector's role within Indian industrial development, the challenges it faces and its competitive advantage are therefore worth exploring.

Analysing the first thirty years after Independence, it is clear that the Indian automobile market was highly protected and regulated: foreign competition was restricted, imports were limited and industrial licensing was required. Following the socialist goals of promoting the national interest and achieving 'self-reliance', progressive manufacturing programmes were implemented in order to obtain the indigenisation of products, with a necessary 50% of indigenous content required, extended to 80% by

1960-61 and to 85% by 1965-66 (Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009). The result of the first industrial policy resolutions (IPRs) was a market dominated by a few national companies producing a limited number of models. The passenger car segment was mainly constituted by the re-adaptation for the Indian market of two old European designs, the Ambassador - a local version of the Morris Oxford, manufactured by Hindustan Motors - and the Premier Padmini, an old FIAT model then produced by Premier Automobiles. Within the motorcycle segment, manufacturing was limited to Rajdoot, Escorts, and Enfield (Prakash Pradhan and Singh, 2008). Overall, despite the production base being still quite narrow, technologies employed being rather obsolete, and the resulting economic performance not being brilliant, during the first post-independence decades the foundations of a national automotive industry were set. According to Khan (2009), the protected market years allowed to build initial 'capabilities' which were vital for the subsequent growth of the sector. This was true not only for auto manufacturers compelled to rely on their own forces, but also for the auto-component segment, which developed as a consequence of large manufacturers being pushed to employ local inputs rather than assembling imported products, on which high tariffs were imposed (Prakash Pradhan and Singh, 2008).

Following the economic shocks which hit the country in the 1960s and the 1970s (China and Pakistan wars, drought, oil shocks), and in order to recover from the downturn in manufacturing production which ensued, auto policies from the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s started pursuing a different path. During Indira Gandhi's first government, state intervention was still a dominant feature and even stricter regulations constrained the industry, but the populist rhetoric somewhat began to divert production patterns from luxury cars to more affordable passenger cars, accessible to a wider consumer base, to some extent initiating the process of formation

of a broader middle class (D'Costa, 1995; Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009). The proper turn, however, occurred in the 1980s under Rajiv Gandhi's rule, anticipating some trends that affected the rest of the economy only in the following decade. In these years, a partial relaxation of protectionist measures and a new attention towards foreign investors determined in fact some of the changes which shaped the pioneering role the auto sector has played on the way to reforming industrial policy, innovating production organisation and the labour regime. The sixth FYP (1980-85) and the industrial policy resolution issued in 1980 under Indira's second government but properly enforced by Rajiv, marked a first, significant step towards more flexible licensing controls, reduced tariffs on imported technological inputs, and a friendlier environment for foreign investors. In 1983, the event which completely revolutionised the history of Indian automotive industry took place: the first partnership between the state-owned Maruti Udyog Ltd and Suzuki Motors was signed, officially enabling the access of Japanese capital onto the Indian market.

The definitely enticing deal agreed with the Japanese company, in the form of a joint venture, involved the introduction of three brand-new models, 26% equity stake and 95% of indigenous content to be achieved by 1988-89. Together with investment and convenient manufacturing terms, the collaboration with Suzuki also allowed India to import the whole 'package' of management principles and manufacturing techniques that Japan had already experimented within its 'lean factories' back home (see Ishigami, 2004).⁸³ Shortly after, Toyota, Mitsubishi, Nissan and Mazda also joined the Indian market, while Honda Motors and Piaggio entered the 2-wheelers segment (D'Costa, 1995; Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009). Despite this opening the 1980s did not constitute a 'proper' liberalisation, as conditions imposed on foreign companies and

⁸³ The NCR auto cluster was built around the dominating Maruti- Suzuki plants; in this sense, the region represents a crucial site to investigate changing industrial relations and the impact of the lean model.

extremely high indigenous content required still represented a significant barrier, what happened still informed a radical change. Indeed, the ‘Maruti revolution’ paved the way for a substantial restructuring of the Indian automobile industry, according to modes and pace that make the whole industrial trajectory followed by the country undeniably unique. On one level, as we mentioned above, the entry of Japanese capital implied increasing investment, the access to more advanced technology, and an attempt to implement management principles proper of a ‘successful’ lean production model. On another level, however, the entry of Japanese capital initially occurred under the strict supervision and on the basis of the conditions imposed by the Indian state. State involvement throughout the first phase of the process was significant. Overall, in the first liberalisation phase, even while pursuing the path towards increasing industrial deregulation and ‘de-reservation’ of the industrial sectors under state monopoly, India never granted foreign private capital unconditional leeway. At the same time, domestic private capital was always guaranteed a rather privileged treatment. According to Khan (2009:70), the partial liberalisation which occurred in the 1980s, combined with heavily protected internal markets, actually ‘*created strong incentives for foreign technology providers to enter*’, in a way that allowed India to keep using domestic content regulations on foreign investors who at the same time were interested in its domestic market rents. As reported by D’Costa (1995), the partnerships established between Japanese companies and Indian firms turned out to be a particularly successful factor, as they entailed technology transfers for engines and transmissions to local producers that were then enabled to upgrade some of their products. In terms of organisation of production, the entry of Suzuki Motors and of the other Japanese companies meant the innovation of management principles⁸⁴ and of

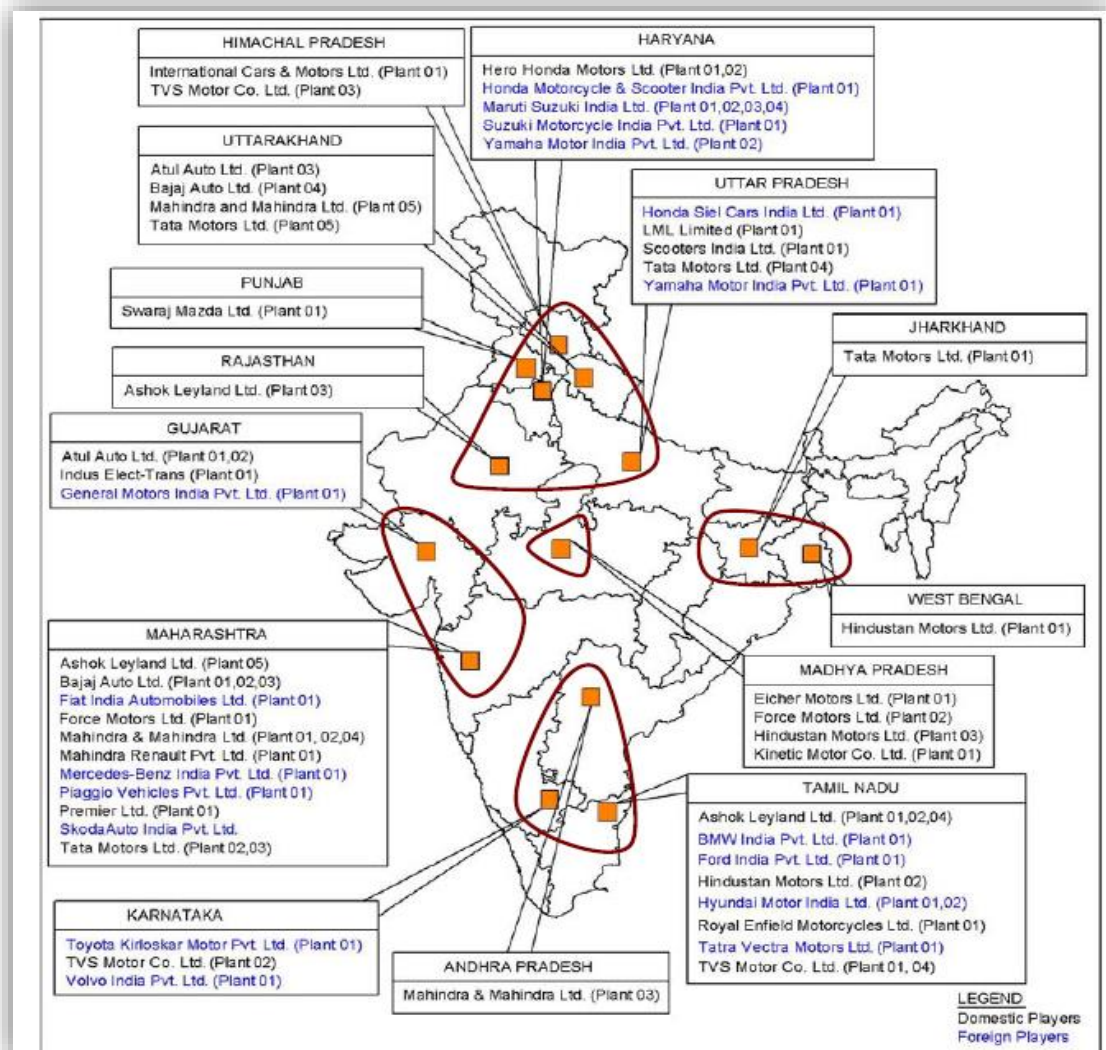
84 According to principles of lean production and JIT system, with the aim of adopting the *Advanced Manufacturing Technology* (ATM) standards. See for example Jha and Chakraborty (2012).

spatial location of production activities: processes of market segmentation, increasing subcontracting and selective production assigned to India in line with world market preferences were initiated in the 1980s. This process reshaped labour organisation within the factory realm accordingly. This translated into a proper geographical re-organisation, whereby traditional industrial areas progressively developed into proper clusters, marked by the spatial concentration of auto-component manufacturers around main assemblers,⁸⁵ while new industrial towns like Gurgaon in Haryana, and Pitampur, in Madhya Pradesh, were formed (see Okahashi, 2008; Tomozawa, 2008).⁸⁶ A recent configuration of major Indian auto clusters can be observed in the picture on the following page.

85 OEMs, Original Equipment Manufacturers.

86 For a study of how industrial development has caused a spatial reconfiguration in China, through increasing 'clusterisation' and the formation of 'specialised towns' see Barbieri, Di Tommaso, Bonnini (2012), Bellandi and Di Tommaso (2005) and Di Tommaso and Bazzucchi (2013). On how geographical re-organisation can lead to territorial disequilibria, see Di Tommaso, Sarcina, Bonnini (2013).

Pic. 4. Major Indian Auto Clusters

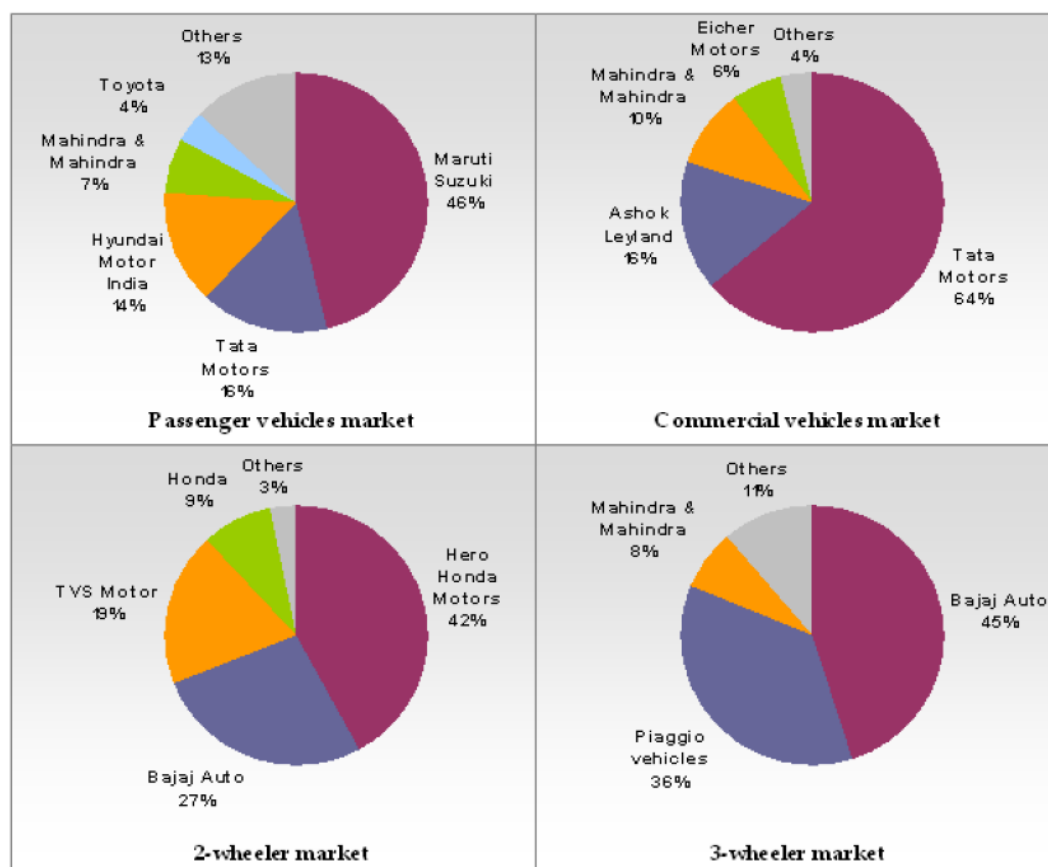


Source: Ranawat and Tiwari (2009:14).

Finally, the entry of Japanese capital and the competitive advantaged acquired by the partnering Indian companies also induced a restructuring of market shares in the Auto segment: while Hindustan Motors and Premier Automobiles saw their participations declining, MUL-Suzuki progressively assumed the role of ‘national champion’, cornering within 8-10 years more than 50% of the passenger car market (D’Costa,

1995) – a dominant position which it still holds today. The chart below shows the market share held by main companies:

Chart 3. Market share per sector



Source: Ranawat and Tiwari (2009: 12).

Coming back to auto policies, although a partial relaxation of automobile market regulations occurred already in the 1980s, the full liberalisation of the sector took place only after the 1991 reforms. The new industrial policy included in the reform package aimed at creating a more competitive environment, at removing barriers to the entry of new and foreign firms, and at attracting FDIs through targeted measures, which involved the abolition of licenses, FDIs allowed up to 51% of equity stake, the almost complete cancellation of the MRTPA, and a progressive disinvestment in public

enterprises in favour of the private sector. For what concerns the auto industry, this implied substantial changes. Both the vehicle segment (except for passenger cars) and the auto-component market were delicensed, the liberalisation of FDIs led to the creation of many new JVs and foreign collaborations,⁸⁷ and by 1994 the phased manufacturing programmes (PMPs) requiring the indigenisation of products were substantially downsized (Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009).

In terms of trade-related measures, tariffs of imports addressed to auto manufacturing were gradually but drastically reduced throughout the decade. The peak tariff rate set at 150% in 1991, was lowered to 110% in 1992, to 85% in 1993, to 65% in 1994 and to 50% by 1995 (Kathuria, 1996, in Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009). Vehicle imports remained instead under stricter regulation, still aimed at protecting the local manufacturing base: vehicle manufacturers were allowed to import units only in SKD/CKD form and still subject to signing a MoU with the DGFT⁸⁸, which implied the commitment to manufacture units and not to merely assemble SKD/CKD kits⁸⁹, to enter the market bringing in at least 50 USD million for subsidiary operations, to achieve 50% of indigenous content by the third year and 70% by the fifth year from the clearance of the first lot of imports, to contain foreign exchange outflows through a commitment to a level of exports equivalent to that of imports by the third year following the start-up (Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009).

These requirements, which still constituted a relative protection for Indian manufacturing base and for local producers, were further diluted throughout the

87 By mid-1990s, the number of JVs operating on the Indian territory had considerably increased: Mercedes-Benz with Telco (1994), General Motors with HML (1994), Peugeot with PAL (1994), Honda Motors with SIEL Ltd (1995), Ford with M&M (1996), Fiat with Tata Motors (1997), Toyota with Kirloskar Group (1997) etc. (Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009).

88 Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

89 CKD/SKD, Complete Knock Down/ Semi Knock Down, rather than CBU, Completely Built Up.

following decade. By January 2000 the obligation to compensate imports with equivalent exports was eliminated, by 2001 the need for foreign companies to obtain a license by signing the MoU was abolished, and accordingly the last quantitative restrictions on imports (Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009). In the 2000s, auto policies have been framed by two following acts, *Auto Policy (AP) 2002* and the *Automotive Mission Plan (AMP) 2006-2016*. Auto Policy 2002 has the declared goal of making the Indian automotive industry globally competitive and facilitate its integration on international markets. It therefore emphasises the investor-friendly character of the previous policy resolutions,⁹⁰ recommends the compliance with WTO prescriptions and with international environmental and security standards, targets the modernisation of indigenous models and designs,⁹¹ and promotes India as international hub for manufacturing of small cars (GoI, 2002; Ranawat and Tiwari, 2009). On the same lines, the AMP 2006-16 provides recommendations in order to improve the competitive position of Indian automotive at global level. It sets targets of USD 145 billion output accounting for 10% GDP and of 25 million additional jobs to be reached by 2016. As for specific areas of intervention, the AMP focuses on investment in research and development (R&D) and technology, on skills development and education, on benchmarking criteria, infrastructure, new production techniques and global quality standards. It also includes specific recommendations in terms of environment and safety regulations, to expand domestic demand and encourage exports (GoI, 2006).

Overall, from the traced evolution of the policy settings which have accompanied the development of the sector we can draw a few conclusions. First, again, while it has

90 Now allowing foreign equity participation of up to 100% for manufacture of both automobiles and auto-components.

91 Substantial tax reductions are granted to companies investing in India.

been argued that the protectionist strategies and the strict regulations which characterised the auto segment in the first decades following independence somehow hampered or delayed its competitive growth, on the contrary these safeguarded the national manufacturing base, allowed crucial capabilities to be built and national champions to emerge (Khan, 2009), while preventing the premature diversion of national targets towards external interests. Second, even while proceeding towards liberalisation and openness to international competition, the gradual pace imposed by the constant presence of the state undoubtedly assured overall sustainability to the whole process. Today, the massive drive to internationalisation and to global integration and the marked attention paid to increasing productivity and competitiveness are more and more evident. What also starts emerging, however, is a focus on compelling challenges which can no longer be ignored, like the compliance with environmental standards and the unsustainability of a competitive advantage too long resting on low cost labour. We will come back to these in the concluding section.

3.4 Indian Auto: main trends and factors of competitiveness

Despite an only recent slowdown, partly due to an apparent exhaustion of a phase of consumer credit, partly to a late impact of the global financial crisis which had not severely affected its market yet, the Indian auto sector in the past few years has experienced an extraordinary growth, which has reasonably led to consider its potentially leading role within the country's industrial development (Chandrasekhar, 2013; Majumdar, 2012; Narayanan and Vashisht, 2012). As reported by the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF, 2014), besides its recent staggering growth, the

sector accounts today for almost 7% of the country's GDP, and provides direct and indirect employment to around 19 million individuals. At a global level, although the industry cannot yet be compared to that of other Asian competitors (China, Japan, South Korea), India aims at becoming an international hub for the production of small passenger cars, and is surely gaining competitive advantage in the manufacture of two-wheelers. According to estimates provided by the *Organisation Internationale des Constructeurs d'Automobiles* (OICA), India is currently the sixth largest producer of motor vehicles in the world, and has also surpassed Brazil.⁹² By April 2014 the sector registered a production of 1,861,849 vehicles, with a recorded growth of 10.35% over the same period the previous year, when a decline compared to 2011/12 had been observed (SIAM, 2014). In terms of cumulative production, in 2012/13 the industry reached 20,626,227 units, with the leading segment being that of two-wheelers, followed by passenger cars (SIAM, 2013). See tables 2, 3 and 4 below.

Tab. 2. Automobile Production (n. of vehicles) 2007-2013

Automobile Production Trends						(Number of Vehicles)
Category	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Passenger Vehicles	1,777,583	1,838,593	2,357,411	2,982,772	3,146,069	3,233,561
Commercial Vehicles	549,006	416,870	567,556	760,735	929,136	831,744
Three Wheelers	500,660	497,020	619,194	799,553	879,289	839,742
Two Wheelers	8,026,681	8,419,792	10,512,903	13,349,349	15,427,532	15,721,180
Grand Total	10,853,930	11,172,275	14,057,064	17,892,409	20,382,026	20,626,227

Source: Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, SIAM online (2013)

⁹² See <http://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/>.

Tab. 3. Automobile Domestic Sales (number of vehicles) 2007-2013

Automobile Domestic Sales Trends						(Number of Vehicles)
Category	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Passenger Vehicles	1,549,882	1,552,703	1,951,333	2,501,542	2,618,072	2,686,429
Commercial Vehicles	490,494	384,194	532,721	684,905	809,532	793,150
Three Wheelers	364,781	349,727	440,392	526,024	513,251	538,291
Two Wheelers	7,249,278	7,437,619	9,370,951	11,768,910	13,435,769	13,797,748
Grand Total	9,654,435	9,724,243	12,295,397	15,481,381	17,376,624	17,815,618

Source: Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, SIAM online (2013)

Tab. 4: Automobile Exports (number of vehicles) 2007-2013

Automobile Exports Trends						(Number of Vehicles)
Category	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Passenger Vehicles	218,401	335,729	446,145	444,326	507,318	554,686
Commercial Vehicles	58,994	42,625	45,009	74,043	92,663	79,944
Three Wheelers	141,225	148,066	173,214	269,968	362,876	303,088
Two Wheelers	819,713	1,004,174	1,140,058	1,531,619	1,947,198	1,960,941
Grand Total	1,238,333	1,530,594	1,804,426	2,319,956	2,910,055	2,898,659

Source: Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, SIAM online (2013)

Despite domestic sales and exports experienced a slight downturn in the past two years, they grew considerably in the last decade, showing both a progressive penetration of the huge internal market and an increasing integration on global markets. Indeed, the still low proportion of vehicles to population⁹³ and the fast growing middle class, suggest an enormous growth potential of the sector, both in terms of passenger cars and of two-wheelers. The expansion of the middle class, together with increasing income per capita and relatively easy access to finance have been identified by Narayanan and Vashisht (2012) as major factors driving the higher demand for vehicles, which has accordingly pushed the Indian government to invest more in infrastructure. On the other side, the rising global integration is reflected not only by increasing trade flows, but also by several dynamic trends. As reported by SIAM (2012a),⁹⁴ attracted by the widespread expectation that by 2020 BRIC countries might raise their contribution to the global Automotive industry expansion up to 40%, a growing number of foreign OEMs is investing and opening technology centres in India. At the same time, while companies from USA, EU, Japan look at India and emerging economies to relocate their production and broaden their markets, companies from India and the other BRICs more and more often seek merging operations and acquisitions in order to enlarge their share on advanced markets and gain foothold abroad.

Indeed, the Indian auto industry provides some enticing opportunities and shows some interesting comparative advantages to potential investors. According to SIAM (2012a), foreign investors are attracted by India for the possibilities offered by its wide and fast-growing domestic market, for the still low costs of its manufacturing and its

⁹³ 8.5/thousand (Narayanan and Vashisht, 2012).

⁹⁴ Extracts from the 52nd SIAM Convention on 'Auto Industry: India in Changing World Order', attended in Delhi, September 2012.

manpower, together with the overall qualified labour force endowed with averagely good engineering skills and the large auto-component suppliers base connected to OEMs in each industrial cluster. From a survey conducted amongst 45 firms (14 assemblers – OEMs – and 31 component manufacturers), Narayanan and Vashisht (2008), conclude that the competitiveness of Indian auto industry lies in the sustainability of the price/quality relation: Chinese companies may offer cheaper products, but Indian firms are perceived to provide relatively better quality in exchange for prices more affordable and sustainable in the long term. In terms of technology and quality standards, the firms surveyed by the two authors declare to offer poorer quality products compared to Korea, Thailand, USA and EU, but better products than countries like China, Malaysia, South Africa, Taiwan and Indonesia. Some of the companies express the need to receive longer-lasting government support for R&D and capital-subsidies to invest in more advanced technologies. Most of them result willing to engage in further technological collaborations. For what concerns costs, the composition largely varies across different regions and industrial clusters: in the Southern cluster, for example, due to the proximity to the Bangalore IT centre, emoluments, power and manufacturing costs tend to be higher. This has been observed also for the NCR, the Northern cluster, where industrial land tends to be costlier, emoluments tend to be pushed upwards because of the higher cost of living and of the larger pool of skilled workforce, production costs rise due to a better infrastructure provision and closer access to both retail market and decision-making centres. In their study, Narayanan and Vashist (2008) also interrogate firms about employment-related aspects: an interesting response pertains to the use of contract workers, which firms perceive to be an advantage as they tend to be more efficient than permanent workers. On the same question, surveyed firms also advocate labour reforms like raising the cap

of permitted number of contract workers, reducing limitations on overtime and allowing extra working-hours. Ranawat and Tiwari (2009:10) point to the “low cost scientific talent, the diffused IT skills and at the good base for prototyping, testing and validating of auto-components” as factors attracting foreign companies willing to invest in India for R&D. Comparing India to the emerging Chinese auto industry, Noble (2006:8) claims that the country might have better prospects in the long run, thanks to “its superiority in software and soft infrastructure, including a democratic political system, an independent judiciary, better (if still imperfect) financial system, and two aces in the hole: widespread proficiency in English, and better-managed companies largely free of political interference and full of experienced project managers with extensive international experience”. Looking at the auto-component segment, market research conducted by the Indo-Italian Chamber for Commerce and Industry (IICCI, 2007), highlights India’s strength in providing affordable products and flexibility in small-scale production, plus its widespread competence in the IT field in relation to design, research and development.

Concluding remarks: constraints to growth and challenges ahead

Through its different sections, this chapter has sought to call attention to the automotive sector in India, to the significance of its policy changes within the country’s liberalisation process, and to the leading role it can potentially play along the path of future industrial development. The discussion of India’s market reforms has also tried to shed light on the crucial role that the state plays during structural transformations. In this sense, state interventions and regulations, together with the

slow pace of reforms, allowed India to lay its industrial foundations, to build vital capabilities and the entrepreneurship culture the country has today. Despite an only recent slowdown, which however seems already overcome,⁹⁵ the automotive sector can keep providing an essential contribution to India's growth, not only leading its integration on international markets, but also by generating substantially beneficial spillovers in terms of social development.

However, given the factors of competitiveness underlined above, which can make the sector undoubtedly attractive for foreign investors, current constraints and costs entailed by the recent growth represent important challenges to address in the coming years, and must therefore be considered as well.

Narayanan and Vashisht (2008) identify a number of weaknesses that still need to be overcome. This includes a still low capacity utilisation, precarious contracts between OEMs and component suppliers, insufficient infrastructure, high costs for energy provision, lack of skilled workforce (in some regions more than others – not in the NCR), poor quality of materials, lack of incentives and high taxation (in Maharashtra in particular), insufficient availability of land and inadequate environmental regulations. The need to solve issues related to poor road infrastructure and traffic congestion, together with the necessity to fulfill environmental imperatives, to promote low emission technologies and to find alternative energy sources are also central in the *Auto Policy 2002* (GoI, 2002). Becker-Ritterspach and Becker-Ritterspach (2008) question both the economic and ecological sustainability of the small car path currently followed by the Indian automobile industry. While its economic sustainability is related to the capacity of sustaining domestic demand and

⁹⁵ Trends reported by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) for 2015 seem to already suggest a recovery, see <http://www.siamindia.com/statistics.aspx?mpgid=8&pgidtrail=9>.

to keep attracting foreign investors who will join Maruti and Tata in the production of the Maruti 800 and of the Tata Nano, the ecological sustainability is threatened by environmental pollution and unregulated emissions. For what concerns the need to stimulate domestic demand, as highlighted by Chandrasekhar (2013) when analysing the downturn the industry experienced in the last biennium, an important constraint relates to the limitations of the consumer credit granted in the past decade. If the path followed has effectively reached its exhaustion, in order to avoid risky imbalances and unwanted bubbles, new avenues to incentivise consumption will have to be found.

Besides the need to overcome infrastructure bottlenecks, to attract investment and to promote the compliance with safety and environmental standards, also acknowledged by the Government of India in the *Automotive Mission Plan 2006-2016* (GoI, 2006), there are however more structural and compelling political challenges. Among these, there is the need to favour ‘quality’ employment creation and of intervening to counter the unsustainability of a development model that has for too long relied on low cost labour. These trends should be urgently and substantially addressed by any future political intervention. On one side, quality employment creation should be promoted to counter the recorded *jobless* growth in Indian manufacturing (see Kannan and Raveendran, 2009; Singh, 2009). This has not actually meant a stagnation in employment opportunities, but the lack of quality jobs, with new ones created only in unprotected, informal segments. On the other side, and in relation to the previous point, the progressive *informalisation* of the labour force should be addressed at a more systemic level (see Deshpande, Karan, Sharma, Sarkar, 2004). As we will discuss in chapter 5 and 6 in relation to the NCR, this has involved a disproportionate increase in precarious forms of casual and contract labour, a progressive deterioration in labour standards and working conditions, and a perpetual circumvention of existing labour

laws. These processes have occurred as part of aggressive, profit-seeking strategies pursued by capital, tolerated by the Indian State in order to preserve the competitiveness of the sector. In this sense, without taking a strong stance to contain capital's detrimental strategies, and without intervening to properly tackle labour issues, the Indian State will not be able to guarantee sustainable growth for its 'shining' Auto industry. Conflicts will keep emerging, and the concealed contradictions of the vaunted competitiveness will be inevitably unveiled.

Chapter 4

Fieldwork and Research Methodology: *Workers' Inquiry* as a Tool to explore Industrial Conflict

Introduction: the centrality of conflict

In line with the embraced *workerist* approach, this thesis is built around the strong belief that industrial conflict represents a crucial, and revealing, moment, where contradictions emerging within processes of industrial development and the involved power relations are powerfully ‘unmasked’. It is with such conviction that time and space boundaries of the present research were set. Indeed, it was not only the presence of an ongoing industrial conflict that attracted me towards the Delhi region, but the perception of the scope and the relevance of such conflicts, happening *there, at that point in time*. In this sense, and as I will further clarify in chapters 5 and 6, the core mission of this investigation became that of explaining not only *why conflict happened, how struggle developed, and what outcomes were eventually achieved*, but why it occurred *there and then*. The theoretical perspective adopted, and the way this influenced the objectives of the present research, informed the methodology employed accordingly, shaping the process of field research. These will be reported in the present chapter, before discussing the research findings in the last two sections of the thesis.

The empirical part of this thesis narrates the story of a conflict. It aims at exploring causes, dynamics and impact of an industrial conflict that had started in the years before the research was conducted, and marked, intermittently, the region investigated for the whole last decade, reaching one of its major peaks exactly while this fieldwork

was carried out. In this sense, the possibility of witnessing the most intense phase of the conflict, while imposing a few limitations, certainly allowed to follow struggle dynamics more closely. Overall, the closer participation in the ongoing conflict, while also requiring the consideration of issues related to research ethics and ground politics, proved to be a unique opportunity. If on one side it also entailed risks, on the other it incredibly enriched the research experience, allowing to gather significant data and extremely telling stories.

By conflict here, I refer to a phase of particularly harsh and tense industrial relations that affected the Automotive production segment in Delhi (NCR), India, from 2000 onward, achieving its acme in 2011- 2012. I could directly observe this last phase, as it coincided with the timings of the field research I carried out. Throughout this period, in fact, I conducted two separate rounds of fieldwork, one from November 2011 to April 2012, and a second one from July to September 2012. Overall, the intensifying industrial dispute and the emergence of a strong, local labour movement, showing a new and resolute subjectivity, markedly influenced the course taken by and the objectives pursued in the present research. Indeed, while the decision to map labour composition in the area had been already inspired by the tradition of a *workerist inquiry*,⁹⁶ further reflections on working class formation and on the relationship between autonomous movements and labour institutions were progressively informed by the direct observation of the struggle on the ground. This chapter will discuss methodological issues, fieldwork architecture, and some necessary ethical considerations which arose while being in the field.

⁹⁶ See also chapter 1.

4.1 '*Knowledge is tied to Struggle*':⁹⁷ *Workers' Inquiry* as a tool to explore Conflict

After discussing in chapter 1 how a workerist perspective contributed to shape the theoretical approach taken in this research, it is important to illustrate how this effectively translated into the methodological tools employed to conduct the proper field investigation.

The workerists themselves, and Tronti in particular (2006; 2009), never talked of a 'method', a jargon that they actually overall refused, but of a 'cultural and political experience' which produced a new, and revolutionary 'point of view', based on the analysis of the role working class struggle plays in determining the trajectory of capitalist development. In this sense, workerists assigned crucial importance to *struggle*, not only in determining a reaction of the capitalist class, aiming at ultimately making '*a capitalist use of working class struggle*', but also in generating '*workers' knowledge*', necessary source for the formulation of a revolutionary political praxis (Tronti, 2006). Therefore, despite a generalised scepticism towards the definition of a systematised methodology, along the view of formalised disciplines as '*a bourgeois science*' (Tronti, 2006), within workerist contributions we also find an attempt to establish ways to access such knowledge. Ultimately, the aim is that of building a collective learning process together with workers, and of channelling the experience gained in the direction of specific political goals (see Panzieri, 1994). In this sense, the workerist inquiry, as *co-research* practice, can be seen as anticipating the following debate on *participatory action research* within social science, and on the need for critical, engaged, grounded labour studies (see Stewart and Martínez-Lucio, 2011;

⁹⁷ In Italian '*la conoscenza è legata alla lotta*', struggle is a source of knowledge, and the participation and the analysis of working class struggles produce knowledge. Tronti (2006:10).

Bergold and Thomas, 2012; Brook and Darlington, 2013; Huzzard and Björkman, 2012). Overall, what distinguishes the early workerist research tool from later definitions of research objectives within the study of work, and of the role of the organic intellectual within the co-production of knowledge, is a much greater emphasis placed on the *militant* nature of the research itself. This involves, for example, a greater sense of *collectivity* within the intellectual / researchers / activists considered as a group, a more defined distance between militant intellectuals and labour institutions, informed by the *autonomist* tradition, and a much stronger orientation towards the design of *revolutionary actions* as end goal of the *co-research* process. In this sense, the workerist *militant researcher* takes an expressly *partisan* stance in unison with the working class engaged in the struggle, politically embraces the demands of the struggle itself, and directly contributes to the political outcome of the actions taken. This is more than a commitment of the organic intellectual towards the class he/she represents, it is a sort of dissolution of the difference between researcher and researched, within a common, class- based, political goal.

In practice, in the earlier workerist studies, we can also find indications aimed at delineating a common method for research. These can be traced in Panzieri's definition of a *workers' inquiry* as a clearly suggested path for political investigation on working class struggle. 'Political' here expressly refers to the ultimate use that will be made of the resulting *workers' knowledge* for the design of revolutionary actions, whereas the *inquiry per se* also involves a detachment from the struggle and a moment of scientific analysis on the grade of consciousness reached by the working class (Panzieri, 1976; 1994). The actual gathering of information, according to Panzieri, can be based on methods proper of a sociological survey, like questionnaires, interviews, direct meetings with workers (Panzieri, 1976), besides the collection of all materials

produced by the workers themselves (including factory reports, leaflets, speeches), and the direct observation of processes happening inside the factory (Tronti, 2009). The starting point of the workerist inquiry, and necessary step in the sought link between theory and political action, is a phase of '*inchiesta a caldo*', a phase of research developed during the highest peak of the industrial conflict, where the relationship between the working class and the capitalist system emerges more clearly (Panzieri, 1976). Overall, from Panzieri's work, it clearly emerges how what distinguishes a workerist enquiry from any other sociological survey on labour is the emphasis placed on struggles; on the researcher's involvement in the struggle; and on the political objectives of the research experience. In this sense, a *militant research*, where the politics of the struggle and the produced revolutionary knowledge are shared between intellectuals and workers, is based on a collective learning process. This is what workerists named *co-research*, involving collaboration, collective discussion, joint political action between the militant researcher and the struggling workers (CRS, 2011; Monaco, 2015). In terms of research objectives, data collection must aim at the analysis of *class composition*, in order to understand struggle dynamics, to interpret capital's moves, and to eventually implement successful strategies for the advancement of the working class (see Panzieri, 1976; 1994). In line with such goals, and within the debate on *autonomia*, workerist studies carefully focused on the relation between spontaneous movements and existing labour institutions, especially trade unions. Inspired by all this, my research methodology and objectives took shape.

