There are black people who believe that they treat us that way because we are black. That is not to understand history at all. The persecution of subordinate minorities or weak majorities is a commonplace of history, and you have to understand that what is taking place is part of a universal historical development. Once you believe that is happening to you only because you are black - it is happening to us only because we are black - that is a mistake. - Cyril Lionel Robert James, Lectures on the Black Jacobins.

Javid Tariq, a forty-year-old New York cabdriver, is a political refugee from Bengal. He lives in New York City after a long period in Germany, where he worked as a bricklayer. Although he only succeeded in finding an unskilled job, he has a high level of education and political organizer skills, as well as experience as a photographer. Since he arrived in the USA, he has worked on a photography project about metropolitan violence, fighting at the same time for his day-to-day survival. Then, one day he was shocked by dreadful headlines: an increasing number of New York cabdrivers, who are mostly from India, are attacked and frequently killed in ambiguous circumstances. As a result he decided to go and search for a racist serial killer and started to drive a yellow cab, patching together a creative job, that is, photography, with a low-skill activity. At the same time, he has become a leader activist in the Taxi Worker Alliance - which is a New York workers centre focused on the cabdriver’s struggles. Since then Javid has shown his photographs in Manhattan, he has written papers and travelled around Europe for academic conferences, but to subsist he is still a cabdriver. So according to what happened in Javid’s labour and life experience we can highlight how the colour line, as the problem of the 20th century, is still a problem today.

Starting from this point, my argument focuses on the articulation of race, labour and capitalist production. Therefore, I talk about race and race relations to apply to a double process. On one side, there is race as a discursive operation affecting the labour market, the space of citizenship and, last but not least, cultural production concerning identity politics, sex and gender relationships or identities, and so on. On the other side, there is the economic and juridical context that produces - especially with regards to the labour market and the space of citizenship - racialized differences as social, political and economic segmentation. Thus, I refer to race both as a structuring discourse and as the unstable effect of the inter-relationship of different structuring processes and struggles over identity and politics. This is a double mutual process. Referring to Louis Althusser’s analysis, this process implies a relationship of over-determination which suggests moving beyond the traditional Marxist idea about the economic base as that which determines the social “superstructure”, by considering the relation as one of over-determination: a way of thinking about the multiple, often opposed, forces active in race and in race relations, without falling into an overly-simple idea of these forces being simply “contradictory”. As Paul Gilroy brilliantly pointed out, race and class should be thought to both combine and contradict. Both race and class mutually entail an endless process of translation; a process which produces junctures among differences, and which bears a new commonality ‘precisely while difference is produced out of incommensurability’. Following this conceptual framework, ‘the concept of class cannot be entirely banished from inquiries into racial politics’, although its use must be carefully specified, as Gilroy suggested. And yet, while ‘the positions of dominant and subordinate groups are ascribed by “race”, race and racism play ‘an active role, articulating political, cultural and economics element into a complex and contradictory unity’. This ensures that ‘race is the modality in which class is lived’.

Following these remarks, race and class appear strictly combined with each other, in contemporary as well as in former social relations. This means, as Stuart Hall suggested, redefining the Marxist determination from structure to superstructure as ‘a problem of articulation’. Thus, the articulation of the different social, economic, cultural or political elements change over time. It means that race (as well as racism) are not present in the same form or degree, in all capitalist formations. Nevertheless, in the
capitalist transition whether in the 17th and across the 19th and 20th centuries or in the present time, the process of primitive accumulation each time redraws the coordinates of workers’ exploitation. Therefore, the problem of transition re-emerges in each historical moment when the conditions of translation (that is a way to produce junctures among differences) have to be established anew. As Sandro Mezzadra states, the

‘point is precisely that global capitalism is characterized by the fact that capital as translation is compelled to confront the problem of the establishment of the conditions of possibility of translation at the very level of its everyday operation’. 11

It is the production of the conditions of the subordination of living labour to abstract labour. This is a problem 'not only at the point of production but also more generally as a societal problem':12