In line with the approach and the method illustrated above, my field research developed in two phases and around two main objectives, partly determined and 'flexibly' re-adapted while following the evolution of the struggle itself. A first phase was built around the aim of mapping labour composition in the NCR, in order to

understand the background and the motivations of the workers who engaged in the strikes. With such aim, I designed a questionnaire-based survey. Thanks to the help provided by unionists and workers with the distribution and the collection of the questionnaires prepared, the survey covers a sample of 140 observations from 6 OEMs and 13 component suppliers operating both in Gurgaon and Faridabad. The questionnaires were composed of four main sections, intended to gather information about NCR workers' personal background, their working and living conditions, and their position toward union-related issues.⁹⁸ An exploration of working conditions imposed inside the factory also served the purpose of investigating management attitudes and strategies employed to control labour. After this phase of 'extensive' research, a more in depth investigation of struggle dynamics, of power relations between the actors involved in the industrial dispute, and on the politics of the capital-labour conflict in the area, took place. This involved interviews with workers and other key informants, focus groups, and the attendance at official events with both unions and workers. Overall, different research methods were deployed, on the basis of a key rationale privileging the dimension of struggle.

4.2 Grounded ⁹⁹ research and qualitative methods

Within an overarching structure inspired by a *workers' inquiry*, several methods of data collection were employed. Overall, there was the need to flexibly adapt and combine different qualitative methods, available to a field researcher, according to the

⁹⁸ An exact sample description and a thorough discussion of the survey findings can be found in chapter 5.

⁹⁹ Term used by Glaser and Strauss (2008).

information required and to the circumstances in which the investigation took place. Within social science research, it is frequent to mix diverse techniques depending on the purpose of the study, data needed, time and resources available; the exact combination will nonetheless be influenced by the researcher's personal approach and objectives, identified as 'optimal', within a range of possibilities dictated by the context (Mikkelsen, 2005). Highlighting how research plans based on pre-defined guidelines can substantially differ from actual field data collection, Brydon (2006:x) points at how *'research on the ground is a much finer-grained complex of quick thinking and responsiveness and, in some cases, the abandoning of the rules'*. The need for flexibility in field research methods, while on one side may be seen as a disadvantage, as inevitably raising ethical and scientific considerations (Breman, 1985), on the other can also effectively function to interestingly combine materials of a diverse nature, and to compensate strengths and weaknesses of each technique (Mayoux, 2006).

For the purpose and scope of the present research, pondering not only time and financial constraints, but also the peculiarities of the investigation site and the circumstances that emerged, a mix of qualitative methods for data collection was adopted. Whereas quantitative data were incorporated into the questions,¹⁰⁰ these did not aim at providing simple statistical evidence regarding the observed phenomena, but at actually supplying a material base for a better understanding of qualitative aspects related to working and living conditions within the industrial sector analysed. Overall, as mentioned above, the survey served as a basis to interpret workers' demands emerging through the struggle, and to grasp the effective practices of

100 Questions addressing wage levels or living expenses were included both in interviews and in the survey questionnaires.

managerial control taking place within the factory. I will get back to this later on in this chapter.

Initially, a set of 'open' interviews was held with scholars studying the Indian labour market and manufacturing sector. These allowed an exploration of the field, to map the research site, to recognise the key actors involved and the scope of the targeted processes. Specifically, these led to the identification of the main OEMs operating in the NCR cluster, of the most active Trade Unions in the area, and to a first conceptualisation of issues surrounding the Maruti case and the Indian system of Industrial Relations. Subsequently, when dealing with Trade Unions and workers, 'semi-structured' interviews were employed. These allowed, on one side, to discuss with the interviewee some points and issues of interest, previously fixed in a check-list (see appendix C), but at the same time to grant sufficient flexibility to let the 'subjectivity' of the interlocutor emerge. In general, this sort of method is particularly advised when dealing with politically sensitive issues, as it helps putting the informant at ease (on characteristics, potentialities and limitations of different types of interviews, see Brockington and Sullivan, 2003; Devereux and Hoddinott, 1992; Willis, 2006). Contacts of interviewees were generally obtained by 'snow-balling' (see Mezzadri, 2009; Willis, 2006), or by personal networking when attending official events. The samples analysed, as in the case of the questionnaires, were also determined by the available access to informants, in some cases partly different from the hoped or predicted extension.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ As experienced by Miyamura (2010:169), who reports how during his field research on Labour Market Institutions in the Indian Industry, his sample "significantly depended on the politics of access or 'gate keeping', and especially when dealing with the corporate world, it was strongly "dictated by feasibility and atmosphere of mutual distrust between the management and union members".

Different sets of interview checklists were deployed to obtain information from scholars and trade unionists (this can be observed in appendix C).¹⁰² At the same time, different methods were adopted when dealing with workers. Besides questionnaires and a limited number of one-to-one interviews, whenever possible, focus groups were arranged. These presented some disadvantages, like overlapping of information, or more difficulties in translation and transcription, but generally helped by creating a more 'comfortable' atmosphere where workers felt safer and therefore ready to converse. For example, focus groups proved to be the best method to obtain reports from the strikes.

Two issues arise here, which also emerged when working with questionnaires and that will be considered again in relation to research ethics and politics. One concerns the language, the other the question of 'mediation'. Regarding the language, I did not experience particular issues when talking to managers, officers, the majority of trade unionists and skilled workers, who although obviously speaking English at different levels of articulation and abstraction, were always able to engage in interviews and to properly address asked questions. In other cases though, sometimes with less skilled or simply older workers who preferred discussing in Hindi, translation was needed, as my Hindi for beginners did not allow the proficiency required to hold interviews.¹⁰³ This issue, while it was relatively overcome when working with questionnaires, through the help of both English – Hindi and Hindi – English translators,¹⁰⁴ was

¹⁰² I had also prepared a checklist to interview managers and employers, but I never managed to integrally use it (see appendix B). Chances to meet managers and corporate offices were in fact limited, and happened in circumstances not allowing to follow a rigid scheme.

¹⁰³ I attended a Hindi course, but only during the field, and it unfortunately only enabled me to grasp basic language for daily needs.

¹⁰⁴ The Questionnaires were written in English, translated into Hindi by an assistant, delivered to workers in both languages. The answers received were partly in English, partly in Hindi. Those in Hindi were translated again into English by another professional translator, hired in the second part of the field.

sometimes harder to address during interviews or focus groups. Generally, when a meeting could be arranged in advance, either the same trade unions offered help, or an external assistant was found for the occasion. In a few cases where meetings were improvised or circumstances not well clarified beforehand, though, communication inevitably encountered some obstacles, and information gathered is therefore slightly more limited. Fortunately, such problem represented an actual impediment only in two or three cases.

The assistance provided by trade unions, leads to the question of 'mediation'. Support was given, in fact, not only by helping with translations when needed, but also by practically facilitating the arrangement of meetings with workers, the access to official events and to useful contacts, and by providing a sort of 'protection' in risky circumstances, even if only limited to the availability of a 'safe place' (like a trade union office) where to meet workers without over-exposition. Although this may have led to a sometimes unwanted level of mediation, it was nonetheless inevitable and often the only possible solution, especially in the most acute phases of the industrial conflict. Indeed, in several circumstances, without intermediaries further informants would not have been accessed and even the participation in open events would have been riskier. Of course, being aware of such a level of political mediation, all answers provided by workers were always carefully screened and 'skimmed' of all possible institutional biases. In this sense, even the information obtained through questionnaires, the other method employed to gather workers' voices, may have been influenced by union mediation in the sample selection. Unions helped in fact with delivering, distributing and re-collecting questionnaires, or at least with contacting one or few workers who might act as a channel to perform such delicate task. Indeed, where due to tense industrial relations, company plants could not be directly accessed for

research activities, only trade unions' mediation made a similar investigation possible. Eventually, such facilitation allowed to meet a much higher number of workers and to access more companies than I could have hoped. All these issues are further discussed in chapter 5.

Overall, even when employing the same techniques or adopting a similar approach towards informants, the two phases on the field were characterised by a very diverse scope and different objectives. As mentioned, the first phase represented a sort of 'exploration', an extensive attempt to map the site, to engage with relevant actors operating in the sector, to understand relationships among them and main dynamics of industrial relations in the NCR. Eventually, such exploration allowed for a broader understanding of social relations shaping the industrial conflict, together with an extensive picture of the local labour composition. The second round of fieldwork, whose boundaries were set by the acute explosion of the Maruti conflict, was fully dedicated to the understanding of struggle dynamics and power relations between the Maruti movement and existing labour institutions.

4.3 Background

The field research planned and then conducted in India, in the Delhi region, in 2011-12, initially benefitted from two background experiences, which were also used to gain direct access to the investigation site. One was a first field experience in India in the spring of 2009. This began with an internship in the State of Tamil Nadu, but then continued with a first research in Delhi, focused on labour and industrial restructuring within the Indian Auto sector. Conducted for my Master's dissertation, this not only developed into the present PhD research, but also provided helpful contacts that

functioned as a starting 'gateway' at the beginning of the fieldwork. A second experience,¹⁰⁵ which also determined the original decision to specifically focus on the Automotive sector, was the collaboration, in 2008/09, with a research group (*CRS Gruppo Lavoro*) working on the effects of 'lean restructuring' on labour within a FIAT industrial plant in Italy (see CRS, 2011; Monaco, 2015).¹⁰⁶ The exposure to such research work was beneficial for several reasons. First, since this group experimented methods characteristics of a *workers' inquiry* and of *co-research*, initial methodological considerations were developed back then. Second, this working group was related to the Italian *Centro per la Riforma dello Stato* (CRS),¹⁰⁷ chaired by Mario Tronti, the 'founding father' of the Italian *Operaismo*. The contact with such group thus resulted in the opportunity to meet Tronti himself, in October 2011. During an extremely inspiring meeting, I had the chance to discuss with Tronti my original research project, and he provided incredibly valuable advice.¹⁰⁸ Third, the research produced by that working group allowed to gain familiarity with FIAT's industrial history, with knowledge regarding *lean* management and manufacturing practices, and about working conditions within Auto manufacturing plants. Indeed, this proved to be an interesting 'exchange material' when discussing with my informants in India.

4.4 Fieldwork: developments, challenges and limitations

Within the period ranging from November 2011 to September 2012, I had the opportunity to spend around seven months in the field, in two rounds. The months

¹⁰⁵ I am still very thankful to M. Cerimele, researcher from the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' and *co-researcher* in the above-mentioned project, for facilitating this opportunity.

¹⁰⁶ In Pomigliano, near Naples, Campania, Italy.

¹⁰⁷ Centre for State Reform. See chapter 1 and 2.

¹⁰⁸ He actually asked questions, more than giving answers. I will never forget that exciting, challenging, inspiring conversation. He eventually left me saying '*...and if you find class struggle in India, then let me know*' (Rome, 18/10/2011).

spent outside the country, in between the two periods, while on one side allowed me to elaborate and reflect on a first set of collected data, on the other also imposed a slightly unfortunate halt on some ongoing activities and relations, and maybe determined the relatively 'wrong' timing of the second part of the research. The second fieldwork coincided in fact with a particularly violent turn in the NCR labour protests, which resulted in repression, strict controls, tense industrial relations. On one side, this coincidence partially affected the feasibility of some pre-planned research activities. On the other side, it certainly proved to be a unique and valuable opportunity to witness the industrial conflict much more closely, informing the most exciting and interesting phase of the envisaged workers' inquiry.

I will return to this point. What is important to note here is that the two phases, beyond responding to different research objectives, also assumed a rather diverse character in terms of research conditions, and entailed different kinds of limitations. It is therefore worth differentiating the research work into two different steps, each raising different issues.

When I reached Delhi for the first time, in November 2011, the situation was relatively peaceful. Besides common, daily difficulties related to living in a tough city like Delhi, working conditions were manageable. Although a sort of preliminary study on the Indian Automotive sector had been undertaken before, I spent a first period on contextualising the argument, in order to exactly map the area of investigation and better focus both my case study and the research questions I had in mind. In this phase, going more or less from mid-November to Christmas 2011, I attempted to re-connect with contacts established during my first visit to Delhi in 2009, mainly from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), from the International Development Economics Associates (IDEAs) Network, and from the Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE). Here, I

was glad to realise that most of the scholars and researchers I had met still remembered me since 2009, and thus claimed to be ready to help. At ISLE – IHD (Institute for Human Development), key figure was Alakh N. Sharma, an interesting meeting was held with Dev Nathan and logistical support was offered by Preet Rustagi. Precious help and assistance was also given, throughout the whole time spent in India, by the IDEAs colleagues and friends Smitha Francis and Murali Kallummal. Through these initial contacts, I was also invited to attend some official events, which served as opportunities for networking and exchange of ideas: a WTO/ UNCTAD Workshop at Indian Institute for Foreign Trade (IIFT) on 'Twenty Years of India's Liberalisation: Sharing of Experiences', the inauguration of the Centre for Studies on Informal Economy (CSIE) at JNU, and the ISLE Annual Conference, held in Udaipur, Rajasthan, from 17th to 19th December 2011.

During this preliminary phase, meetings with other scholars and researchers working on the Automotive sector or on Manufacturing and Labour (from JNU, from Sidney University, from the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, ICRIER) were also organised. At the same time, I also followed another path. I followed up on contacts established while performing an internship at UNIDO – ITPO Italy (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation – Investment and Technology Promotion Office) in 2010, which gave the opportunity to work on India – Italy industrial cooperation exactly within the Auto Industry. I used such contacts to find a connection with UNIDO India, in order to access materials that might help tracing the productive structure of the sector, and ultimately also find a channel in direction of Business Associations and then Auto Companies. This route was explored during the months of January and part of February 2012.

What this first period in the field actually enabled to do, was not only securing a first set of informants and potential 'helpers' who might serve as a 'gateway' to a following level of actors, but also understanding the *enjeu*, the issues at stake, on which to revolve the proper case study. If, for example, I had initially considered the hypothesis of comparing corporate strategies and labour practices adopted in Auto Companies based in different industrial clusters,¹⁰⁹ by the end of the first month in Delhi the perception of the importance of the events occurring in the NCR led me to acknowledge that this cluster deserved my full attention and time. At the same time, I traced a map of all relevant first-level informants, and I considered the positionality to take towards different informants and its ethical implications. By the end of this period, perceiving its crucial relevance, I had already decided to investigate the Maruti case in full depth. The initial idea was that of proceeding along two parallel lines, starting from contacts already held and then trying to move on by 'snow-balling' (Willis, 2006).

On the corporate side, this would mean departing from UNIDO Italy, connecting to UNIDO India, trying to approach Business Associations (CII, Confederation of Indian Industries, and SIAM, in particular – Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers) and then hopefully access Auto Companies, with the ultimate goal of taking interviews focused on productive organisation and corporate strategies.¹¹⁰ On the labour side, another path was envisaged, starting from National Union Federations (National Centres), passing through local and plant-based Unions, and to ultimately reach factory workers. This aimed at investigating labour composition, understanding the structure

¹⁰⁹I would have initially liked to confront Companies from the Northern, NCR cluster, with at least TATA and FIAT, operating within the Pune Auto cluster, Maharashtra.

¹¹⁰A checklist prepared for this kind of interviews is attached in appendix B.

and role of local labour institutions, and at unveiling dynamics of the recent labour struggles.

The first contacts with UNIDO worked quite well; through Dino Fortunato, from UNIDO Italy, I could reach James Daniel Paul, working for UNIDO India. He provided a description of UNIDO India activities, notes about the NCR cluster and further contacts from UNIDO Delhi. Communication with UNIDO Delhi was harder, since the Office is now understaffed, mainly dealing with diplomatic relations or regional coordination, and some of the projects I was most interested in, once run to their end, were not re-financed. Following many and persistent contacts, only in February, through Shipra Biswas (UNIDO Delhi), I could visit the UNIDO Subregional Office in Delhi. There, I met Sanjay Mudgal, a former UNIDO officer who had been in charge for the ten years 'Auto Component Partnership Programme'. In that circumstance, although Sanjay Mudgal's help was crucial to collect meaningful materials and gather important information, the outcome was quite disappointing. I knew UNIDO had mainly operated within the Auto-component sector, but I hoped there could be more connections with large assembling companies – *Original Equipment Manufacturers* (OEMs), somehow enabling me to climb up the production chain and eventually access large factory plants. This was not possible. In practice, the conclusion of their Partnership Programme with Auto Companies and the consequent replacement of the involved staff, made me realise that UNIDO could not be the significant channel towards the corporate world I had hoped. Besides UNIDO Delhi, however, the contact with James Daniel Paul turned out to be definitely helpful. For example, out of three entire days at the 'Delhi Auto Expo 2012', one of the largest and most important Asian showcases for the Automotive Industry, I spent a full day with James D. Paul, who also introduced me to Carol Holden from NW Automotive

Alliance (UK). Being in their company allowed me to access stands and approach Managers or Sales / Market Officers from several Auto Companies. At the Auto Expo, I could not only observe Auto Companies' marketing strategies, but could also collect key materials and contacts. For example, following the event, I managed to arrange interviews at the *Auto Components Manufacturers Associations* (ACMA) with Anil Kumar Unni, at the *Society of Indian Auto Manufacturers* (SIAM) with Vishnu Matur and at the *Confederations of Indian Industries* (CII), Gurgaon with Sarita Nagpal.

Although willing to grant quite extensive interviews, and promising to provide further help, representatives from Business Associations never concretely facilitated a liaison with Auto Companies, even after repeated contacts. In my view, this sort of 'lack of collaboration' was also linked to a general reluctance towards 'investigations' in a period of high labour unrest, whereby Auto-Companies at that time were particularly in the public eye. Reiterated and constant attempts to independently approach OEMs managers without the mediation of Business Associations, did not produce satisfying results either. Despite attempts to introduce the research in the least 'alarming' way, stressing the mere interest in better comprehending productive organisation and market strategies followed by their Company, no officer or manager in this phase was practically ready to give an interview.¹¹¹ Apart from causing an inevitable waste of time, this unforeseen obstacle required a necessary reformulation of the entire research schedule and partly of research objectives. The initial intention of complementing the labour inquiry with an investigation of capital strategies also explored through the corporate world, and the idea of accessing the factory plants by directly contacting the companies, had to be completely reconsidered. In this sense, I could visit factory

¹¹¹ This impression was confirmed by at least three other researchers attempting the same endeavour.

premises only when helped by plant union representatives, and the number of direct accounts I collected from the managerial side is limited.

On the contrary, on the labour side many doors easily opened up. As soon as I found a 'key gateway' within the *International Metalworkers' Federation* (IMF), namely Sudharshan Rao Sarde, Head of the South Asia Office based in Delhi, I immediately accessed a whole new world. Being an umbrella organisation, in fact, IMF not only embodies several National Centres and Industrial Federations (National and Sectoral Unions), but also coordinates a significant number of smaller unions at local level. Therefore, since the first, long meeting had at IMF with Rao Sarde and his team, where I had the chance to freely describe my research, to ask questions about the Indian trade union structure, about the Maruti dispute, the forthcoming General Strike etc, finally a proper 'snow-balling' started. The period between mid-February and mid-April was thus very intense and busy. The simple participation in an International IMF Workshop on 'Climate Change and Green Jobs' allowed me to meet Surya Dev Tyagi, President of the SMEFI (Steel Metal Engineering Workers Federation of India), affiliated to the *Hind Mazdoor Sabha* (HMS), P.J. Raju, Secretary of the *Indian National Trade Union Congress* (INTUC), Ashwani Rana, of the *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* (BMS, BJP Affiliate), Suzanna Miller, from IMF Geneva, Helmut Leiise, Automotive Department, IMF, Suzanne Adely, from the *United Auto Workers* (UAW, US) Global Organizing Institute. In this way, in the following few weeks, I could easily arrange interviews with representatives of several trade unions. Meetings were held with representatives of INTUC Delhi; AEEU-HMS Faridabad; of the *Centre of Indian Trade Unions* (CITU) Delhi, CITU Gurgaon, and the *New Trade Union Initiative* (NTUI), Delhi. CITU Gurgaon and AEEU- HMS Faridabad were particularly helpful contacts, and helped with the organisation of several other meetings, including focus

groups with Suzuki, Maruti and Honda Workers; meetings with union representatives from Honda Motorcycle & Scooter Employees Union, and from Escorts and JCB Faridabad. In Faridabad, where the overall situation of Industrial Relations was tendentially quiet, I could also visit Escorts and JCB plants, and have meetings inside the factory premises, facilitated by AEEU-HMS representatives.

Overall, I quickly realised how building a relationship of trust with informants belonging to trade unions was much easier, thanks to both the nature of my research and my personal background. On their side, I could always perceive an extreme willingness to share their stories, their political claims, the reasons of their struggles. Beyond overall sympathy towards my research project, they generally showed also a sort of protective attitude that was undeniably comforting, considering the hardship of working alone in industrial areas, and in politically tense situations. Within the 'trust-building' process, as I mentioned earlier, I could soon appreciate how my interest and knowledge about the Italian FIAT, FIAT workers' movements, and the Italian historical, political culture in relation to factory struggles, could be an excellent exchange material. Such background revealed to be very fascinating to most of my informants, and massively helped me in capturing their attention. In this way, thanks to the collaboration of trade unions, I had the chance to meet workers and also to distribute and re-collect the survey questionnaires I had prepared on *'Working Conditions and Labour Practices in the Automotive Sector - NCR'*.¹¹² As I stated above, without mediation, these operations would not have been possible. Preparing, delivering, collecting questionnaires required time and several travels to the industrial areas, whereas due to the importance of the material I generally preferred to personally manage and supervise the situation. When dealing with questionnaires, I always had

¹¹² These are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

to act with particular caution, as I was aware that this was an evidently research-related activity, within a highly politicised environment, and that my helpers were politically exposed actors. For this reason, for example, I decided to second the advice of never personally distributing questionnaires in close proximity to industrial plants, and I generally had to give them to a worker or a plant leader met inside a trade union office. In Faridabad, where the industrial area is particularly distant from any transport connection, I could only move around by a hired car with a driver, or with someone accompanying me. Nevertheless, even being constantly careful, in several circumstances I felt overly exposed, and I realised the level of protection I could be provided by the trade union leaders who were assisting me might not be sufficient. This occurred, for example, when I attended a Gurgaon trade unions meeting that turned out to take place outdoors, and when I joined one of my trade union informants outside the Haryana Court, where Honda workers were attending their trial. In both cases, although I had been assured the situation would be quiet, I realised it was instead very tense and fully controlled by the police. In all these situations, of course, being a young white woman in a completely male-dominated environment did not help at all, as I was immediately visible and therefore automatically exposed, so much that in a few cases I had to face people directly asking 'who is she and what is she doing here?'.

For the same reason, while I generally travelled alone in the oldest part of Gurgaon, I preferred visiting the Manesar Industrial Township (MIT), the whole area nearby the Maruti plant and the village where Maruti workers live, only together with other outsiders: an Indian, a British and two French activists, all interested in the Maruti dispute and the local labour movement.¹¹³ The fortunate meeting with this group, occurred through friends from JNU in early April, allowed to finally reach the Maruti

¹¹³ From, or linked to, the *Gurgaon Workers News* activist group.

gates, to observe workers changing shifts, to perceive the tense atmosphere within an almost 'militarised' area,¹¹⁴ to follow workers in their housing community, and therefore effectively picture their living conditions. The interviews in that circumstance were mainly taken in Hindi and only partly translated simultaneously. However, these visits certainly represented a crucial moment along the research path followed in the first phase.

As mentioned above, though, while other interesting meetings could be scheduled and activities of questionnaires distribution / collection were still on-going, the field had to be forcedly abandoned. When I reached the area for the second time, the scenario had suddenly changed: the second research plan had thus to be adapted to changed circumstances.

The second period in the field, which had purposely been planned to complete some of the activities interrupted in April and integrate first data collected, abounded with unfortunate obstacles and unexpected circumstances, to be added to overall living and working conditions which were undoubtedly not the most favourable.¹¹⁵ Harder living conditions were nevertheless a minor issue compared to the shape the industrial conflict took in the same weeks.

Exactly one week prior to the second arrival in Delhi, in fact, on July 18th, a serious accident had occurred at the Manesar Maruti plant. While this event made the whole

¹¹⁴ At the time we explored the area, on April 12th, also due an awaited visit from Government Officials on the following day, the whole zone surrounding the Maruti industrial plant was under complete police surveillance – and due to curfew regulations, for any small group gathering there were guards coming and supervising the situation.

¹¹⁵ An extremely hot and humid climate in the Monsoon season, experienced while living in an area that following heavy rains became particularly impassable, was made worse by continuous and unprecedented black-outs that struck Delhi and a large part of India between the end of July and August 2012, letting commentators talk of one of the most severe power crisis of the past decades. Prolonged and repeated power cuts, of course, not only hit electrical appliances, affected transportation, but tended to damage those technological devices which are essential in the field...

investigation of the industrial conflict undoubtedly more challenging, it also affected the feasibility of several research activities. Following an argument between a worker and a contractor, which turned quite violent on both sides, clashes broke out inside the factory, culminating into a fire where a HR Manager died.¹¹⁶ This specific event resulted in more than one hundred workers being arrested, the remaining Maruti employees leaving the industrial area for fear of retaliation and further repercussions, the factory plant being locked out, carpet investigations, curfew,¹¹⁷ phones under surveillance, and of course, very limited leeway for any labour organisations, especially smaller and less protected ones.

Undoubtedly, the Manesar accident produced important effects, impacting the overall system of industrial relations in the area, the direction taken by the emerging labour movement, and the relationship between labour movement and institutions. Therefore, for the purposes of the present research, it represented an incredibly important development and a unique opportunity to observe the ‘core’ of the industrial conflict. However, it also hindered some of the planned research activities. This was due to the fierce repression and the carpet retaliations that followed the event. Indeed, the climate of fear and tension that ensued, made all the research activities requiring the exposure of targeted workers too risky, at least for the first weeks after the accident. I had to thus reconsider my intention to keep distributing questionnaires, and I had to meet unionists and workers far from the factory premises. Overall, despite increasing difficulties in meeting my informants, the ‘highest peak of conflict’ also allowed me to get into the most inspiring and challenging part of my research, and to properly

¹¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of these events see chapter 6.

¹¹⁷ According to Section 144 of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, when a condition of unlawful assembly is invoked, more than 4-5 people gathering in a surveilled area (in this particular case, the article was imposed all over Manesar), can incur into Police intervention, stopping, holding, and even arrest.

make sense of my engagement in a *workers' inquiry*. It was exactly in the month of August that the enlightening words Tronti had told me during our meeting in Rome, resounded more clearly...'*go where the struggle leads you*'. Despite research limitations, I felt I was at the right place, at the right time.

With my objectives clear in mind, I decided that my second period in the field had to become the most comprehensive attempt to understand what had actually happened at Maruti, how different actors related to the struggle, and a first opportunity to assess its possible impact on the long run. What I first thought to do, when the post-accident atmosphere was still extremely tense, was to contact those informants and informed friends I had trusted more during the first field visit, and ask them to describe the latest events and advise on how to move. It took me some time to arrange the first meetings. In those days, larger trade unions were engaged in a heated situation of agitation, while smaller activists were practically stuck, limited in their leeway by the political turmoil, the strict police surveillance and the blurred legal boundaries of the whole situation. In the first half of August, I managed to meet my previous informants from CITU Gurgaon and CITU Haryana, from JNU, from AEEU and JCB in Faridabad. All of them had previously helped me. They all confirmed that the situation was exceptionally tense and politically hot. They warned me that it would have been extremely risky to meet workers, especially from Maruti, at least until the factory reopened and the fullest unrest blew over. They also suggested to be absolutely careful in case of group gatherings and demonstrations, that phones might be under control, that I had to avoid any kind of over-exposure, like desisting from taking pictures or distributing questionnaires in 'sensitive' areas or dangerous circumstances. I therefore realised that I had to rethink my initial intentions. I also informed my SOAS Referees, reporting the situation, and I was further warned. In that precise moment, I could have

also given up and maybe postponed my research, but on one side, considering my limited resources of almost totally self-funded PhD student, and the next academic commitments I was afraid I could have no other chance to come back. On the other hand, I also felt the too strong need of investigating more, nearly a sort of 'responsibility' a witness can have. Hence, I decided to stay in loco and try to collect as much information as possible, even within a constrained freedom of action. I realised I had no other chance than, at least temporarily, laying aside the idea of directly meeting workers, while the best and safest option could be targeting the most 'authoritative' informants, those still 'free to move', that in case of emergency could provide protection as well.

Thus, in the following days, through my informant from HMS, I managed to visit the Maruti Gurgaon plant and interviewed the plant union president, met a few Maruti Manesar workers (whose contracts had just been terminated for the involvement in the July accident), and workers and plant leaders from Lumex (an ancillary Company) and Eastern Medikit Ltd (not Auto - related, but another interesting case in the area). Then, I managed to interview Mahadevan, from AITUC, whom I had not been able to interview earlier. Re-connecting with Sudarshen Rao Sarde, from IMF, I eventually interviewed Mathew Abraham, first historical leader of the 2000 Maruti struggle. Through my CITU Gurgaon informant, I also had the opportunity to interview Anuradha Lamba, Deputy Labour Commissioner in Gurgaon. In addition, I decided to attend official events, which could have been relevant and not dangerous. I participated in a discussion roundtable on 'Issues arising out of Manesar - July Incidents in the Maruti Plant', attended by all National Trade Unions, at the Centre for Social Development (CSD), Delhi; I went, through Mahadevan (AITUC), to the 'All Workers National Convention' at the Talkatora Indoor Stadium, and, still in the attempt to

deepen my knowledge on corporate strategies and finally approach managers, I attended the CII event on 'Innovation and Flexibility in the Auto Supply Chain' and the 52nd SIAM Annual Convention, on 'Auto Industry: India in a Changing World Order'. During this last event, I finally managed to interview one of the Maruti managers. That was on one of my last days in the field.

4.5 Ethics and Politics of Research: fieldwork in contexts of acute social conflict

Both the context experienced in the field and the theoretical perspective chosen, require some necessary clarifications in terms of ethics and politics of research. On both sides, dilemmas can be raised for the same focus on a conflict, which *per se* is neither a neutral nor an easy-to-manage terrain.

For what concerns ethical issues, these mainly emerged in relation to the treatment of informants and data collected through them, and to the *positionality* of the researcher, which is also linked to research politics. With regard to informants, a first distinction was made between more or less protected informants, i.e. those belonging to an organisation or a trade union, used to be publicly visible, experienced activists, etc. on one hand. Younger, isolated, less experienced or precarious workers, individuals involved in legal cases, activists belonging to unofficial or smaller organisations etc., on the other. For all the less protected informants, whose exposure could be riskier, numerous precautions were adopted in the field and ethical issues were also considered during the writing-up phase. These were generally met in safe environments, possibly

indoors, interviews were not recorded if they asked,¹¹⁸ and all the information provided, either through interviews or questionnaires, have been kept anonymous or reported under fictitious names.¹¹⁹

In terms of *positionality*, ethical considerations were necessary when I had to decide how to introduce myself and my research work. Regarding a personal presentation, all details were analysed before meeting different informants, ranging from political, to cultural and even to aesthetic aspects.¹²⁰ This relates to the discourse on *positionality* as 'representation of the self' (Brown, 2009) often varying according to the type of informant, the purposes of the research, and the information needed in every single circumstance: although no single recipe or code of conduct can be prescribed, transparency over means and ends of research and full respect towards the informant should prevail (Mikkelsen, 2005).

For what concerns the way the research work was presented, this might have been more difficult to ponder and require some light omissions about politically-loaded factors when facing informants belonging to the corporate world. (Un)fortunately, this sort of problem was encountered only in a limited number of cases, due the previously mentioned difficulties in gaining access. Generally, contents and objectives of the research work were clearly explained before starting all interviews and focus groups;

118 Before any meeting and interview I always asked the informant whether he/she could allow me to record the session or not, specifying that in case I did it, the recording would have been kept strictly confidential, and it would have only served the purpose of facilitating my transcription activities.

119 Answers received through interviews or focus groups have been kept anonymous. Questionnaires were collected in anonymous form since the beginning. Since the survey findings report sensitive contents, also the companies workers belong to have been mentioned using code letters. On Confidentiality and Anonymity, see Mikkelsen, 2005; Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens, 2003; Wilson, 1992.

120 Even the outfit had to be differently planned when meeting for example business people or old trade unionists, in the city centre or in the inner parts of industrial areas. It could be more 'western-style' in the first case, preferably traditionally Indian in the second. At least to avoid 'over-exposure' and allow a smoother development of research activities.

for the questionnaires, an introductory paragraph was included at the beginning, written both in English and in Hindi.

The question of *positionality* is strongly connected to the politics of research, which in this case specifically concerns the role of the researcher within a context of conflict. Social science research and data collection through fieldwork are *per se* 'constantly subjected to ethical and political questions' (Miyamura, 2010:157). They are implicated in power relations and presuppose values (Hammersley, 1995), 'forcing the researcher to engage with and contextualise their ethics in particular political and social conditions' (Miyamura, 2010:157). However, a situation of social conflict and political sensitiveness raises even more dilemmas. Therefore, starting from recognising data collection as a 'social and political process, rather than an impersonal and neutral process of collecting "facts"' (Lockwood, 1993, in Miyamura, 2010:156), a few points must be considered. Firstly, in a situation of acute social conflict, the *positionality* of the researcher is often dictated or at least strongly influenced by the feasibility of research activities and the possibility of concretely gaining access. Secondly, on the same line, it is frequently hindered by the need to minimise risks and preserve personal safety. According to Bøås, Jennings, and Shaw, within conflict and emergency situations, proper 'coping strategies' must be deployed in order to reduce risk exposure (2006). In our case, for example, this might be reported to the need of accepting an even 'biased' mediation,¹²¹ as it happened with trade unions. A similar 'compromise' does not necessarily mean taking a specific stance or diverting political objectives, but certainly implies a further effort to skim and triangulate information gathered. Finally, re-connecting the discourse on a workerist point of view

¹²¹ In the sense that I would have generally preferred to avoid intermediate institutional layers, and meet workers without third parties.

to the issue of research politics, two further points must be clarified. One relates to writing, the second to research ends, both again linked to the role of the researcher within social conflict. For what concerns the writing-up phase, although we have advocated the direct involvement in the struggle, we still agree with Panzieri (1976) that a following 'disengagement' is necessary, made of observations formulated from the outside (Wilson, 1992). This allows a much clearer understanding of all the power relations involved in the industrial conflict, and of the role of the actors who previously acted as informants. Finally, the application of a *workers' inquiry*, as form of *militant research*, also calls into question the theoretical and political ends of the conducted research, recalling a link between theory and praxis. In the 1960s and in the 1970s, the workerists engaged in the struggles outside Italian factories, could probably more easily influence the revolutionary strategies of the growing Italian working class. Here, due to the differences in research settings and conditions, and the distance from the investigated field, producing a direct impact seems a bit harder. However, we do hope that even this type of *workers' inquiry*, with all its limitations, may contribute to a serious political debate over class struggle and labour organising in India, or possibly even outside India. Indeed, this inquiry has been developed with this scope in mind.

Chapter 5

Working and Living Conditions in the Auto Sector: an analysis of Labour composition in the NCR

Drawing on a survey conducted in the NCR Auto cluster in the spring of 2012, this chapter aims at ‘mapping’ the working and living conditions of a sample of workers from both Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) - large assembling factories, and ancillary units manufacturing auto-components – vendors. The reported findings are based on the analysis of 140 questionnaires (see also chapter 4) distributed to production workers as well as to a limited number of non-production workers¹²² from 6 OEMs and 13 component suppliers, operating across the areas of Gurgaon and Faridabad, within the auto cluster surrounding Delhi (NCR). Due to the political economy of conducting fieldwork in the area, explained in chapter 4, the selection of respondents was mainly facilitated by the presence of trade unions, who acted as ‘gate-keepers’, and it was determined by the specific possibilities to gain access to factory plants.

In practice, the distribution of questionnaires was possible only amongst workers from companies under the purview of ‘collaborative’ unions and reachable through personal contacts. In particular, workers from vending companies were accessed via other workers who acted as ‘mediators’ and helped with the distribution and re-collection of questionnaires. Overall, the selected sample does not include all categories of workers in equal proportion, but does include workers from a wide range of companies, and in

¹²² Service workers, engineers, supervisors employed in the surveyed auto-factories.

this sense, it provides a sector-based (as opposed to single company-based) picture of working and living conditions. At the end of the survey, the emerging trends were further confirmed with what reported by the key informants interviewed. In fact, the material collected through interviews is used to complement and support the findings of the survey. Indeed, the findings presented here provide a clear indication of why labour unrest exploded in the area, and specifically in Gurgaon – Manesar. They illustrate the distinctive features of the ‘working-class-in-the-making’ characterising the NCR and its key differences vis-à-vis the workforce of other industrial clusters in India. Finally, findings also illustrate the most common demands raised by workers through protests, an issue which is particularly relevant in the context of the guiding categories of analysis deployed in this thesis.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section presents the survey and places the case investigated here into the wider context of the complexities of the Indian labour market. The second section discusses the sample and provides a description of the companies targeted in this study, focusing particularly on the overall composition of their workforce. Where possible, a distinction between the composition of workers from the Gurgaon area, compared to those employed in the Faridabad companies, is drawn. The third section presents the working and living conditions of the surveyed workers, on the basis of the different key areas of enquiry that characterise the questionnaires distributed. In order, this section is further composed of three sub-sections: 1) working conditions (general working conditions, working hours/ shift, facilities provided on the workplace, safety of the working environment, recruitment/ contract, salary); 2) living conditions (general living conditions, social benefits); 3) labour rights/ organisation. Finally, the concluding section builds on the collected findings to present and analyse overall trends. These will be further discussed in the

light of the case study analysed in chapter 6. The questionnaire at the basis of this survey exercise is presented in Appendix A at the end.

5.1 The background: an overview of the Indian labour market

The Indian labour market is hardly comparable to any other – not only for its size, but also for its great fragmentation and social segmentation, and complex employment categories. The country's huge labour force, which has now reached 500 million (Papola, 2013), can be in fact differentiated according to multiple criteria. These may focus on different productive sectors, social groups and layers, or on the employment status of individual workers. Overall, the heterogeneity of this labour market cannot be stressed enough, and can hardly be captured in the context of a single analysis. For this reason, while outlining some of the main employment trends at work in India, this chapter mainly focuses on a number of key aspects and categories that are more relevant for the case analysed.

As reported by Papola (2013), out of the estimated 500 million individuals composing the Indian labour force, 95% (about 475 million) are officially employed, while only a meagre 5% is supposed to be unemployed, that is barely 25 million individuals. Indeed, such figures severely overlook the issue of unemployment in India. This can be related to both measurement difficulties and conceptual misinterpretations. Besides the unavailability of accurate data, in fact, wrongful quantifications can also be explained by a substantial underestimation of the nature of the phenomenon per se, that from having a predominantly seasonal character is progressively assuming a

structural connotation, linked to a mismatch between supply and demand.¹²³ However, the main reason why a definition of unemployment based on official data (e.g. the five years surveys of the *National Sample Survey Organisation*, NSSO) may prove to be largely inadequate is the failure to acknowledge all the different ways in which *underemployment* – or *disguised unemployment* can manifest itself in the Subcontinent. In fact, the majority of the Indian working poor rely on multiple sources of ‘partial’ employment, which, while excluding people from complete unemployment, hardly guarantee full means of subsistence (TISS, 2009; Papola, 2013).¹²⁴ Estimates on unemployment based on current daily status (CDS) of the whole working population are reported in table n.5 below.

Tab. 5 Unemployment rates per CDS

Categories/Survey Years	1999-2000	2004-05	2009-10	2011-12
Rural male (%)	7.2	8.0	6.4	5.5
Rural female (%)	7.0	8.7	8.0	6.2
Urban male (%)	7.3	7.5	5.1	4.9
Urban female (%)	9.4	11.6	9.1	8.0

Source: Shaw (2013), based on NSSO, various rounds.

In terms of occupation across productive sectors, agriculture in India still accounts for more than 50% of total employment, despite a declining share in both GDP and employment contribution. Overall, both the industry and service sectors have

¹²³ Especially in the fast-expanding service sector, due to the lack of an adequately skilled workforce.

¹²⁴ An attempt to grasp different levels of employment/ underemployment lies in the use of statistical measures like usual principal status (UPS), usual status (UPSS), current weekly status (CWS), current daily status (CDS) of the employed population (see Bhalla, 2008; Shaw, 2013).

experienced increases in the share of GDP and workforce employed, although they have followed different patterns. Growth in the industrial sector has occurred mainly in construction and low value-added segments, rather than in capital-intensive manufacturing. This suggests an expansion of low quality jobs rather than a rise in good-quality employment opportunities, which in fact seem to have shrunk also across skilled sectors (Kundu and Sarangi, 2009). Within the service sector, growth has been impressive, but rather unbalanced: here employment growth has only slowly followed the rapid increase in GDP, signalling a relatively weak structural transformation with regard to workforce skills. Once more, these trends clearly emerge from the estimates of the *Central Statistical Organisation* (CSO) and the *National Accounts Statistics* (NAS) data, which are reported in table 6 below.

Tab. 6: Structural change in Growth and Employment

Sector	Share in							
	GDP				Employment			
	1972-73	1983	1993-94	2009-10	1972-73	1983	1993-94	2009-10
Agriculture	40,92	37,15	30,01	16,23	73,92	68,59	63,98	51,36
Industry	23,32	24,30	25,15	25,93	11,30	13,98	14,96	22,02
of which: Manufacturing	13,43	14,52	14,46	15,41	8,87	10,66	10,63	11,50
Service	35,76	38,56	44,84	57,84	14,78	17,63	21,07	26,67
All	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Papola (2013:5), based on NSSO.

Besides a basic distribution of the workforce across productive sectors, probably the differentiation raising the highest concerns is that between *formal* and *informal*. Since a mere distinction between formal and informal *sector* would lead us to include an

abysmal 92-93% of the workforce within the latter (NCEUS, 2009; TISS, 2009),¹²⁵ thus missing substantive segmentations that more subtly categorise Indian workers, further specifications are needed. Indeed, a definition of what actually constitutes the formal or organised sector in India is of no simple solution. First, it is important to clarify that talking about a formal or *organised* sector in India is not equivalent to referring to a unionised labour force, which still corresponds to no more than half of the organised segment, i.e. barely 3-4 % of the total working population (Bhalla, 2008; NCEUS, 2009; NSC, 2012). In an attempt to set ‘boundaries’, Tendulkar (2003:2) refers to the organised sector as composed by all *‘those workers having regular, contractual hired employment’*, who represent a very small and privileged part of the Indian labour market. For ‘organised sector labour’, Harriss-White and Gooptu (2001:89) intend those *‘workers on regular wages or salaries, in registered firms and with access to the state social security system and its framework of labour law’*. In accordance with the estimates provided by the Indian Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET), Government of India, in 2006 the organised sector counted only about 26.6 million workers, of which 65-70% still employed in the public sector (public administration and services), the rest in private firms and in tertiary activities (Jha, 2008). Based on the last available Census from 2004-5, the National Statistics Commission (NSC) (2012) also attributes not more than 7% of the total working population to the organised sector, with over 450 million individuals employed in the informal or unorganised segment. The NSC also breaks down the contribution of the unorganised sector per productive activity, as reported in table 7.

¹²⁵ According to such estimates, at least 450-60 million individuals should be classified as belonging to the informal sector, while less than 40 million should constitute the formal sector.

Tab. 7: Share of Unorganised Sector per Economic Activity (%)

Tabulation category/Description	2004-05 Share of Unorganised Sector
A: Agriculture and Forestry	99,9
B: Fishing	98,7
C: Mining	64,4
D: Manufacturing	87,7
E: Electricity, Gas, Water supply	12,4
F: Construction	92,4
G: Wholesale and Retail Trade	98,3
H: Hotel and Restaurants	96,7
I: Transport, Storage & Communication	82,2
J: Financial Intermediation	32,4
K: Real estate, Renting and Business activities	81,4
L: Public Administration and Defence, etc.	2,6
M: Education	37,9
N: Health and Social work	55,1
O: Other Community, Social and Personal Services	92,5
P: Private Households With Employed Persons	100
Q: Extra Territorial Organizations And Bodies	87,8
Grand Total	93

Source: NSC (2012), p. 26-27.

For what concerns the unorganised or informal sector, definitions are even more problematic, and boundaries between multiple employment categories even more blurred. The National Commission for the Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) (2009:12) provides one of the most widely accepted definitions of unorganised sector in India, considered as consisting of ‘*all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers*’. Within its scope, the NCEUS also includes most of the agricultural activities, except the plantation sector and some types of organised agriculture. What

effectively falls into the broad category of informal/unorganised sector, how in many instances this is due to multiple institutional/legal constraints or strategies to circumvent labour regulations, is the object of a long and complex debate. Notwithstanding the difference in positions within this debate (e.g. Breman versus Sanyal, see Breman, 2013), scholars focusing on Indian informal economy agree on the limited purchase of conceptualisations that separate sharply the ‘organised’ and unorganised sectors. In fact, dual approaches to economic activities and employment, opposing organised and unorganised sectors, are quite unhelpful to grasp what *informality* actually means and how it manifests (Breman, 2013). Labour informalisation is in fact a process that has undoubtedly affected both ‘sectors’. For instance, informalised/casual labour is increasingly incorporated into the organised segment as well (see, for example, Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2001; Mitra, 2008; NCEUS, 2009).¹²⁶ In this sense, an attempt to classify workers as per their employment status may prove to be much more relevant. The same NCEUS (2009:12), for example, also distinguishes between formal or organised and informal or unorganised employment, the latter being characterised as: *‘unorganised workers consist of those working in the unorganised enterprises or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment/ social security benefits provided by the employers’*. The relative growth of informalised labour within the organised sector (data updated to 2004-5) is clearly pictured in table 8 below.

¹²⁶ As it will be argued shortly, in relation to our case study.

Tab. 8: Relationship between Sector and Type of Employment (UPSS) – All workers 1999/2000 and 2004/05

Formal/Informal Sector	Total Employment (Million)		
	Informal/ Unorganised Worker	Formal/ Organised Worker	Total
1999 - 2000			
Informal/ Unorganised sector	393.7 (99.5)	1.8 (0.5)	341.5 (100.0)
Formal/ Organised sector	23.1(42.1)	31.8 (57.9)	54.9 (100.0)
Total	362.8 (91.5)	33.6 (8.5)	396.4 (100.0)
2004 - 2005			
Informal/ Unorganised sector	391.8 (99.6)	1.4 (0.4)	393.2 (100.0)
Formal/ Organised Sector	28.9 (46.2)	33.7 (53.8)	62.6 (100.0)
Total	420.7 (92.3)	35.0 (7.7)	455.7 (100.0)

Source: NCEUS (2009), p.13, based on NSSO, 55th and 61st Round.

For what concerns the employment status of single workers, Tendulkar (2003) classifies the Indian labour force into four categories, according to their ‘activity status’. He distinguishes between *self-employed*, *wage and salary earning*, *casual* and *unemployed* individuals, where self-employed and casual labourers are the largest groups, prevalent among rural and female labour, while regularly waged workers constitute less than one sixth of the total working population and unemployed represent only a tiny minority. The NSSO also makes a distinction between *self-employed*, *wage employed* and *unemployed*, where wage workers can be further differentiated between *regularly salaried* and *casual workers* (see Bino Paul, 2010). For the purposes of the present research, in relation to the manufacturing segment and to the auto sector (one of the traditionally most ‘formal and protected’ ones), the difference between *regularly waged employment* and the increasing proportion of *casual* workers is of particular relevance. From what emerges from the TISS Indian Labour Market Report 2008 (2009:34), regularly waged/salaried labour only accounts for a scant 16-17%, just about one sixth of the total workforce. With reference to this group of workers, the

NSSO highlights the less precarious position they enjoy, characterising them as *'those, who work in others' farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and, in return, receive salary or wages on a regular basis'* (NSSO 62nd round, in TISS, 2009: 43). Still according to TISS, only half of the Indian regular employment is supposed to be in the organised sector, while the other half is likely to belong to the unorganised segment. In this sense, only regularly waged workers employed in the organised segment are supposed to have access to social security and labour rights. For what concerns economic activities, regular employment is mainly concentrated in public administration, manufacturing and education (TISS, 2009).

Out of the overall labour force, following the largest group composed by around 52-53% of self-employed individuals, the second widest category is that of *casual* workers, who make up about one third of the total, i.e. around 32-33% (TISS, 2009:34). These are broadly identified with those workers without a regular contract, who do not benefit from social security schemes and are usually employed on temporary or occasional basis. The NSSO officially defines a casual worker as *'a person who is casually engaged in others' farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and, in return, receives wages according to the terms of the daily or periodic work contract'* (TISS, 2009:65). Within this group, one could also include the rising number of contract workers, hired through a contractor, generally on fixed term/ temporary basis, easier to dismiss and usually not entitled to security benefits (Neethi, 2008).¹²⁷ Due to the frequently irregular availability of employment, their relatively lower wage level and the denied access to social protection, Sengupta, Kannan and Raveendran (2008), estimate that almost 90% of casual workers in India is poor and vulnerable. Many are involved in processes of

¹²⁷ This category of workers will be widely discussed in chapter 6.

circular migration (see Srivastava, 2012). The increasing *casualisation* of the labour force across the manufacturing sectors is of particular relevance for the present research, as these trends also affect the auto sector.

Employment status and occupation is not the only way in which segmentation occurs. Indeed, the extreme fragmentation of the labour market as a whole is highly dependent on multiple socio-cultural patterns affecting both the distribution of the workforce and its access to social protection and labour rights. For example, Harriss-White and Gooptu (2001) describe how existing ‘social institutions’, namely caste, class, age, gender, religion, not only segment the labour market but are also related to more or less evident discrimination. In their study of the unorganised sector, they explain how caste as a social structure has all but disappeared since the onset of liberalisation. It still influences occupation, access to political power, and social identity, especially within the lower strata. However, the relevance of social institutions in segmenting the workforce is highly sector-dependent. For instance, it has not proven to be a key variable for the understanding of labour composition in the auto sector. Moreover, as it will be discussed below and in the next chapter, in the auto industry social segmentation has also not prevented labour from developing a common identity.

Besides focusing on caste, social differentiation and labour market discrimination can also be based on gender and religion. For instance, briefly analysing the processes of *feminisation of employment* at work in India one can conclude that Indian women still generally cover disadvantaged positions, and that the quality of their employment is still a matter of high concern. TISS (2009) reports that women are not only primarily deployed as workers in the informal economy, but they also tend to be concentrated in low-end, low-skilled jobs and/or in agriculture-related activities. They are always paid less than their male counterparts (see RoyChowdhury, 2015). With reference to the

unorganised segment, Harriss-White and Gooptu (2001:97) underline how gender discrimination is particularly evident and pronounced, whereby women *'still own and control so remarkably less assets than men, are so much poorer and so significantly less educated'*. Finally, religion and age also keep emerging (especially in the unorganised sector and in rural areas) as means to perpetuate long-term discrimination and exclusion from labour markets, thus reproducing a vast reserve army of labour. Within religious minorities, Muslims generally bear the brunt of unjust employment practices, and are concentrated only in low-skill sectors and in more insecure, low-end forms of employment, earnings lower salaries than other groups (TISS, 2009). In terms of age differentiation, together with the still alarming phenomenon of child labour, another worrisome trend is the frequent lack of a 'retirement age', especially in the informal sector, where incapacitated old people are yet employed but often paid along 'differential piece-rates' (Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2001).

Focussing on the industrial sector, a survey conducted by Vijayalakshmi, Dhaliwal and Gupta (2006) reveals how discriminatory practices based on gender, region of origin, education, marital status, age and caste differences are still very common among Indian companies. These factors, according to the three authors, can affect several processes, including recruitment, job allocation, transfers, promotions and job terminations. For what concerns the manufacturing sector, Papola's work (2013) addresses crucial issues that are of particular relevance for the present research. He highlights how, besides a structural segmentation determined by existing social institutions, geographical location and rural-urban settings, the Indian labour market is further fragmented by labour institutions and regulations themselves. For instance, uneven access to union membership and welfare schemes (for casual/contract workers, for example) or labour laws with differential application according to firm size, tend

to widen rather than reduce market segmentation, contributing to the unequal provision of social security (see also Anant, 2009). In this sense, ironically, and despite the current rhetoric of the Modi government, the current ‘inflexibility’ of Indian labour regulations and social institutions seems to be a severe obstacle against the protection of the most vulnerable workers, rather than an actual impediment to corporate strategies.

5.2 Surveying the NCR auto cluster: firms and workers under investigation

The National Capital Region (NCR) auto cluster includes the industrial areas surrounding the Delhi metropolitan conglomerate, mainly falling across the cities of Gurgaon and Faridabad, in the State of Haryana, but also encompassing some industrial units operating in Noida (Uttar Pradesh) and at the border with Rajasthan. More specifically, it generally indicates the ‘triangle’ between the three hubs of Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad.

Pic. 5 – The Delhi – Gurgaon – Faridabad industrial ‘triangle’



Source: google maps

The cluster developed around Maruti as a regional leader: during the 1980s, the company entered what used to be a ‘greenfield’ area, and then drove its expansion and consolidation as a leading manufacturing hub. The organisational needs determined by the Japanese model of production management, introduced through Maruti’s partnership with Suzuki,¹²⁸ and the already existing network of local component producers, have shaped the cluster as we see it today (see Okada, Siddharthan, 2007). Maruti – Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) is still the biggest player in the area, owning two large car manufacturing plants, one in Gurgaon and one in the Manesar Industrial Model Town (IMT), opened in 2006. In addition to MSIL, whose ownership today is

¹²⁸ The first joint-venture was signed in 1983.

composed by 100% Japanese capital,¹²⁹ Suzuki also owns another plant manufacturing motorcycles – Suzuki Motorcycles India Pvt Ltd. In the Gurgaon area, the other OEMs currently operating are Hero MotoCorp Ltd (former Hero – Honda, world’s largest two-wheelers manufacturer), and Honda (Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India Pvt Ltd, HMSI). Honda also manufactures cars, in the Honda SIEL India Lts, Noida plant.¹³⁰ In Faridabad, major OEMs are Yamaha (India Yamaha Motor Pvt Ltd, 100% subsidiary of Yamaha Motor Japan, motorcycles manufacturer), Escorts (agri-machinery, construction equipment, railway equipment and auto-component manufacturer) and JCB India (construction equipment).¹³¹ In terms of component suppliers, in 2012 the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), reported around 265 firms registered in the Northern cluster (ACMA, 2012).

The suppliers network is structured upon many layers, from Tier 1 to Tier 4 firms, where Tier 4 is composed by what UNIDO defines as ‘micro-enterprises’. Productive units are classified on turnover basis, where 10 USD million is the threshold separating micro from SMEs, and 100 USD million marks the difference between SMEs and big firms.¹³² The relationship between OEMs and component manufacturers expressly follows sub-contracting lines, built upon a hierarchical structure where Tier 1 firms directly supply the assembling factory and are supplied by Tier 2 and 3 firms. Overall, while most SMEs operating as Tier 1, 2 and 3 suppliers are registered in the Small Scale Industries (SSI) record of the Government of India (GoI), often Tier 4 micro-

¹²⁹ Interview to Vishnu Matur, Director of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), 5/3/2012.

¹³⁰ For company profiles see SIAM, 2012.

¹³¹ Agri-machinery and construction equipment are generally sectors associated with the automotive industry, but not strictly part of it (the broader group being ‘Automotive and Heavy Equipment Industry). In fact, these industries usually belong to separate industrial associations (in India, for example, JCB and Escorts are not SIAM members). However, since these companies operate in the same industrial cluster, rely on the same network of component suppliers, and share a common ‘labour history’ with the other OEMs operating in the same territory – they have been considered together.

¹³² Interview to Sanjay Mudgal, former UNIDO officer working on the UNIDO – ACMA Partnership Programme (see UNIDO – ACMA, 2010).

enterprises are not. Tracing them can be hard even for the Government.¹³³ In terms of employment, cluster statistics are scarcely available. Overall, we know that the Indian auto sector currently provides direct and indirect employment to around 19 million workers (Economic Times, 2014). Out of the total size of the sector, the unorganised segment is estimated to contribute to 30% of employment, although with a much lower productivity (producing barely 1.5% of the total output in the industry; Teknikföretagen, 2008).

Within this scenario, the survey conducted in March-April 2012 aimed at mapping working and living conditions of a sample of 140 workers from 6 OEMs and 13 component suppliers (vendors). The OEMs are operating both in Gurgaon and in Faridabad, while all vendors are based in the Gurgaon-Manesar area. When describing the survey findings, OEMs will be indicated with the letter O and progressive numbers (O1, O2, O3 etc.), while vendors will be identified by the letter V and progressive numbers (V1, V2, V3 and so on). However, while due to the higher number of responses obtained from OEMs, and the relative difference in working conditions from company to company, OEMs will also be mentioned individually, while suppliers will be mostly grouped together as vendors (V group). Within OEMs, a differentiation between companies operating in Gurgaon – Manesar (O1 to O4) and companies operating in Faridabad (O5 and O6) will prove to be meaningful in certain circumstances. For what concerns surveyed workers, the number of respondents per company and per job performed are reported in table 9 below. The composition of the workforce in terms of gender, age gap and area of origin is represented in charts 4, 5 and 6 on the following pages.

¹³³ Interview to Sanjay Mudgal, former UNIDO officer working on the UNIDO – ACMA Partnership Programme (see UNIDO – ACMA, 2010).

Tab. 9: Number of respondents per area, company and job performed

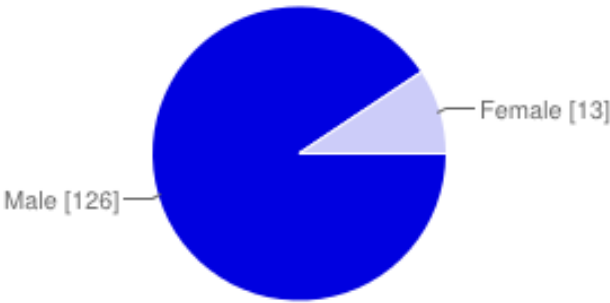
Area	Company	N. Resp.	Job performed				
			Administration	Engineering	Production	Supervision	N/A
Gurgaon	O1	24	3	/	20	/	1
Gurgaon	O2	22	22	/	/	/	/
Gurgaon	O3	1	/	/	1	/	/
Gurgaon	O4	7	/	/	/	/	7
Faridabad	O5	25	10	/	5	9	1
Faridabad	O6	29	2	/	26	/	1
Gurgaon	V1	8	1	/	7	/	/
Gurgaon	V2	7	2	1	4	/	/
Gurgaon	V3	1	/	/	1	/	/
Gurgaon	V4	4	/	2	1	1	/
Gurgaon	V5	1	/	/	1	/	/
Gurgaon	V6	1	/	/	1	/	/
Gurgaon	V7	1	1	/	/	/	/
Gurgaon	V8	1	/	/	1	/	/
Gurgaon	V9	2	/	/	1	1	/
Gurgaon	V10	2	/	1	1	/	/
Gurgaon	V11	2	/	1	1	/	/
Gurgaon	V12	1	/	1	/	/	/
Gurgaon	V13	1	1	/	/	/	/
Total		140	20	7	92	11	10

Source: author's own field survey, march- april 2012.

For what concerns the gender composition of the workforce, out of the total number of valid responses (139/140), we can note that the sample is composed by 90% of male workers and 9% of female workers. Of the 12 female workers whose responses were

recorded, 6 work for vendors; 7 for OEMs; 4 perform administrative tasks; 4 work in production; 1 work in the HR department; 2 work as engineers. The heterogeneity of the sample and the limited employment of women’s workers in the sector do not allow to derive trends on women’s working conditions in the production segment.

Chart 4: Gender composition of workers

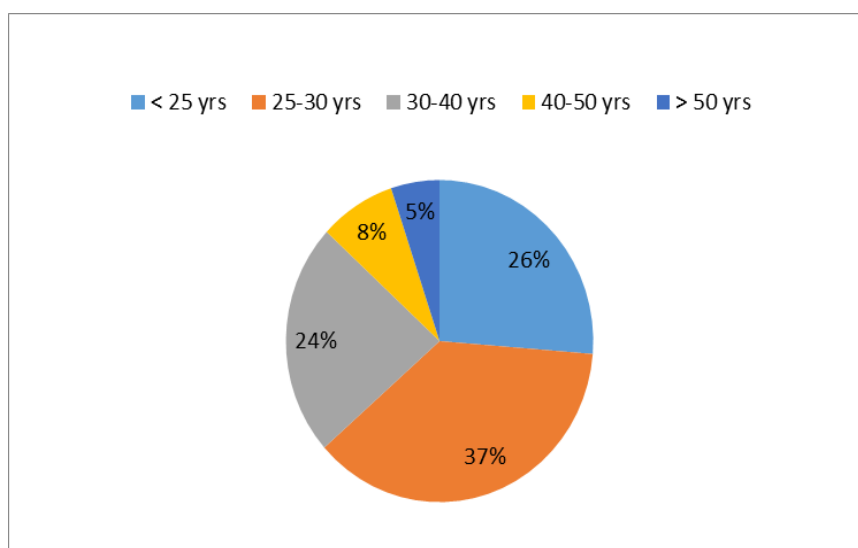


Male 90% Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

Female 9%

When we look at labour composition in relation to workers’ age, we can observe that over 60% of the workforce is less than 30 years old, while only 13% is above the age of 40. The classification of workers per age gap is reported in chart 5 below. Not surprisingly, the average age of workers is higher in Faridabad than in Gurgaon / Manesar, where industrial plants have opened more recently. This can be noted also cross-checking workers’ age with the length of employment of workers per company, in the next section. The average age of workers in O5 and O6 operating in Faridabad, for example, is around 32 and 36 years old, while in O2 and O4, the OEMs from Gurgaon / Manesar, this is around 27 and 25 respectively. The average age of workers in component suppliers (about 28 years old) is less indicative, as the group comprises 13 different companies. These are reported in table n. 10 on the next page.

Chart 5: Composition of workers by overall age gap



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Table n. 10: Average age of workers per company

Company	Age of workers (average)
O1 (Gurgaon)	32.26
O2 (Gurgaon / Manesar)	26.68
O3 (Gurgaon)	31 (1)
O4 (Gurgaon / Manesar)	25.14
O5 (Faridabad)	31.68
O6 (Faridabad)	36.10
V (Gurgaon / Manesar)	27.51

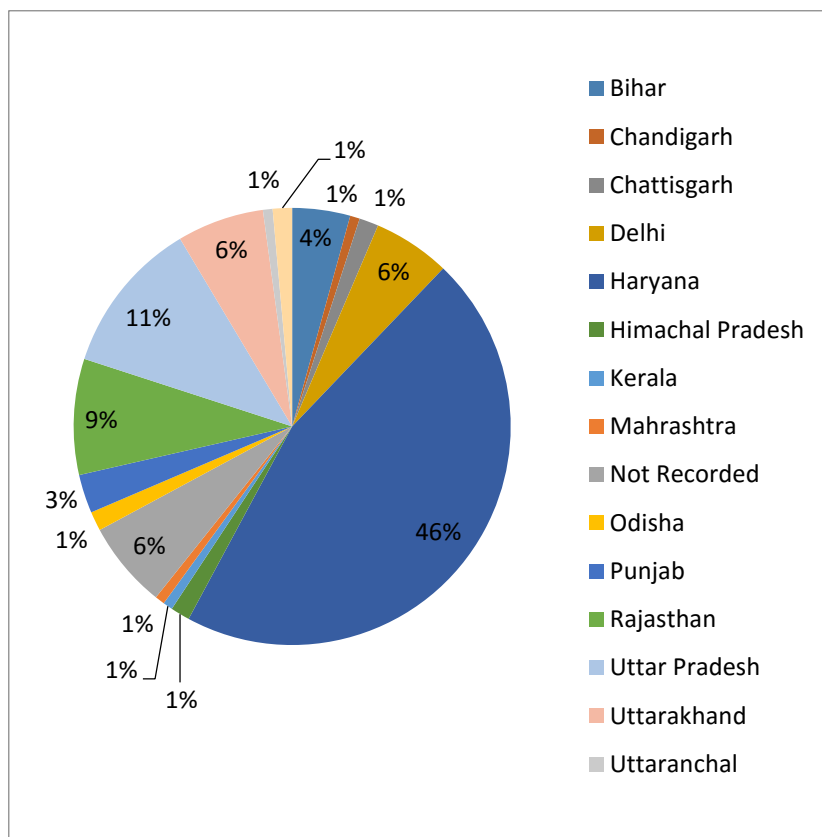
Source: author's own field survey, march/ april 2012

As we will later discuss, both the young age of the workers in the Gurgaon / Manesar area and the marked fragmentation of the workforce are interesting factors to consider when trying to explain why labour unrest exploded in the region. Arguably, these factors also partially explain why managerial strategies aimed at preventing unrest did not work. Fragmentation is particularly evident when we group workers according to their State of origin, The workers in the sample come from 15 different Indian States. The distribution can be observed below in graph 6. It must be noted that although almost half of the workforce comes from the State of Haryana, 48% of workers comes

from different parts of the subcontinent. A substantial proportion of the workforce is thus composed of migrant labour.

If on one side the different origins of labour may play a limited role in fragmenting the workforce coming from the ‘Hindi Belt’, who speak the same language and are slightly more homogeneous in terms of cultural background, they could play a more substantial fragmenting role for workers from Kerala, West Bengal, Odisha, or Maharashtra.

Chart 6: State of origin

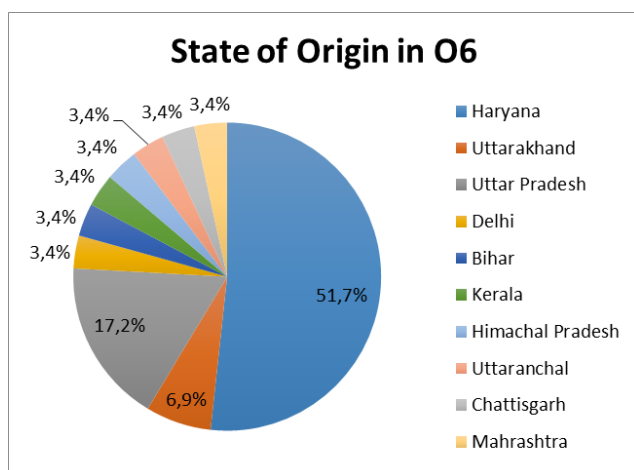
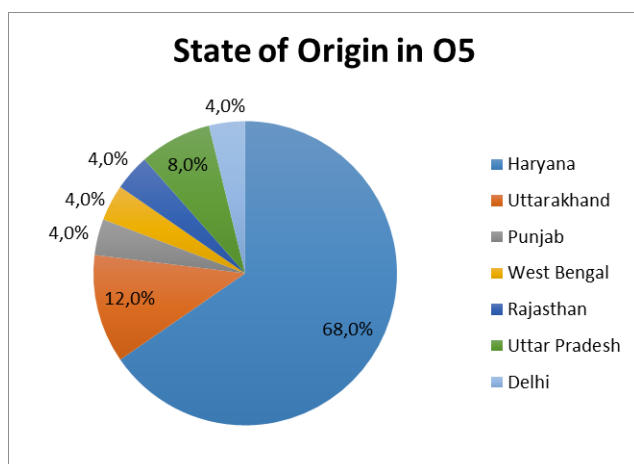


Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

If we look at workers' origin in companies O5 and O6 (charts 7 and 8), located in Faridabad, we can notice that the percentage of those coming from Delhi and Haryana goes up, while the number of states overall decreases. Although this does not entirely emerge from our sample,¹³⁴ such composition is indeed related to a wider use of migrant labour in the industrial plants of more recent formation.

¹³⁴ But it did emerge from interviews, and it is a trend confirmed by local activists as well (see for example, <https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/>)

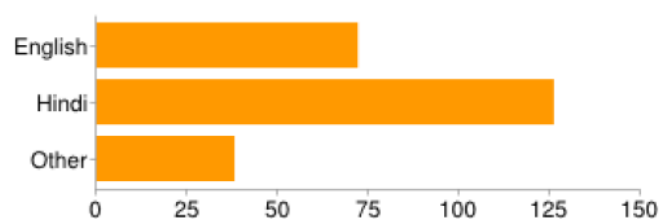
Charts 7 and 8: State of origin in companies O5 and O6 (Faridabad)



Source: author's own field survey, march/ april 2012

The map of workers according to the language spoken is reported in graph 7. It is worth noting how, however, 90% of the workforce speaks Hindi as a first or second language. Almost 30% speaks a language other than Hindi or English as mother tongue, and only half of the workers declared that they spoke English.

Chart 9: Language spoken

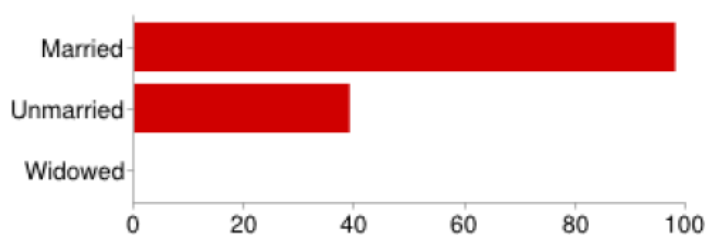


English	72	51%
Hindi	126	90%
Other	38	27%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Finally, in order to understand the main social characteristics of the workforce under investigation, workers were asked to specify their family status and to indicate their education level. For what concerns their status, it emerges that 70% of workers are married, and 66% have children (1 to 4 per nucleus). Family status greatly affects the financial sustainability of workers' income, as the majority of the workers declares that no other family member receives a regular salary (this issue is discussed in the next section).

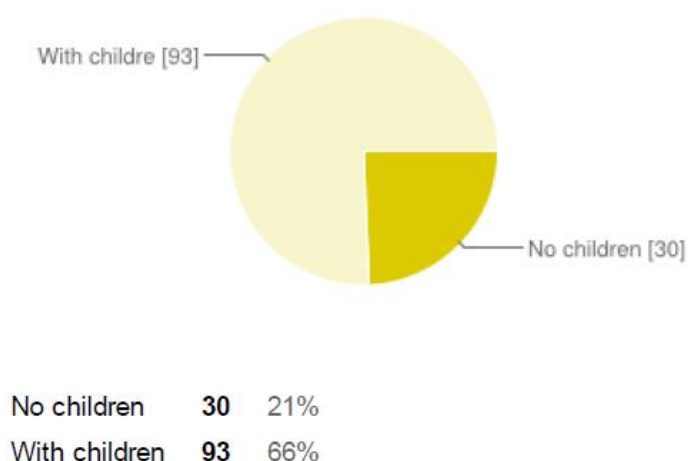
Chart 10: Marital status



Married	98	70%
Unmarried	39	28%
Widowed	0	0%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

Chart 11: Family composition

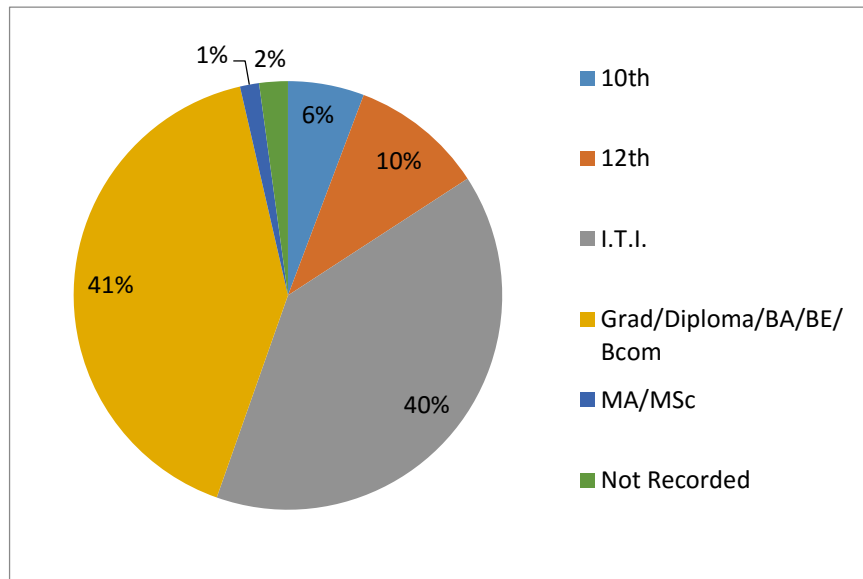


Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

The level of education of workers is a particularly meaningful factor to understand the explosion of labour unrest in the area. On the one hand, it sets a distinctive feature of the auto sector, where workers are on average highly skilled and educated compared to other sectors. On the other hand, the relatively higher educational qualification of the workforce is also linked to geographical factors, as it is also due to the high number of technical colleges and universities present in the National Capital Region. Finally, and especially in the Gurgaon-Manesar area, high levels of education seem to also mark a generational divide. Here, the life-style aspirations of a young, educated workforce appear to be one of the possible motivations behind labour unrest. These aspirations are very likely to have clashed with the increasing levels of casualisation of employment, making the poor working and living conditions offered by the sector particularly unbearable.