In order to clarify this understanding of race in the present time, while Chandra Mohanty points out that 'capitalism is a foundational principle of social organization'13, she nevertheless explains that

this does not mean that capitalism functions as a “master frame” or that all forms of domination are reducible to capitalistic hierarchies, or that the temporal and spatial effects of capital are the same around the globe. It does mean that at this particular stage of global capitalism, the particularities of its operations (unprecedented deterritorialization, abstraction and concentration of capital, transnationalization of production and mobility through technology, consolidation of supranational corporations that link capital flows globally, etc.) necessitate naming capitalist hegemony and culture as a foundational principle of social life. To do otherwise is to obfuscate the way power and hegemony function in the world.14

With this account, I aim to develop an argument about the materiality of race in the 21st century. And will present an analysis of the coordinates of non-white labor exploitation both in the past and in the present time. My intention is to examine the process of racialization inside the labour market, as well as struggles and strategies of resistance grounded in anti-racist practices. Firstly, I examine race emerging at the beginning of capitalism, focusing on White exceptionalism as a historical matter. Secondly, I discuss non-white worker exploitation in the contemporary phase of capitalistic transition, stressing how processes of racialization and cognitivization of labour have become filters which regulate entrance into the labour market. Then the segmentation of labour will be observed, focusing on the history of the USA through the 20th century, especially with regard to the exploitation and submission of the Mexican workforce. Finally, I try to think about race as a political and conflictual production, that is, as a chance to generate political mobilization which opposes the increasing discrimination both on labour and inside society. Here, I focus especially on the Latino/a mobilization in the USA since the spring of 2006, trying to highlight how this struggle is challenging the modern idea of citizenship as well as the traditional forms of democratic representation. This article focuses mainly on the USA, although both the processes of labour hierarchisation and the resistance strategies along the colour line have a global scale.

**Race formation at the beginning of capitalism**

To develop the argument, we can begin with the story of the split between white and non-white workers in the capitalistic transition in the 17th century. It is a well known story which traces its roots in the labour system of the plantation, during the colonial era. Nonetheless, this background helps us to comprehend what dominance and resistance, as a matter of fact, mean. Primitive accumulation in the beginning of capitalism is not only a tale of labour segregation, but takes into account struggles, escapes and autonomous organizations. There is a good deal of evidence telling us that for a long time struggles exploded in the cross Atlantic slaves ships, as well as in the plantations and marronage communities, perturbing capitalism since its inception.15 It ought to be considered that, initially, within the plantation system, white (mostly wanderers, sex workers, and the poor taken away from their native land) and black (slaves) people worked side by side, subserviently, in the same system of labour. On occasions, they fought communally against submission and exploitation. Yet, across the 17th and 18th centuries ‘the “white race” was invented as the social control formation’.16 It was necessary to break down the common struggles of these workers, stopping their insubordinations. Since then race - as racial differentiation - was related to ‘a pattern of oppression (subordination, subjugation, exploitation) of one group of human beings by another’.17 And a stark separation in the juridical organization of labour between the free white workers and the black enslaved ones was introduced.
From that time onwards, to have white skin became a legal device to legitimate social, political and labour discrimination. A white identity grew to be the linchpin for racial dominance, which was supported by the law. Nevertheless, 'more than simply codifying race in the limited sense of merely giving a legal definition to pre-existing social categories', laws 'have served not only to fix the boundaries of race, but also to define the content of racial identities and to specify their relative privilege or disadvantage', as Hanye López has argued. Thus, since the 17th century White exceptionalism has been the norm. Indeed, White dominance justified the non-white worker subordination to white profit all over the world. In this way racism became a sort of "additional internal charge" in the determination of the labour market during different times of capitalistic transition. This has been explained by WEB Du Bois’ significant analysis of the 19th and 20th century USA labour market: white workers 'while they received a low-wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they are white'. In other terms, despite the fact that they had in some instances the same wage, white and non-white workers received different treatments along the colour line or - citing David Roediger - 'toward whiteness'..