Chart 12: Education level

In our overall sample, as we can observe in the pie chart 12 here, only 16% of workers reports to be educated up to



10th/12th standard, while a striking majority is in possession of further qualifications.

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Of these, 40% obtained a degree from Industrial Training Institutes. These are government-run vocational schools providing 1 to 3 years training in a wide range of technical specialisation for the manufacturing sector (electrician, fitter, plumber, welder, etc.). Even more impressively, a significant 41% of the workers surveyed pursued post-secondary courses, corresponding to undergraduate degrees, such as BA/BSc/ Bcom or an equivalent Mechanical Diplomas (see chart 12 above). As can be noted, a small 1% also obtained post-graduate qualifications (dark blue slice). In the Gurgaon / Manesar area, together with the young age of the workers, the clash between educational attainment and expected living standards seemed to be one of the key features of this working class-in-the-making, which manifested particular malaise against the increasingly casualised working and living conditions offered by the sector. It is to these working and living conditions that the analysis now turns.

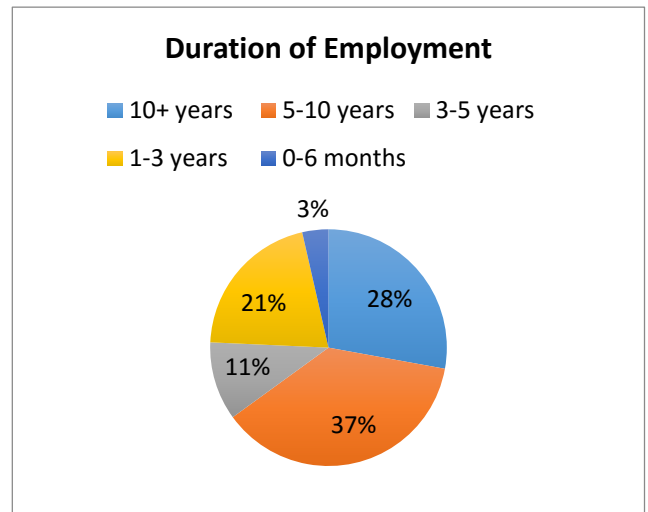
5.3 Working and living conditions: emerging findings

5.3.1 Working conditions

In order to investigate and understand working conditions satisfactorily, the survey addressed six main fields. First, it aimed at mapping the general composition of workers, on the basis of the company they worked for, of task performed, and of duration of employment within the same company. Together with an explanation of their task, workers were also asked to specify how long it takes to perform the required operation, and how many times per day they perform it. Then, they were asked to describe their workstation, as this is also crucial to understand their working conditions and constraints. The responses collected thus give an overall idea of the intensity of their job, of their working rhythms, and of the physical space where they operate. A second set of questions asked workers to report about their working hours/ shift. Here, an indication of working hours combined with the frequency of overtime, breaks and number of days off, further illustrates the rhythms and pressure workers are subject to. A third set of questions concerned their working environment; namely, the facilities provided in the analysed plants. A fourth set of questions focused on health and safety on the workplace; risks connected to the specific workstation, experience of accidents and the provision of safety equipment are here included. The fifth set of questions deals with recruitment and contract: here we find an overall description of the kind of hiring procedures, of the existence (or lack of existence) of written agreements and of the sort of contracts workers possess. Finally, the last set of questions outlines salary conditions; namely the regularity of wage transfers and who is involved in the transaction. If and how salary levels are recorded is an issue that is also relevant for living conditions (discussed in the next section), in relation to average living expenses

Chart 13: Employment duration

- 1) With regard to the overall composition of the sample, the distribution of the workers per company is reported in table 9 above. When asked to specify the company they work for, however, respondents were also questioned about the duration of their



employment. Although this variable does not say much about the potentially casual nature of working relationships, it does add further information on the social profile, which indicates that the auto industry is characterised by a relatively young workforce. In this sense, while the overall composition of workers per duration of employment (chart 13) can just give an idea of the proportion of workers/ total sample that has been employed for the same company for less than 10 years (aggregate 72%), the breakdown per company can add further insights. This is reported in table n. 11 below. Here, OEMs are considered individually, while workers in vendors' units are considered as a group. What is more significant, is the difference between O5 and O6, OEMs operating in Faridabad, and O1-O4, companies from the Gurgaon-Manesar area. The earlier start of the employment in O5-O6 can be explained by the fact that Faridabad is a fairly older industrial area. As we shall argue, the longer history of manufacturing activity in the region also means a more experienced workforce and a rooted tradition of trade unionism. In Gurgaon, and in the Industrial Model Township (IMT) in Manesar instead, OEM plants opened

more recently and all hired a young workforce, most of whom were at their first working (and organising) experience.

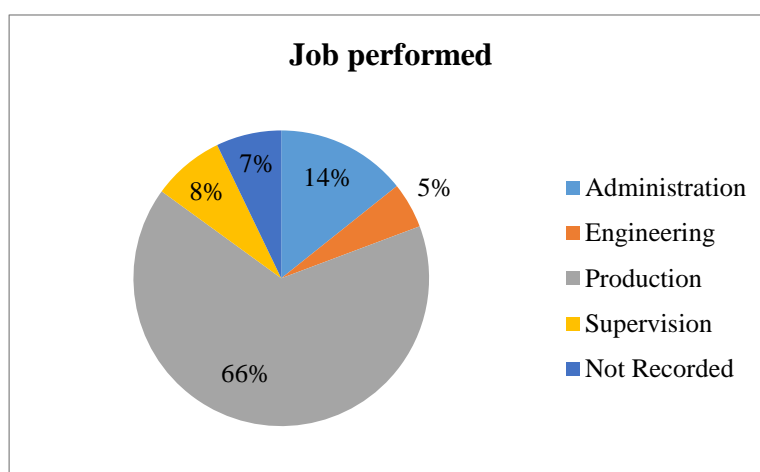
Tab. 11: Min and max duration of employment per company (per starting year)

Company	Max	Min
O1	2001	2005
O2	2006	2009
O3	2006	2006
O4	2003	2010
O5	1977	2012
O6	1987	2011
Vendors	1998	2012

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

In terms of jobs they perform, workers were classified in four different groups, namely administration/ service, supervision, production and engineering.

Chart 14: Jobs performed



As we can see from chart n.14, out of 130/140 valid responses, which make up 93% of the total sample, 66% of the workers carry out

Source: author's own survey, march/april 2012.

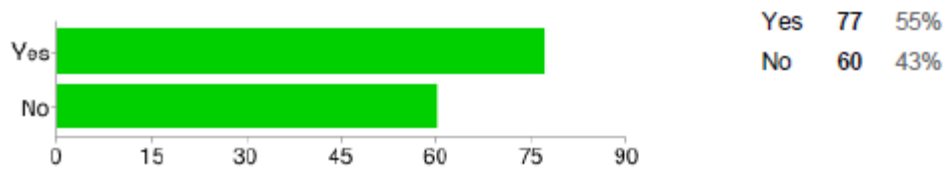
production activities. These include painting, welding, pressing, assembling, cutting, operating specialised machines (such as lathe machine). 14% of the jobs involves administrative tasks (in the office, like purchasing, data feeding, dispatching operations) or duties performed on the assembly line but that can be considered as belonging to the service segment, like maintenance or quality checks. The 8% of supervisory roles includes different tasks, from teams supervision on the line to the role of shop clerk (similar) or the supervision of materials distribution (including arrivals from component suppliers): overall these can all be considered managerial roles and are therefore better paid. Finally, a 5% of jobs pertaining to the engineering sector was also recorded: these include quality advisors and design engineers.

For what concerns production workers, the survey also allowed for the collection of an interesting set of responses that can help provide a description of the intensity and the rhythm of the job they perform. For example, when asked to indicate the time required to execute their operation, 52.6% of the respondents reported that it takes them between 10 seconds and 1.5 minute to complete their task, while a further 12.2% spends less than 10 minutes on it.¹³⁵ Grouped together, this means that 64.8% of the respondents repeat the same operation from a minimum of 85 to a maximum of 2560 times per shift, with a range of 350 to 2560 times for the workers who spend 1.5 minute or less performing each task.¹³⁶ Indeed, the great pressure such rhythms entail and the alienation this may lead to, clearly emerge from findings. In addition to excessive speed and repetitiveness of tasks, 43% of the total sample of workers also report that the position required to perform their operations is not comfortable. This can be observed in chart 15 below.

¹³⁵ On a number of valid responses corresponding to 61.95% of the total sample of production workers interviewed.

¹³⁶ Author's own calculations from field survey, march/april 2012.

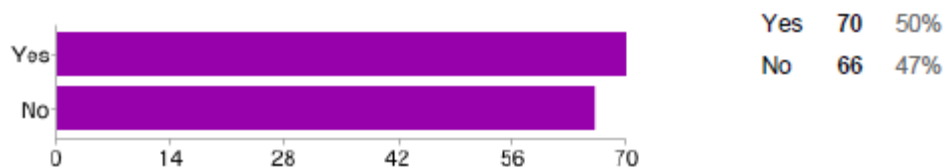
Chart 15: Is the position you are required to assume in order to perform your tasks comfortable?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

The explanations provided by those who report to work in uncomfortable conditions are varied. These include prolonged standing positions, hot and humid environment (for those working in casting departments),¹³⁷ lack of space surrounding the machine that makes the workplace too crowded and congested, and a general discomfort expressed by all those who complain operation time is too short and work too hard. Finally, 50% of the respondents also declare that they have to move to different workstations during the same shift (chart 16).

Chart 16: Are you ever asked to move to different workstations during your shift?



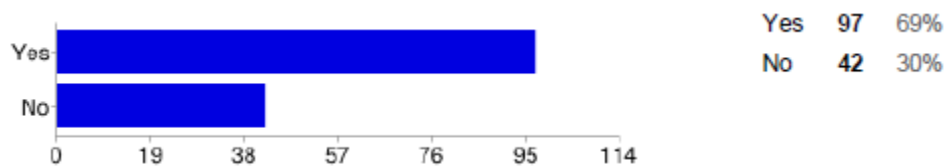
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

- 2) In the second section focusing on working conditions, the investigation concerns shifts and working hours, in order to further analyse the kind of workload workers bear, and the time they have outside the factory. With regard to the official shift, most workers declare to work between 8 and 8.5 hours plus breaks, on 6 days per week. The only exceptions are company O6 in Faridabad,

¹³⁷ Casting of metals requires particularly elevated temperatures. The presence of liquid metals also makes the working environment very humid.

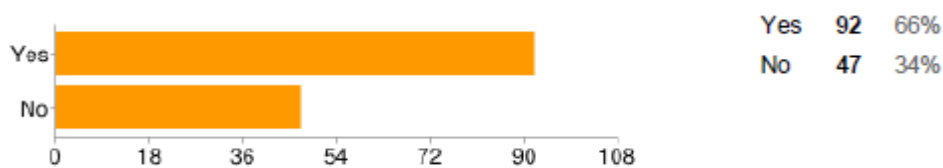
where workers report to work 9 hours per day but on 5 working days, and fairly isolated cases of 10-12 hours shifts in companies O1, O4, V4, V8, V12 (which cannot be considered trends and might include overtime). In relation to night shifts and overtime, responses can be observed in charts 17 and 18 below.

Chart 17: Night shifts



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

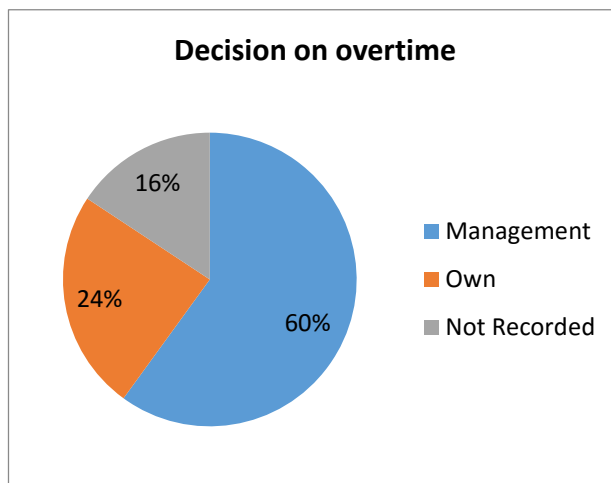
Chart 18: Extra time



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

As far as overtime is concerned, it is worth highlighting the following aspects. First, while the frequency of extra time performed is overall rather moderate, a peak can be noted for company O1 in Gurgaon, where respondents report to work extra hours up to 120, 150, even 300 times a year. Second, it is interesting to point that, while 81% of the workers declare that extra time is remunerated (at either single or double rate, compared to the normal hourly rate), 60% of the respondents claim to work overtime upon management's request. The percentage of workers seconding management's decision, as opposed to that of workers engaging in overtime voluntarily, is reported in chart 19.

Chart 19: Decision on overtime



The high percentage of workers denouncing management's imposition of extra working hours reveals an arbitrary determination of workloads. At the same time, when overtime rates are higher workers may choose to do it. Hence overtime

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

can either be a coercive or an incentive-based mechanism to increasing productivity by stretching the working day.

More than the official shift duration or the enforcement of compulsory overtime, however, one of the reasons of major complaint is the absence of adequate breaks during the shift. Actually, the insufficiency of resting time and the impossibility of satisfying even basic needs during the available breaks seem to have been key factors in raising Gurgaon workers' awareness of exploitative conditions. Even during interviews and focus groups, in fact, these constantly emerged as indicators of excessive pressure and unbearable working rhythms. Within the analysed sample, while the situation appears more acceptable in O6 (Faridabad) and in some of the vendors' units (V6, V8, V9, V12, V13), where workers report to have two 15 minutes tea breaks and 30 minutes lunch break (1h total), it becomes gradually worse across the other companies. In companies O1, O4, V2, V5 breaks amount to 50 minutes in total (two 10-minutes tea breaks and one lunch break of half an hour). In turn, while all workers from company O2 consider their overall 45 minutes break (same as in

company V11, they have 7 and 8 minutes for two tea breaks + 30 minutes for lunch) insufficient, companies such as O3, V1, V4 seem to allow an even shorter time, with 40 minutes in total (either 5-5-30 or just 10-30 minutes). For what concerns company O1, it also emerges how supervisors enjoy a different treatment compared to production workers, with the former reporting a total of 60 minutes break, and production workers (specifically, helpers on the line) overall 40 minutes. Besides indicating whether the allowed breaks are sufficient to satisfy their needs, workers are also asked to specify the reason of their dissatisfaction. From the 28% of responses expressing discontent, it emerges that a) the time available is inadequate to physically rest after a prolonged effort; b) due to the significant distance of canteens or tea-stalls from facilities tea breaks are not even enough to reach them; c) the canteen gets too crowded (and thus workers have to queue), therefore 30 minutes are barely sufficient to get lunch. Some of the responses obtained include, for example, *'this time not enough to take lunch and tea because too much rush in canteen that time due to lack of space'*, *'because a person reaches the rest area from the workplace in 10 minutes'*, *'since there is no sufficient space in the canteen, it becomes crowded; and we have to stand in a Q for 10-15 minutes'* (O1), *'work area and canteen are at a considerable distance'*, *'because tea, snack and toilet can't be done during this time'* (O2), *'5 minutes tea time is very short time'*, *'in that break time, I am neither able to eat tea/snacks nor to go to the bathroom'* (V1), *'no, time is very short and work is very hard'* (V4) (author's own survey, march/april 2012).

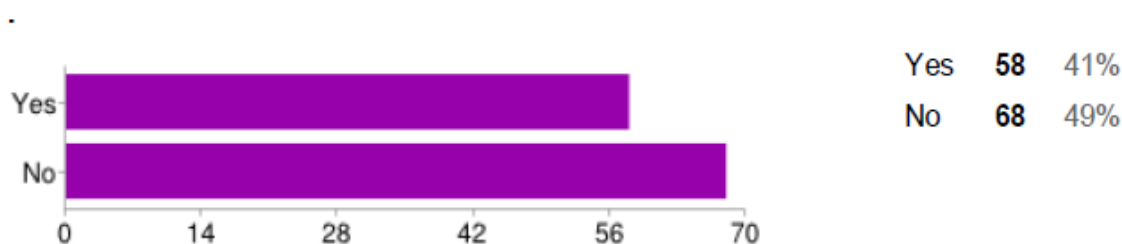
The responses provided with regard to the insufficiency of resting time relate to two further issues. First, the lack of proper breaks during the shift also corresponds to a very limited number of days off during the year. Second, breaks do not allow for the

satisfaction of basic needs also due to the inadequacy of existing facilities inside the plants.

As far as time off is concerned, despite 93% of the surveyed workers report to have days off, in the majority of cases this only refers to Sundays. If this may not be a problems for workers in company O6, who usually operate on a five days weekly schedule, it does denote excessive pressure for those in the other plants (O1). In company O2, V12, V13 workers declare to have 14 or 16 days off in a year – this could correspond to a reasonable number of leave days. However, the rest of the answers provided is too heterogeneous to properly assess whether this is a trend; i.e. if this allowance is conceded in other plants as well.

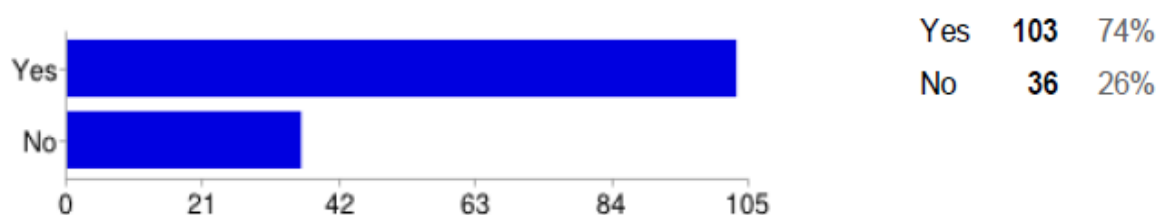
When questioned about the facilities present inside their own plant, the majority of workers declare not to be happy. The exact proportion out of the sample of valid answers collected can be observed in chart 20 below. More detailed answers focusing on washrooms and canteen services follow.

Chart 20: Do you think there are adequate facilities inside your plant?



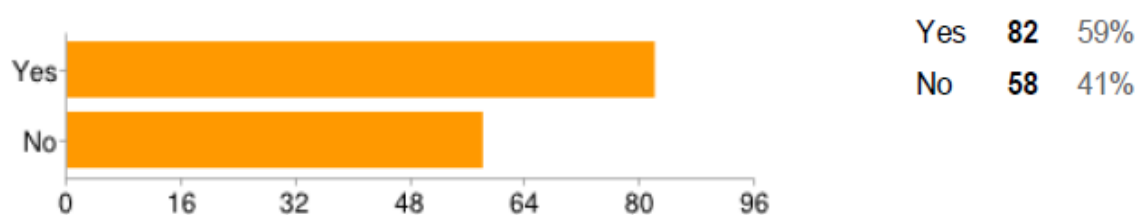
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 21: Is there an adequate number of washrooms?



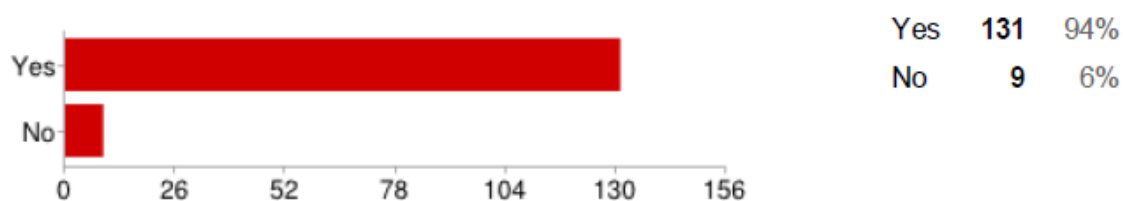
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 22: Are they sufficiently close to your workstation?



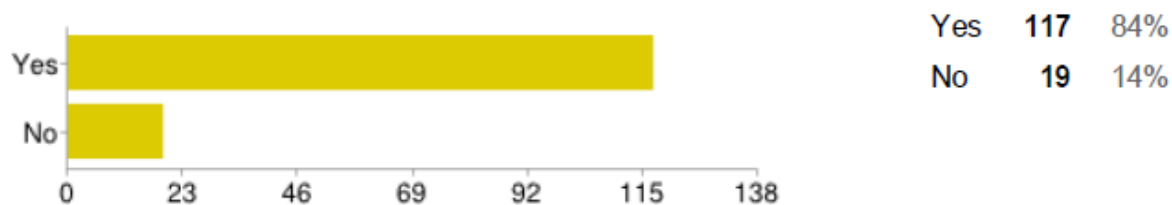
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 23: Is a canteen provided in your plant?



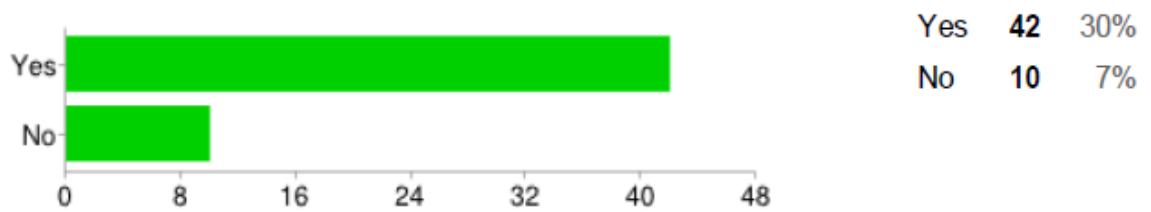
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

Chart 24: If yes, do you make use of it?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

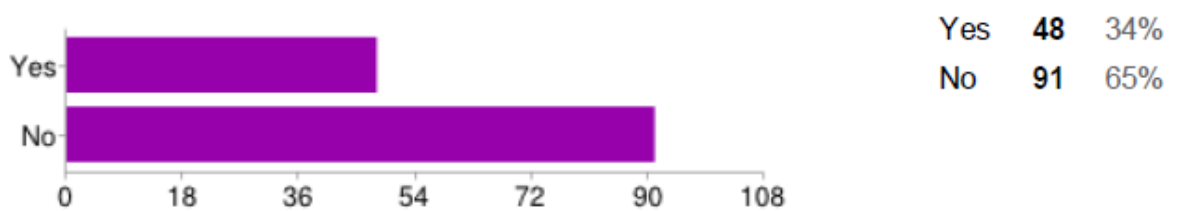
Chart 25: If no, do you think one would be needed?



Source: author's own field survey, march/ april 2012.

- 3) Following this first investigation of working conditions through an analysis of working time and rhythms, the survey also aims at capturing aspects related to safety and security of the workplace. To start with, when asked whether they consider their workstation as potentially risky, 34% of the workers answered yes. This is evident from chart 26 below.

Chart 26: Do you consider your workstation as potentially risky?

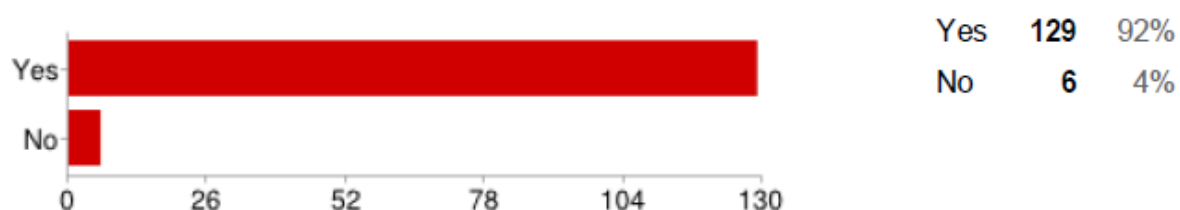


Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Breaking the respondents down by company, the majority of workers worried about the level of risk connected to their workstation seems to belong to companies O1, V1 and V2. While some of them raise concerns related to the actual nature of the task they perform (i.e. hot & humid environment in the casting and welding departments, loud noises on the press shop, dangers deriving from proximity to high voltage etc.), workers from company O1 expressly denounce the lack of EH&S measures, the poor maintenance of workstations, the absence of exit doors. Interestingly, workers from company O6 complain about the lack of space around the workstation, about a

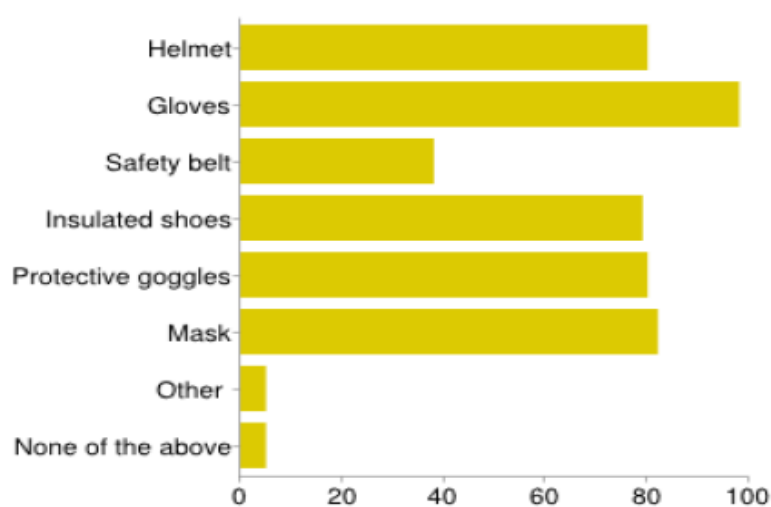
congested workplace and a ‘not good working method’. Respondents from V1 and V2 also report that their machines do not comply with safety measures. Even more worrisome, despite the 92% of respondents claiming that the employer supplies safety equipment (see charts 27 and 28), is the number of reported accidents.

Chart 27: Is safety equipment arranged by your employer?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

Chart 28: If yes, which of the following items are provided by your employer?

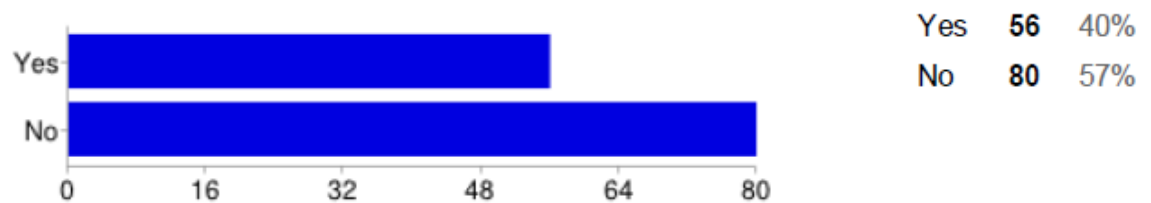


Helmet	80	57%
Gloves	98	70%
Safety belt	38	27%
Insulated shoes	79	56%
Protective goggles	80	57%
Mask	82	59%
Other	5	4%
None of the above	5	4%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Indeed, considering the relatively limited population under investigation, the number of respondents who declare to have experienced an accident on their workstation appears particularly high. This can be noted in chart 29.

Chart 29: have you ever had any accident on your workstation?

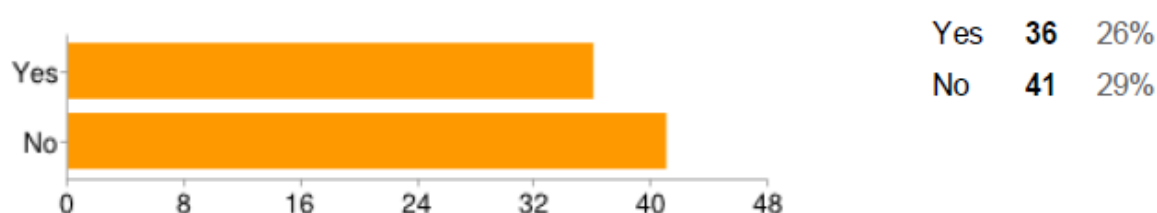


Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Company-wise, the incidence of injuries and accidents on the workplace proves to be higher in companies O1, O6, V1 and V2. In company O1, while the majority of accidents is attributed to the risk connected to the machine or the job performed (i.e. lifting heavy loads), workers also relate their causes to the lack of safety in the plant and the excessive pressure put by supervisors to finish tasks in order to comply with targets. Respondents point to the lack of safety measures, at the absence of proper guidelines that allow supervisors on the line to impose an overly fast pace, and at the potentially wrong disposition of machines on the line.¹³⁸ The issue of accidents being caused by the extreme speed required on the line is raised also in company O2. With regard to the kind of incident reported, most injuries involve cuts and fractures to hands and fingers (especially in welding departments and in the press shop), hand and chest burns (in the casting department). In terms of damage caused, 26% of the respondents described it as serious or permanent.

¹³⁸ For example, due to fans being placed at a low height, a worker reports it is easy to hit them and incur hand accidents.

Chart 30: Did it cause any permanent/serious damage?

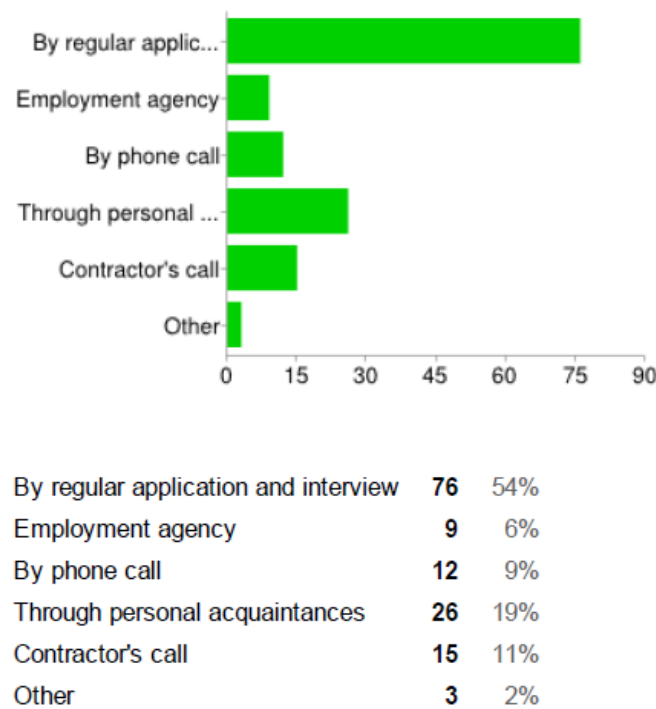


Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

The exploration of working conditions within our sample continues through an analysis of recruitment and contractual conditions of the workers. Here, an introductory clarification may be important. The process of sampling was mediated by trade unionists and unionised workers who acted as ‘gatekeepers’. Hence, the sample is effectively biased towards including a significant percentage of unionised workers. This means also that the sample includes a majority of workers on a permanent contract, as by law contract/ casual workers are still denied union membership. In this sense, the proportion of casual labour out of the total sample analysed does not correspond to the broader picture, neither at plant level, nor at regional/cluster level, with reference to the NCR. While this could be identified as a limitation of this analysis (see also chapter 4), it is also its strength. In fact, the analysis shows the many processes of casualisation and work intensification that are also at work against the so-called ‘labour aristocracy’ of the sector. Moreover, data related to the percentage of contract workers and the increasing casualisation that has affected certain plants are extracted from interviews, in order to complement the survey findings. Attention to both permanent and casual work is particularly relevant when examining recruitment processes, contractual relations, and firing, suspension or dismissal procedures. These are analysed below.

For what concerns modes of recruitment, the majority of workers claimed that they had been hired through formal application and interview. Indeed, this is likely to affect young workers in particular, whereby auto companies often build strong connections with I.T.Is and technical schools, where they recruit fresh graduates through regular calls and interviews. Also, this is more likely to occur in OEMs, while small suppliers more often rely on informal hiring procedures. However, with reference to our sample, we cannot distinguish different recruitment processes in OEMs and vendors, as the answers given are overly heterogeneous (see chart 31).

Chart 31: How were recruited for your current position?



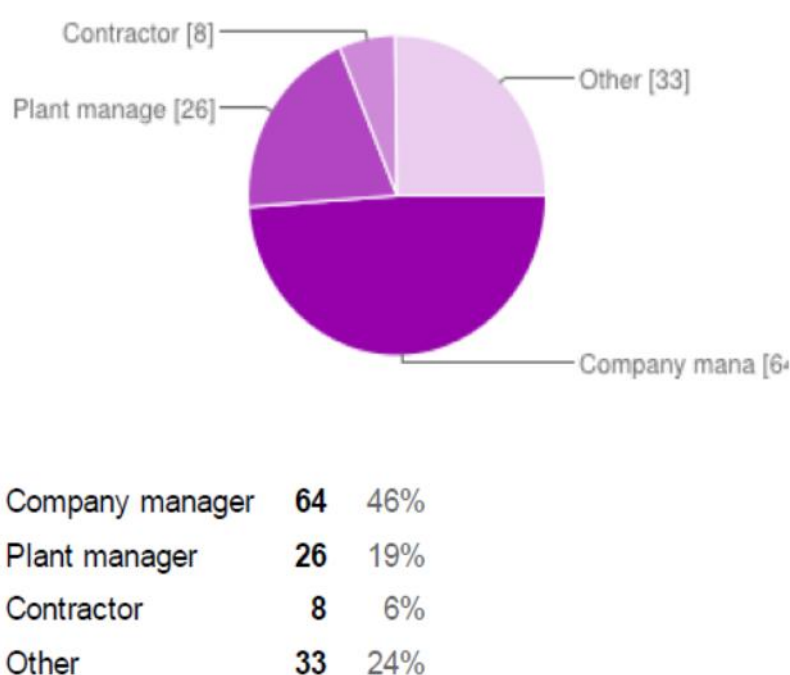
As we can observe in chart 31, despite a majority of respondents reporting formal (application-based) recruitment procedures or the presence of official employment agencies, there is almost one

Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

third of workers who declare they were hired via more ‘informal’ means, such as phone calls, personal acquaintances, or contractors. Amongst these, 11% are in fact contract workers.

However, when data describing the recruitment process are cross-checked with the questions where workers were asked to indicate their employer and the kind of contract they have, the picture obtained looks highly varied. For example, when asked to identify their employer, only 6% of the respondents refer to a contractor, while for 24% the employer figure is neither the contractor nor a manager.