Describing the labour composition in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century, Du Bois pointed out the contempt, exploitation and social exclusion, as well as the control of non-white workers. Thus, he highlighted the crucial role of such subordination, noting at the same time how it founded its function in capitalistic accumulation and wealth production. Therefore, the submission of non-white labour ‘made the basis of world power and universal domination and armed arrogance in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, New York and Rio de Janeiro’. The implications of Du Bois’ ideas are still at work today, as we can find similarities between the past and the present. It is not difficult to observe and recognize contemporary racialization processes, focusing on the submission of non-white labour to the advantage of capital, which is constitutionally white. While today the labour composition has undoubtedly changed, a system of labour exploitation still operates. It means that dispositives of control exercised by juridical and cultural apparatuses are obstructing the mobility of living labour, even though, at the same time social and labour struggles challenge the future of capitalism. On the one hand, there are racialization processes and the labour discrimination in wages; on the other hand, there is ‘race as political space’, that is, the possibility to build large mobilizations and struggles deploying race, in order to modify the social and political community as well as the labour market. Therefore it’s important to analyse class composition along the ‘colour line’ because it clarifies, as Mohanty highlights, how power and hegemony function in the world. However, in order to proceed, new forms of exploitation in a globalized world need to be interrogated.

**Contemporary spatial and temporal coordinates of exploitation**

The constitutive tension between capture and rupture, between the control and mobility of labour, helps us to understand the contemporary phase of capitalist transition. One of the most impressive features of contemporary capitalism is related to the fact that the more intimate human attitudes and abilities such as languages, affectivity, relations and knowledge have become means of production. Following this idea contemporary capitalism has been explained as postfordism in order to stress the displacement from an industrial focused production system to another. With regard to that, other scholars like, such as Carlo Vercellone, who has written extensively on Cognitive Capitalism, emphasize that while the fundamental coordinates of the capitalist system (profit, wage, capital gains) persist, new labour structures and new sources of capitalist production of value as well as new sources of property, are put to work. These are related to knowledge production. Hence, the contemporary capitalist transition and, correspondingly, globalization processes, increasing migration, the rise of knowledge work and so on, establish new spatial and temporal coordinates in which the composition of contemporary living labour is placed.

This emerging labour composition challenges the traditional image of the international division of labour created by the distinction between a first “developed” world and a third "underdeveloped" one; furthermore, since colonial apparatuses of domination and anti-colonial resistances are taking a new global form, the coordinates of exploitation in contemporary metropolises are being redrawn. Because of globalization and increasing migration flows, modern and traditional forms of labour, dependent and independent jobs, as well high-skill and low-skill activities are posed side by side so that different labour forms are articulated with each other in a process of translation. The New York cabdriver Javid Tariq’s experience demonstrates how the stereotypic image of non-white workers - who are usually assigned to low-skill jobs and supposedly have a low level of education - does not really match; rather this experience
requirements. The second matter is related to migrations during the 20th indeed, settled the question of the annexation of the occupied territory, thus fixing citizenship two key concerns can be discussed: firstly, a historical and geopolitical issue, that is, the USA military America - which is a traditional reservoir of the low-wage workforce - has been regulated, is helpful, and and submission. In this regard, concentrating on how the access to USA from Mexico and Central certainly one from the USA that has historically taken advantage of non-white work through exploitation as a fundamental requirement for naturalization, and almost 100,000 Mexicans living in the "American South West" lands were denied full citizenship. They became colonized people, many being deprived of both their land and their social and human rights. Since the beginning Mexican-Americans have lived the such conditions of racialization. As Bruno Cartosio underlined "colonial" capitalism made full use of the "colonized" mexicanos and, at the same time, it drew around them the imaginary "colour line" which would prevent them from progressing through the social ladder. At the end of the World War II, the 'Bracero Program' acted in that same direction. While it formally controlled the workforce movement from Mexico and Central America, in fact, it promoted a large deportation of undocumented workers, increasing their vulnerability. These deportations had a double direction: it proved useful to hinder the reproduction of the Latino workforce in the USA by avoiding the process of settling and by attracting an adult migrant workforce that was more convenient in the labour market and, the guest worker program aimed at decreasing the wages and labour guarantees for
Latinos and Latinas. By the time the 'Bracero Program' was enacted, the illegalization of workers from Mexico and South America rapidly increased. For each *bracero* employee four other undocumented Mexicans entered the USA, often encouraged by the employers, who could elude the USA and Mexico bilateral agreement, passing over the labour protections.

Therefore, racialised and illegalized Latinos, once trapped in that mechanism of exclusion from labour protections and from their social networks, found themselves relegated to the lowest position inside the labour market as well as in society. The mass deportations are both cause and effect of the images of Latinos as illegal aliens, consequently increasing their vulnerability at work and the blackmail against them. Nor was the situation modified in the successive decades of the 20th century: while the USA migration policy changed, the labour subordinations and the Latino and Latinas wage discrimination still persisted. As a result of the transformation of the capitalistic mode of production, as well as the achievements of the 1960s civil rights struggles, the USA invented new forms of labour subordination, especially with regard to the Latino/a workers. At that time, the *maquiladora* was created to shift the exploitation in the grey zone along the border; for the first time, in 1976, the *Immigration Act* established the quota for South and Central America migration inaugurating what has been described as ‘an active process of inclusion through illegalization’. 39 Although in the middle of the 20th century Latino/a workers were attracted legally and illegally into the USA labour market, more recently, the expedient of the USA war on terrorism after 9/11, has distinctly marked a closure to, if not refusal of, migrants, especially Latinos.

Nevertheless since spring 2006, Latino/a workers in the USA rejected this attack against them and they have been organizing large demonstrations to contest the worst Immigration bill the USA government has ever produced.40 The bill, called the *Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act* (HR 4437), has as its first aim to countervail undocumented migrants who generally end up doing low-skill jobs. After the Latino/a mobilizations as well as the employers’ protests (who were afraid to lose the guarantee of a “cheap” labour supply), last summer the immigration bill was ditched by the Senate discussion. In the meantime, a strong, racist and patriotic campaign against Latino/a workers has spread and has been articulated around both the idea to protect and secure the border and plans to put the “Deportation by attrition” into action. In several local and state governments, particularly in the suburban areas, legislative measures against immigrants and especially undocumented workers (mostly Latinos) are multiplying. In the legislative vacuum for the missed approval of the immigration bill, local officers issued administrative measures to force undocumented workers to return to their countries of origin.

Moreover, HR 4437 was oriented to arrange a new guest-worker program which intends to have involved less braceros, railroaders and other low-skill jobs, and in addition it putting together a “new class” of guest workers, highly-trained and qualified, though subject to the flexibility of short term contracts. While this proposal along with the discussion of the bill in the Senate last summer failed, the stance the USA government in relation to foreign, especially temporary workers, remained unchanged. It seeks to provide for the high-tech industry asking for expanding the number of work visas for skilled professionals, yet it increases the control on migrant workers. Raids by the federal government are regularly occurring both in houses and workplaces all over the USA, creating a state of fear and distress among millions of men, women, and children through illegal deportations and separations of families.

At the same time, the political struggles around the new guest workers program explain to us how in contemporary capitalism the racialization and illegalization processes, together with the increasing flexibility and precariousness of labour, result in a new labour composition: new capacities and competencies are put to work such as creativity, knowledge and relational attitudes. Nonetheless, those who do high-skill jobs and are organized through independent jobs, similarly experience labour subordination and wage discrimination on the basis of the colour of their skin (such as demand for high-tech migrant workers by the big corporations have shown).

**Forging political mobilizations**

As the Latino/a struggles in the USA indicate, race does not only imply labor subordination or the erection of borders, whether they are social, political and cultural. Understanding race also means taking into account the political production of race, that is, the chance to build up political mobilization to oppose the increasing discrimination both in the labor market and society. Roediger stressed that “in the United States race has functioned as both category into which laws, employers, realtors, police, teachers,
streetcar conductors and others have placed people and as an identity through which USA residents have embraced or contested such categorizations of themselves. In other words, race is perceived or is experienced through forms of struggles and resistance but it can also be felt like an ‘acquiescent acceptance’ of the power apparatuses which model the forms of non-white labour exploitation. It means that to forge political mobilizations around race is a practice that develops as antagonism between opposing forces. On one side there are the social and juridical devices operating in society, and on the other, the processes of class formation around non-white work exploitation and domination.