Chart 32: Which of the following best describes your employer?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

The proliferation and the overlapping of managerial/supervisory roles on the shop floor is such that workers themselves do not know exactly who their boss is and who is responsible for their work.¹³⁹ A worker, for example, answered, '*there is lots of*

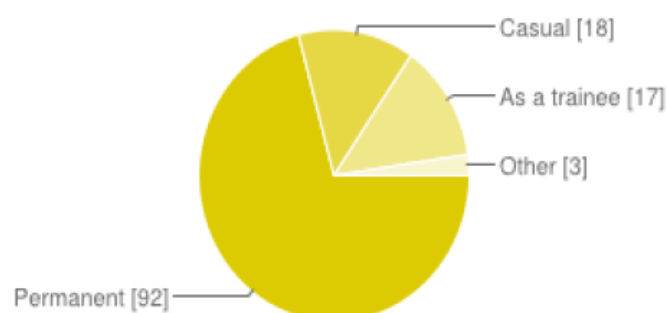
¹³⁹ Especially with the adoption of Japanese management and lean production techniques, the required division in teams and units has been accompanied by a multiplication of team leaders and supervisors the workers need to refer to.

managers. I don't know who is boss. Our boss is P.. ' (and provides an individual name) (author's own survey, march/april 2012). This would be confirmed by the long list of 'other' employers, reported by 24% of the workers. Other employers may include supervisors, shift in-charge, area in-charge, heads of department, those indicated as 'foremen', engineers, etc.

In relation to the type of contract these workers have, while the majority of permanent workers may reflect the induced bias discussed in relation to union's mediation, the composition is nonetheless mixed.

Chart 33: What kind of contract do you currently have?

As we can observe in chart 33 to the right, besides a 66% of workers on permanent contracts, there are also a 13% of casual /temporary workers and a 12% of apprentices/ trainees.



Overall, both casual workers (including contract workers) and trainees perceive lower salaries,

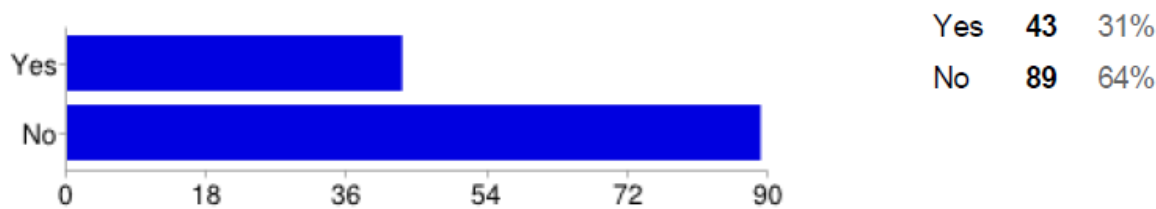
Permanent	92	66%
Casual	18	13%
As a trainee/ apprentice	17	12%
Other	3	2%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

enjoy less job security and benefits, and cannot be union members. However, while the majority of permanent workers might suggest a considerable percentage of stable, secure contracts, the actual situation in terms of written contracts is somewhat puzzling. When asked whether they signed an employment contract, in fact, a large

majority of workers, even many of those claiming to enjoy a permanent position, respond negatively (chart 34).

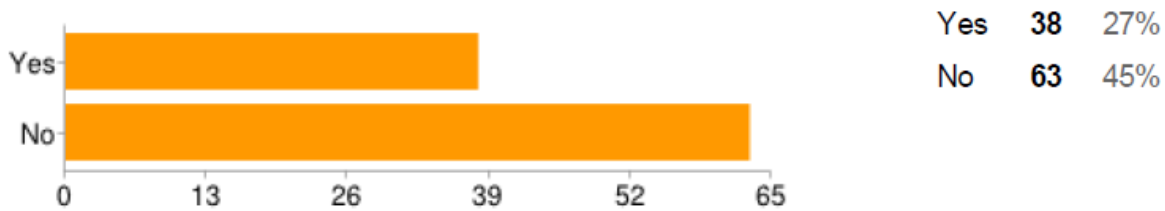
Chart 34: Did you sign an employment contract for your current position?



Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

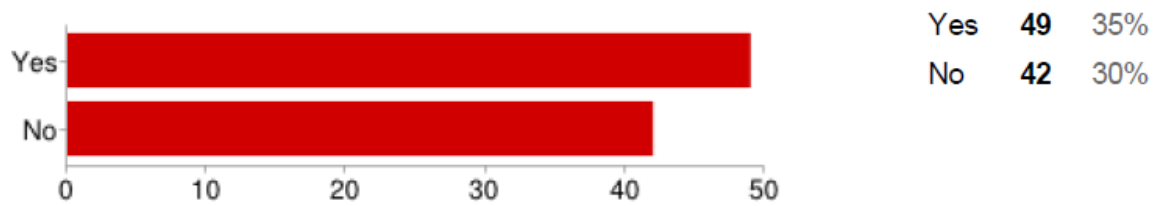
In this sense, where workers claim to benefit from a permanent contract but have signed no written agreement, it seems likely that they received only verbal communication regarding their position, but possess no formal guarantee. Unions and interviewees also confirmed that this process is largely common. The uncertainty related to contractual conditions also emerges when addressing the specification of terms and tasks implied in the contract. For example, 45% of the respondents claimed that terms and conditions of the signed contract (or of the verbal arrangement, a larger sub-sample in fact) were not clear when they started the job, and 30% declared that they were performing tasks different from those specified in the contract. These can be observed in charts 35 and 36 below.

Chart 35: Were terms and conditions of the contract clear when you signed it?



Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 36: Are you currently performing exactly the tasks stated in the above contract?



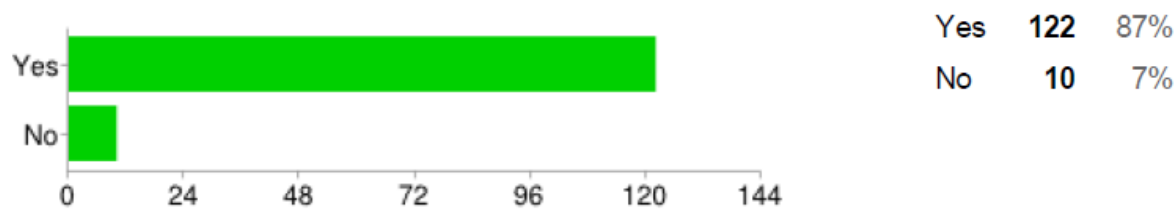
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

In relation to chart 36, responses collected from those who affirm they are carrying out different tasks, are particularly interesting. Amongst these, a few respondents declare they are doing *'all kinds of work'*. One says: *'I do not know anything about it. I got into this work through my contacts, I work under the contractor'*, another declares that he *'was appointed for electrician's job and then they made me Diesel operator, that too without departing any training. Training was given after 6 years'* (author's own survey, marc/april 2012). Beyond the uncertainty associated with vague employment conditions and the mis-specification of tasks, what these answers suggest is rather critical. First, they indicate the flexibility required from the worker, who is appointed for a specific task, but then asked to perform many different ones. Second, the answers also highlight the risks of demanding flexibility without providing adequate training. In this scenario, workers do not only risk to poorly execute the job they were not meant to do, but they are also exposed to higher health and safety risks leading to accidents and injuries.¹⁴⁰ Third, the casual nature of contracts suggests that workers are trained for specific tasks only long after the start of the employment relationship. Fourth, contract workers, who refer to a separate employer, are in fact treated as a 'detached' workforce within the same company.

¹⁴⁰ Well explained in the FIAT's case. See CRS, 2011; Monaco, 2015.

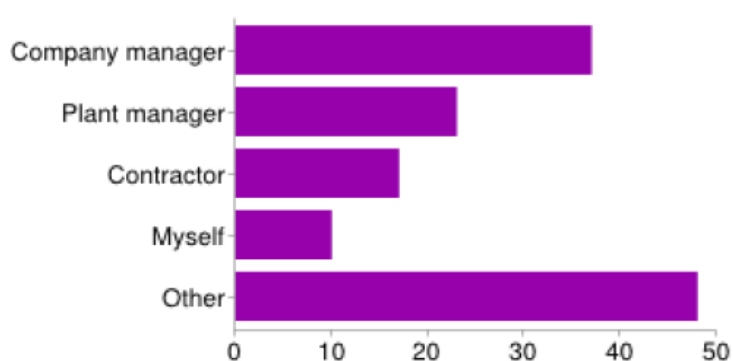
In order to further assess the regularity of the workers' position within the factory and their relationship with the employer (or the supervisor they refer to), the following factors were also considered: a) whether their name is listed on the attendance register; b) who keeps a record of their attendance; c) who takes responsibility in case issues or accidents occur in the workplace. Overall, these questions aimed at grasping the presence of unregistered workers, and the sort of relationship between the worker and their bosses. In fact, contractors may hire workers, pay them, but not always take any responsibility for either their conduct or working conditions or welfare. Responses are reported in charts 37, 38 and 39 below.

Chart 37: Is your name listed on the company/plant's attendance register?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

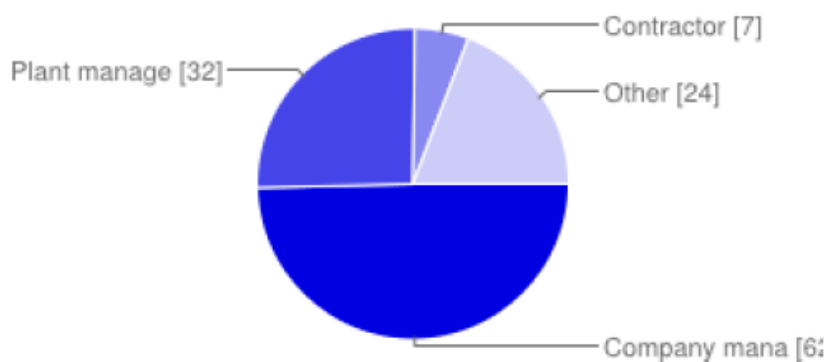
Chart 38: Who keeps a record of your attendance/ working hours?



Company manager	37	26%
Plant manager	23	16%
Contractor	17	12%
Myself	10	7%
Other	48	34%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 39: Who takes the responsibility in case any issue/ dispute / accident occurs on your workplace?



Company manager	62	44%
Plant manager	32	23%
Contractor	7	5%
Other	24	17%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

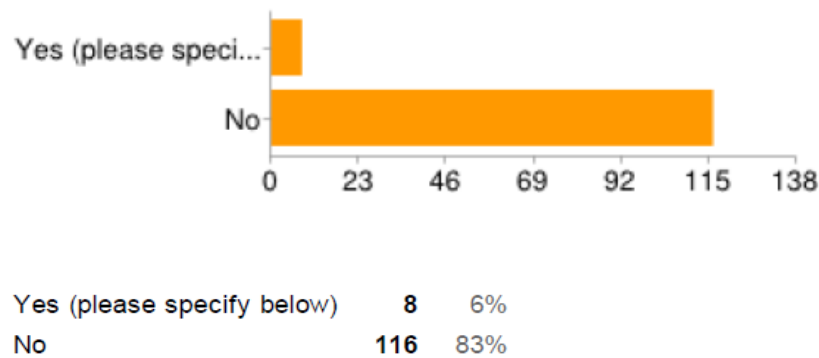
The data reported above also confirm the picture obtained when analysing the type of contract in relation to the identified employer. In effect, if on one side a large majority of the respondents claim their name is listed on the attendance register (chart 37), answers differ significantly with regard to who takes workers' attendance. Even more, if we focus on that 34% of workers indicating that someone 'other' than company and plant managers, contractors or themselves keeps the records, we learn that there can be several ways to check workers' presence. It can happen via HR managers, supervisors, time officers...and even through finger-punching machines. The same goes for the request of specifying employers. Also in this case some workers report confusion due to the high number of supervisors/ managers on the shop floor. Likewise, when asked to indicate who is responsible for issues occurring on the workplace, despite a majority pointing at managers, and only a low 5% of the sample referring to contractors, a significant 17% mention other roles.¹⁴¹ As far as contractors are concerned, the low figure does not necessarily imply their relative absence. It may also indicate that contractors may hire workers, take their attendance and remunerate them, without taking any other responsibility over shop floor issues, accidents and working conditions. On this matter, a few workers either answer '*no one takes responsibility*', or '*everybody is responsible*', signalling an overall dispersal of liability (author's own survey, march/april 2012).

A last important point to conclude the analysis of contractual arrangements and power relations at the workplace, concerns firing or dismissal procedures. Only a small percentage of workers answered that they had been fired, suspended or dismissed in the past (chart 40), and the responses given are not fully reliable. However, some

¹⁴¹ These include supervisors, HR department, unit managers etc.

provide interesting insights. Notably, labour issues and union formation are explicitly reported as causes of suspension/ dismissal.

Chart 40: Have you ever been fired/dismissed/ suspended?

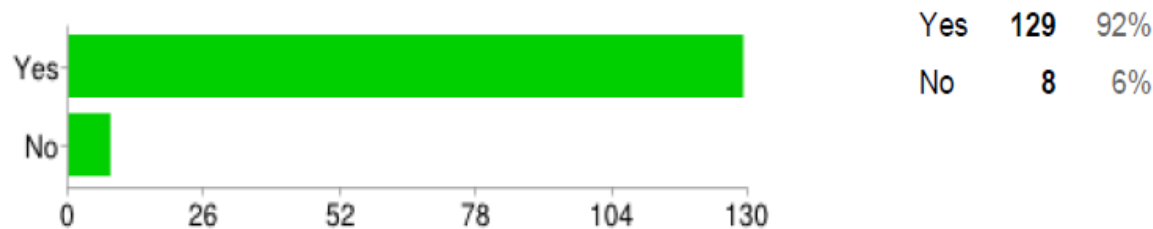


Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

4) In the last set of questions, the survey focused on modalities and regularity of wage payments. These questions do not only shed light on who pays the salary, but also clarify the relationship between workers and those they recognise as their bosses. As already mentioned, a more detailed discussion of salary levels is included in the section on living conditions.

Firstly, workers are asked whether they are regularly paid a salary. Here, the absolute majority answers positively (chart 41 below).

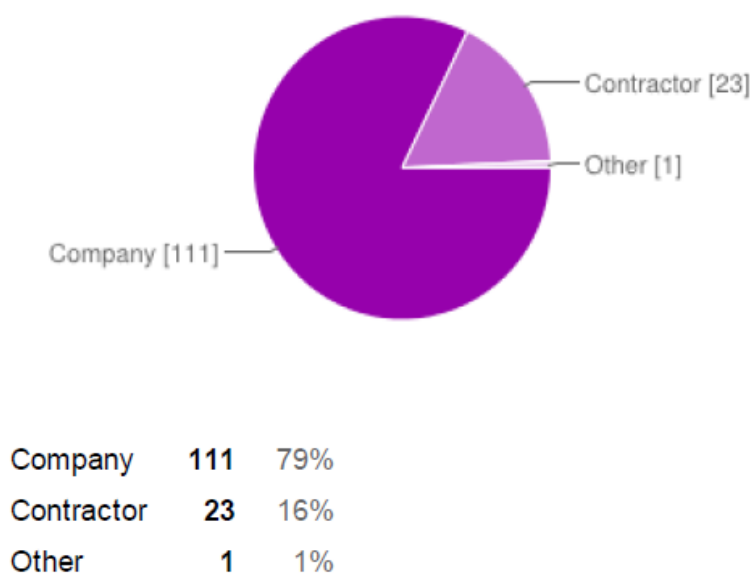
Chart 41: Are you regularly paid a salary?



Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

However, regularity in payments is not extremely telling if not cross-checked with the source of the transfer. For such reason, workers are also required to indicate who pays their salary. The map of the responses provided can be observed in chart 42.

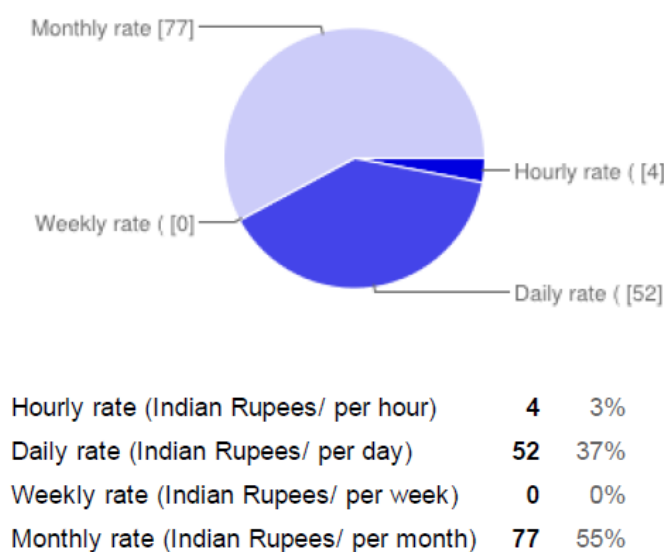
Chart 42: Who pays your salary?



Here, as we can see, the percentage of respondents who refer to contractors is higher. Finally, workers are also asked how their salary is calculated

and whether they ever experienced issues or delays with payments. Responses are reported in charts 43 and 44.

Chart 43: How is your salary calculated?



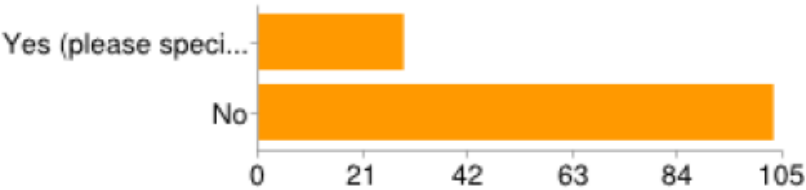
The percentage of workers declaring monthly payments is very significant, set at 77%. This seems to suggest payments regularity and stability. However, this

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

picture may change when one considers amounts, which are discussed in relation to overall salary levels in the following section.

Chart 44: Has it ever happened that your salary was not paid or delayed?

A significant proportion of workers report irregularities and delays in salary payments, (21%). Some workers expressly report that delays and



Yes (please specify circumstance below)	29	21%
No	103	74%

Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

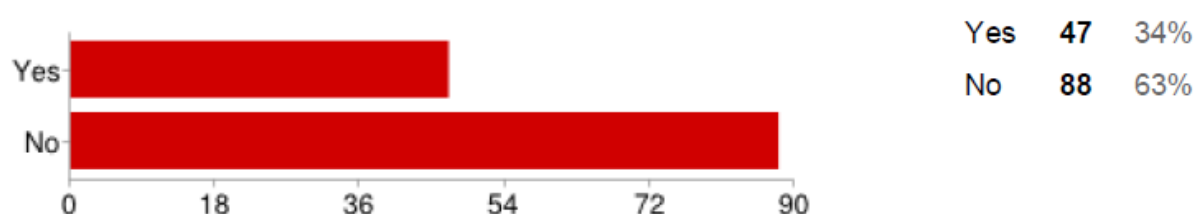
suspensions occurred during strike periods. Others report that salary cuts were arbitrarily implemented by the company during holidays, or that unjust deductions may depend on complaints made by Heads of Department.

5.3.2 Living Conditions

In order to gain a broader understanding of the social setting in which the working conditions analysed above are experienced, and of how they affect the life of the workers involved, the survey also attempted to map living conditions in the NCR. In particular, this section considers where workers live (distance and commuting time), salary levels in relation to family composition and average living expenses, and spare time activities. In addition, it also includes a focus on social benefits.

In the first place, workers’ residence is examined. In this regard, the vast majority of respondents declares to live far from the workplace. See chart 45.

Chart 45: Do you live nearby the plant?



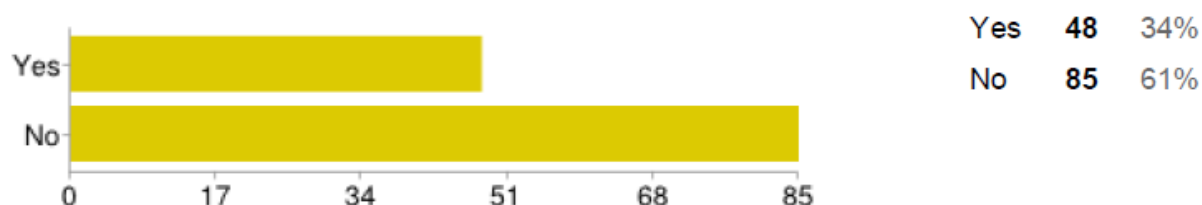
Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

On average, workers live at a 19.5 km distance from the plant, and take around 42 minutes to commute. Considering the extremes, there are workers living up to 90 km far from their workplace, and spending up to 120 minutes to travel to the factory. Needless to say, added to long shifts (made even longer in case of overtime) and exhausting workloads, long commuting times imply extra stress and fatigue, as well as more time deducted from the private sphere. In addition, whereas the company does not cover transport costs (according to what respondents report, casual workers are not entitled to corporate conveyance), longer commuting also means a further financial burden.

Within the investigation of living conditions, comparing salary levels in the light of family composition and living costs is crucial to understand workers' ability to satisfy their reproductive needs. For what concerns family composition, it has already been mentioned that the majority of respondents are married and with children (respectively, 70% and 66%, see charts 10 and 11 above). On average, families have 2-3 children (2.5 being the exact average). However, when respondents are asked to indicate the overall number of their family members, the average goes up to 6. This probably represents the frequent inclusion of members other than spouses and children within the nuclear family (often the elderly). When asked whether any other member of the

family earns a regular salary, the majority of the respondents answers negatively (chart 46 below).

Chart 46: Is any other member in your family perceiving a regular salary?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

With regard to salary levels, due to the extreme heterogeneity of responses and because of the large variations between groups, the data collected are broken down according to the following criteria: a) company category (OEMs / vendors considered together); b) single company; c) job performed (administration/service, supervision, production, engineering); d) gender; e) contract (permanent, casual, trainee/ apprentice). For groups *a-d*, maximum and minimum values are extracted, so as to highlight the variation, for group *e* instead, averages are drawn.

Tab. 12 Min and max salary per group of companies (in INR per month)

Group	Min salary	Max salary
OEMs	4000	60000
Vendors	7000	28000

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Tab. 13 Min and max salary per single company (in INR per month)

Company	Min salary	Max salary
O1	7500	29167
O2	8000	18083
O3	13000	13000
O4	8000	12000
O5	4000	60000
O6	8300	58334
V1	7800	18000
V2	11000	15000
V3	7000	7000
V4	7200	12000
V5	8500	8500
V6	9200	9200
V7	12000	12000
V8	20000	20000
V9	9000	28000
V10	12300	12500
V11	10800	18000
V12	18000	18000
V13	10000	10000

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

From a first examination focusing on a single company as well as a group of companies, some initial observations can be derived. First, there is a huge disparity between minimum and maximum salaries. The gap is much wider in OEMs compared to vendors. Within these gaps, we range from salaries corresponding to about one fourth of the minimum wage set by the State of Haryana (15,000 INR) to four times the minimum wage. In pounds, recorded wages range from a minimum of 43 £ (4,000 INR) to a maximum of around 644 £ (60,000 INR). Second, however, we can note that the range is enormously widened by the maximum salaries registered in companies O5 and O6 (Faridabad), where the highest salaries are more than double than the equivalent in all other companies. This could be explained by several factors, like seniority accrued to workers in companies that have operated for a much longer period, or the more deeply rooted unionism in the area. The same is valid if we break values down according to job performed (tables 14 and 15). In order to show the ‘upward

distortion’ caused by the much higher salaries paid in Faridabad, we have first calculated extremes considering all companies together, and then excluded companies O5 and O6.

Tab. 14: Min and max salary per job performed (in INR per month, all companies)

Job	Min salary	Max salary
Administration/ service	4800	58333
Supervision	4500	60000
Production	4000	50000
Engineering	7000	18000

Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

Tab. 15: Min and max salary per job performed (in INR per month, excluding O5 and O6)

Job	Min salary	Max salary
Administration/ service	9200	20000
Supervision	9000	28000
Production	7200	29167
Engineering	7000	18000

Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

Hence, we can observe the following trends. First, we observe that again, excluding top salaries from Faridabad companies, even highest wages are almost halved. Second, that by excluding O5 and O6 the overall gap slightly reduces, whereby lowest salaries in all the other companies are not as low as in the OEMs we removed. As far as production jobs are concerned, this is due to a specific reason emerging from field visits and interviewes. In this case, the cause cannot be attributed to the type of employer or to stronger unions able to negotiate fairer deals. In fact, the lowest wages in O5 and O6 represent the remuneration of ‘helpers’ on the production line, a category of poorly paid ‘production assistants’ which is not reflected in the sample collected from the other factories. With regard to engineering jobs, which should generally benefit from higher remuneration compared to production or administrative tasks, the relatively low figures here represent entry-level positions (respondents are all very

young). Tellingly, the length of these arrangements can also be considerable. Finally, analysing salaries on the basis of gender and type of contract, other trends emerge, albeit figures are distorted due to the small size of observations focusing on women workers. For instance, a clear gender disparity in the highest wage category may be noted (table 16).

Tab. 16: Min and max salaries per gender (in INR per month)

Gender	Min salary	Max salary
Female	7200	48000
Male	4000	60000

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

As for the substantial gap that can be observed between minimum and maximum salaries, it is due to jobs of a different nature. For what concerns female respondents, for example, the lowest wage represents the remuneration for a production job in a vending company, while the highest value is the wage compensated for an administrative job in an OEM in Faridabad. Regarding male respondents, the lowest level is associated with one of the 'helper' roles mentioned before, while the highest salary is associated with the role of supervisor. Overall, it would be interesting to understand whether the better paid supervisory positions are predominantly assigned to men. Unfortunately, within this sample, where the percentage of female respondents is limited (although this confirms an overall composition, as the whole sector is largely male-dominated), such trend cannot be analysed (only one of the female respondents works as a supervisor, the other mainly in administration and service). Lastly, salaries are broken down per type of contract: permanent, casual, and as a trainee/ apprentice. In this case, averages were calculated, in order to highlight the relative advantage/ disadvantage of a group compared to the others. It emerges that on average, permanent workers receive 21,281 INR/month, casual workers 6,083 INR/month,

trainees/apprentices 11,050 INR/ month. Interestingly, four ‘outliers’ were spotted, namely supervisors declaring to work on casual terms. As these do not seem to share any other condition with the rest of casual workers, their average salary was calculated separately: this amounts to 38,750 INR/month. Overall, while trainees and apprentices are generally contracted for short term positions but should theoretically access a better paid post once their probation term is over, casual workers (this group included contract workers) often perform the same tasks as their permanent counterparts but receive much lower salaries, are not entitled to the same social benefits and cannot be union members.

With regard to the average wage disparity between permanent and casual workers (21,281/ 6,083), this properly reflects overall trends recorded in the NCR. While auto workers on permanent contracts are averagely better paid than factory workers in other industrial sectors, the relative disadvantage of casual workers is dramatic. They keep earning salaries way below the required minimum wage, they still have no political representation, and are bound by a ‘social divide’ that separates them from colleagues on permanent position as far as most social benefits are concerned (conveyance, insurances, pensions etc).

Once analysed salary levels, we can also get an idea of workers’ purchasing power, and the extent to which wages allow for the satisfaction of their reproductive needs by cross-checking salary data with average living expenses and social benefits. In terms of living expenses, we asked workers how much they spend on average on a monthly basis on housing (rent or building), food, medical care, transportation, education, and extras, if needed. The monthly averages are reported in table 17.

Tab. 17: Average monthly expenses (in INR)

Expenses	Monthly average
Housing	7211.34
Food	5266.67
Medical care	1310.00
Transportation	1590.21
Education	3647.37
Extra	3049.21
Tot.	22074.8

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012

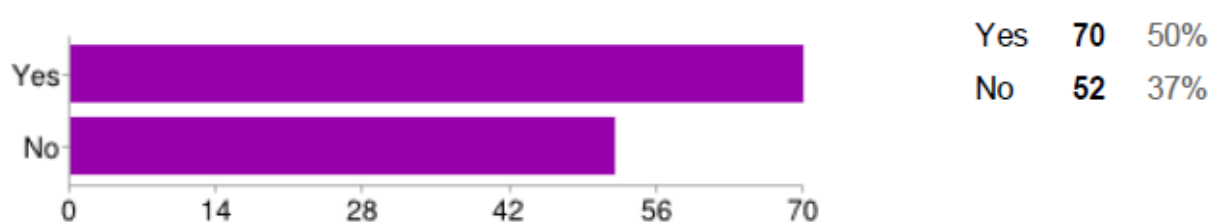
Although the amounts reported in table 17 represent averages, they are sufficiently explanatory and can lead to the immediate conclusion that the salary levels of casual/contract workers are absolutely inadequate, while those of trainees/apprentices are still well below the average living costs in the area. Of course, averages do not express the real gaps and the actual disparities in living standards that characterise the Gurgaon region. While old Gurgaon is still a village with poor housing, bad roads and transport and poor facilities, the newly built part of Gurgaon is connected to 'shining India' through the brand new Delhi metro. Malls and office buildings mushroom all around, and living costs skyrocket accordingly. For the same reason, the average housing expenses reported by workers vary massively, ranging from 1,000 to 47,000 INR, where 1,000 could be the cost of a room shared with 2, 3, 4 other workers in one of the villages close to the factory plants,¹⁴² and 47,000 indicate the rent for a whole family house, either in Faridabad or closer to the Delhi centre.

¹⁴² I had the chance to visit the Aliyar workers' village in Manesar in April 2012. I had the good fortune to go together with some of the people writing for the excellent blog *Gurgaon Workers News* (<https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/>). We visited workers' houses, took interviews, and received a warm and friendly welcome. Overall, the main advantage of living in these villages is the proximity to the factory, which allows workers to save on commuting times and costs. Rents are obviously cheaper than in Delhi – a room (to share) can be around 3,000-4,000 INR per month. However, houses end up being overcrowded, with contract workers sharing the same room with 2-3 others to reduce costs. Water and electricity provision is also worse than outside and the drainage system is almost non-existent (I also lived in a nearby village for a while, and a poor drainage system means that when it rains or during the Monsoon season the area gets completely flooded and all garbage surfaces).

For what concerns transportation, it must be noted that it makes a big difference whether the company provides conveyance or not: it is frequent in fact that workers demand a transport subsidy amongst urgent needs.

Following an analysis of salary levels and living costs, our investigation of living conditions also explores the distribution of social benefits, including Gratuity, PF/ESIC scheme (the two most common benefits provided to industrial workers), and insurance funds. Gratuity is a benefit plan that only full time employees can enjoy (working at least 240 days in a year); it is a contribution paid by the employer that can be accumulated as a retirement fund, or received as a severance package upon leaving a job. Provident Fund (PF) and Employee's State Insurance (ESIC scheme) are further contributions that can be either deducted from a salary¹⁴³ (if above 6,500 INR/pm) or should be paid extra from the employer to all employees receiving 15,000 INR or less per month. These cover health insurance and medical care. With regard to our sample, the coverage of workers under these schemes can be observed in charts 47 and 48.

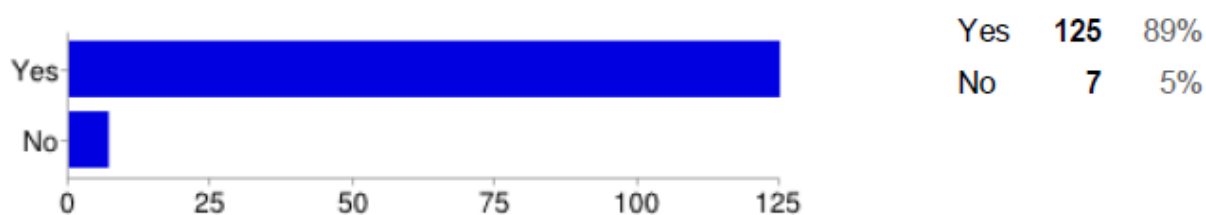
Chart 47: Are you entitled to any Gratuity?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

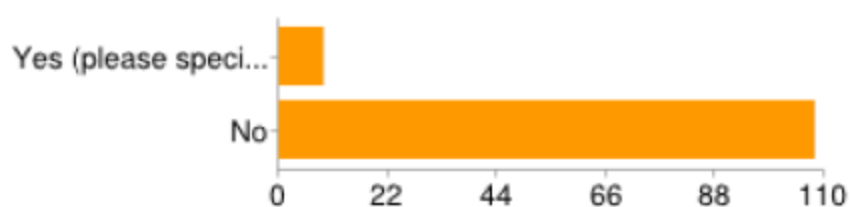
¹⁴³ The ESIC scheme should consist of a 6.5% deduction, of which 1.75 charged to the worker and 4.75 paid by the employer. The PF corresponds to 12% of the gross salary.

Chart 48: Do you have access to PF/ESIC schemes?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

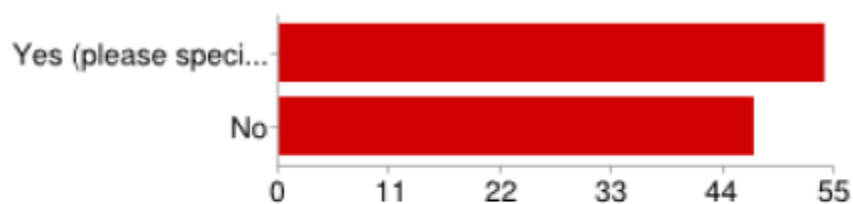
Chart 49: Do you benefit of any other social scheme?



Yes (please specify below)	9	6%
No	108	77%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 50: Do you have any insurance?



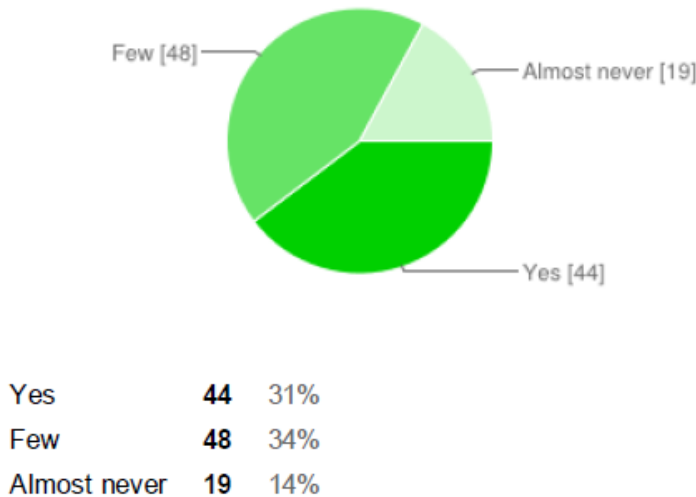
Yes (please specify below)	54	39%
No	47	34%

Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

As we can see, the coverage by PF/ESIC schemes is much wider than the Gratuity distribution. However, this does not necessarily mean that the employer is contributing to such fund, whereas all those receiving a salary lower than 6,500¹⁴⁴ are supposed to be entitled to Government subsidy. With regard to the Gratuity scheme, the vast portion of workers excluded from such benefit seems to indicate a very poor coverage of retirement/ pension funds. Finally, for what concerns insurance benefits, an interesting factor is that a quite significant percentage of those responding positively also report to be covered by a private insurance package (like LIC life insurance, or Bharti AXA, amongst others).

The last question addressed to workers in order to understand their ‘quality of life’, is whether they had spare time and what they liked to do once out of the factory gates. Responses are reported below, in chart 51.

Chart 51: Do you generally have spare time?



A majority claims to have little or almost no spare time. However, it is interesting to read through responses regarding preferred activities.

Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

¹⁴⁴ The threshold should have now been increased to 7500, but only for larger companies. Updates have not been confirmed yet.

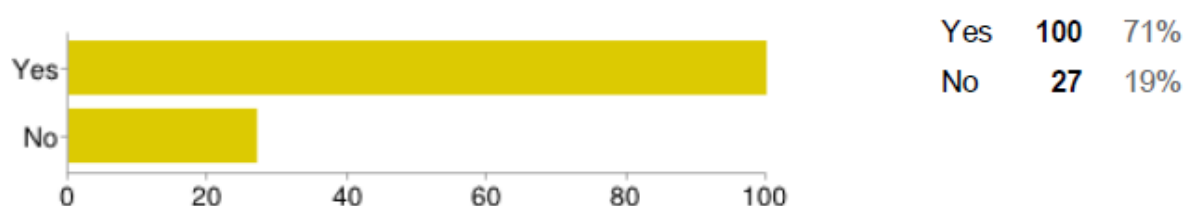
Apart from many answers related to spending time with family and children, and a number of complaints regarding *‘having no free time at all’*, the remaining basically include *‘relax’*, *‘rest’*, *‘sleep’* and the like – indicating an evident physical exhaustion.

5.3.3 Labour rights and organisation

After mapping working and living conditions of the selected sample of workers, the third objective of the survey was to explore their level of organisation and unionisation, in order to ultimately test their awareness toward their own working situation, and to broadly grasp what they would consider as a priority to improve it. As we mentioned earlier, the modalities of sample selection may have determined the percentage of unionisation within the sample itself, since main facilitators were union leaders and union members. This percentage, overall, does not correspond to the degree of unionisation inside single plants or within the NCR. In addition, this is the section where the number of valid answers was relatively lower, probably because union-related questions may have been considered of a more sensitive nature, thus restricting workers’ propensity to engage.

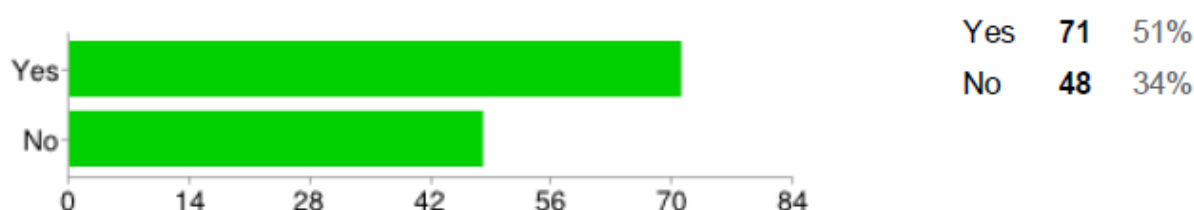
Respondents were first asked whether they know a union exists in their plant, whether this is affiliated to a National Centre (CTUOs, Central Trade Union Organisations) and, in case of negative answer, whether they thought a union was needed. Answers are reported on the next page (charts 52, 53 and 54).

Chart 52: As far as you’re aware, is there any labour union inside your plant?



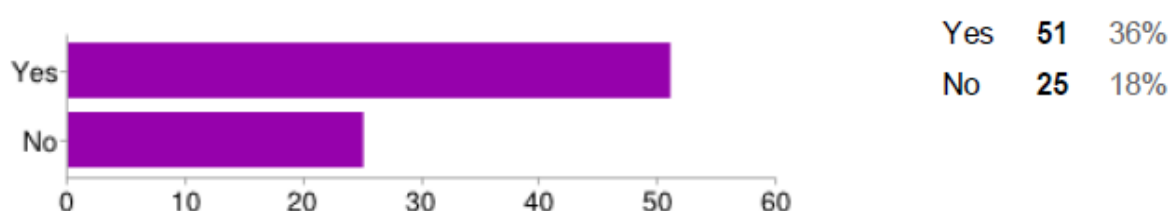
Source: author’s own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 53: If yes, is this affiliated to any National Centre?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

Chart 54: If no, do you think one would be needed?



Source: author's own field survey, march/april 2012.

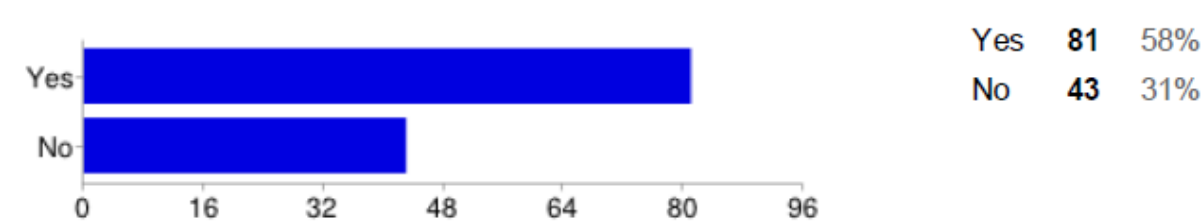
Observing the charts above, we can draw some remarks. First, while a majority of workers acknowledge the existence of a union, there is also almost a fifth of the sample who is either unaware of it, or claims there is no union in their plant. The latter option is in fact possible, as few of the recent struggles occurred in the NCR have exactly revolved around the demand to establish a union where none was there. Second, we can note that only half of the respondents acknowledge the affiliation of the existing union to a National Centre. This could either be a signal of relative independence, in the aftermath of the debate on union independence and the critiques addressed to National Centres,¹⁴⁵ or else a negative sign. In fact, the proliferation of detached, plant-based unions has also been one of the causes behind the process of weakening of collective bargaining. Third, it is interesting to mention the explanations provided by those who report no union in their plants, in relation to if they thought a union was

¹⁴⁵ This point will be expanded in the next chapter.

needed (chart 54). Those claiming a union should be formed, for example, assert that *'they will fight for our rights'*, *'because after this, workers will not be exploited. No worker who is honestly working will be victim of exploitation'*, and *'if union is there, our rights will not be taken away. Company can not impose anything on us forcefully'* (author's own survey, 2012). Also, some openly state that current union leaders should be replaced because of inexperience, and that a union exists but should be replaced as it is a 'pocket union'. By this, they indicate those unions either directly chosen and appointed by management, or in collusion with management. On the other side, some of those who declare a union is not needed mention that the *'company doesn't want one'*, and that *'it's bad for company's growth'*. The latter set of responses show that anti-union narratives can also be embraced by workers themselves.

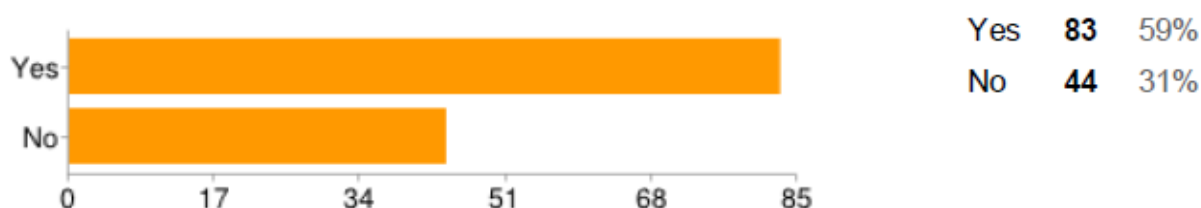
As a second step, workers were asked whether they were personally members of a union, and whether they tend to refer to union leaders. Alternatively, they could indicate other key figures they rely on in case of disputes or accidents. Responses can be observed in charts 55 and 56.

Chart 55: Are you personally member of a union?



Source: author's own field survey, march /april 2012.

Chart 56: In both cases, do you ever refer to union leaders in case issues/disputes/ accidents occur in your plant?

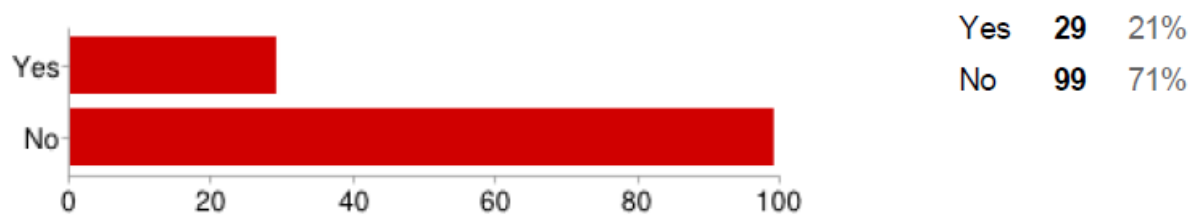


Source: author's own field survey, march /april 2012.

As we can see from chart 54, the degree of unionisation within the analysed sample is substantially high. We have already discussed the possible bias that might have influenced such value. With regard to whether workers refer to union leaders, the majority of positive answers may reflect two factors. First, a relation of trust toward existing leaders. In Faridabad, meetings held with both unionists and workers inside both factory plants and union offices suggest high levels of trust. Second, there is also a significant portion of casual workers and trainees who, by definition, cannot subscribe to a union, but may need support or guidance in case of workplace issues. Those workers who do not refer to union leaders may contact contractors, HR officers, shift-in-charge (supervisors), managers, department personal managers. Two workers report that they '*don't refer this type of condition*' (i.e. they don't report labour issues in case they happen) or that they '*can't tell it to anyone otherwise they will be thrown away from the company*', expressly emphasising a climate of fear and imposed silence (author's own survey, 2012).

Questions on disputes or protests allow us to understand workers' priorities in relation to their working and living conditions. In terms of labour disputes, approximately 20% of the workers reported there had been one at their workplace (chart 57).

Chart 57: Have there recently been disputes at your workplace?



Source: author's own field survey, marc/april 2012.

As for the reasons leading to disputes, these can be many, such as, for instance, the use of facilities (toilets and bathrooms); the lack of a company transport service; excessive workloads; management's rigidity and authoritarian behaviour; or shift changes.

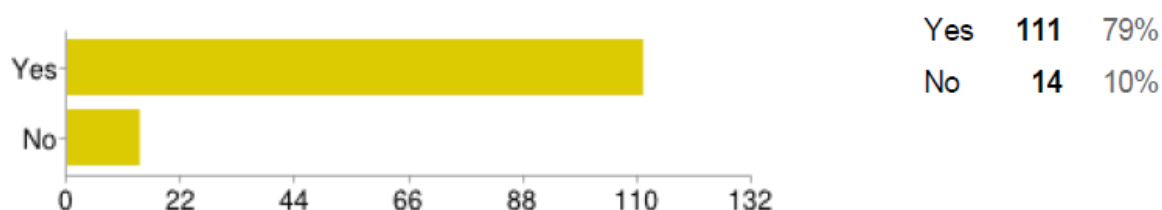
In order to test workers' exposure to broader labour issues, and to nation-wide demands, respondents were also asked their views on the General Strike that had recently taken place on 28th February 2012. This strike had wide resonance, as it was *'the first joint strike since Indian independence'*, gathering all major union federations and over a million workers across the country.¹⁴⁶ On that occasion, for the first time in years, different unions gathered on a common platform, and put forward core demands. These included curbing inflation and an increased minimum wage; the extension of social security schemes, the abolition of contract labour and regular registration procedures for trade unions.¹⁴⁷ Within our sample, a vast majority of the respondents

¹⁴⁶ In the words of CITU Delhi union officer, interviewed on Feb 29th 2012. Although other General Strikes were organised before, that seems to have been the first one where even centre and right-wing unions adhered to the agreed demands.

¹⁴⁷ The General Strike on 28th February 2012 was supported by all major national trade unions, including AITUC, BMS, INTUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, AICTTU, UTUC, TUCC, LPF, SEWA. The common platform was based on the following ten demands: 1) contain price rise; 2) concrete measures for creation of employment; strict enforcement of all basic labour laws; 4) universal social security cover for unorganised sector workers; 5) stoppage of disinvestment in socially strategic PSUs (Public Sector Undertakings); 6) regularisation of contract workers; 7) fixation of statutory minimum wage at no less than 10,000 INR (for Haryana, due to higher living costs, this was set at 15,000); 8) removal of all ceilings for the payment of bonuses, provident fund, gratuity; 9) assured pension for all; 10) compulsory registration of all unions within a period of 45 days and immediate ratification of ILO conventions n. 87 and 98. See AITUC (2012). General Strike demands were also discussed during interviews with Ms Sindhu, CITU Delhi (29/2/2012), Mr Mody, NTUI (1/3/2012), Mr Raju, INTUC Secretary (14/3/2012), Mr Mahadevan, AITUC Secretary (24/8/2012).

claimed to have read about the General Strike and to agree with its demands (see chart 58 below).

Chart 58: Have you read about the last General Strike at national level?



Source: author's own field survey, marc/april 2012.

Out of the total number of responses, only 3.6% disagrees with the General Strike, while an impressive 96.4% is in accordance with the demands advanced. Within this 96.4%, workers share solidarity with most of the core demands, and particularly underline those related to minimum wage and control of inflation. For example, some of the answers include, *'minimum wage should be Rs 15,000. Those working on contract should be made regular'*, *'Inflation should be reduced, salary should be increased'*, *'Wages should increase in proportion with inflation'*, *'Yes. There is so much inflation, income is stagnated at Rs.4000 since 3-4 years, there are funds and tax too'*. And also *'I agree, because workers are harassed a lot'*, *'Yes, because workers are troubled too much by management'*, *'Yes, because it's right of the workers to form the union'* (author's own survey, 2012).

To conclude the survey, workers were asked to describe the most urgent and serious issues affecting their company/plant, and what they would consider as a priority in order to improve their working and living conditions. Answers were numerous and varied. On the first point, among pressing problems, they listed low salaries, excessive use of contract labour, lack of safety in the workplace, poor facilities, lack of housing and transport provision, lack of proper managerial skills and authoritarian attitudes

from management. On this last issue, for example, answers recorded that *'the most serious issue or problem in the company is that no senior officer behaves properly with subordinates, nor talk gently'*, *'management lacks ability to make workers work properly, therefore tussles happen'*. *'it's company's dictatorship'* (author's own survey, 2012). Along the same lines, respondents also expressed what their priorities would be in order to achieve better working and living conditions. Here, they voiced the need of being provided housing and transport, additional safety equipment, the need to increase minimum wages and to end the contract labour system, and the need for 'training' management to handle workers... *'the day company management takes up our problems with all sincerity and seriousness, solutions will be there automatically'*, a worker interviewed concluded (author's own survey, 2012).

5.4 Issues at stake

Trying to extract main issues at stake from the wide and complex picture the conducted survey yielded, is not an easy task. As we described at the beginning, the Indian labour market per se embodies such numerous segmentations and differences that identifying core problems or deriving political or normative guidelines to ameliorate the overall working conditions of the workforce in its totality may be an extremely arduous endeavour. However, the present survey aimed to highlight some key features that may contribute to both a political and theoretical understanding of the workforce, of its needs and demands. In addition, the scope of the analysis was also to show the methodological relevance of a labour-centred investigation mapping labour

composition within a broader analysis of capital-labour relations in a specific socio-political context.

With respect to the overall findings of this study, the most significant aspects, particularly in relation to an understanding of struggle dynamics, are the following. First, the survey indicates the similarities in workloads and rhythms between the Indian auto industry and the rest of the global auto industry,¹⁴⁸ within an overall subjugation to global capital strategies informed by the needs of the lean production system. In this sense, the excessive speed, the stretched working shifts, the physical burden Indian workers witness and report, is experienced on a world scale, it is a clear manifestation of global capital imperatives to increase profits while controlling labour. However, second, the survey also aimed to shed some light on the peculiarities making the Indian NCR case somewhat unique – both in terms of labour standards and in terms of living conditions. Looking in this direction, the widespread use of contract labour, the enormous wage disparities, the hardships experienced in the workers' daily life, are dramatic and compelling. Third, the analysis reveals the relevance of the particular composition of the workforce in explaining struggles. Especially in the Gurgaon area we found a generation of young, educated, skilled workers, mostly with no experience of unionism and struggle, however with clear aspirations to a better life compared to earlier generations of workers. Such aspirations clash with the pressures imposed by the lean production system. In fact, how labour reacts to this scenario, and how institutions deal with working class demands, is subject of the next chapter.

¹⁴⁸ See for example the study on the Pomigliano FIAT plant (CRS, 2011; Monaco, 2015).

Chapter 6

Labour struggles in the NCR

Introduction

Within the present research, the decision to focus on the National Capital Region, and on the Capital-Labour relations that have shaped its industrial development, was not at all accidental. The scope and the relevance of the industrial conflicts that have shaken the region in the last ten-fifteen years, inscribed into its growth trajectory, make it in fact a paradigmatic case epitomising the inner contradictions of both the lean manufacturing system and the Indian capitalist model. In this respect, while the industrial hub built around the National Capital Region has come to represent one of the ‘gems’ of the fast-growing, ‘shining’ Asian giant, it has also recently shown the weaknesses of a model erected on dangerously shaky grounds. In particular, the labour composition investigated in the previous chapter, and the political strategies aimed at keeping labour fragmented, have proven to be recipes that cannot guarantee indefinite success. This chapter tries to make it clear, analysing how labour reacted and developed an independent political subjectivity nevertheless. Indeed, if *‘knowledge is tied to struggle’* (Tronti, 2006), as we believe and have claimed throughout this work, then the struggles occurred in the NCR are incredibly revealing – and therefore worth exploring. Their investigation may certainly help disclosing capital strategies, whereby the Japanese model based on lean manufacturing and management is not infallible, and Capital attempts to control Labour may fail. Secondly, an analysis of struggles may shed light on processes of working class formation, on modes of labour organising, and on the role, and power, of labour institutions. In this sense, the way

existing trade unions have dealt with ‘conflict management’ in the NCR distinctly unveils weaknesses and limitations of the Indian union movement. Finally, the interventions enacted to suppress the conflict, with the involvement of specific modalities of repression and retaliation, uncover the relationship between State and Capital, laying bare issues related to institutional responsibility, violence, and rights violation. All this will be told in the following sections. After briefly touching upon the most salient traits of past and present struggles that hit the NCR, the focus will be concentrated on the dispute that affected Maruti-Suzuki since 2011. Indeed, the demands raised through the Maruti protest, the dynamics of struggle and repression that marked the case, set a major milestone in the history of Indian labour and industrial relations.

6.1 Struggles in the NCR and the Maruti – Suzuki dispute: core issues and demands

As we mentioned while analysing working and living conditions in the NCR, this area is composed by two main industrial conglomerates surrounding the cities of Gurgaon and Faridabad, in the state of Haryana, bordering Delhi. Faridabad is a city of older industrial formation, dominated by the large Yamaha, Escorts and JCB plants, characterised by an older and more experienced workforce enjoying relatively better working conditions, and by peaceful industrial relations, supervised by the collaborative HMS (Hind Mazdoor Sabha) - affiliated unions.¹⁴⁹ Overall, no major

¹⁴⁹ The HMS is the third largest union federation in India, counting more than 3 million members across the country. It is politically affiliated to the Socialist Party. In Faridabad, the strongest union is the HMS-affiliated All Escorts Employees’ Union (AEEU), which gathers members from all Escorts plants, JCB, India Fortis Hospital, Yamaha. Several interviews were taken in Faridabad with Mr Surya Dev Tyagi, AEEU President and long-term figure of the NCR labour movement.

disruption nor industrial dispute occurred in the past decade, and local unions maintain a rather strong hold of the territory. Gurgaon experienced instead definitely turbulent years, reaching the highest peak of industrial conflict in 2011-12, when intense and prolonged unrest shook the Maruti-Suzuki plant in Manesar. Given the features of Gurgaon's industrial structure, and considering the particular labour composition we highlighted in the previous chapter, understanding causes and dynamics of struggle in this area is of crucial importance. Certainly, the scope and the magnitude of the most recent labour protests came as a surprise. Gurgaon is in fact an only recently industrialised area, where large OEMs opened their manufacturing plants only in the last 10-15 years, generally hiring a young workforce - at their first employment and with no memory or experience of previous struggles, and where unions are not historically rooted. Counting all the ingredients of a perfect *greenfield* location, companies investing in the area seemed attracted by the possibility of combining a potentially docile workforce with scarce unionisation – what better recipe for success.

Unfortunately, capital, and foreign investors', expectations were not met. Capital strategies in the area faced opposition already in 2000, when a first, powerful agitation struck the former Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL) plant in Gurgaon. A massive protest at Honda followed shortly after, in 2005. Another broke out at the RICO vending company in 2009. And then the industrial conflict reached its acme in 2011-12, with the unprecedented strikes that shook the Maruti (now Maruti Suzuki India Limited, MSIL) Manesar plant.¹⁵⁰ Overall, important lessons can be learnt from these struggles, and both theoretical and political conclusions can be drawn if we consider the composition of the protesters, forms of organising and main claims forwarded. While

¹⁵⁰ From an interview with a representative from NTUI Haryana, 22/03/2012.

the first two will be discussed throughout the next sections, here is it worth dwelling upon core issues and demands emerged from the Gurgaon strikes. As we are going to argue, these help challenging, on one side, the universal applicability of the lean paradigm and the efficacy of the rhetorical apparatus that accompanies it; on the other, the sustainability of a local labour regime nested on certain political and institutional settings and a certain system of industrial relations.

Indeed, while the whole Gurgaon cluster developed around the myth of the 'Maruti revolution' (see Ishigami, 2004), alluding to the way the partnership with Suzuki channelled the introduction of the Japanese management and manufacturing model, its tenets were rapidly debunked. Today, Maruti still proudly founds its management and production strategies on the principles of *Total Quality Management*, of the *kaizen* methodology aiming at achieving continuous improvements through the involvement of all workers, on *team work* and a *just-in-time* structure.¹⁵¹ However, already in 2000, Maruti workers denounced harsh working conditions on the line, harassment on behalf of managers and supervisors, punishments and retaliations following the strike months (PUDR, 2001; 2007), laying bare the actual meaning of the managerial changes implemented and the reality concealed behind them.

Beginning with a protest against an incentive wage scheme arbitrarily introduced by the management,¹⁵² the Maruti strike in 2000 already highlighted a regime based on strict labour controls, on the forced depoliticisation of the workforce and on management-State connivance in the modalities of repression.¹⁵³ Indeed, a system far

¹⁵¹ From an interview with a Maruti Suzuki India Ltd manager, 6/09/2012. For an interesting reading about the 'Maruti formula – lean manufacturing', see FMS, 2011.

¹⁵² The previous scheme linking incentive wages to workers' productivity was withdrawn in favour of a new one depending on company's sales.

¹⁵³ In order to be re-allowed into the factory premises after the strikes, workers were obliged to sign a *good conduct undertaking* (GCU) and were issued *chargesheets* (one of the most notorious charges was imposed on Mathew Abraham, leader of the protest and General Secretary of the workers' union, also interviewed in Delhi on 26/08/2012). In addition, striking workers were punished with the full deduction

from the harmonious workplace relations supposed to reign within the *lean* factory. In 2005, another Japanese champion operating in Gurgaon – Honda - found itself in the public eye.¹⁵⁴ Back then, the company was hit by intense labour unrest, which lasted from December 2004¹⁵⁵ to the end of July 2005, going through different phases. The 2005 dispute brought to the light some major issues that exploded even more vehemently during the most recent Maruti case. Firstly, together with claims related to poor working conditions and low salary levels,¹⁵⁶ whereby the 2000 Maruti strike had not led to any substantial improvement, Honda workers demanded a union. For the first time in the region, the young, still mostly unorganised, workforce from Gurgaon asked for political representation. Secondly, severe labour rights violations emerged, ranging from the attempts to hamper or delay the union registration process, to a two months lock-out presented as a strike,¹⁵⁷ for which workers were deducted full pay, to unjustified suspensions and terminations.¹⁵⁸ Thirdly, repression of the 2005 Honda strike resolved in a brutal use of violence, remembered on July 25th every year, day in which a rally organised by Honda workers was fiercely charged by the police. In that case, the use of ‘private’ violence was also denounced – as it recently happened at

of salaries for almost half a year, with arbitrary dismissals, suspensions and transfers, and with intensified workloads and higher production targets in the aftermath of the protest (see PUDR, 2001).

¹⁵⁴ On this case, information is mainly reported on the basis of a long interview held with the General Secretary of the Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India Employees’ Union, on 20/03/2012, of a focus group with 5 Honda workers held on 31/03/2012, and a ‘life history’ from another Honda worker, collected on 1/04/2012. On that occasion, I had the interesting chance to spend the whole day at his family place in old Gurgaon.

¹⁵⁵ The Honda Employees’ Union was registered only on 30th May 2005, while different forms of protest (boycotts inside the factory, tool-down actions, *dharna* (non-violent sit in that may include fasting in sign of protest), rallies outside the plant), had started since December 2004.

¹⁵⁶ Honda workers who were working for the company at the time the strike broke out, report that working conditions were extremely tough: they worked ‘*for long shifts, with very short breaks, under pressure from supervisors and they were hardly allowed to talk to each other. No mobile phone was permitted on the line, and there was an only landline for emergencies in the whole plant. Harassment was frequent, and they were severely punished even if they were a little late (ex. with an extension of the probation period)*’. Information reported from the focus group held on 31/03/2012.

¹⁵⁷ From June 27th to July 25th 2005, then again from July 31st. Details provided by the General Secretary of the Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India Employees’ Union, interviewed on 20/03/2012, and from Honda workers met for a focus group on 31/03/2012.

¹⁵⁸ Initially, 50 workers were suspended and 4 terminated. From the same interview and focus group.

Maruti, the company made extensive use of local ‘bouncers’ and ‘musclemen’¹⁵⁹ to suppress workers’ agitation. While the strike was overall successful, as Honda workers eventually managed to get their union registered, the issues here highlighted – lack of political representation, labour rights violation, disproportionate use of police violence¹⁶⁰ – have persisted, and equally emerged during the following Maruti struggle. Peaks of violence were also reached during the strikes that affected several Tier 1 component suppliers in 2009, particularly RICO Auto and Sunbeam Casting. In October 2009, RICO workers engaged in a long strike to protest against unacceptable working conditions:¹⁶¹ even in this case, management imposed a lock-out, suspended workers with no official charge,¹⁶² hired private police to prevent any form of action within the factory premises. Within a shocking escalation of violence, it happened that police opened fire upon workers: a worker died, and at least other 40 were injured. Most strikingly, two workers were arrested for the murder, while the private police guards promptly disappeared (libcom, 2010; ICC, 2009). Indeed, what was particularly striking in the RICO case, was on one side, the extreme leeway capital enjoyed in the use of violence to repress the protest, and the blatant non-interventionist attitude from

¹⁵⁹ Reported by all union representatives interviewed in Gurgaon.

¹⁶⁰ G., Honda worker who participated in the 2005 strike, tells that ‘*on the day they organised the mass rally, July 25th 2005, out of about 5000 workers present, almost 3000 were stopped by the police, to intimidate the others. Police freed most of them on the same day, but after beating and harassing them. The majority of them got injured: they had hands, legs broken, head injuries. 75 workers were arrested, and 62 of them kept in jail for up to 21 days, charged with article 307 (attempt to murder, according to the Indian penal law)*’. G. told me his story on 1/04/2012. When I was in Delhi, in 2012, the Honda legal case was still open: I had the chance to meet this group of workers and hold a focus group / group interview exactly because on that day (31/03/2012) they had just gathered at the Haryana Court, in Gurgaon, for a judicial hearing regarding the 2005 events.

¹⁶¹ In this regard, the report from a RICO worker, translated for libcom (see libcom, 2010), is excellent: ‘*Work has to be performed standing and after 8 1/2 hours duty, they force you to keep working. Even on weekly rest day, shift workers have compulsory duty. Payment of overtime is at single rate. They keep increasing the production target and for not completing the production target, they harass us. Wages are said to be 5,500 but really 4,200 are given. Basic wages are low and there are various allowances. Leave Travel Allowance (LAA) money is cut from the wages each month and given at the end of the year when LAA is supposed to be provided by the company. In the canteen, bad food for more money. No arrangement for transport.*’

¹⁶² During the early stages of the protest, while no direct confrontation had occurred yet, 16 workers were suspended for having ‘incited the other workers to slow down, thus hampering the achievement of production targets’.

state-institutions. On the other side, the violent peak reached during the RICO dispute triggered spontaneous and widespread forms of solidarity, whereby the protest soon extended to Sona Koyo Steering Systems, Lumax Industries, and several other vending companies in the Gurgaon area (libcom, 2010; ICC, 2009). In this sense, the 2009 events already testified both a diffused intolerance towards working conditions perceived as unjust and exploitative, and an increasing awareness of a common status on behalf of an emerging working class. In addition, the rapidity in the propagation of the protest, and the involvement of a number of component suppliers whose strikes affected OEMs' production trends, also highlighted the interconnections existing along the supply chain, and the effective possibilities for disruption within the cluster setting.¹⁶³

All the distinctive features that characterised the struggles affecting Gurgaon between 2000 and 2010 also emerged throughout the Maruti – Suzuki Manesar dispute in 2011-12. However, the scope, the intensity, the legal implications of these Maruti strikes were unprecedented, making it a unique case and a milestone both in the history of industrial relations in the area, and in the formation of a more defined working class in a recently industrialised region. Struggle dynamics will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Here, it is important to point at the key issues that were raised by the Maruti protest, and to the elements that remarkably distinguish it from all previous struggles. These pertain to the composition of the striking workforce, to the demands forwarded, to the modalities of struggle, and to the reactions that followed, in terms of both management's repression and institutional intervention.

¹⁶³ Especially in a producer-driven chain like the auto one, the agency of workers in potentially disrupting interconnected nodes can be interestingly explored.

One of the most astonishing features of the Maruti Manesar strike was undoubtedly the composition of the workers who took action. These were not only very young, but also largely employed on contract-basis. The plant where the strike broke out is in fact the Maruti – Suzuki A plant in IMT Manesar, inaugurated only in 2006. When it opened, the company recruited the majority of workers directly from ITIs and technical colleges, thus securing a pool of young, skilled, and ‘committed’ workers. A generation of workers who has become the symbol of the modernising ‘shining India’, striving for growth, progress, personal achievement. A generation of workers that was also supposed to be easy to control, as not politicised yet. A generation of workers who soon experienced, though, the alienation of backbreaking work on the line, and saw rosy aspirations clashing with the reality of rampant casualisation and the brutality of an oppressive management.¹⁶⁴ In this sense, the tough working conditions and the relentless rhythms imposed by the Maruti lean factory seem to have proven particularly unbearable.

As numerous sources now report, and our findings back up, life on the Maruti line involved extremely fast speed, continuous and repetitive operations, control and harassment on behalf of contractors and supervisors (see gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com; PUDR, 2013; ICLR, 2013; FMS, 2011).¹⁶⁵

Direct accounts by Maruti workers testify of 7 minutes only breaks, of compulsory

¹⁶⁴ On the profile of Maruti’s protesters, read *The Indian Express* (16/10/2011), ‘Face of Maruti Suzuki strike is a 24-year-old’.

¹⁶⁵ On Maruti events, we also rely on the following direct accounts: interviews held with representatives from CITU Gurgaon (12/03/2012), AEEU - HMS Faridabad (15/03/2012), a focus group with Suzuki Motorcycle workers (15/03/2012), a focus group with Maruti Manesar workers (20/03/2012), an interview with a labour activist from the *Faridabad Majdoor Samachar* (FMS, 10/04/2012), an interview to Maruti Manesar workers taken in the Manesar workers’ village together with activists from the *Gurgaon Workers News* group (12/04/2012), an interview with a representative of CITU Haryana (07/08/2012), an interview with a labour activist from JNU (14/08/2012), a second interview with a representative from CITU Gurgaon (15/08/2012), a second interview held at AEEU – HMS in Faridabad (16/08/2012), a focus group with Maruti Gurgaon workers (20/08/2012), a roundtable discussion on Maruti at the Council for Social Development (CSD), Delhi (23/08/2012), an interview to the AITUC General Secretary (24/08/2012), an interview with Mr Mathew Abraham, at the International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF, 26/08/2012).

overtime of up to two hours per day, of punishments and salary deductions for every minute of delay, of forbidden communication among workers on the line and frequent harassment from contractors and supervisors.¹⁶⁶ Reporting factory conditions in excellent detail, the *People's Union for Democratic Rights* (PUDR, 2013) describes a proper 'dehumanisation' of the workforce, compelled to meet the target of one car in every 42 seconds, even if this means insufficient time to rest within and between shifts, physically draining rhythms, no paid overtime nor leave. Regarding contract/casual workers, in addition to extreme work pressure, their condition is aggravated by the lack of medical benefits and the ineligibility for transport facilities.

The conditions of contract workers bring us back to the second, important feature characterising the Maruti protesters. Not only these are young, supposedly unexperienced and – in theory - scarcely politicised. They also belong to both permanent and casual workforce. This ruins all management's expectations, and overtly clashes with capital plans.

Despite the higher vulnerability of their positions and the precariousness of their employment relations in fact, contract workers do not hesitate in taking action, and bravely do so. Furthermore, the hoped fragmentation between workers on different statuses does not prevent permanent and casual workers from striking together, within an incredibly inspiring manifestation of unity and solidarity, hardly observed before.¹⁶⁷

In this sense, if the already lower salaries and the greater exposure to dismissals and termination could have acted as a deterrent, discouraging precarious workers from personal involvement in a strike, Maruti events rather follow a different direction. Likewise, if the employment of workers on different conditions and the concession of

¹⁶⁶ Focus groups with Maruti Manesar workers were held on 20/3/2012 and 12/04/2012, one with Maruti Gurgaon workers was held on 20/08/2012.

¹⁶⁷ Emerged from interviews with all unions.

separate treatments might have led to imagine different needs and aspirations, rivalries, distinct demands and different willingness to fight, Maruti's ground reality also proves to contrast the initial expectations. Indeed, as we will later conclude, the common class identity developed in a context of generalised exploitation and widespread oppression, appears to overcome all other forms of workforce segmentation that may have encumbered labour organising.

The composition of the striking workers also explains the demands raised through the Maruti protest.¹⁶⁸ These revolved around two main claims: the recognition of an independent union, and the regularisation of contract workers. The request to form a union is connected, per se, to several issues. First, the autonomous initiative to form an independent union, in early 2011, and the long struggle until this was finally registered, on 1st March 2012, showed that the young, inexperienced, Maruti workers had gained collective awareness of their own conditions and matured a common subjectivity. This entailed the acknowledgement of diffused exploitation, unjust employment relations and uneven power balances, up to the determination to act unitedly for a change, to affirm collective rights. Albeit at an early stage, as we will argue in the next section, this signals the development of *class consciousness* where it was previously absent. Second, the need to establish a union was felt both as a response to the perceived lack of political representation, and as ultimate solution to address unbearable working condition. Indeed, denunciations regarding the 'dehumanising' conditions experienced on the line vehemently emerged throughout the whole strike, and the formation of a union came forth in the hope to let finally surface what had long been silenced (see again, PUDR, 2013). Third, it is important to note that the demand

¹⁶⁸ Opinions and impressions regarding Maruti workers' demands, as expressed in this section, largely draw on direct accounts collected through interviews and focus groups held personally.

for an independent union did not happen in a vacuum, but came as a reaction to the long-lasting imposition of a ‘company-union’, a pre-existing management-friendly union whose leaders were repeatedly selected by the company itself, with no involvement of workers. In this sense, the request to recognise the *Maruti Suzuki Employees’ Union* (MSEU), as opposed to the previous *Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union* (MUKU), disclosed a situation of utter political control and absolute lack of democratic consultation, whereby not only union leaders were directly chosen by the management, but no election was ever held. Interestingly enough, when the independent MSEU was finally registered on 1st March 2012, the company imposed another sort of ‘independence’, obstructing the affiliation to National Union Federations (CTUOs), with the idea of minimising the external influence of ‘too ideologised’ organisations.¹⁶⁹ Finally, the initial absence of a workers’ union, the protracted attempts to invalidate its registration, plus the following retaliations targeting those recognised as leaders, can all be inscribed into a generalised hostility towards labour organisations, particularly accentuated within multinational companies championing the Japanese model of ‘collaborative industrial relations’.¹⁷⁰

For what concerns the second, core demand expressed by the Maruti strike, namely the regularisation of contract workers, framing the context may help grasping its relevance and scope. The issue of contract labour has powerfully emerged in the last few years, finally appearing on the agenda of national General Strikes organised by

¹⁶⁹ From interviews with representatives from CITU Gurgaon and CITU Haryana (7/08/2012) and AITUC Delhi (24/08/2012). This discussion on independent unions and the relation between ‘spontaneously formed’ groups and existing institutions will be further explored in the next sections.

¹⁷⁰ A trend clearly emerged already in the Honda case. The long-lasting hostility of Japanese management was clearly reported during discussions had with INTUC representatives (14/03/2012), FMS activists (10 and 12/04/2012), HMS/ Maruti Gurgaon workers (20/08/2012), NTUI representatives at the CSD roundtable (23/08/2012), AITUC representatives (24/08/2012), and Mathew Abraham at IMF (26/08/2012).

major union federations, and even prompting casual workers to bravely fight on the forefront – as in the Maruti case. The nature of the problem distinctly surfaces if we consider the extent of the contractualisation process within Indian manufacturing, the use (and abuse) of contract labour in relation to the existing law, and the working conditions contract workers endure. The increasing share of informal, ‘more flexible’ labour within Indian organised manufacturing has been widely documented by extensive studies: Deshpande, Karan, Sharma and Sarkar (2004), for example, report how the use of non-permanent workers has particularly intensified within large firms employing 500 or more workers. Convincingly overcoming the conceptualisation of a dualism between an organised and an unorganised segment, the authors illustrate how a process of casualisation has progressively permeated the formal sector, through an overt *substitution* of permanent workers with temporary, casual, contract labour. As we will also assert in relation to the NCR case, such process not only helps the employer to increase profits by lowering costs, but allows to ‘manage industrial relations in an orderly manner’ (p.85). This is due, on one side, to the rooted practice to remunerate casual workers with wages much lower than those compensated to their permanent counterparts. On the other, employers tend to prefer hiring casual workers as they are easier to dismiss and, according to the existing law, not entitled to union membership.