Examples of these anti-racist struggles are the massive Latino demonstrations that were staged all over the country, expressing the largest anti-racist mobilizations in USA since the Civil Rights movement. The demonstrations culminated in a general boycott, on the 1st of May 2006 - El gran paro - which was the first migrant labour strike in the USA. More then one million workers marched crying out “no work, no school, no sell, no buy”; together with them Latino/a students who did not go to school and other demonstrators stretched out in the streets and picketed shops and commercial centres. In Los Angeles, the truck drivers’ strike resulted in the blockage of the seaport. At that moment the American economy could not but recognize its dependence on Latino/a labour. New demonstrations were organized this year, on May 1st even if not as large as the previous year. However the general mood in 2006 as well as in 2007 was expressed by the motto “Sí, se puede”: they voiced their anger and claimed specific rights as Latino/a workers, that is, the political dimension of race or, borrowing from Critical Race Theory, the political race.

By valorising themselves through struggles and demonstrations, the Latinos overturned the condition explained by Du Bois as in-between people: a peculiar sensation that allows the “non-white” to be in-between with respect to how they are seen by white people and consequently how they see themselves. In the words of Du Bois: ‘One ever feels his two-ness, - An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings’. Therefore, this kind of ‘double consciousness’ triggered an opposition against the privilege of whiteness. In a process of subjective self-determination, Latinos and Latinas started to think about themselves in terms of their racialization, by making race the ground of resistance and political mobilization. Such a manner experiencing race and racial discrimination highlights a constitutive antagonism inside the capitalistic exploitation of non-white workers: the struggle of Latinos and Latinas articulated as a fight against prejudice is a conflictual refusal of the racialized assignment in the USA labour market.

**Conclusion**

Emerging social conflicts in the contemporary metropolises, such as Latino/a struggles, the Indian cabdrivers’ struggles in New York and the banlieusards’ uprisings in France, as well as migrant workers’ resistance all over the world, point to the urgency of rethinking the modern idea of citizenship as well as the traditional forms of democratic representation. Discussing citizenship, Saskia Sassen has recently highlighted two emerging figures of citizens: the ‘unauthorized yet recognized’, such as the Latinos in the USA, as well as the undocumented migrant workers who are recognized as workers but unauthorized as citizens, and; the ‘authorized yet unrecognized’, such as the French banlieusards as well as the children migrant workers who are formally host country citizens, though unrecognized with respect to substantive citizenship rights. This discourse, evidently, focuses on the limit of the modern idea of citizenship.

Furthermore the mobility of living labour engenders social and political experiences, whether they are of Latino/a workers, Indian cabdrivers or banlieusards, which take form across the nation-state borders. Boundaries become more and more porous through tight social networks between the native and the host country, indicating that migrants can practice new forms of transnational citizenship. Thus, these social and political experiences prove to be a vital and viable antithesis to either the assimilationist or the liberal integrationist-multicultural perspectives on citizenship.

These struggles amplify the crisis of traditional forms of democratic representation: they clearly show the impossibility of translating labour and social conflict articulated along the colour line through the unions’ and parties’ codes. Labour protests against racial discriminations which structure the labour market have the ability to set off autonomous political process, which are distant from the traditional structure of unions or parties; and these struggles assume social and transnational networks as the space in which to build up political actions. Moreover the linguistic and relational attitudes, which shape contemporary living
labour, become a means of struggles, and demonstrate how being low-skill workers doesn’t imply passivity or ignorance. The Latino/a struggles for example, produced and circulated knowledge mainly by the use of free radios that were significant to the recent mobilization in the USA.

However, the coordinates of the struggles articulated along the colour line are ambivalent, on one had there is the chance to forge political mobilizations, making race a ground of resistance; on the other hand, there is the danger of producing or legitimating an identitarian backlash - reproducing racialized divisions and reinforcing borders. And the concern here is the reproduction of the privileges of whiteness vis-à-vis the re-forging of labour racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, by examining struggles, we can begin to grasp the forms and practices for changing the present. While struggles which spring and grow on the grounds of racialized difference can be incompatible with the status quo, they nevertheless always mean that social change is ineluctable.