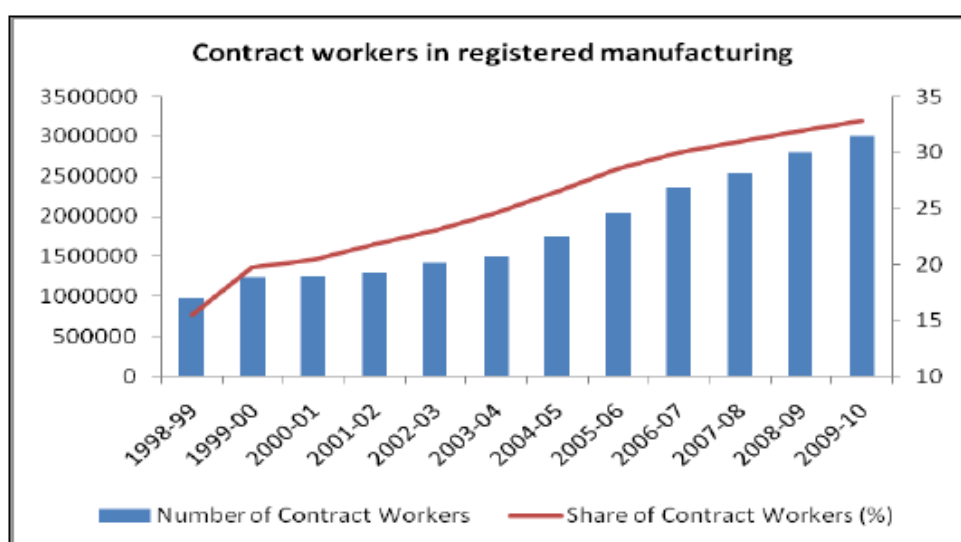
Considering the NCR, a process of ‘*casualisation by substitution*’ has clearly manifested following all major labour struggles: Mathew Abraham, for example, reports how, after the 2000 Maruti Gurgaon strikes, the company terminated more than 2000 employees,¹⁷¹ to then replace them with contract workers.¹⁷² Chandrasekhar and

¹⁷¹ 2300-2400 employees, both permanent and trainees who were about to become permanent, were terminated within one year from the strike. Of these, around 1100 were immediately sacked, while the others were induced to leave through the actual imposition of a *Voluntary Retirement Scheme*.

¹⁷² From a long interview held at IMF on 26/08/2012.

Ghosh (2014) also highlight how the use of informal contracts perfectly services the requirements of the formal sectors. Within an overall process of informalisation of the organised manufacturing segments, they show how the rising employment of contract workers has been particularly prominent. This can be observed in charts 59 and 60 below. Together with non-permanent/ temporary workers, contract workers can be classified as a specific category of casual/ non- regular employment (see again Deshpande, Karan, Sharma, Sarkar, 2004). As with all casual workers, they tend to receive lower wages, more restricted social benefits, and cannot subscribe to union organisations, thus still being excluded from political representation. However, what distinguishes contract workers from the other forms of casual labour, is their ‘indirect’ nature, whereby they are hired by a third party and they are not directly connected to the main company in terms of employment relationship and methods of wage payment (AIOE, 2013). Normally, they should be hired, supervised and remunerated by a contractor, who then in turn is generally compensated by the ‘mother-company’ (ib.).

Chart 59: Contract workers in Indian organised manufacturing



Source: Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2014:2.

Chart 60: Percentage of contract workers per productive sector



Source: Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2014:3.

The reason why the contract labour system has recently become a matter of high contention and generated widespread protest has to deal with its over-use and abuse, in overt violation of the existing *Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act 1970*. Firstly, the increasing and extensive employment of contract workers has occurred regardless of the legal limitations forbidding its use within ‘core activities’ and on works of ‘perennial nature’ (Papola, 2013). In addition, the system has channelled the creation of a separate category of workers, employed at cheaper rates and excluded from social security schemes, despite the Contract Labour Act’s requirement to provide contract workers with regular salaries and at least minimum social benefits (Papola, 2013). Thus, in spite of supposed restrictions, the use of contract labour within organised manufacturing has considerably grown, increasing from about 20% in 2000-1 to 33% in 2009-10 (Papola, 2013:22; Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2014). Within the

whole auto industry, 1/3 of the workers seem to be currently employed on a contract basis.¹⁷³

At company level, especially inside large firms, the share of contract workers has sometimes – illegally - outnumbered that of permanent workers. For what concerns the NCR auto factories, union representatives report of 60% of contract workers at Honda, over 90% at Hero – Honda Haridwar,¹⁷⁴ while PUDR (2013) states that Maruti overall employs at least 40% of contract workers, exceeding 60% at the Manesar plant. Beyond the impressive number of non-regular employees, the system itself rests on all sort of violations. For example, although after 240 days of continuous employment a worker should be made permanent, contracts are often rolled over for years.¹⁷⁵ In addition, contract workers are usually paid extremely lower salaries compared to permanent colleagues - often being compensated amounts well below the statutory minimum wage – albeit they perform exactly the same tasks. Against such violation, one of the core demands National Federations keep voicing lies on the principle ‘*equal work, equal pay*’, whereby the differences created represent a purely arbitrary imposition.¹⁷⁶ In terms of payment, PUDR (2013) reports that contract workers are generally remunerated on daily wage basis, i.e. they get paid only 25-26 days in a month, excluding Sundays. This also implies that they are not entitled to any paid leave. Plus, they are often denied PF and ESIC bonuses, not benefitting of any insurance, medical assistance, nor pension scheme.¹⁷⁷ Finally, at the time they are

¹⁷³ While another third is employed as trainee/ apprentice, and another third on a permanent basis. This was reported by Dev Nathan, interviewed at the *Indian Society for Labour Economics* on 28/11/2011.

¹⁷⁴ CITU representatives, interviewed on 12/03/2012, and Honda Employees’ Union representative, interviewed on 20/03/2012.

¹⁷⁵ INTUC representative, interviewed on 14/03/2012, mentioned cases of workers kept on contract basis up to 18-20 years.

¹⁷⁶ According to S.D.Tyagi (AEEU – HMS, 15/03/2012), contract workers averagely get 5000/6000 INRs per month, while permanent workers performing the same role may be paid up to 30000. Honda Employees’ Union Secretary reports that contract workers in their company may also perceive only 4000 -5000 INRs, while the established Minimum Wage should be 10000 (20/03/2012).

¹⁷⁷ Trend confirmed by all CITU, INTUC, HMS, AITUC representatives.

hired, contract workers are usually only verbally informed about their appointment: in the absence of any written agreement, whether slowdowns in production or political turmoil require it, employers can easily dismiss them (see PUDR, 2013).¹⁷⁸ All these trends, including wage gaps, lack of social protection scheme, informality of employment agreements, also confirm findings emerged from our survey (see chapter 5).

Given the background scenario, and having explained the core issues that have animated recent labour protests in the NCR, the relevance and the scope of the Maruti struggle, whose dynamics are reported in the next section, shall now appear clearer.

6.2 Maruti workers on strike: struggle dynamics

Although the claims raised by the Maruti protest can be inscribed in an overarching set of issues already emerged throughout the previous decade, the strike that affected the Maruti Manesar plant in 2011-12 was unprecedented in its intensity, duration and impact. As we have discussed earlier, the composition of the workforce who took action – young, with no previous struggle experience, largely employed on contract basis – together with the request for an independent union within a completely hostile terrain, make the case unique. However, also in terms of dynamics, organising and reactions it attracted, it was definitely beyond parallel.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ On contract labour in India, read also: The Economic Times, ‘Contract labour pay parity plan caught up in bureaucratic triangle’, ‘Rise in contract labour causing unrest: Centre’, ‘Contract labour: a ticking bomb amid auto industry’s labour force’, ‘Contract labour law: convincing workers, employers key’; World Socialist Web Site, ‘India: Striking NLC contract workers must expand struggle industrially and politically’ and ‘India: Strike challenges NLC’s decades-long use of contract labour’. All links to the online articles are provided in the bibliography.

¹⁷⁹ For a detailed reconstruction of the timeline of the whole strike, I am indebted to PUDR and the Gurgaon Workers News (GWN) collective, who provide an extremely accurate account of every step taken in the struggle. In particular, the documentary material and the analyses collected by GWN are of exceptional quality,

Overall, the strike at the Maruti plant in Manesar lasted from early June 2011 to the ‘accident’ that occurred on 18th July 2012. It went through different phases of labour and management offensive, until it was brutally suppressed by the wave of repression which followed in the summer of 2012. Nonetheless, its impact went beyond the immediate retaliations, and while the involved labour movement was somewhat eroded, it undeniably set a milestone within Indian industrial relations, and is still remembered as example of brave antagonism.¹⁸⁰

Agitation started on 3rd June 2011, when workers submitted an application to register their own, independent union. A ‘yellow’ union, the *Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union* (MUKU) had existed at Maruti since 2000. This was completely controlled by management, no election had been held for 10 years, and membership was also collected according to a sort of ‘compulsory co-option’ practices. Permanent workers who were MUKU members had accumulated dissatisfaction towards the lack of democratic representation and the impossibility of voicing their own concerns. When the initiative to form an independent organisation became known, management started exercising pressure and forcedly seeking workers’ signatures to an undertaking where they declared to be part of the old union (PUDR, 2013). Only 10% of the workers signed, while the others responded with a sit-in strike inside the plant. This marked the beginning of a first occupation, which lasted for 13 days, with around 2000 workers sitting inside the factory.¹⁸¹ During this first strike period, workers already expressed their demands very clearly: registration of their own union, regularisation of contract

¹⁸⁰ Despite the wave of repression, other struggles followed after 2012, with workers openly declaring to have been ‘inspired by Maruti’. See for example, Workers’ Solidarity Centre (2014) on the Munjal Kiriu’s case.

¹⁸¹ Permanent, casual and trainees together. They resisted almost two weeks, despite management’s deployment of police inside and outside the factory premises, ‘bouncers’ introduced into the plant, restriction of water, electricity and toilet facilities, and no food provision. Solidarity groups, composed of unions, workers from other companies, families etc. immediately gathered outside. Tool-down strikes were also organised in other 60-65 neighbouring factories. Communication with media was instead continuously obstructed (read gurgaonworkersnews n. 41).

workers, improvement of unacceptable working conditions. On June 17th, management and workers reached a first agreement: the company promised to proceed with the union registration and to reinstate 11 workers who had been terminated in the meantime.¹⁸² In the month of July, while negotiations were officially underway, management again terminated 4 workers and suspended 6: workers reacted with a tool-down protest. In the meanwhile, the situation inside the factory was still tense: rhythms and workloads continued to be excessive and abuses were still reported (PUDR, 2013; GWN, n.41 and 44). In mid-August, the Haryana Labour Department formally rejected the application for the new *Maruti Suzuki Employees' Union* (MSEU), for apparent technical reasons. On August 28th, following a few weeks of 'underground dispute', the Manesar factory was suddenly invaded by around 400 police officers and illegally locked-out.¹⁸³ Management's offensive lasted for 33 days, during which a fence was erected all around the plant and the whole area kept strictly militarised.

Throughout this period, Maruti workers built a protest camp outside, while employees from Munjal Showa (component supplier for Maruti-Suzuki), Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Castings and Suzuki Motorcycle organised solidarity strikes (GWN, n.44). In an attempt to politically subdue the protesters and prevent further agitation, Maruti's management then started allowing workers in only upon the acceptance and signature of a 'good conduct bond',¹⁸⁴ while operating suspensions, terminations and first arrests, especially targeting union members, active workers and those identified as leaders. At the same time, while only a minority of workers signed the good conduct undertaking and thousands were still protesting outside, the company hired, *ad-hoc*,

¹⁸² While all workers who had been involved in the action were punished with an illegal two-days wage deduction per each day of strike.

¹⁸³ The whole lock-out was declared a strike and workers' wages were deducted for the inactivity days.

¹⁸⁴ Imposing quiet behaviour, no disturbing activities during workshift (no singing allowed while on duty!), no go slows, no boycott/ sabotage (see gurgaonworkersnews n.44).

around 800 new contract workers, in order to replace the ‘striking’ colleagues (PUDR, 2013; GWN, n.44 and 45). After 33 days, a second agreement was reached, where workers finally accepted the good conduct bond, in exchange for the conversion of 44 terminations into suspensions and the re-employment of 18 trainees who had been fired. Surprisingly, when the factory re-opened on October 3rd, management allowed only permanent workers in, leaving 1100 - 1200 contract workers outside. Rather than silencing the protest, this sort of revengeful behaviour and attempt to break the unity between permanent and casual workers that had characterised the struggle since the beginning, further inflamed the situation. On October 7th, the workers inside the factory, in solidarity with those kept outside, started a second occupation, to demand the reinstatement of all contract workers. The three Suzuki plants and other eight auto factories immediately followed, rapidly organising solidarity strikes. After eight days, on October 14th, police entered the factory premises, closed the canteen and interrupted water provision, thus forcing workers to move out. Workers left the plant, but continued to protest outside, striking until October 21st (PUDR, 2013; GWN, n.44). In the months following the strike, a sort of continued ‘arm wrestling’ took place, with the union registration process being dragged out, union members who had led the protest being continuously targeted, and the imposition of the ‘independence from outside’ conditionality, namely no affiliation to Union Federations.¹⁸⁵ In the meantime, retaliation for the stoppage took shape: management deducted salary and bonuses for the whole period the factory was locked-out, illegally representing it as a strike (PUDR, 2013). The *Maruti Suzuki Employees’ Union* (MSEU) was finally registered on 31st January 2012, with (permanent) workers’ memberships active since March 1st.¹⁸⁶ During the following months, talks over the ‘Charter of Demands’ presented by

¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, this was sought both on management’s and on workers’ side...

¹⁸⁶ According to existing trade union laws, casual workers cannot be union members yet.

the workers took place: this addressed issues like excessive pressure and workloads, compulsory overtime, end of the imposed incentive scheme.¹⁸⁷ However, despite ongoing negotiations, the climate inside the Manesar plant continued to be extremely tense: the area was still under police surveillance, the fence still isolated the plant from outside,¹⁸⁸ working conditions had not substantially improved. On July 18th, the ‘accident’ that definitively doomed the Maruti struggle, occurred. Following an altercation between a worker and a supervisor, apparently started with a casteist abuse by the supervisor and a reaction from the worker, the worker was suspended. Within a climate of widespread tension, this episode immediately generated a collective reaction, workers from the second shift joined the factory, police were called in, probably bouncers as well: violence broke out. There was a fire, an HR manager died, and several workers were injured. Carpet arrests and violent repression followed the accident: since workers had left their accommodation, police started searching across all the neighbouring States, in workers’ villages, reportedly harassing families in order to find them. Within a month, 546 permanent and 1800 contract workers were terminated and almost 150 workers jailed, including all union leaders (ICLR, 2013). Although it was proven that arrests were randomly executed¹⁸⁹ and no official conviction or fair trial were ever conceded, and despite media involvement and pressure from outside, 147 workers were kept in jail until March 2015.¹⁹⁰ Throughout

¹⁸⁷ Honda workers report that these incentive schemes entail the payment of bonuses upon different criteria, including performance, discipline, attendance, accidents on the workplace. From a focus group held on 31/03/2012.

¹⁸⁸ I visited the Maruti area and the workers’ village in Manesar in April 2012: no outsider could enter the plant, police was deployed inside and all around the factory premises, every small gathering was monitored as the curfew law was still in force in the whole area.

¹⁸⁹ On this, read ‘The curious case of the alphabetically accused’, on The Hindu, 7/08/2014. It seems that due to the arbitrary selection of workers to arrest, the list included also some who were not present inside the factory on the day the accident happened.

¹⁹⁰ News from March 2015 report that 81 workers were finally granted a bail of 25,000 INRs, while more than 60 are still under detention at the Bhondsi jail in Gurgaon. Read ‘77 former Maruti workers get bail’ (Business Standard, 17/03/2015) and ‘81 Maruti Suzuki workers granted bail’ (IndustriALL, 20/03/2015).

their detention, violence, torture and abuses were repeatedly reported (see The Hindu, 26/09/2012; ICLR, 2013).

Pic. 6 and 7: Maruti Suzuki plant in Manesar, Gurgaon



Source: Taken by the author during a visit to the Manesar area in april 2012.

Having briefly reported the dynamics and main phases of a strike that was undeniably unprecedented, for its duration, scope and intensity, it is important to highlight what makes the case so relevant, before proceeding with a more theoretical and political analysis. First, the Maruti protest, and the cycle of struggles that characterised the NCR since 2000, proved the relative avail of *greenfield* strategies pursued by capital. Providing that the location in a newly industrialised area, with scarce union interference and a less politically experienced workforce guaranteed initial industrial peace, this only lasted for a limited period of time. Second, the composition of the workforce who engaged in the Maruti strike was particularly meaningful: despite the young age, the scarce political experience, the vulnerability related to the casual working status, they revealed awareness, courage and determination. The extent to which they developed a collective consciousness will be further discussed in the next section. Labour composition also relates to the following two points. Third, the outstanding participation of casual and contract workers and the exceptional solidarity between permanent and casual workers were also unique. These contradicted all expectations that the insecurity of temporary, contract positions could act as a deterrent against organising, and that the differences in status might impede the creation of political bonds. Fourth, and in relation to this, the Maruti struggle was of particular significance as it proved how the strategies deployed by capital to control labour, by keeping it fragmented¹⁹¹ and obstructing its politicisation, did not prevent conflict. Fifth, the Maruti struggle actually signalled an intensification of the industrial conflict in the area, whereby actions taken and practices employed were particularly powerful and long-lasting. Specifically, the second occupation after the protracted lockout was

¹⁹¹ Not only through the imposition of different employment relations and working statuses, but through all the hiring practices. See for example, composition of workers per place of origin, language spoken etc. in chapter 5.

a symptom of strength, willingness to resist, and bravery. Sixth, however, the Maruti strike was not only unprecedented in terms of labour organising, but also as far as management repression was concerned. In this sense, facing the inability to prevent conflict and even to manage it while underway, capital displayed resilience only through the use of – disproportionate – force. The abuses reported by the *International Commission for Labor Rights* (ICLR, 2013) are particularly revealing in this regard. The prolonged detention without fair trial, the harassment, beating, torture of jailed workers and sometimes of their families, suggest a use of violence that goes beyond the simple disregard of labour rights, rather flowing into overt violation of human rights. Finally, the Maruti case was paradigmatic in the way management and state institutions jointly intervened to silence the protest. On this matter, the Haryana State's position ranged from express connivance with capital, while tolerating labour rights violations and anti-union behaviours, to acting as 'agent of capital',¹⁹² through the direct authorisation of police repression and unjustifiable punitive measures.

Overall, what has emerged in the Maruti case is a full *institutionalisation* of violence and repression, on the grounds of the economic interests of an expanding manufacturing hub.¹⁹³ In this sense, NCR industrial relations have deviated towards a complete by-partite system, with no room for mediation within a capital – labour open conflict.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, considering the premises on which the 'Maruti revolution' was introduced, praising the harmonious and collaborative industrial relations that would

¹⁹² From an interview with NTUI representative, 1/03/2012.

¹⁹³ Hence not only the promises of containing labour unrest to avoid discouraging foreign investors, but also the continuous threats of 'moving to Gujarat', where industrial conflict is practically absent (and the State-Capital association is even more solid).

¹⁹⁴ In the sense that Capital and State constitute an only, compact front. From the words of a Labour Department official quoted in Roychowdhury (2010:186), '*The government is now, at best, a neutral onlooker; the outcome of an industrial dispute therefore depends on the relative power of management and labour. In most cases, the power of management is determined by the fact that they now have access to contract labour, outsourcing and so on*'.

have reigned within the new lean factory, such outcome appears to utterly contradict the effective consistency of the Japanese model.

Pic. 8: Maruti Suzuki workers the day MSEU registration was announced



Source: International Commission for Labor Rights (ICLR, 2013:3)

6.3 A political analysis of the Maruti struggle: on class formation, autonomy and institutions

For the purposes of the present research, our interest is reflecting on the political subjectivity of the labour movement emerged in Gurgaon, and on the way this related to pre-existing labour institutions. With such an aim, we will attempt to inscribe the Maruti struggle within a process of class formation, and then dwell upon the way

existing unions dealt with Maruti's 'spontaneism' and on the outcomes of the strike. In this sense, the analysis of the role labour institutions played within the Maruti struggle is particularly revealing as it discloses major weaknesses of the Indian union movement, due to their embeddedness in a wider structure of political relations that prevents them from adequately supporting the grassroots needs of the working class (on this approach, see Miyamura, 2012).

With respect to class formation, two premises are necessary. First, although Labour Studies of Marxian inspiration have manifested a renewed interest towards the '*making and re-making*' of working classes following neoliberal globalisation of production (see for example, Silver, 2014), we agree with Selwyn (2012) that these do not sufficiently account for working class agency within the process of capitalist development. Silver's (2014) theory that working class is 'made, unmade and remade' through capital-labour conflict that perpetually 'follows' capital, for example, is not completely convincing. Although it is possible that capital strategies – like industrial re-location for example – trigger or accelerate processes of class formation, we find Silver's theorisation of working class formation as rather depriving the working class of its revolutionary subjectivity and its power to determine the direction taken by capitalist development itself. In this regard, we more closely embrace the conceptualisation of working class agency as elaborated by Italian Autonomist Marxists, discussed in chapter one (see Tronti, 2006; 2010). Drawing on a different literature, closer to the political Marxism of Brenner and Wood, and on Thomson, Selwyn (2012) rightly points to the need for analysing class formation outside of pre-determined categories, looking at material determinations that allow organised workers to consciously shape the social relations of production they are embedded in. In relation to our case, this means that we not only remain unconvinced by an idea of

class formation seen as a process induced by capital-fixes à la Silver, but also that we don't believe in a global trend that can equally inform working class struggle and formation. While capital certainly adopts global strategies, as we tried to show when discussing lean production, and labour may build global bridges, class formation depends on local labour regimes and institutional settings. Moreover, always in line with a workerist approach, we see capital strategies and capitalist development as provoked by working class advancement, as a political reaction to re-balance political and economic power 'from above' whereby working class struggle has shaken the terrain 'from below'.

The second premise relates to why we select class as a dominant form of identity that has brought NCR workers together, despite the Indian context being so variegated and marked by multiple layers of differentiation. This is based on both theoretical and empirical considerations. On one side, from a Marxist perspective, class is identified as main determinant of social relations (see Poulantzas, 1975); on the other, considering the specific context, class has proven to be the principal unifying ground, beyond caste, geographical belonging or other sources of identity.

With reference to the NCR, the Maruti struggle has undoubtedly disclosed a process of working class formation and of the development of a collective consciousness. This has occurred despite the absence of a rooted working class tradition, in a recently industrialised area. It has occurred despite a labour composition based on multiple lines of fragmentation (see also chapter 5), purposely reinforced by capital strategies aimed at preventing labour organising. And, as we will shortly argue, it has occurred autonomously, before the political interference of pre-existing unions and without external 'guidance' of institutional structures. Overall, we believe the process of

working class formation in the area – emerged with particular strength through the Maruti struggle, has been informed by four main factors.

First, the evident mismatch between the Japanese system of production based on the principles of lean manufacturing, and the local working and living conditions (see chapter 5). The blind assumption that the same system could be integrally applied in the Indian NCR, without experiencing glitches or resistance, has simply proven wrong. The imposition of extremely hard working conditions, added to such poor living conditions, was simply unsustainable in the long run. The teamwork philosophy, installed upon factory hierarchies and the abuses of the contract system, has simply failed. Overall, the blatant exploitation of the factory regime resulted much stronger than corporate rhetoric, thus facilitating the development of a collective awareness of unjust working conditions and uneven power relations.

The second factor pertains to the very existence of a labour regime built on increasing casualisation and on the indiscriminate use of contract labour. Employed in part as a cost-cutting strategy, but above all as a means to politically control labour, the extensive contractualisation, and the abuses of the system, have revealed such a deep level of inequality, exploitation, institutionalised harassment, that labour has come together to denounce it, rather than staying fragmented along its lines. In this sense, capital has failed.

Third, working class formation has been shaped by a mismatch in consumption patterns. Exposed to increasing costs of social reproduction, within a geographical area where the proximity to the shining, consumerist India is driving prices up, working class' purchasing power is becoming lower and lower, leading to increasing frustrations and clashing aspirations. Working class living standards, as opposed to booming middle class aspirations, have generated explosive discontent.

Finally, what has progressively compacted a working class front and welded a common identity, has been state – management connivance in the use of violence and in the modalities of repression. Whereby any tri-partitism in industrial relations has practically collapsed, while labour and human rights violations have been tolerated, capital-labour conflict has remained the only battlefield, thus contributing to reinforce working class identity.

Asserting that industrial conflict and labour struggles in the NCR have enabled the development of a working class consciousness, also leads us to take a defined stance within the debate about *spontaneism* vs *institutions*. In our view, and in line with a workerist approach as expressed for example by Bologna (1977; Cuninghame, 2000. See chapter 1), Maruti's spontaneism has not indicated lack of organisation or political immaturity, but rather a conscious *autonomous* position articulating an independent political identity and the rejection of traditional forms of organisation and representation. In this sense, even identifying a union as the only possible structure to deliver their demands, Maruti workers have strenuously defended its independence, refusing both management and traditional unions' interference (read also GWN, n.61). Comparing their struggle with experiences in the past, Maruti workers' request for the recognition of an independent union might recall the *Comitati Unitari di Base* (CUB) experience in the Italian factories during the 1970s (see chapter 1). Their initial enthusiasm for the union, rather than indicating moderation and institutional compromise, was actually a sign of strong political identity, whereby it was the symbol of victory and unity in struggle (see GWN, n.61). Contrary to the interpretations provided by established unions, we also see practiced adopted – including the violent peak that led to the 18th July's accident – as expression of conscious anger, collective strength and solidarity, rather than a manifestation of inexperience and immature

organisation. Unfortunately, the July accident did represent a setback, and the following repression definitely weakened what had been a powerful and courageous movement. Such an outcome was due to several reasons, which have to be inscribed into the relationship with existing labour institutions, and require us to at least briefly outline the background.

In our view, the institutionalisation¹⁹⁵ of an autonomous movement is not a sufficient, nor a strictly necessary, step towards the success of a struggle. In this regard, we disagree with Tronti's *autonomy of the political* as justification of unavoidable entryism (see Tronti 2006; 2010; CRS, 2011; Monaco, 2015). Not sufficient, because in the absence of a strong class-based identity and grass-roots organisation, the essence of a struggle might be dissolved within a mere bureaucratic apparatus, thus being doomed to fail. Not necessary, whereby if an autonomous movement manages to solidify its *modus vivendi*¹⁹⁶ by enlarging its base or by properly defending an independent union or association, the incorporation within a broader political structure, which also risks diluting its original identity, may be superfluous or even counter-productive. This said, the Maruti movement probably failed to acquire a sufficiently solid *modus vivendi* or to generalise the struggle to the extent that might have helped to resist external institutional pressure. However, it is also true that the accident of July 18th provided a pretext for a closer intervention of established unions, thus dispelling the movement's original autonomous power.

Overall, had the existing institutional structure been different, the Maruti movement could have probably avoided such a setback. What happened instead was that the

¹⁹⁵ Meant as incorporation into broader, pre-existing institutional settings. In this case, the affiliation of the MSEU to National Union Federations.

¹⁹⁶ On this, I had the pleasure to have a very inspiring discussion with the Indian Labour Historian Dilip Simeon, on 18/12/2014 at SOAS. On working class formation and identity within a similar case, although far back in time and occurred in the Indian State of Bihar, see Simeon, 2010.

weaknesses of the established union movement interfered with the struggle developments, to the extent that management could eventually determine its outcome and the strongest potentialities of the movement were not sufficiently grasped.

In our view, given the existing union structure, there are currently two major constraints that prevent working class struggles in India from being successful, and that have also played a substantial role in the Maruti case. One is of legal nature, the other is predominantly political. The legal barrier lies in the current legislation that still does not allow casual workers to obtain union membership. Either in the case of an independent union or in case of affiliation to a national organisation, the political unity and the solidarity bonds that may emerge on the ground, practically dissolve within formal employment relations, denying casual workers the access to official representation and negotiation processes. This, considering the substantial proportion of casual workers within the sector (and in the country's labour market overall), definitely represents a major obstacle.

Second, probably the main hindrance that also affects spontaneous working class movements, even when they reveal a strong autonomous character like in the Maruti case, is the political structure of the current trade union movement in India. As it currently stands, the trade union scenario is dominated by a few, large, union federations, or *Central Trade Union Organisations* (CTUOs), and a myriad of 'independent' unions, born out of plant-level disputes or localised issues, not affiliated to any national centre, for a total number of 18602 registered unions across the country (GoI, 2010). The five main union federations are the *Indian National Trade Union Congress* (INTUC), the *All India Trade Union Congress* (AITUC), the *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* (BMS), the *Hind Mazdoor Sabha* (HMS), and the *Centre of Indian*

Trade Unions (CITU), all declaring a membership of above 3 million.¹⁹⁷ The main issue posed by national union federations has been their strong affiliation with political parties,¹⁹⁸ which has deeply affected both their policy orientation and the relation with their members. Indeed, at least at national level,¹⁹⁹ their party line has dictated policies much more concerned with their political electorate than with grass-roots needs, largely causing a detachment from proper working class issues (see Jha, 2008; Shyam Sundar, 2008, 2010; Hensman, 2010, 2011; Janardhan, 2008; Sarkar, 2008).

This has provoked, in turn, fragmentation of the support provided to spontaneous movements, rivalries, together with the consequent proliferation of independent unions, seeking to contain both management pressure and national federations' interference (see Hensman, 2011; Sarkar, 2008). The latter phenomenon, which has been particularly growing in the past twenty years, while leading to the progressive erosion of central bargaining mechanisms and contributing to a further fragmentation of the union movement,²⁰⁰ has also represented a sort of 'democratic push', overall bringing the focus back to grass-roots demands (Hensman, 2011).

Another major weakness, linked to the legal constraint highlighted above, is the substantial incapacity of national union federations to deal with informalisation issues and the needs of the fast-expanding number of casual workers (Shyam Sundar, 2008).

Without dwelling further upon the weaknesses of the current union movement in India

¹⁹⁷ There are huge discrepancies between verified and declared membership of all major unions. Figures beyond 3 million were verified by the Ministry of Labour through a survey whose results were released in 2008. Since then, CTUOs have declared much higher membership. See Jha, 2008; GoI, 2010; Business Standard, 2013.

¹⁹⁸ INTUC is linked to the Congress Party, BMS to the BJP, HMS to the Indian Socialist Party, AITUC to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and CITU to the Marxist fringe of the Communist Party (CPI-M).

¹⁹⁹ I have perceived slightly different approaches comparing national offices and local offices (ex. Delhi office / Gurgaon branch), with local branches lightly more sensitive to ground disputes. However, policy lines are determined at the top.

²⁰⁰ The only noteworthy attempt to keep the independency from party-lines while seeking to coordinate smaller, independent unions is the establishment of the *New Trade Union Initiative* (NTUI) in 2006. This seems to have already surpassed 1 million members.

and on what would be necessary for its renewal,²⁰¹ it is interesting to note how these constraints also emerged within the Maruti ‘conflict – management’. While the initial enthusiasm towards the scope and the power of the spontaneous agitation led all major union federations present in the area to ‘race for the affiliation’, aiming at absorbing the Maruti militancy within their rank-and-file, during the later stages of the strike the scenario had completely changed.

When the July’s accident occurred, the different political and ideological orientation of the union federations immediately translated into different degrees of violence condemnation, with few exceptions.²⁰² Despite following support provided in defence of the jailed workers and in the quest for a fair investigation of the case, the original involvement largely faded away, and the Maruti workers were broadly depicted as ‘young, inexperienced, immature militants’, who had failed because of the refusal of external guidance.²⁰³

Overall, this revealed a profound incomprehension of the working class autonomy demonstrated by the Maruti movement, of the scope of their demands, as well as of the depth of the anger they expressed. Indeed, an adequate understanding of the independent power of the Maruti workers would have also required a thorough self-criticism, which none of the national federations showed to possess (read on this, GWN, n.61). At the same time, the way established unions failed to properly follow up on the Maruti demands, revealed an incapacity to grasp the ‘golden opportunity’ provided by the extraordinary unity between permanent and casual workers and the exceptional involvement of contract workers. For Maruti workers, a deeper understanding of the scope of their struggle and a more substantive class solidarity

²⁰¹ For a wider debate on trade unions renewal, read Cohen, 2014 and Gillan & Biyanwila, 2009.

²⁰² See CTUs, 2011. On the opposite side, Global Suzuki, 2012.

²⁰³ This emerged very clearly during the all-trade unions’ roundtable discussion on Maruti, held at the CSD, Delhi, 23/08/2012.

would have meant a more robust protective network when facing hostilities. A stronger, more sensible alliance among established unions would have particularly helped when the accident occurred and throughout the workers' detention period. At least to shed light and catch outside attention towards the utter violations that were being perpetuated. Indeed, besides localised support, the case fell silent for the past two years, until bails were recently conceded.²⁰⁴ Overall, for a stronger and more effective labour organisation within the current institutional settings, a complete rethinking of established unions' policy orientations and strategies would be needed, which should include not a de-politicisation but a party de-linking (see Janardhan, 2008), together with a renewed working class-based, grass-roots approach, and a more resolute inclusion of casual workers. Without these, the institutional incorporation of autonomous movements still appears neither sufficient nor strictly necessary for the advancement of the Indian working class.

Concluding remarks

Analysing the development trajectory of the National Capital Region strongly requires to look at the labour struggles that have accompanied its industrial growth. These are read here not as a mere consequence of capital strategies, but as an integral part and an inner contradiction that lie inside capitalist development, whose steps are largely induced by working class advancement itself. The key importance of struggles within capitalist development is highlighted by Tronti (2006), when he claims that *'knowledge is tied to struggle'*. Indeed, labour struggles are a clear indicator of systemic issues and power balances – so much that their investigation may help

²⁰⁴ These are overall comments, differences between different unions who intervened in the case partly apply.

disclosing the entire politico-economic architecture of historically determined development processes. In our case, the analysis of NCR struggles has helped unveiling the real – exploitative – working conditions the ‘Maruti lean model’ rests upon, capital strategies of labour control based on fierce anti-union behaviour, on the abuses of the contract labour system and on brutal repression, and the tight alliance between state and capital aimed at preserving the system from ‘political threats’.²⁰⁵ More than all the previous protests, the Maruti struggle powerfully signalled the main contradictions the system is built on. In addition, the Maruti case is one of the most interesting examples of development of a working class consciousness and of rejection of traditional institutional settings and modes of political representation that India has witnessed in the past few decades. Despite its bitter conclusion, it can undoubtedly provide lessons to the whole union movement and to future struggles in India.

²⁰⁵ On the abuses of the contract labour system and on state-capital violence, read also AITUC publications from 2012.

Conclusions

What you read here is the story of a conflict. A conflict epitomising the contradictions of an industrial development model seeking to comply with global capital strategies by taking advantage of a local labour regime. A conflict that unveils some of the vulnerabilities of the fast-growing Indian giant and of its apparent competitive advantages. A conflict that reveals how capital attempts to control labour, even when pursuing the most aggressive strategies and securing powerful allies, may fail. A conflict that tells how labour, through struggle, becomes an autonomous political subject, emerging as a vehicle of *antagonism* within the system. A conflict that lays bare the weaknesses of institutional mediation and representation. A conflict whose lessons go well beyond its bitter outcome.

In this work, conflict is interpreted as a crucial moment disclosing the actual power relations shaping a development process. As such, it becomes the main terrain of analysis, and the primary research site to develop an understanding of the overarching power structures that determine the direction development takes. Here, following Tronti's seminal thought (2006; 2009), development is interpreted as a *reactive formation*, where material settings lead to the formation of an *autonomous class consciousness*, driving working class towards *revolutionary action*, and capital strategies are predominantly a reaction aimed at *politically* controlling labour, at neutralising it in order to manage *conflict*. Within Tronti's *Copernican revolution*, in this sense, an irreconcilable dialectical conflict is triggered by the working class not simply in setting the development trajectory,

but in posing a *limit* to capital. In his view, capital *follows*, to the extent that its moves are, in their essence, nothing but political attempts to control labour. What we find, and embrace, is not a reductionist effort to determine where capitalist development begins, who sets the process in motion, but rather a perspective aimed at giving working class full revolutionary subjectivity, within a political interpretation of corporate strategies as imbued with ideological patterns. This is Tronti's actual *overturning*, a reversal of interpretative keys and assigned political subjectivities centred around the primacy of the working class (2006, 2009).

Thus, inspired by Tronti's approach and in line with a *workerist* perspective, the investigated industrial conflict is explored here through the lens of the working class. Overall, working class struggle is expressly seen as *source of knowledge*, necessary for both a reading of capitalist development and for the translation of *theory* into revolutionary practice. In this sense, Tronti's (2006) thesis that '*knowledge is tied to struggle*' becomes the key principle informing both the methodological approach and the theoretical perspective adopted in the present research. Along compatible lines, the methodology chosen, which allows us to combine a theoretical interpretation based on the '*point of view*',²⁶² and research methods aiming at gathering workers' knowledge, is the *workers' inquiry*. Inspired by the original workerist practice defined by Panzieri in the early 1960s (see Panzieri, 1976), the use of a workers' inquiry is meant to facilitate the collection of workers' voices and direct testimonies, in order to analyse class composition, struggle dynamics, and ultimately capital-labour relations. Indeed, the decision to conduct a workers' inquiry responds to several calls. Not only it complies with the

²⁶² Practice of the '*point of view*', that of the working class, leading to a '*partisan reading of reality*' through which the dynamics of the capitalist system are then interpreted (Tronti, 2006; 2009).

expressed need of ‘grounding’ a labour study in the material existence of an historically and socially determined working class, but also fits within a reconsideration of the role of the labour scholar within current academic research. In this sense, the choice of a workers’ inquiry voices the need of overcoming the political separation between researcher and researched, to jointly produce the knowledge necessary for the formulation of a revolutionary political action. More than in other forms of grounded *action research*, a workerism-inspired inquiry aims at shaping an intellectual that is not only *organic* to the working class he/she engages with, but fully embraces the political motivations and the objectives of the struggle itself.²⁶³

Following the original workerist example, the workers’ inquiry applied in this research allowed to firstly map labour composition in the NCR, and then to use the picture obtained as a basis for the interpretation of struggles occurred in the area. In particular, the analysis of labour composition in the industrial setting investigated facilitated the understanding of ongoing processes of class formation. It crucially informed the study of the motivations underlying the struggle analysed, and of the relations between different actors involved in the industrial conflict. Ultimately, at a broader level of analysis, this methodology also helped reflecting on the relationship between the *autonomous* labour movement emerged in the NCR, and the existing labour institutions.

Building on the findings from the present research, we can derive important theoretical and political conclusions.

²⁶³ For further insights on the debate on *participatory action research* and the need of pursuing an *engaged public sociology* of work, refer to Stewart and Martínez-Lucio, 2011; Brook, 2013; Ram, Edwards, Jones, Kiselincev, Muchenje, 2014.

Firstly, through an analysis of labour composition, of working and living conditions, and of struggles in the NCR, we can have a clear indication of capital strategies within the Indian Auto sector. These may contribute to a wider study of *lean manufacturing* practices within the global Auto industry, by shedding useful light upon the global/local nexus that characterises both the functioning and the limitations of this paradigm. Indeed, an analysis of corporate strategies within the Indian Auto industry can not only help debunking myths associated with the lean production rhetoric, but also provide some evidence about *why lean does not work*, and *where lean may fail*. In particular, this study may help disclosing the distance between the technical advancement established through the introduction of lean manufacturing and management techniques, and the ideological discourse it rests upon. Indeed, once the latter is unveiled, whereby the material conditions experienced by the working class crash against the lean rhetorical apparatus, the possibility itself to politically control labour is undermined. This erodes capital's ability to build a *hegemonic* regime based on workers' *consent* and *involvement*, core pillars of the lean paradigm.

Secondly, by specifically looking at the Maruti case, we can not only derive political lessons for the broader Indian labour movement, but also draw some theoretical conclusions on working class formation and struggle, and on the relation between *spontaneism* and *organisation* (see Bologna, 1977).

Finally, through an assessment of the way union organisations intervened in the Maruti 'conflict management' we can also outline some of the characteristics of the broader scenario of the current union movement in India.

When analysing management and production strategies within the global Auto industry, we defined the dominant *lean production paradigm* as a form of

hegemonic control that, resting on specific modalities of labour subordination, allowed capital to reverse the labour standards achieved under the Fordist regime (see Charron and Stewart, 2004), by perpetuating a systematic ‘ideological assault’ upon organised labour (Stewart *et al.* 2009). Building on Miliband (1989) and Burawoy (1985), the worldwide promotion of a lean manufacturing model was also interpreted as a global manifestation of *class struggle from above*, aiming to subsume working classes through the rhetoric of *consent*. In practice, the global advancement of the lean production paradigm, presented as a universal recipe endowed with unconditional validity, has been possible only through the exploitation of *local* labour regimes and *local* institutional settings. In this sense, without favourable local conditions, lean proves to have no universal applicability, nor predictable success. The ‘variability gap’ linked to the global/local nexus, also brings to the factors that might potentially cause glitches in the acceptance of the lean model, and ultimately lead to the impossibility of building an hegemonic discourse. Provided that the innovations the lean system entails in terms of management and production techniques require specific forms of labour subordination aimed at securing *consent*, two factors seem to particularly affect its functioning. One is the local *class composition*, which can influence the way lean is ‘welcomed’. Specifically, class composition crucially implies different degrees of resistance to the model introduced. The other factor is the specific *labour regime* on which managerial and manufacturing innovations are nested. Indeed, this determines the sustainability of the model in the long run. In the light of the case analysed, all this was particularly evident.

The *lean manufacturing system* was introduced in India through the revolutionary partnership between the Indian Maruti and the Japanese Suzuki in the early 1980s. Such collaboration marked the diffusion of new production techniques based on the concepts of *teamwork*, *continuous improvement*, on the optimisation of working times and spaces in order to guarantee higher flexibility. As our survey reported, with reference to the NCR, in practice this involved strict supervision on the assembly line, tough rhythms, heavy workloads and uncomfortable working spaces. In practice, ‘consent’ to hard working and harsh living conditions was achieved through a wide set of means aimed at keeping labour fragmented and depoliticised. One was the deployment of a very specific workforce, expected to stay silent and unorganised. In this sense, the process of hiring young, politically inexperienced, ‘ambitious’²⁶⁴ workers, yet less capable to communicate and unite due to profound differences in origin and status (see chapter 5 and 6), expressly served this purpose. Another means adopted by capital to politically control labour was the widespread use (and abuse) of the contract labour system. Other than representing a solution to reduce labour costs and to easily adjust labour quantities,²⁶⁵ this proved to be an essentially political strategy to prevent labour from organising. This was based on the assumption that the distinct separation between permanent and casual workers would have impeded the formation of bridges, and on the impossibility for casual workers to become unionised. The political nature of the use of casual labour vividly emerged in the aftermath of all the major NCR struggles. Following the strikes in fact, management extensively replaced dismissed permanent workers with their - more convenient - casual

²⁶⁴ Due to the wider expectations of a highly educated workforce, - in theory – committed to improve their working and living conditions to the extent of not risking any political exposure (see chapter 5 and 6).

²⁶⁵ See Moody (1997) on *numerical flexibility*, chapter 2.

counterparts – in a process that we could define as ‘*casualisation by substitution*’. Furthermore, once the recent Maruti protest was repressed, the company progressively supplanted previous contract workers with new ‘company casuals’.²⁶⁶ Publicised as a move to limit the employment of contract workers and their continuous in-sourcing, this strategy was instead a way to maintain the advantages of casual labour while exercising more direct control upon it.²⁶⁷ Finally, capital also attempted to contain labour conflicts through the deployment of an openly anti-union strategy. This manifested through the continuous obstructionism towards existing unions; through systematic attempts at hindering the formation of new unions; and, again, through a politics of recruitment expressly targeting not-unionised, casual workers.

However, overall, capital strategies aimed at controlling labour by keeping it fragmented and depoliticised, have not worked in the NCR. The labour composition engineered by capital has not acted as a deterrent against labour organising, whilst actually leading to the progressive formation of a collective political consciousness. The labour regime on which the lean model was implemented, and the contract labour system in particular, have neither guaranteed the flexibility sought by capital, nor helped capital preventing conflict. Actually, the use and abuse of the contract labour system has instead powerfully revealed the unsustainability of the ‘Indian version of the lean paradigm’. In fact, crucially, when mechanisms of labour subordination stop functioning, *lean may fail*. As without *consent*, all the myths built to sustain the ‘*hegemonic discourse*’ inevitably collapse.

²⁶⁶ Casual, but directly hired from the company and not through a contractor. See Gurgaon Workers’ News n. 61.

²⁶⁷ From an interview with M. Abraham, leader of the 2000 Maruti strike. Delhi, 26/08/2012.

From our analysis of labour composition and struggles in the NCR, and from our interpretation of the Maruti strike in particular, we can also derive significant theoretical and political lessons in terms of working class formation and organising. Indeed, the strong character and the determination the emerging labour movement showed, which reached its highest peaks during the recent Maruti struggle, signals the significant rise in class consciousness by NCR workers and, arguably, the consolidation of a new political subjectivity. This was achieved despite the scarce tradition of political organisation in the area and without the initial guidance of established labour institutions. In this sense, the Maruti case proves how a process of class formation may be triggered *autonomously*, regardless of external influence, depending on material circumstances allowing the development of collective thought and action. Within our context, in our view, four main factors led to a common understanding of shared exploitative conditions, which then turned into action. First, there was an evident mismatch between the corporate rhetoric on lean production, and the actually lived working experiences. Second, there was an extensive, abusive deployment of casual labour. Third, workers experienced a growing gap between desired consumption patterns and effective possibilities of social reproduction. Fourth, workers developed a sense of unity against both capital and the State, as both formed a strong coalition to repress struggles through violent means (see chapter 6).

Overall, a collective class-consciousness emerged despite capital strategies intended to fragment, control, and depoliticise labour, in an area where it was not expected to emerge, and from a workforce that was not supposed to organise. Most importantly, workers' collective awareness of their own exploitation and their firm resolution to take action overcame the barriers imposed by extensive casualisation.

The separation between permanent and casual workers and the actual, greater vulnerability of the latter did not prevent the formation of strong solidarity bonds. In a sense, despite the violent repression that followed the strike, and State-capital connivance in abusing labour and human rights, this was Maruti's happy story. A story that sets an important precedent in the history of the Indian working class, but that can also provide inspiring lessons for labour organising in general.

The strong and independent character displayed by the Maruti movement also prompts some necessary reflections on the relation between *spontaneism* and *institutions*. In this regard, we interpreted Maruti's 'spontaneous revolt' not as an indicator of disorganisation or political immaturity, but as a sign of political independence and *autonomy*, and of conscious rejection of traditional mechanisms of union representation. After such a spontaneous revolt, facing severe managerial attacks, and not adequately supported by formally recognised labour organisations, the movement failed to generalise its struggle, solidify its *modus vivendi*, and sustain its original autonomy. In similar cases, the *institutionalisation* of spontaneous movements, i.e. the incorporation into established labour organisations, may be an option, in order to facilitate the continuation of a struggle and help avoiding unwanted outcomes. However, as we have argued, such institutionalisation is neither sufficient, nor strictly necessary. It is not sufficient, because in the absence of strong class-based and grass roots organisations, the political essence of a struggle and its autonomous character might dissolve, and get absorbed within a merely bureaucratic apparatus. It is also not strictly necessary, because whereas a movement manages to solidify its *modus vivendi* and develop a strongly independent form of organisation, the incorporation within a broader union structure might dilute its identity and original demands; a move that

may even be counter-productive. In this regard, we disagree with both Tronti's *autonomy of the political* (Tronti, 2006; 2010; CRS, 2011; Monaco, 2015) and Negri's *autonomy of the social* (see Corradi, 2011; Negri, 2007; Turchetto, 2008), as both may lead to either an *a priori* advocacy of entryism, or to the justification of an unrealistic detachment from the political sphere. In this sense, the success of an *autonomous* movement depends on a balance between the conservation of a strong, independent class identity, and the consideration of the broader political structure in which this identity is embedded. Knowledge of the institutional setting and the creation of wider solidarity networks may help facing periods of crisis or peaks of violent repression, whilst avoiding self-destructing mechanisms able to affect the political potential of working class movements.

The question of the potential *institutionalisation* of spontaneous movements also leads to an assessment of the current status of labour organisations in India. As we argued when discussing the inadequate union intervention within the Maruti case, we also addressed some of the main reasons behind their weaknesses and political blindness. We traced these in their high fragmentation, in their political affiliation to national parties, and in their substantial incapacity to deal with processes of casualisation. These have generated a progressive detachment from working class demands, and a diffused inability to incorporate current challenges affecting the Indian labour movement. In this sense, in order to effectively renew their mandate and to strengthen their political leverage, Indian unions should follow three main directions. First, they should consider a substantial de-politicisation, not in terms of dilution of their ideological apparatus, but in terms of a *de-linking* from the strong party-logic that still too often prevails over workers' needs (see Janardhan, 2008). In this sense, a defined ideological character and a strong political

background may be an asset only to the extent that they do not prevent the organisation to properly represent the working class constituency. Whereby the party-logic obscures the workers' original mandate, the union structure has lost its significance and its possibility to gain legitimacy. Therefore, secondly, union organisations should go back to a more defined class-based, grass-roots approach, getting closer to their base. Third, they should develop mechanisms for a proper inclusion of issues related to casual workers. Until then, workers will keep bravely fighting alone, but unfortunately many golden opportunities for the advancement of the Indian working class will still be wasted.

Appendix A

Questionnaire about Working and Living Conditions in the Automotive Sector – NCR

Dear Workers,

This questionnaire is part of a PhD field research on Working/ Living Conditions and Labour Practices in the Automotive Sector, NCR. All the answers will be kept confidential and the questionnaire will be kept anonymous. Your information will be restricted to be used in this research only. To answer the questions, either put a tick in the appropriate box(es), or write your answer in the spaces provided. You can choose to answer either in English or in Hindi, in both cases please write clearly in order to facilitate the following transcription/ translation. Thank you very much for your time and your collaboration.

मह प्रश्नावरी नी.एच.डी पील्ड रयसचच का एक हहस्सा हैं. सबी जवाफ औय प्रश्नावरी गोन्नीम याखी जामेगी. आनके द्वाया डी हुई जानकायी ससपच रयसचच हेतु उनमोग कक जामेगी. अनने उत्तय देने के सरए सही का ननशान रगाएो मा दी हुई खरी जगह में सरखें. अनने उत्तय आन हहोदी मा ओग्रेजी ककसी बी बाषा में दे सकते हैं. कृन्मा अनने उत्तय सपाई से सरखे ताके वो फाद में आसानी से नढ़े जा सकें. आनके भूल्मवान सभम औय सहमोग के सरए धन्मवाद.

A) Personal Details

1) Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female सरोग : नुरुष ☐ स्त्री ☐

2) Age: उम्र

3) Place of Origin: Hometown जन्मस्थान

District जजरा _____ State/Territory याज्म/ प्रदेश

4) Language Spoken: ☐ English ☐ Hindi ☐ Other बाषा : ओग्रेजी ☐ हहोदी ☐ अन्म ☐

5) Status: ☐ Married ☐ Unmarried ☐ Widowed वववाहहत ☐ अवववाहहत ☐ ववधवा ☐

6) Family: ☐ No Children ☐ With Children, नरयवाय : फच्चे ☐ फच्चे नहीं

Number सोख्या

7) Education Level: शैक्षक मोम्मता

B) Working Conditions

B1. General

8) Which Company do you work for?

आप ककस कंपनी में क ायरत हैं ?

9) What is the Company producing?

आपकी कंपनी में क्य उत्प दन होत है ?

10) How long have you been working for the same Company?

आप इस कंपनी में कब से सेव रत हैं ?

11) What kind of job are you doing / what tasks do you execute?

आप क्य क म करते हैं ?

12) How long does it take to perform each operation?

एक क म करने में आपको ककतना समय रगत है ?

13) How many times per day do you repeat the same operation?

एक क म को आप हदन में ककतनी ब र दोहर ते हैं ?

14) Is the position you are required to assume in order to perform your task comfortable?

जजस शायीरयक जस्थनत भें आनको काभ कयना होता है, क्मा वोह आयाभदामक है ?

☐ Yes ☐ No, हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

because

कमूकक

15) Are you ever asked to move to different workstations during your shift? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्मा नारी के दौयान आनको कामच कयने कक जगह फदरने के सरए कहा जाता है? हाँ नहीं

15a) If Yes, how often?

अगय हाँ, तो ककतनी फाय

B2. Working Hours / Shift

कामच सभम / नारी

16) How many hours do you work per day/night?

एक हदन/ यात भें आन ककतने घोटे काभ कयते हैं ?

17) How many days per week?

सप्ताह भें ककतनी फाय ?

18) Do you ever work on night shifts? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्मा आन कबी यात कक नारी भें काभ कयते हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

19) Do you ever work extra hours? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्मा आन सभम से अधधक काभ कयते हैं? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

19a) If Yes, how often? In a week? _____ In a month? _____ In a year? _____

अगय हॉ तो ककतनी फाय? सप्ताह भें _____ भहीने भें _____ वषच भें _____

19b) Do you generally decide to work overtime or is it the Management asking you?

क़मा आन खुद अननी भर्ज़ी से ओवय टाइभ कयते हैं मा मैनेजमेंट के कहने नय?

19c) Are you paid for your overtime work? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क़मा आनको ओवय टाइभ के सरए अरग वेतन सभरता है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

19d) How much compared to normal working hours?

साभान्म वेतन कक तुरना में ककतना ? _____

20) How many breaks do you have in a shift?

एक नारी में ककतनी फाय ब्रेक का सभम सभरता है? _____

20a) How long do they last? ककतनी देय के सरए?

20b) Do you consider these breaks enough to satisfy your needs? ☐ Yes ☐ No, because

क़मा आनको रगता है कक इतना सभम कापी है? हाँ ☐ नहीं , ☐ क़मूकक

21) Do you ever get days off? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क़मा आनको कबी छुट्टी सभरती है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

21a) If Yes, how many? अगय हाँ तो ककतनी Per Week? सप्ताह में

Per Month? भहीने में

Per Year? वषच में

B3. Facilities

22) Do you think there are adequate facilities inside your plant? ☐ Yes ☐ No, this should be improved

क्या आनको रगता है कक सोमोर भें सायी सुववधाएो हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं, इन्हें औय फेहतय ककमा जा सकता है ☐

22a) Is there an adequate number of washrooms? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्या नमाचप्त सोख्मा भें शौचारम हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

22b) Are they sufficiently close to your workstation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्या वह कामच कयने कक जगह के ननकट हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

22c) Is a canteen provided in your plant? ☐ Yes ☐ No

कमो आनके सोमोर भें कैटीन है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

22d) If Yes, do you make use of it? ☐ Yes ☐ No

अगय हाँ तो क्या आन उसका उनमोग कयते हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

22e) If No, do you think it would be needed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

अगय नहीं, तो क्या आनको रगता कक कबी कयेंगे? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

B4. Safety

23) Do you consider your workstation as potentially risky? ☐ Yes,

क्या आनको रगता है कक आनके कामच कयने के स्थान भें कोई खतया है ? हाँ , ☐

Because क्मूकक

_____ ☐ No नहीं
☐

24) Have you ever had any accident on your workstation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्या आपके कामच करने के स्थान में कभी कोई दुर्घटना हुई है? हाँ व नहीं ☐

24a) If Yes, what kind? अगर हाँ तो ककस प्रकार कक

24b) Did it cause any permanent/ serious damage? क्या उस से कोई गंभीर चोट आई है?

☐ Yes, the following हाँ, इस प्रकार से

☐ No नहीं

25) Is Safety Equipment arranged by your Employer? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्या सुरक्षा उपकरण कम्पनी द्वारा हदए जाते हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

26) If Yes, which of the following Safety Items are provided by the Employer?

अगर हाँ, तो इनमें से कौन से सुरक्षा उपकरण हदए जाते हैं?

(You may choose more than one) (एक से अधिक चुन सकते हैं)

☐ Helmet ☐ Gloves ☐ 3. Safety Belt ☐ 4. Insulated Shoes ☐ 5. Protective Goggles ☐ Mask ☐

१. हेलमेट ☐ २. दस्ताने ☐ ३. सुरक्षा नेटी ☐ ४. इन्सुलेटेड जूते ☐ ५. सुरक्षा चश्मे ☐ ६. मास्क ☐

७. Other मा अन्य

8. None of the above ☐ ८. इनमें से कुछ भी नहीं ☐

B5. Recruitment / Contract बती

27) How have you been recruited for your current position? ☐ By Regular Application and interview ☐

Employment agency ☐ By phone call ☐ Through personal acquaintances ☐ Contractor's call ☐ Other

इस नौकरी में आनकी बती कैसे हुई?

साभान्म अजी औय इोटयव्मू ☐ योर्जगाय एजेंसी ☐ पोन ☐ जान नहचान ☐ ठेकेदाय के द्वाया ☐ मा अन्म ☐

28) Which of the following best describes your employer? ☐ Company Manager ☐ Plant Manager ☐

Contractor ☐

Other _____

इनमे से आनके फॉस का क्मा नद है ? कोननी भेनेजय ☐ सोमर भेनेजय ☐ ठेकेदाय ☐

अन्म _____

29) Did you sign an employment contract for your current position? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्मा आनने इस नौकरी के सरए कोई कात्रेक्ट नय साइन ककमा है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

29a) Were terms and conditions of this contract clear when you signed it? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्मा साइन कयते सभम आनको साये ननमभ औय शतें भारूभ थी ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

29b) Are you currently performing exactly the tasks stated in the above contract? ☐ Yes ☐ No,

क्मा आन वो ही सफ कामच जो कॉरेक्ट में सरखे हैं, अबी कयते हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

I'm rather doing अफ में मे काभ कयता हूँ

30) What kind of contract do you currently have? ☐ Permanent ☐ Temporary ☐ Casual
☐ As a Trainee/ Apprentice ☐ Other

इस सभम आनका कोरेक्ट ककस प्रकार का है? - नभचनेनेट ☐ कैजुअर ☐ - रेनी/ अप्रेंटिस ☐ - मा अन्म

31) Is your name listed on the Company/ Plant's Attendance Registrar? ☐ Yes ☐ No

कमा आनका नाभ कोननी के यजजस्टय में दर्ज है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

32) Who keeps a record of your attendance/ working hours?

☐ Company Manager ☐ Plant Manager ☐ Contractor ☐ Myself ☐ Other

आनकी हाजजयी औय कामच सभम का हहसाफ कौन रखता है ?

कोननी भेनेजय ☐ सोमर भेनेजय ☐ ठेकेदार ☐ स्वमो ☐ अन्म ☐

33) Who takes the responsibility in case any issue / dispute / accident occurs on your workplace?

☐ Company Manager ☐ Plant Manager ☐ Contractor ☐

Other _____

कामच_____ में ककसी वववाद / झगडे मा दुघचटना के सभम ककसकी जर्जम्भेदायी होती है ?

कोननी भेनेजय ☐ सोमर भेनेजय ☐ ठेकेदार ☐ अन्म ☐

34) Have you ever been fired / dismissed / suspended? ☐ Yes (please specify)

कमा कबी आन फखाचस्त / डडससभस / सस्नेड ककमे गए हैं ? हाँ ☐ (सो_____ में फताएँ)

☐ No

34a) Were you given any notice? ☐ Yes (how

long?) _____ ☐ No

क्या आपको कोई नोटिस हदमा गमा था ? ☐ हाँ (ककतने सभम का) _____ ☐ नहीं ☐

34b) Was a regular procedure followed in that case? ☐ Yes ☐ No (please specify)

क्या उस सभम आपके साथ साभान्म प्रकिमा अननाई गमी थी जैसी सफके साथ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

B6. Salary

35) Are you regularly paid a salary? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्या आपको सभम नय वेतन हदमा जाता है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

36) Who pays your salary? ☐ Company ☐ Contractor

आपका वेतन कौन देता है ? कम्पनी ☐ ठेकेदार ☐

☐ Other अन्म ☐

37) How is your salary calculated? आपका वेतन कैसे धगना जाता है ?

☐ Hourly rate: घंटे के हहसाफ से ☐ _____ Indian Rupees/ per hour
रुनमे प्रनत घंटा

☐ Daily rate: हदन के हहसाफ से _____ Indian Rupees/ per day
रुनमे प्रनत हदन

☐ Weekly rate: सप्ताह के हहसाफ से _____ Indian Rupees/ per week
रुनमे प्रनत सप्ताह

☐ Monthly rate: महीने के हहसाफ से _____ Indian Rupees/ per month
रुनमे प्रनत माह

38) Has it ever happened that your Salary was not paid or delayed? ☐ Yes, in this circumstance _____

☐ No

क्या कभी ऐसा हुआ है कि आपके वेतन का भुगतान नहीं हुआ हो या देय से हुआ हो ? हाँ ☐

इस स्थिति में _____

नहीं ☐

C. Living Conditions

C1. General

39) Do you live nearby the plant? ☐ Yes ☐ No

आप प्लांट के पास रहते हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

40) If Not, how far, more or less, in Km? अगर नहीं तो कितनी दूरी, कितनी ?

41) How long does it take you to travel to the plant every day?

प्लांट तक जाने में आपको कितना समय लगता है

42) How many members does your Family have?

आपके परिवार में कितने सदस्य हैं ?

43) Is any other member of your family perceiving a regular salary? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्या आपके परिवार का कोई और सदस्य भी कमाता है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

44) Please indicate the annual income you and your family received last year (in Indian Rupees)

अन्ने औय अन्ने नरयवाय कक सभराके एक सार कक आभदनी फताएँ (रुन्ने में)

Your income: आन्का वेतन

Your spouse's income: आन्के ननत/नत्नी का वेतन

Other (please specify) अन्म (सोँने में फताएँ)

Your household income: आन्के घय कक कुर आभदनी

45) How much do you (as household) averagely spend for living expenses, on monthly basis?

आन्के घय का भहीने का खचच अन्ककतना होता है ?

Rent/ Build House ककयामा / भकान

Food बोजन

Medical Care भेडडकर/ दवाइमो आहद

Transportation आना/ जाना

Education नढाई/ स्कूर

Extra अन्म खचे

46) Do you generally have spare time? ☐ Yes ☐ Few ☐ Almost Never

कमा काभ के अनतरयक्त आनके नास खारी सभम फचता है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐ कबी नहीं ☐

46a) What activities do you prefer doing in your spare time?

अनने खारी सभम भे आन कमा कयना नसोद कयते हैं ?

C2. Social Benefits

47) Are you entitled to any Gratuity? ☐ Yes ☐ No

कमा आन ग्रेजुटी के हकदाय हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

48) Do you have access to PF/ ESIC schemes? ☐ Yes ☐ No

कमा आनके नास प्राववडेंट पोड /इ.स.आई.सस . स्कीभ कक सुववधा है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

49) Do you benefit of any other Social Scheme? ☐ Yes (please specify)

कमा आन ककसी औय स्कीभ का राब उठा यहे हैं, ? अगय हाँ ☐ तो सो ☐ ने भे फताए

☐ No ☐ नहीं

50) Do you have any Insurance? ☐ Yes (please specify) कमा आनके नास ककसी प्रकाय का फीभा है, अगय हाँ ☐ तो सो ☐ ने भे फताए

☐ No ☐ नहीं ☐

D. Labour Rights / Organisation

51) As far as you are aware, is there any Labour Union inside your plant? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क़मा आनको अननी पैक़ी भें कोई रेफ़य मूननमान है? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

51a) If Yes, is this affiliated to any National Centre? ☐ Yes ☐ No

अगय हाँ तो क़मा मे ककसी अखखर बायतीम केंद्र से सोफोधधत है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

51b) If No, do you think one would be needed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

अगय नहीं, तो क़मा आन सभझते हैं कक इसकी ज़रूरत है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

51c) For which purpose? क़मों औय कैसे

52) Are you personally member of any Union? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क़मा आन स्वमो ककसी सोगठन/ मूननमन के सदस्म हैं? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

53) In both cases, do you ever refer to Union Leaders in case issues / disputes / accidents occur in your plant? ☐ Yes ☐ No

दोनो जस्थनत भें ककसी वववाद/ झगडे/ दुघाचतना के साभी क़मा आन मूननमन रीडय से सभानकच कयते हैं?

हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

53a) If Not, who do you generally refer to and why?

अगर नहीं तो ऐसी जस्थनत में ककस से सोनकच कयते हैं औय क्मूँ ?

54) Have there recently been disputes at your workplace? ☐ Yes ☐ No

क्मा आनके कामच कक जगह नय कबी वववाद/झगडे हुए हैं ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

54a) For which reasons? ककन कायणों से

55) Have you read about the last General Strike at National Level? ☐ Yes ☐ No

आनने वनछरी याष्ट्रीम स्तय कक आभ हड़तार के फाये में नढ़ा है ? हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

55a) Did you personally agree/ disagree with the demands claimed? Why?

क्मा आन वमजक्तगत रून् से उन भोगो से सहमत / असहमत हैं ? क्मूँ ?

56) In your opinion, at moment, which are the most urgent and serious problems in your Company /in your plant?

आनकी याम में, इस सभम आनकी कम्ननी में सफसे ज़रूयी मा गोबीय सभस्मा क्मा है ?

57) What would you personally consider as a priority in order to improve your working and living conditions?

आनकी याम भें आनके काभ औय यहने कक जस्थनत फेहतय कयने भें सफसे ज़रूयी क्या कदम हो सकते हैं ?

This is the end of the Questionnaire. Thank you again for your collaboration. Please feel free to leave a personal contact (phone or mail, in the space provided below) in case you are available for future correspondence (optional).

मह प्रश्रावरी मही सभाप्त होती है, आनके सहमोग के सरए धन्मवाद. अन्नना पोन नोफय मा भेर नीचे सरखें

Date/ Place
हदनोक स्थान

Appendix B

General Checklist for Interviews with Employers / Managers from OEMs in the NCR Auto Cluster

- **Capital /Ownership**

- Current Ownership (Family –run business? Nationality? Presence of JV/ Equity/ Foreign Participation? If foreign, when did the business start in India?)
- Ownership in Historical terms (Any change after market liberalisation? Any change in participation share following the allowance of different Auto Policies?)
- Capital: Has level of investment changed over time? Have they expanded their business/ acquired new units/ relocated production/ invested in new technology / R&D?
- Current turnover/ expected turnover?
- Capacity utilisation over installed capacity?

- **Production**

- Location: HQ/ Manufacturing units/ why are they located in this cluster and not in others? Which is the basis of comparative advantage in current location (consider different State policies with regard to taxation, energy provision, land allocation, or also, different labour costs across States)? What could attract investors to operate in India/ this cluster? Why/how are local products competitive: price, quality, technology employed, quality standards, cost?

- Component suppliers: same cluster/ other clusters /abroad?
 - Type of production: 2-3-4 wheelers/ models?
 - Manufacturing operations: only assembly or also manufacturing? What is done inside and what is outsourced? Evolution over time? Relationship with Subcontractors?
 - Inside Units: How are assembly lines organised? Technology employed? Metric system? Are they complying with WCM standards? How many machines? How many workers? How many shifts per day/ week?
 - Have they been able to operate on full regime even in times of lower productivity / demand (in periods of crisis, for example, or even last year, as reported in the Maruti case)? To what extent do employers perceive the global Crisis? Which strategies have they preferred in order to bear production costs during high peaks of market crisis?
- **Market Strategy**
 - Import / Export levels?
 - Foreign / Domestic market sales? Which countries do they export to? What kind of target/ buyer on the Domestic Market?
 - Considering the growing expansion of the Domestic demand (especially in terms of passenger vehicles) do employers see the Automotive sector as potentially leading Indian Industrial Development? Do they see any room for employment generation /absorption, compared to other industrial sectors?

- **Policy**

- Any particular production-related constraint due to current Auto Policy? Any relevant benefit following Auto Policy 2002?
- Comments on Automotive Mission Plan 2006 -2016.
- If employers could claim substantial / more targeted interventions by the Central /State Government (depending on the issue), what would they currently require? (subsidies, reduction of import duties, infrastructure improvement, lower taxation, easing of labour regulations, further service provision etc.)
- Do employers belong to any Association? Do they benefit from belonging to it? How? Is there cooperation/ competition about its members?

- **Employment – related issued**

- How many employees per unit / per line?
- How can employers describe the current workforce: trained, speaking English, young (specify age range), male or female, local or migrant? Why do they think this is the case? If you could choose, which type of labourforce would you want?
- Which factors are considered in the recruitment process? How is recruitment operated? (interview/ call/ personal acquaintance or through agent/contractor) Type of contract they generally prefer? Why do they prefer it? If employers use contractors, how do they find them? Is there anybody inside the company who is in charge of this? How is this particular agent called in the company? What is the benefit to use contractors? Are they satisfied with the contractors' work?
- Any skills shortage/ mismatch between skills offered/ demanded on the local market? Any training provided to increase workers skills level?

- Best strategy to deal with labour costs/ to achieve labour costs minimisation?
- Comments on recent labour unrest: has production suffered? Did employers ever completely shut the plants? Have they registered substantial losses? Do they think labour unrest in other companies has affected their position as well / the whole cluster market value (some firms are currently opting to localise their plants in other clusters, even to escape NCR labour unrest/ organisation i.e. Gujarat/ Maharashtra – what's their opinion?)
- **Desired strategy for the future?**
 - Capital?
 - Production?
 - Market?
 - Policy – related?
 - Employment?

Appendix C

Checklist for Interviews with Trade Unions /National Centres

- 1) How is the Centre / Federation structured?
 - Which actors does it gather?
 - What relationship with Industrial Federations? (ex. Steel Workers Federation, Construction Workers Federation)
 - What relationship with smaller unions, like company/ plant – based unions? (Contacts to share?)
 - Any relationship with IMF (International Metalworkers' Federation)?
 - Relationship with Business Associations? Type of Bargaining?
 - Relationship with the affiliated Political Party?
 - Government / Representation in Parliament?

- 2) Have the unions participated in the National Strike on Feb 28th?
 - Which is their position on current National Labour Policies?
 - On current Labour Laws (what is missing/ what should be changed/ what should be updated/ what is present but not enacted)?
 - And in particular, on Minimum Wage?
 - On Contract Labour?
 - On Hire&Fire Procedures?
 - On Union Rights treatment?

3) Do they follow disputes in the Automotive Sector?

- In the NCR in particular?
- Have they been involved in the Maruti struggle?
- What is at stake there?
- Ask for explanations about the Independent Trade Union issue, Contract Labour, Wage levels etc.
- What about State – Management relationship?
- Level of Repression?
- Apart from Maruti, what differences / similarities with other Companies from the same cluster? Similar Corporate trends / struggles? Any difference in Labour practices across different clusters?

4) Further Materials / Contacts?

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