Notes

1. I met and interviewed Javid Tariq in the June 2006 in New York City. He is a founder of the Taxi Worker Alliance (www.nytwa.org).
8. Ivi, 23.
10. Hall S., 1980, Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance in Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism, Unesco, 305-345. 'What is “determined” is not the inner form and appearance of each level, but the mode of combination and the placing of each instance in an articulated relation to the other elements'. Ivi, 326.
17. Ivi, 127.
29. As Sandro Mezzadra asserts ‘Translation is one of the fundamental modes of operation of global capital’ (Mezzadra 2007, 2).

31. As Xiang Biao explained, in a recent book titled “Global Body Shopping” (2007), Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford), the USA Information Technology Industry, between 2000 and 2001, have involved more then twenty thousand of Indian workers. In this industry body shops work as mediators between workers and companies, ensuring the low cost of a highly-skilled workforce as well as its flexibility. Low-wage and flexibility, indeed, are not easily associated to the White American high-tech workers.


34. Although since the middle of nineteenth century, a large number of Mexican have worked in USA, in the aftermath of the World War II, the USA federal government initiated what came be known as the Bracero Program, in order to face of renewed labour shortages caused by the war. The Bracero Program was a temporary contract labour program which attracted a very large number of Mexican workers in USA, although they received low-wage in a temporary labour contract. It was supported by the Mexican government. ‘The Mexican government’s complicity in the excessively exploitative arrangements of the Bracero Program was merely the most blatant and transparent occasion when mass migration to the United State was deemed an appropriate safety valve for the mitigation of potentially explosive social crisis within Mexico’ De Genova argued (2005 Op. Cit., 225).

35. The Naturalization Act (1790) is one of the founding provisions of the USA Constitution. Although the Constitution did not originally define the citizenry, it explicitly gave Congress the authority to establish the criteria for granting citizenship after birth” Haney López, who have deeply analysed this matter, pointed out (2006 Op. Cit., 30). Article I, indeed, grants Congress the power “To establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization”. Thus, “from the start, the Congress exercised this power in a manner that burdened naturalization laws with racial restriction that tracked those in the law of birthright citizenship. In 1790, only a few months after ratification of the Constitution, Congress limited naturalization to “any alien, being a free white person who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United State for a term of two years”” (López 2006 Op. Cit., 31).


40. However the Latinos resistance against racialisation and labor exploitation could be traced back up to the middle of the 90s. At that time strong and radical campaigns for the justice on labor started, fighting against both corporations and racial prejudice. The popular Justice For Janitors campaign from the SEIU and the Unite HERE’s struggles in hotels and restaurants prove this as an example. Furthermore to contrast national law such as the Immigration Responsibility Act (1996) and the Proposition 187 oriented to erase the welfare structures for migrant people, community based political experiences was born. The “Centre for Immigrant Family” in Manhattan, New York City (www.c4if.org) proves this as an example. It is involved in reconstructing social networks among Latinos, Bangladeshi and African American women in a mainly migrant neighborhood.

41. The bill turns illegal migration into felony and criminalizes anyone who helps or supports undocumented people. Then, it creates detention centres and it establishes the enforcement of the border between USA and Mexico through the enlargement of the wall along the border line and the rise of border police.

42. The national television advertising “Where is the fence?” (available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90SdhwNeIo) provide it as an example.

43. These penalize landlords that rent to undocumented migrants, as well as businesses that hire them, and in addition establish English as the only official language against the practice of writing various notices - including building-code violations and the monthly newsletter - in both English and Spanish, Kotlowitz A., Our Town in “New York Times Magazine”, August 5, 2007.


45. Big high-tech companies as Microsoft and Google demand of a ‘larger numbers of well-educated, foreign-born professionals who, they say, can help them succeed in the global economy’ as the

46. The reproductive networks, are strongly affected by these repressive actions. The Department of Homeland Security through the Social Security Administration act is issuing new regulations in order to shut down the illegal-immigration jobs market. Since last summer controls have started on social security numbers, sanctioning employers which hire undocumented migrant workers. This action is known as No-Match Letter. It is a letter issued by the Social Security Administration which notifies the employer that an employee’s name.


